

Women's Leadership Imperative: Speak Up, Stand Out and Succeed

By **Isabelle St-Jean**

"The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems." —Mohandas Gandhi

WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THAT THE MAJORITY OF TOP TIER positions within corporations are still male-dominated, seeing change can be difficult—even discouraging. However, it is not a matter of how far women have come, but how much further we can go that defines the true scope and potential of women in leadership.

Speak Up to Stand Out

As stated by Judith Humphrey, founder and chief creative officer of The Humphrey Group, in a recent interview, women's progress up the corporate ladder seems to have come to a standstill. Conversely, Humphrey emphasizes, it is more important now than ever for women to reach these leadership roles to help bring about real transformation.

Humphrey's most recent book, *Taking the Stage: How Women Can Speak Up, Stand Out and Succeed*, is crafted with this paradox in mind to encourage women to "find their own strong voices and seize new opportunities to lead." Over the past 25 years, The Humphrey Group has helped countless leaders hone their presentation skills and enabled tens of thousands of women to shift beyond their perceived limitations and free their authentic leadership voice.

Overcome the Doubts of a Lifetime

Exploring the root cause of what holds many capable women back from stepping into leadership roles, Humphrey notes that the latest office politics are just the tip of a much deeper iceberg. "We carry the seeds of our upbringing through our whole life," she notes.

If we are not wholeheartedly encouraged and taught to develop and believe in our strengths as children, we are likely to keep seeking approval of others in adulthood. Similarly, if we were discouraged from particular behaviours or pursuits as children, that impact too carries over to present day. Moreover, if define ourselves through the approval of others, we lose touch with our authentic self, our inner True North. That in turn breeds the ground for self-doubt to make itself at home in the decorum of our minds.

Humphrey's accomplishments are many, including being awarded the 2012 YWCA's prestigious Woman of Distinction award for Entrepreneurship. However, her greatest achievement is ongoing—enabling women and men to connect with their inner source of confidence, to validate themselves and free up their self-expression. As we learn to trust our insights and voice our ideas, we grow in our capacity to form larger visions that can fuel an expansive leadership spirit.

Be A Visionary Change Agent

In her keynote address at the 2011 Women's Leadership conference in Australia, Linda Dunkel, former president and CEO of Interactions Associates, spoke engagingly about the new imperative for women to lead purposefully as visionary change agents embracing a new mindset.

Pondering the question of how real change could come about, Dunkel pointed out that the expansive opportunities and demands of globalization on corporations have already created changes within organizational hierarchies and will continue to do so for the next few decades. With a greater pool of opportunity, coupled with continued demands for diversity and innovation, women will have access to the upper echelons of large companies in greater numbers; they will also be better able to stir the corporate world towards a more inclusive, expansive vision whose time has come.

Four Tenets of the Triple Bottom Line

Centring her talk on the concept of conscious capitalism, Dunkel asserted that the world is in desperate need of a model of doing business that includes the triple bottom line—people, profit and planet. She grounds this re-orientation of business upon four primary tenets:

- A higher purpose that goes beyond making money;
- Primary clients and shareholders aligned and in sync with that purpose;
- Conscious leadership; and
- A conscious culture based on trust, caring, compassion, respect and authenticity.

This type of culture—rooted in the new economy of meaning, wherein consumers are discerning and buy what matches their values—is not modelled on competition and has little precedent in the traditional patriarchy of the workplace. Rather, this type of culture is based on fostering creativity, innovation, and synergetic collaboration while honouring what are traditionally considered female strengths.

A Broader Bottom Line

This model of leading business, beyond the single bottom line, is a natural fit for women because of how they tend to differ from men on the psychology of money. Raised as bread-winners, men have traditionally been oriented towards "more is better" in order to satisfy their family's needs. In contrast, more women tend to associate earning money or creating profits with a specific purpose in mind; it's a means to an end.

The psychology of the profit-only-driven business unfortunately is far more pathological as outlined by books such as *The Corporation*. As men have traditionally dominated the upper echelons of the corporate hierarchy, much of this pathology has been attributed to them, fairly or not—after all, women in leadership also need to answer to the bottom line.