

## Relationships help woman take charge

Cincinnati Business Courier - November 24, 2006

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Years ago, women were not able to climb the corporate ladder as high as men.

Times have changed and the world has evolved into more workplace equality between the sexes. Although women in management are more accepted, and even expected, sometimes there still are challenges to overcome for women to continue to receive the respect they deserve.

As a woman, you may have years of experience in your field where you have climbed through the ranks to the top. You are well-known and respected in your industry and, as a result, have been pursued for a new opportunity at another company. These are all positive aspects about you as a professional that result in you being a confident woman and business person.

However, you may experience a change in that feeling when you discover that the job you just accepted makes you the only woman on a management team of men.

Although you may not have a problem being the only woman on your team, you realize that it could be an issue for your peers.

Obviously, you want your input to be valued and you want to quickly gain respect from the peers on your management team.

If you are in a similar circumstance, or know someone who is, the following story offers insight from the experience of a highly qualified woman manager with more than 25 years of experience in her industry. This story shares her experience, her challenges and how she overcame them, what she learned through the process, and how she came out ahead in the end.

The challenges became apparent at her very first management team meeting, as soon as she walked into the conference room. She had not yet met most of the men. Her first conversation with them involved her being asked to get coffee for the others. Clearly, the person who did the asking had immediately mistaken her for an assistant rather than one of his peers.

This was only the beginning. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a particular process that was going to be converted in the company.

The woman was well-versed in this process due to extensive experience in this area. She was the only person in the room to speak meticulously about the process from start to finish.

She raised a few questions and concerns, and gave input. It was obvious to her that others were challenged by what was soon to take place.

She remained confident and humble as she spoke. She remained professional without an attitude or arrogance. She knew that it wasn't what she knew, but how she presented herself that would gain her the respect she deserved.

The changes to this process were a transition planned over a 12-week period. Roundtable meetings were scheduled weekly for the management team to discuss the progression of the conversion along with any concerns or challenges that should be known to the others. There was no flexibility with the target deadline to complete this conversion.

The process had to be converted flawlessly by the target deadline. This conversion was not just internal to the company, but external as well, as it involved several thousand consumer accounts.

In the first few meetings, the men would listen to the woman's input but, at the same time, would avoid her to a degree. They weren't inviting or interested in getting to know her yet.

However, beginning around week four, when the procedures began to convert the process, the "knowledgeable" woman quickly became a resource to the inexperienced peers for their role (or function) in the process.

She noticed that the peers would never show their inadequacies or frustrations during the weekly management meeting, but would approach the woman after the meeting in a one-on-one discussion, or call her office to ask questions and obtain direction for their function in changing the process.

Throughout the conversion, she realized that she was providing troubleshooting on an individual basis to more than seven of her peers.

During the 12-week span, the peers who came to her for solutions and assistance never knew that she also was helping other men on the management team. She never mentioned the discussions she was having with the other peers during her one-on-one conversations.

In addition, she never publicly humiliated anyone during the weekly roundtable meetings, when she knew some were having difficulty understanding and completing their function in the conversion.

In the end, the conversion process was a success and seamless to the hundreds of consumers that it affected. However, this wasn't the only success that resulted from this massive and tedious conversion. In the woman's mind, it was the respectful business relationships that were gained with each of her peers that was of greater importance.

As the 12-week conversion process progressed, the relationships with all of her male peers went full circle. In the beginning, she was mistakenly viewed as a "non-event." In the end, she was respected as the leader she knew she was.

This is a perfect example of conveying that it isn't just what you know that makes you a leader, it is how you present yourself that makes you a true leader.