

Viewpoint: Lessons I've learned from influential women

Mar 15, 2019, 4:00am EDT

From the Pittsburgh Business Times:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/news/2019/03/15/viewpoint-lessons-ive-learned-from-influential.html>

Audrey Murrell, PhD is a Professor, Associate Dean, College of Business Administration, and Director, David Berg Center for Ethics and Leadership, at the University of Pittsburgh, School of Business. (For more publications and information or to contact: www.audreymurrell.com)

A great deal has been written about pathways and barriers to women's advancement into positions of influence.

Metaphors like the glass ceiling, concrete walls and sticky floors have received a lot of attention in academic research and popular media.

And the recent rise of women into key leadership roles in business and higher education and the record number of women elected to public office all underscore the fact that the faces of leadership have changed.

Taking time to recognize the accomplishments of women of influence has prompted me to reflect on the invaluable lessons I learned from women during my own leadership journey and career.

The first lesson that women of influence taught me is to not be surprised by the personal pathway one takes to leadership.

Research by psychologists shows that women must navigate through a tricky labyrinth of obstacles and obstructions. They come in the form of persistent gender discrimination, work-family balance and the double bind that makes their career paths both distinct and challenging.

This labyrinth represents the unique journey that women leaders must take.

In this environment, unexpected turns and detours are not failures but represent trail points that prepare women of influence for the success they will ultimately achieve.



JOE WOJCIK

Audrey Murrell, associate professor, University of Pittsburgh, College of Business Administration

The second lesson I learned from women of influence is to be a tireless advocate for diversity and inclusion. Research shows that diversity benefits organizations and their stakeholders in measurable ways that affect the bottom line, including revenue, market performance, employee engagement and firm reputation.

Female representation on boards of directors is positively related to organizational effectiveness. Female CEOs have been shown to advance fiscal conservatism and ethical decision making.

Women in leadership roles often have a dramatic impact on increasing diversity and inclusion, both in representation and in overall workplace climate.

The impact is strong because advocates for diversity also are champions for positive change. The women of influence that I have encountered work on behalf of diversity and organizational impact, never seeing them as separate and always viewing them as necessary drivers of success for all stakeholders.

The third lesson that influential women have taught me is that effective leaders must choose humility over hubris.

These women model humbleness in their actions and create environments grounded in respect, tolerance and outcomes that are mutually beneficial for the people and for the organization. These influential women are strong role models who radiate positivity and create an upward spiral that elevates positive behavior in others.

As leaders who model civility, they build workplaces with high levels of employee engagement, integrity, satisfaction and retention.

They don't just give lip service to stopping workplace incivility; they actively shape and reward positive behaviors that value and normalize positive workplace civility.

These three powerful lessons in leadership came from many amazing women of influence across all different sectors, demographics, industries, generations and workplace positions.

These women have been my mentors and my sponsors, and they didn't cultivate status and resources for their own gain; they leveraged their power and networks in support of others — including myself.

They provided me with many of the invaluable functions of mentoring relationships: exposure and visibility, being a role model and sharing their networks. Their influence has done nothing less than shape my view and practice across my various leadership roles.

We should not only celebrate women of influence. We should also learn from them.

To read more about the 2019 Women of Influence winners, go [here](#).

Audrey Murrell is Professor, Associate Dean, College of Business Administration, and Director, David Berg Center for Ethics and Leadership, University of Pittsburgh, School of Business.