

SESSION 8:

Getting the Word Out: Personal Communication Techniques

(Approx. 3 hours in total)

Session Objectives:

- To study the differences in perception of female leaders versus male leaders
- To consider ways to communicate messages effectively through verbal and non-verbal actions
- To discuss our fears about “dirty politics” and how to respond to overt hostility and misogyny in the public/political arena

8.1

Exercise: Does good leadership have a gender?

(Approx. 30 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the following excerpt from an interview with Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet, on BBC’s “Hard Talk” with Gavin Esler (April 7, 2008):



Esler: Are women in positions of leadership judged differently than men?

President Bachelet: I agree with that. For example, somebody just told me that the newspapers in Chile are making remarks about my visit [to England]. They are speaking about how I dress, the color of my [clothes] when I visited the Queen yesterday. Those things would never appear in a discussion about leadership when we are talking about men’s leadership. We discuss if [men] are intelligent...if they speak well, if the projects they are defending are correct, if you agree or disagree with them....

I remember with President [Ricardo] Lagos, when he was moved for example by human rights, or something that was very painful...and his eyes would fill with tears. Everybody said, “Oh, what a sensible man he is, he is very sensitive.” If that happened to me, they would [say] in the media, “She could not control her emotions. She’s hysterical.” It is always like that. If you make a tough decision as a man, they say [you are] a man of character. If a woman makes a tough decision, you read that an advisor convinced her...

It is a matter of time. It is a matter of cultural change [for] women who are capable, who have merits, who are sometimes invisible to get the opportunities in life to develop whatever they want to develop.



Questions for Group Discussion

Ask the group to brainstorm about the characteristics of a strong leader?
Write the list on the board.

- Are there characteristics listed that are sometimes perceived as negative for women?
- Are there characteristics listed that are sometimes perceived as negative for men?

8.2

Exercise: What are my own conflicts or struggles with leading?

(Approx. 20 min.)

Break the group into pairs. Ask each participant to share with her partner an experience she had (or an ongoing struggle, i.e. at work, with her family) where she tried or continues to try to balance her femininity, womanliness, and being a “good woman,” with being an effective organizer, manager, and leader. Time the meeting so that each partner has about five minutes to speak. After five minutes, announce that it is time for the second person in each pair to speak. When the group meets as whole again, ask for volunteers to share anything they observed or learned.

8.3

Exercise: What advice would you give?

(Approx. 45 min.)

Ask a volunteer to read the following WLP editorial on media coverage of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton:



February 2009, WLP

Seriously, Is THAT What You Want to Know About Hillary Clinton?

Last year, the Washington Post reported that “there was cleavage on display Wednesday afternoon on C-SPAN2. It belonged to Sen. Hillary Clinton.” Readers learned that the presidential candidate was wearing a rose-colored blazer over a black top. The neckline sat low on her chest and had “a subtle V-shape.” And in case readers were worried, the Post reassured us that, “there wasn’t an unseemly amount of cleavage showing.”

And just a few months later, ABC News panted, “The New York Senator was taking questions from a primarily female group at Cafe Espresso in Portsmouth, when she choked up responding to one woman’s question about how she stays ‘upbeat and so wonderful.’”

Choked up? Didn’t they mean wept, cried, or better yet—beat her breast and tore her clothes asunder?

Clinton explained, “It’s not easy, and I couldn’t do it if I didn’t passionately believe it was the right thing to do. You know, I have so many opportunities from this country. I just don’t want to see us fall backwards.”

The ABC News story went on to describe other instances when Ms. Clinton became teary eyed, emotional, noticeably agitated, and most damning of all—loud.

“Making change is not...making a speech, it’s about working hard,” Clinton said. But the news story was careful to report that the candidate added, “a little bit louder,” that “I want to make change, but I’ve already made change. I’m not running on a promise of change.... We don’t need to raise false hopes of people in our country about what can be delivered.” And then, no holds barred, we learn that Hillary Clinton raised her voice to say, “I think that having a first woman president is a huge change.”

All that noise prompted the author to question whether “Clinton has appeared too emotional, too sensitive, or too weak in her recent public appearances. “

Really? Too emotional?

At least Robin Givhan's description of Clinton in a black Donna Karan dress evoked an image of power, even if it wasn't exactly senatorial. "[Hillary Clinton] was photographed wearing a black Donna Karan gown that revealed her shoulders. It was one of Karan's 'cold-shoulder' dresses, inspired, Karan once noted, because a woman's shoulders remain sensuous and appealing regardless of her age."

Now that she's Secretary of State, perhaps the media will stick to more substantive issues than Hillary's hemline. After all, solving global political tensions is very much in fashion!



Circle Activity

Ask each participant to:

- Give Hillary advice about how she should speak, dress, her body language, or how she should present the content of her messages, etc.
- Explain why she offered the advice that she did, and why it would be important advice for any woman political leader.



Questions for Group Discussion

- Can female political leaders be genuine, frank, angry, or emotional in public? Why or why not? Can male leaders?
- Are emotions, sexuality, or toughness acceptable characteristics for a woman leader to have? Why or why not? Are they acceptable characteristics for her to show publicly? Why or why not?
- What is the balance you would like to find in how you present yourself as a leader? What leadership characteristics do you strive to convey?

8.4

Exercise: The Personal is Political

(Approx. 30 min.)

Ask one or more volunteers to read the following story.



Mira Gupta has been a workshop leader for the Campaign for Good Hygiene (CGH) for over four years. She and her CGH colleagues give lectures and demonstrations to adults and children on the health benefits of good hygiene. In addition to giving the workshops, Mira is responsible for training other workshop leaders. On many of her field trips, she is accompanied by young interns or leaders-in-training.

In the week leading up to each workshop, Mira usually researches the town or village she is going to visit to find out as much as possible about the people and their history. She often asks her workshop trainees to inquire about the probable ages, education levels, religious backgrounds, and the gender composition of their workshop audiences. Days before an event, Mira and her trainees plan together what materials they will need, which exercises they will use, how they will conduct the practice sessions, and even what they will wear.

On one recent occasion, Mira and an intern were asked to give a CGH workshop at a clothes manufacturing plant located in a rural area. The workers were all women, largely illiterate, and most were from very traditional families. It was the intern's first workshop and she was very excited, but also very nervous. Mira counseled the intern to dress modestly and conservatively. She talked with her about the history of the families in the area, and their ancient connection to textile weaving.

When the pair arrived at the plant, the intern was relieved that she had chosen to wear a long dark dress because it fit in with what the workers were wearing. Speaking clearly and using simple and straightforward language, Mira explained to the women why they were there and what topics would be discussed in the workshop. In many of her workshops she would hand out a printed agenda, but not this time because most of the audience could not read. She made clear that no one was obligated to participate, but warmly invited everyone to do so.

After arranging the group in a circle and suggesting that the women sit down, Mira introduced the intern, and asked the workers to introduce themselves. She explained that the intern was training to lead workshops, and also encouraged the workers to consider leading their own workshops. She personally offered to train anyone in the group who might want to become a workshop leader, and gave the

women information about how to contact her. Mira and the intern then began to present the workshop topics.



Questions for Group Discussion

- Why did Mira learn about the history and background of her audiences before she conducted workshops?
- Would you have had additional advice or suggestions for the intern? What would they be?
- What were the short-term and long-term benefits of asking members of the audience to consider training to becoming workshop leaders?
- What steps, procedures, or actions did you most admire about Mira's conduct? Why?
- In which ways is she assisting other young women to become community leaders?
- Is there anything else you might have done if you were leading the workshop?

8.5

Exercise: What can we do when things get really “dirty?”

(Approx. 30 min.)

Ask one or two volunteers to read the following story.



Zeina Shareef, the wife of a wealthy real estate investor, was hurriedly appointed to the City Planning Commission after it was revealed in the international media that the mayor had secretly banned all city departments from hiring or appointing women. The story made headlines across the country and abroad because of the mayor's widely publicized participation in international human rights conferences. Despite the air of scandal surrounding her appointment, Zeina was committed to trying to do her best on the Commission.

From the first meeting of the commissioners, Zeina knew she was going to face a tough battle. Her husband advised her not to attend the meetings at all. He had political connections with the Commission and felt that the best strategy was for Zeina to do nothing. But a storm was brewing over an illegal encampment at the center of the city. Thousands of homeless people lived in the shanty slums that had

slowly built up next to the city park. The reason the encampment was so populated was that a creek ran along its edge, and slum residents used the creek for washing and refuse. Zeina knew that hundreds of street children, as well as prostitutes, garbage pickers, and beggars lived in the encampment, and if it were bulldozed, they would have nowhere to go. She feared that many would die on the street.

When Zeina tried to speak to the other Commissioners about the plans to raze the encampment, she was ignored. In the formal session, although she held her hand high to speak, the Chairman never called on her. Only one more meeting was scheduled to discuss the encampment. The Chairman advised the commissioners to arrive promptly at two p.m. the next afternoon for a final vote.

Zeina spent the next 24 hours contacting everyone she knew who might hold political sway in the encampment matter, even pulling the owner of a shopping complex away from his dinner party to sign her petition to stop the bulldozers. By noon the next day, she had nine signatures from business leaders. She prepared carefully for the Commissioners, and arrived a few minutes early to secure a center seat.

When she entered the meeting hall, she was surprised to see that all of the others were there already. The Chairman smiled as she enter, “Ah, Madam Shareef, you have finally arrived. Well, we finished the vote about a half hour ago. I am sorry we were not able to hear your petition to support the prostitutes and dirty children.” Zeina was stunned. The Chairman just smiled, and the others laughed. And then the Commissioners quickly left the room. As the door closed behind them, Zeina heard one snickering loudly, “Two p.m. She’s such a stupid woman.”



Questions for Group Discussion

- What do you think about this story? Do you believe that it could happen in real life?
- Was there something that Zeina could have done differently so that she would have had more influence with the commissioners?
- How should she have responded when she realized that she had purposely been told the incorrect meeting time?
- Do you have any advice for Zeina? What would you do if you were in her situation?
- If you were a colleague of Zeina, how could you help her be more successful? What role can other women and men play in supporting women in political office?