

Tips from the Top: Female Leaders Share Secrets of Success

By Vanessa Orr

While it isn't easy to break the glass ceiling, a number of women have made it to become CEOs and/or presidents at Pittsburgh corporations. While the path that each took to get to the top was different, they share some of the same opinions on what it takes to lead.

Audrey Russo is the president and CEO of the Pittsburgh Technology Council, a position she's held for the last 10 years. She came to the council after serving as CEO/CFO at MAYA Design and being recruited by a headhunter. While she credits her background in technology, systems and leadership to helping with her success, other factors contributed as well.

"I think my not being from Pittsburgh was helpful because it brought a new set of



Audrey Russo, President and CEO of the Pittsburgh Technology Council.

eyes to the job," she said. "My view is also always business-focused, which is a rather unique perspective; I run the trade association the same way that I would run a business, which I think is different from what other candidates brought to the table."

Karen Wolk Feinstein is the president and CEO of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, which at the time she was hired had no history, officers, staff or even stationery. "It was scary plunging into the unknown," she said of leaving her position as senior vice president of the United Way. "But something in me wanted to lead."

Wolk Feinstein believes in playing to her strengths, which includes surrounding herself with those who may not always agree. "I am very creative, and have a good sense of timing and context, but I can eas-

ily get carried away," she said. "That's why you need people around you who give you alternate perspectives."

Susan Baker Shipley, who has been president of Huntington's Western Pennsylvania and Ohio Valley Region since 2012, focused on positions where she could add value while gaining experience and knowledge about banking, treasury solutions, supply chain financing and more.

"I studied and lived abroad, so I held several positions where a second language and understanding other cultures would be beneficial," she explained. "Rather than a developing a specific career plan 'on the way up,' I've always looked at it as a journey of learning, gaining new experiences and

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connecting with others who want to make a difference.”

Mentoring and collaboration

All three women agree that building relationships is important, as is mentoring the next generation of leaders.

“I’m a huge believer in mentorship; anyone who is in a leadership role needs to recognize younger talent, nurture it and help it advance,” said Wolk Feinstein. “Support their involvement on boards or with worthy community initiatives—and if they ask for advice, give it.”

According to Russo, this support includes spotting future leaders and helping them advance in their careers. “In this industry, people tend to be promoted because of technical prowess, but those aren’t the skills needed to move into leadership,” she explained. “Find people with high aptitude, a zest for continual learning and great interpersonal skills that make them good collaborators. Then take a chance on them.”

Women also need to stop doubting their own abilities. “Maybe it’s the innate desire



Karen Wolk Feinstein, PhD, President and CEO of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation.

to please, or that we learned early on that we wouldn’t be rewarded for being assertive, but symbolically, women need to see themselves as leaders,” said Wolk Feinstein.

“I think that one of the biggest issues that women face is self-doubt; they tend to look at an opportunity and think that if they don’t have 100 percent of the qualifica-



Susan Baker Shipley, President of the Western Pennsylvania and Ohio Valley Region, Huntingdon Bank.

tions, they shouldn’t try,” said Russo. “You don’t have to nail everything completely to move onto the next stage of your career.”

“My advice is to listen to that voice inside of you; the voice that tells you right from wrong,” said Shipley. “Never stop learning, be your authentic self, and remember that setbacks are temporary.” ■

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