

For Women to Swim with the Sharks

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It shouldn't be this way, but in many organizations women are not seen as key players. Study after study shows that women with the same credentials do not get promoted as quickly, nor are they remunerated in the same manner. So the question is what can women do to insure that they be taken seriously. The answer may lie in how they present themselves and in the way they communicate.

- **Dress up.** What does your daily wardrobe look like? Does it mirror how the top leaders dress in your organization or in your professional associations? You may need to up the bar! There are many different interpretations to business casual, but make sure you have a finished look. No wrinkles, spots or holes. No plunging necklines, super short skirts or skin tight jeans or slacks. If you need to go up a size, do it.
- **Change your attitude.** You were hired because the company believed you had a future with them, that you were worth their investment. Don't go into any meeting hoping you won't flub up or make a fool of yourself. Picture yourself being successful and people appreciating your due diligence, your ideas.
- **Voice your opinions.** Let your position be known. Agree if it makes sense; disagree if it doesn't. Be prepared to defend your position. If you know the agenda ahead of your meeting, anticipate the decisions that will need to be made. If necessary, have the information with you to support your ideas. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and author of the book, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, suggests that women need to seek challenges, take risks and voice their opinions. The person, who is too timid to take a stand, rarely is noticed.
- **Speak up.** If you have a softer voice, be sure to raise it. Louder voices are taken more seriously. If people strain to hear you, the presentation fails no matter what else you do. Remember listeners get distracted easily, and a

soft voice invites disinterest. People also conclude you are timid or indecisive; otherwise you would be speaking louder.

- **Pause.** Take your time. Don't rush and give the impression you just want to be done. The more you pause, the more your listeners will be able to digest and sort the information you are sharing. When you pause, you stress the importance of what comes next. You appear more confident and self-assured.
- **Stand up and move.** When the group is over 8–10, be sure to stand up so you can command the room and everyone can easily see you. Work the space. You own it for the time you are in front of the group. Move towards various individuals and personalize your points by using their name. For example, *Jack, I know your concern is that the plan is risky. Let me tell you how I mitigated risk. The next slide will show you how we've covered our bases.* When you stand, be sure to balance your weight equally on both feet. Do not take the ballerina stance where one foot is pointed in front and your hands folded at your waist. It will make you look demure or timid, and that needs to be avoided.
- **Go bigger.** Often women lock their arms at their sides. Instead of gesturing from the shoulder, they gesture from the wrist or elbow. Their gestures have no radius. Go bigger, wider with your gestures so you let energy out and help people to visualize your ideas. Amy Cuddy in her book, *Presence, Bring Your Boldest Self to Your Biggest Challenges*, suggests that women begin any presentation in a superwoman pose where the arms are raised high and wide. She says this will give a commanding impression and also trick the brain into believing you are confident.
- **Look them in the eye.** It projects confidence and honesty. Additionally, it forms a personal bond with people. Eye contact with your audience should begin the moment you open your mouth. It demonstrates that you are taking

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charge. It should look natural. Pick out people at random to involve. The goal should be to talk to everyone for a full sentence or thought, not the same people over and over. Without solid eye contact, there will be something about you that your listeners will not be able to trust. There is a difference between scanning the room and solid eye contact.

Ladies, the time is right for you to soar. Companies are very aware of the dearth of women in top positions. Be sure you are ready by paying attention of the pointers given. See you at the top!

***Question:** What additional tips do you have for women? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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