

A Lady Engineer's Perspective on Leadership
Founder's Day Convocation
Sweet Briar College
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Thank you's

Linda DeVogt, President Alumnae Association

Louise Zingaro, Director Alumnae Association

Elisabeth Muhlenfeld, President Sweet Briar College

Classmates from Class of '64

Recognitions

Elliott is here. Thank you for coming.

My sister Susan and her son Hartley are here.

Susan and I are two of the luckiest girls in the world.

Our parents are here today, our mother who is 91 years old, and our father who is 93 years old.

My father taught me how to throw a baseball ... like a boy.

My mother was a teacher ... she drilled me on arithmetic with those addition and multiplication flash cards.

Reminiscing

I was fortunate to have many good teachers ...

I remember my grade school teachers ...

Mrs. Bowman

Miss Bradford

Miss Quillen

Miss Heasley

Miss Perry

Mrs. Greenawalt ...

I remember my 8th grade English teacher ... Miss Morrissey ... Everyone was scared to death of her.

She taught me grammar, and how to diagram sentences.

I didn't think I ever needed another English teacher, but I got four more of them in high school ... they taught me how to write.

Then in the fall of 1960 I came to Sweet Briar, and I had to take English. I can't believe I typed all those long English papers on a manual Remington typewriter, always trying to figure out how many footnotes were going to fit on each page!

I wound up choosing Physics as a major, mainly because of Professor Lily Rappaport. I was the only Physics major who graduated in 1964.

(Tuck Mattern is one of our classmates here today. She also majored in Physics, but she was so smart she did it in 3 years!)

Mrs. Rappaport was not just a fabulous teacher; she was a mentor and friend. For several years after graduating from Sweet Briar, I and my two young sons visited the Rappaport's at their Ivy, VA home. She always made the boys peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and I always had some of her and her husband Jacques' home brewed beer.

After graduation, VM Del Greco and I headed for Charlottesville, she in her little white Ford Falcon, me in my big black, fin tailed Buick, VM to teach and go to graduate school, me to attend the graduate School of Engineering, ... all those boys and me.

Sweet Briar had prepared us well ...

We thought we were really something when we moved into our brand new apartment on Stadium Road. The first time we turned the oven on, we burned up the instructions ...

The day of my master's orals, Lily Rappaport came. I made it through that day.

Professors that remain friends ... speaks volumes about Sweet Briar ...

Sweet Briar prepared me well ...

The Leadership Message

For many of us who grew up in industry as individual performers, particularly as engineers, and most particularly as women in the heavily male dominated, leading edge technology defense and space business, it can be difficult to make the transition from individual contributor to a leader of others.

I quickly realized that most people just don't do things the same way I do ... maybe they don't do something as

well as I would, maybe they do it better. I quickly was reminded “there can be more than one right answer”. One of the most difficult things for me to accept was that being a leader meant I must be willing to accept the outcome and output of those I led as if they were my own.

I had to be willing to accept the consequences of their performance without excuse. I had to learn that I always must be willing to set aside my wishes for the good of the group and for the good of the corporation for which I worked. I learned I must give credit to others when things went well and take the blame when things went badly.

As a leader in a company or corporation or institution, your role at work is an extension of the objectives of that company or corporation or institution. You must never forget that you are paid to do what is best to achieve the company’s objectives, not your own. Your ability to marshal the resources that you lead to accomplish company objectives is the quantitative measure of your business success.

Your ability to use those skills outside of work – with your family, with the community, in athletic pursuits and other endeavors – tends to be an indicator of your personal success.

Over the years I have spent time now and then, assessing the attributes of those I most admire in business, and I have compiled a list of Leadership Attributes that I most value. There is no particular significance to the order.

I direct these thoughts most especially to those of you who are Sweet Briar girls today, you who will leave this place and become teachers, social workers, lawyers, artists, historians, doctors, and yes, engineers ... and then leaders in your workplaces and communities.

1. Be honest and do what’s right

Nothing is more important than personal integrity and ethical behavior. I am not just talking about doing what is legal. In all the gray areas, I am talking about doing the right thing, the kind of thing you’d be glad to tell your children about and actions you wouldn’t mind seeing on the front page of the Washington Post. You *never* get a second chance to be trusted and respected.

2. Cut to the “chase”

Great leaders are almost always great simplifiers, who can cut through argument, debate and doubt, to offer a solution everybody can understand.

Effective leaders understand the KISS principle ... Keep It Simple, Stupid. They articulate vivid, overarching goals and values, which they use to drive daily behaviors and choices among competing alternatives. Their visions and priorities are lean and compelling, not cluttered and buzzword laden.

Their decisions are crisp and clear, not tentative and ambiguous. They convey an unwavering firmness and consistency in their actions, which are aligned with the picture of the future they paint. The result: clarity of purpose, credibility of leadership, and integrity in organization.

3. Speak well and write well

I am reminded of a true story of a 5 year old approaching a company executive at a party, asking her what she did at her job. Rather than describe herself as the leader or CEO, she told the child that she was like the captain of a ship. The child interrupted with some impatience and said, “No, I don’t understand what you mean. Tell me what you do every day.”

So the executive took another tack and told the child what she did in as clear a way as she could, verbally running through the events of a typical day, mentioning meetings and telephone calls, memos, letters, and one-on-one conversations in the hallways.

The child stopped her again, this time with the satisfaction of understanding, and said, “Oh, what you do is talk. That is your job.”

How simple and how true ... In a large technology and defense corporation, or in any company or institution, a leader’s primary role is to talk to those around her as purposefully and effectively as she can. You are only as valuable as your ability to communicate information and your ideas. There are few things as important as speaking well and writing well.

4. Be passionate about everything you do

Play as hard as you work and have fun at both. I am especially good at this! Don't always run at a breakneck pace. Take time off when you've earned it ... *I recommend two weeks in Scotland and the English Yorkshire countryside.* Spend time with your families. The corollary to this: “Surround yourself with people who take their work seriously, but not themselves.”

Seek people who have some balance in their lives, who are fun to hang out with, who like to laugh (at themselves, too) and who have some non-job priorities that they approach with the same passion as they do their work. Spare me the grim workaholic or the pompous, pretentious “professional”.

Enthusiasm and optimism are contagious. So is the impact of cynicism and pessimism. Leaders who whine and blame engender those same behaviors among their colleagues. I will take the unrealistic aspirations of the optimist any day.

5. Be available and accessible

Colin Powell has said, “The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.”

Leadership doesn't happen when you come to work ... it is a 24/7 kind of thing. A real leader makes sure she is always there for her people, and her boss, and ensures that she can always be reached. She leverages communication and computer tools to stay in touch when she is out of the office.

You should never abuse the access to someone's personal time but never hesitate to act or communicate when required. In this global economy, speed and access are essential because great ideas are worthless if they can't be implemented rapidly and efficiently.

6. Treat people fairly

People deserve to be treated with dignity and there is no excuse for discrimination based upon gender, race, religion, physical handicap or sexual orientation. It is important to get to know your people – personal relationships form the basis of business success.

7. Do not tolerate mediocrity

Mediocrity is quite simply unacceptable. Holding yourself and your people accountable to a high standard of performance is not an option. There must be quick and clear consequences for those who don't perform to the high standards that have been set.

Good leaders delegate and empower others liberally, but they pay attention to details, every day, and constantly challenge the way things have always been done.

I well understand that being responsible sometimes means *ticking* people off. Good leadership involves responsibility to the welfare of the group, which means that some people will get angry at your actions and decisions. Trying to get everyone to like you is itself a sign of mediocrity.

By procrastinating on the difficult choices, by trying not to upset anyone, and by treating everyone equally “nicely” regardless of their contributions, you ironically ensure that the only people you wind up angering are

those who are the most creative and productive.

8. Recognize that your organization's success is your success

A leader is only as good as the weakest link in her organization, and her performance will be judged accordingly. It is her job to educate and train her people and to get rid of those that “just don't get it”.

Organization doesn't really accomplish anything. Neither do plans. Theories of management don't much matter. Endeavors succeed or fail because of the people involved.

In a brain-based economy, the best assets are people. Too often, people are assumed to be empty chess pieces to be moved around at will, which may explain why so many top managers immerse themselves in deal making, restructuring and the latest management fad.

Far better to dedicate yourself to the goal of creating an environment where the best, the brightest, and the most creative are attracted, retained and most importantly unleashed.

9. Project a professional appearance

Be well groomed, socially astute and appropriately attired. You are frequently someone's first, and maybe only, impression of the company.

In case any of you who are Sweet Briar girls in 2005 do not know the origin of the words, Good Taste and Good Judgment, I suggest you seek out the women from the Class of 1964. We will happily fill you in and assure you that these words and behaviors remain relevant today. (*Grace Mary would be proud*)

10. Be an interesting person

The most successful business people I know are the most well read, well informed and well traveled. They also tend to have hobbies and interests in which they frequently excel. Expanding your personal interests creates a broad perspective that enhances your job effectiveness and your life.

11. Never surprise your boss

Trust and confidence must be the foundation of that relationship. A leader asks for help and advice when she needs it and isn't afraid to raise problems and issues, but she is prepared to then find a solution to a problem herself.

12. Give to others

Be active in your community and participate in organizations or causes that interest you – be generous with your financial resources and your time. This is good recognition for your company, and more importantly it is the right thing to do for others.

Only by being unselfish and giving to others can you find your true sense of self. And, of course include Sweet Briar on your list!

13. Keep your ego in check

The best of leaders never put personal ambition or agenda ahead of their organizations'. If your organization does well, you do well. You should never let personal identity get confused with job assignment – for it might change tomorrow.

Too often, change is stifled by people who cling to familiar turf and job descriptions. Real leaders understand that nowadays, everyone's job is becoming obsolete. We need to obsolete our activities before someone else does.

Effective leaders create a climate where people's worth is determined by their willingness to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities, thus perpetually reinventing their jobs. The most important question in performance evaluation becomes not, "How well did you perform your job since the last time we met?" but, "How much did you change it?"

14. Be technology savvy

When my father turned 90 we had a several day celebration. Susan and I gave our dad a computer for his 90th birthday, his first one, and he learned how to use it. He has an AOL account and he uses it! It is oh so important to stay abreast of technology developments – computer and communications tools are seemingly endless and ever changing. Leaders are expected to use them (no matter how high their position).

I strive to learn about new techniques and use new tools and gadgets as they become available. I cannot afford to be viewed as a dinosaur by the youngest and brightest employees, or heaven forbid, by a newly graduated 21st century Sweet Briar woman!

15. Embrace change and uncertainty and act quickly

You have to be flexible, open minded and cooperative ... no matter what! You must use your best judgment and act quickly – it is better to move quickly on an imperfect plan than to implement a perfect plan when it is

too late.

It is true that you don't know what you can get away with until you try.

Good leaders realize if you ask enough people for permission, you will inevitably come up against someone who believes his job is to say “no”. So the moral is, don't ask.

Research reveals that less effective managers endorse the sentiment, “If I haven't explicitly been told 'yes,' I can't do it,” whereas the good ones believe, “If I haven't explicitly been told 'no,' I can.” There is a world of difference between these two points of view.

"If it isn't broken, don't fix it" is the slogan of the complacent, the arrogant or the scared. It is an excuse for inaction. It is a mind-set that assumes (or hopes) that today's realities will continue tomorrow in a tidy, linear and predictable fashion, which of course is pure fantasy. In this sort of culture, you won't find people who proactively take steps to solve problems as they emerge.

In these sorts of companies I wouldn't invest.

16. Encourage conflict

The best ideas frequently emerge from a good argument, but you need to encourage opposing positions and ensure that the conflict is constructive and focuses on the issues, not the people.

Leadership does not emerge from blind obedience to anyone. If you have a yes-man working for you, one of you is redundant. Good leadership encourages everyone's evolution.

It is healthy to disagree – just make sure that you get angry and then get over it. And remember, the ultimate decision must be supported.

17. Be a nice person and be there for others

I am always amazed at the inherent goodness of those with whom I work. A good business relationship usually has a personal element to it. Don't be afraid to be human.

18. Support the company position

For a strong willed, independent woman, this can be tough. I often have to remind myself that I can always voice my opinion and objections *up* the organization, but not with those who work for me. It is unacceptable to editorialize or second guess a company decision once it has been made.

As a leader in a corporation, my role at work is an extension of the objectives of the corporation. I must never forget that I am paid to do what is best to achieve the company's objectives, not my own.

My ability to marshal the resources that I lead, to accomplish company objectives is the quantitative measure of my business success. The ability to use those skills outside of work – with family, with community, in athletic pursuits and other endeavors – tends to be an indicator of personal success.

19. Lead by example

To be a successful leader, you must lead by example – for you have no right to ask others to do something you would not do yourself. I have always had a rule that I will never ask anyone to work harder than I work myself, nor will I ask others to take risks that I am not willing to take with them. This rule has served me well.

In closing

Leadership is a daunting responsibility – for leaders can be no more successful than the poorest performer they lead. It is a leader's job to help look for the next right answer, to train her employees' technique and to help them be in the place of most potential. Leadership is *all* about people – how you help them, talk to them and set an example. The best of leaders are the ones who help reframe problems into opportunities.

Ultimately the essence of leadership is the willingness to make the tough, unambiguous choices that will have an impact on the fate of an organization and on the fate of its people.

There have been so many examples of leadership we have seen and read about since Hurricane Katrina struck on August 29th – many of them everyday people doing extraordinary things.

... like the man in New Orleans who lived on his roof at night while helicopters dropped him supplies, and rowed around in his little rowboat by day, personally rescuing more than 500 people in those awful flood filled days.

... or like the truckers who volunteered to drive some 65 donated tractor trailers, filled with supplies donated by thousands of Vermonters, from Vermont to the ravaged coast of Mississippi within a week of August 29th.

You see, leadership is the *art* of accomplishing more than the *science* of management says is possible. Management is an administrative task – leadership is a *way of life*.

Thank you.