

Letters to the Editor

Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership

In their article “Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership” (September 2007), Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli offer the labyrinth as a metaphor for the obstacle-filled journey that women undertake to achieve top leadership roles. But metaphor alone is not enough to guide them through the maze. Metaphors exist within a context of myths and stories, whose heroes vividly demonstrate how to triumph over challenges. Since most legendary tales are male oriented, however, women and their mentors need

and then encourages and challenges them to draw on their own potential. As a result, the characters become better versions of themselves; the team overcomes the obstacles along the way; and, ultimately, they all realize their destinies. Under Dorothy’s leadership, they create a vision together in which each member benefits from and contributes to the overall journey.

Dorothy, for her own part, spends most of the time looking for a wizard who she believes has the power to send her home. But when she finds him, he can offer nothing extraordinary. It is Glinda, a feminine presence, who shows Dorothy that she can find everything she needs within herself. Glinda helps Dorothy the same way Dorothy helped the scarecrow, the tin man, and the lion – by identifying and revealing their internal strengths. Like Dorothy, women on the leadership journey already have what they need to succeed. And, like Glinda, mentors should help them access and integrate the feminine into leadership practices.

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to find or create, and then use, success stories that feature the feminine archetype. Without that guidance, women either will fail to rise to leadership roles at all or will ascend at the expense of the feminine, the essence of their strength.

Consider the heroine of *The Wizard of Oz*, for example. Dorothy is an emotionally connected transformational leader: She discovers the hidden talents of the scarecrow, the tin man, and the lion,

Perhaps the traditional trade-offs that women face, addressed by Eagly and Carli, are not forced but voluntary. The top performers in U.S. industry more often than not lead very unbalanced lives because their work demands an almost inhuman level of commitment: The CEO of a major corporation is on

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call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And executives are encouraged to minimize cost relentlessly, even in areas such as payroll and customer service. Does any amount of money justify throwing humane concerns overboard to reach a goal? And if so, will ethics and environmental issues be next? With CEO compensation up to 500 times greater than that of workers, achieving team spirit between the boss and the people – perhaps one of the greatest rewards of leadership – is out of the question. This amounts to a lower quality of life and is sustainable neither for the individual nor for the corporation.

Would the world be better off with leaders who have a more balanced view of life? One wonders whether a female president would have embarked upon a costly war in Iraq or if Enron would have met the same scandalous demise with female top management. I believe that female characteristics and qualities are greatly needed in the corporate world. Stereotypical male aggression should not be held up as desirable.

Frank Olsson

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Eagly and Carli respond: We welcome these thoughtful responses to our article. Anne Perschel is right in recognizing the importance of female role models – from myths, stories, and real life. Feminine archetypes of success can inspire women and help them navigate the labyrinth. In our book, *Through the Labyrinth*, we report research showing that merely being reminded of high-achieving women, such as Meg Whitman, increases women's interest in leading. Furthermore, exposure to women in powerful roles weakens people's stereotypes about women's lack of agency. This is good news because, as these stereotypes erode, perceptions about what constitutes a good leader become more inclusive.

Frank Olsson notes an important factor that creates twists and turns in the

labyrinth: the very long work hours and devotion that many organizations require. "Extreme jobs" diminish the quality of life for both men and women, but women suffer disproportionately. To fulfill their career and family obligations, women sacrifice leisure time more than men do. In fact, the average married man has the equivalent of over five 40-hour weeks more leisure time each year than the average married woman. But cultural changes have made family life increasingly important, and now women *and* men say that they value family over career. And no wonder – research shows that having both an involved family life and a meaningful career enhances physical and mental health.

This cultural shift toward greater appreciation of family life pressures organizations to reduce excessive hours and reward high-quality work over extensive face time. These policies benefit employers as well as employees by increasing the numbers of women in leadership positions, which fosters equal opportunity and is associated with corporate financial success.

The Chief Strategy Officer

Though I very much enjoyed R. Timothy S. Breene, Paul F. Nunes, and Walter E. Shill's article "The Chief Strategy Officer" (October 2007), I was disappointed to see that knowledge of strategy was not one of the necessary traits listed in the sidebar "Help Wanted: Finding a Qualified CSO." In my work with more than a hundred senior executive teams, I have noticed a tremendous dearth of strategy experience at the top levels of organizations. This is because almost no one comes up through a strategy function. How, then, can executives learn the science of strategy?

Senior executives are, in general, brilliant strategic thinkers – that is, they can think strategically about their customers, products, competition, and markets. However, they often lack the ability to translate their thinking into a process



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