

Liz Cornish

Founder, First 100 Days Consulting and Author of McGraw Hill Leadership Book,

Hit the Ground Running: A Woman's Guide to Success for the First 100 Days on the Job

Hit the ground running with Liz Cornish

By Paul Sanders, Columnist: Business Book Review, April 6, 2007

Business Lexington columnist Paul Sanders recently spoke with Liz Cornish, author of *Hit the Ground Running: A Woman's Guide to Success for the First 100 Days on the Job*, to discuss her thoughts on current leadership trends and techniques.

PS: Why focus on the first 100 days?

LC: The first 100 days is like the pause between the flash of lightning and the clap of thunder. You have everyone's attention, which is either good or bad news depending on how you manage it. It's a very critical, vulnerable time in a career. Used well, the first 100 days are an unparalleled opportunity to accelerate success and create positive, long-term momentum. Unfortunately, a few tactical errors or misjudgments can instigate a crisis of confidence in leadership from which it's tough to recover.

PS: Why does your book target women?

LC: Actually, my original plan was to write a gender-neutral book — many of the suggestions are universal. However, early in the interview process of over 200 effective

leaders, a pattern emerged. The men focused on "what to do" in the first 100 days of taking charge. The women spent equal time between "what to do" and "how to be." The book addresses both.

PS: What are the key differences you see between a woman's first 100 days on the job and a man's?

LC: Women have an impressive collective track record, and there are many inspirational role models. However, they are still the relative newcomers to leadership, and both genders are trying to adjust. Like a short basketball player, women are not an automatic "in" and must prove themselves - sometimes over and over. Also, females must often navigate some unique detours as a result of an evolving leadership culture, multiple tugs on their time and psyche, uneven rewards and increased scrutiny. They also unknowingly limit themselves. The book is written with that in mind.

PS: Why this book now?

LC: In the next five to 10 years, there will be an unparalleled exodus in leadership. Look around - there are baby boomers everywhere. They are going to retire, relax, re-configure or whatever baby boomers are going to do, and what will remain is a huge leadership void. Women will help fill that pipeline.

PS: What is the most common problem women encounter during their first 100 days?

LC: It depends on whether they are promoted or come in from the outside. Usually it's (1) tackling the dilemma of springing into action versus slowing down long enough to make informed decisions, or (2) managing awkward relationships.

PS: Are there unique needs of women as leaders?

LC: Because they are still relative outsiders and face such enormous tugs on their time and psyche, women need to create solid support systems. Leadership comes with a physical, psychological, spiritual and emotional price tag. No leader - man or woman - can sustain the energy of the organization without replenishing his/her own. That should not get confused with work/life balance. I mean that women need to recognize what they have to get the job done, haggle for it, then give themselves permission to use it, whether it be flex time, a mentor, gym workout, bigger budget or professional development classes.

PS: What are the most common career roadblocks for women?

LC: Attitudes and related choices - their own and others. And perhaps the media.

PS: What can companies do to facilitate the success of women leaders?

LC: Women have consistently demonstrated the ability to lead. Today's smart organizations will create the environment in which they want to lead, by recognizing and encouraging all potential stars regardless of gender and creating systems that support diversity.

By the way, that's going to be an economic imperative. There's plenty of research that supports the positive impact on the bottom line if women share the executive suite. For example, 25 Fortune 500 firms with the best record for promoting women to high positions are 18 to 69 percent more profitable than the median Fortune 500 firms in similar industries.

PS: What strategies can women most effectively use to become better leaders?

LC: There are plenty of excellent leadership resources, and mentors have proven to be very helpful. In the spirit of Churchill, I also recommend that women take chances, grab the risky high profile (often profit-loss related jobs) and learn from experience.

PS: Why does U.S. business culture continue to be slow in recognizing women leaders?

LC: I think we are still evolving, and industries, organizations and individuals are in various stages of accepting change. As a result, women can be ambivalent, too. As I've already mentioned, there are so many tugs on a woman's psyche that can zap the will to lead - what we expect of ourselves as professionals, mothers, friends, daughters, volunteers, how we must look. It's exhausting.

We keep perpetuating it, sometimes unconsciously. For example, look at the questions Katie Couric was asked. Not only did we scrutinize her news credentials, we also asked questions like "Katie, what are you going to wear the first night? Katie, what do your children think of this new job?" Does anyone even know how many kids Peter

Jennings had? And don't even get me started on Nancy Pelosi's pearls! I think both women and men are guilty of the scrutiny and resistance to change.

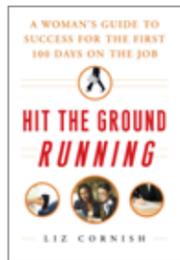
However, women are determined to contribute and are now often creating their own career and business. For example, I recently read that 40 percent of all privately held U.S. firms are owned or controlled by women. Women's companies are now more responsible for more payroll than all the Fortune 500 companies combined ... and their profits are growing faster than all firms.

PS: What do you mean by a leader's "authenticity"?

LC: Any effective leader has to be comfortable with who he/she is. This is particularly difficult for women and minorities, who may feel the push to fit in against the pull to be themselves. But, as one executive said to me, "You must be able to bring your whole self into your leadership role. Otherwise it's one-dimensional leadership and unsustainable - like a wall with only one support." Think about this - what did we want? Another Phil Donahue? No, we wanted Oprah!

PS: Do you think a movie like "The Devil Wears Prada" effectively portrays any of the characteristics women need to have in business today?

LC: Fun movie. Eh? Sure ... self-confidence, drive, creative problem solving and political savvy come to mind. Managing via fear is a short-term strategy. Most of the women I interviewed were more concerned with creating a spirit of "we are all in this together" and "it's gotta feel fair."



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