

Career Challenges for Senior Women - Surviving, Thriving and Leaving a Legacy

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REAL-LIFE
SOLUTIONS



PRACTICAL
ADVICE



SOCIAL
SCIENCE

Outline

- Navigating Workplace Politics
- Navigating Generational Issues
- Leaving a Legacy
- Planning for Retirement



Navigating Working Politics

Among professionals with 20+ years' experience

- 71% of men satisfied with recognition received; 50% of women
- 81% of women mistaken for lower-level employee; 0% of men
- 54% of women denied a bonus or salary increase; 4% of men

Tightrope

Likeability/Competence Tradeoff

"[If women] play a traditional female role, which is more consensus building and looking out for the team, they're considered too wimpy...[but] if they jump in and play investment-banking aggressive, they are labelled as a bitch immediately."



Prescriptive Stereotypes

Women expected to be...

- *Nice*
- “Communal”
 - Helpful & interpersonally sensitive

Men expected to be...

- *Competent*
- “Agentic”
 - Direct, assertive, competitive, ambitious

As women get older, more likely to be seen as threatening – and so unlikeable

Strategy: Gender Judo

- Do a masculine thing in a feminine way
- Femininity as a toolkit
- Likeability often optional for men but not for women
- Should we have to do this?
- No

Tightrope

Authority Doesn't Become You

- *“They just saw her as a royal bitch.”*
- Sometimes being deferential is the price of being seen as reasonable

Deference?

“This is usually some kind of unconscious power struggle that is probably not personal. But the most important thing is that it is not your problem and you don’t have to fix it. Make sure you are communicating in an authentic, kind, and measured way, but don’t try to please or placate.”



Strategies

- Aka work around them
- If that's impossible, think carefully about when and how to bring it up
- Garner allies
- Meeting before the meeting

Tightrope

Managing Down

- *“A junior male colleague wrote me emails starting, ‘Hey, girl.’”*
- Women who give developmental feedback
- *“I had all this work coming in but it was hard to get people to do it.”*



Strategies

- Give developmental feedback matter-of-factly, as career counselling
 - *“We need to talk about how to write a professional email.”*
 - *“There’s a specific way to respond to developmental feedback that can help your career—and another way that can hurt it. Let’s have that discussion.”*
 - Be the best boss ever and take good care of those who work with you
-

Tightrope

Office Housework—or the Glamour Work?

- Organizational citizenship behaviour
 - Women do more of it, and get less credit than they do
 - Off-sites, diversity and women's issues, mentoring

Strategies

- If it's important enough for you to do, it's important enough
 - To merit admin support & a budget
 - To count towards your annual goals
- If it isn't, what's a way to transition to that?

Performance Evaluations:

- **Separate personality problems from skill sets**
Personality issues should be appraised separately from skill that need to be developed. For example, women and people of color may be labeled “difficult” for doing things that are accepted in majority men.



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Bias Interrupters website. On the left, it says "BIAS INTERRUPTERS" in a large font, with the tagline "small steps big change" in a smaller font to its right. On the right side of the navigation bar, there are three menu items: "OUR APPROACH", "TOOLKITS" with a dropdown arrow, and "ABOUT". Below the navigation bar is a large hero image of an office setting with people working at desks. Overlaid on this image is the main headline: "We Help Companies Interrupt And Correct Implicit Bias In The Workplace". Below the headline are two buttons: a white button with a black border that says "LEARN MORE" and a solid yellow button that says "VIEW TOOLKITS". At the bottom of the hero section, the website name "BiasInterrupters.org" is displayed in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Let Us Equip You With Tools To Interrupt Bias

Bias Interrupters is an evidence-based model that provides solutions. It interrupts the constant transmission of bias in basic business systems, which leads to more diverse and better performing workplaces. Bias Interrupters change systems, not people.

Prove-It-Again!

Age Plus Sex

- Women stereotyped as less competent
- So are older people—and less ambitious, too
 - (In fact, they're as competent or more so)
- 1/3 of white men; 2/3 of women and people of color
 - “I have to prove myself more than my colleagues of similar education and experience.”

Prove-It-Again!

Halo/Horns

- *“Oh she’s a workhorse. She really knows how to drive results, but I haven’t seen her drive strategy....”*
- *“Whatever he touches, he just crushes it.”*

Strategies

- *“What do I need to do to be ready for this bonus/role?”*
- Look around: is that what others have had to do?

Prove-It-Again!

Potential vs. Performance

“I bring in millions of dollars in revenue and then... ‘I hit a grand slam last year, so they shouldn’t be bothering me for years’ is what I’m thinking. But nope.”

Strategies

“How many others who had metrics similar to mine last year are still in the rank/compensation band as me?”

Prove-It-Again!

*Objective Rules Applied
Differently*

*“YOU ARE NOT THAT F**KING SPECIAL. It doesn't make any difference that your mother died. You have to live by all of the same rules that your partners do.”*



Strategies

- Call out stigma and disrespect as unprofessional behaviour
- Exercise good tone control
- Make the relevant comparison

Interrupters

- What metrics could your org keep that would help document how women have to prove themselves more than men?
- www.biasinterrupters.org

Should I stay?

- Women who worked at 3+ companies after MBAs earned \$53,472 *less* than those who stayed.
- Men who left earned more.



Working Across Generations

Work-Family Conflict Redux

“The fact that at 55 we are more pressured in certain ways than at 30 says it all. Sick parents, needy children, needy grandchildren, and my male colleagues not all that sensitive to my issues.”

Among professionals with 20+ years experience:

- 54% of women arranged child care – only 1% of men
- 42% of women did laundry; only 8% of men
- 34% of women leave work often for children’s needs; only 5% of men



Maternal Wall

Who Picks Up Slack?

- Sometimes moms assume older women will pick up the pieces – in contexts where they would never dream of asking men to do so
- It's a pass-through of the selfless mother stereotype



Strategies

- What you owe her—and what her partner does
- Socializing over too small a group
- If someone's going on maternity leave, replace her—or prioritize
- Remember: it's challenge for the org (not just you)

Interrupters

- Make sure policies relating to caregiving don't just apply to childcare
- Include eldercare and care of ill family— with men as allies
- Make sure the org is not depending on single people, or people without kids at home, to pick up the slack

Paternal Wall

Chilly Climate for Dads

- One of the best ways you can support other women is to support young dads
- Shift in ideals of fatherhood – use this strategically, to attract the talent
- Older men may find it mysterious...



Tug of War

Tokenism

“If one woman gets a prized position, another woman won’t.”

Strategies

- Work with other women and male allies
- In this day and age – one “woman’s slot”?

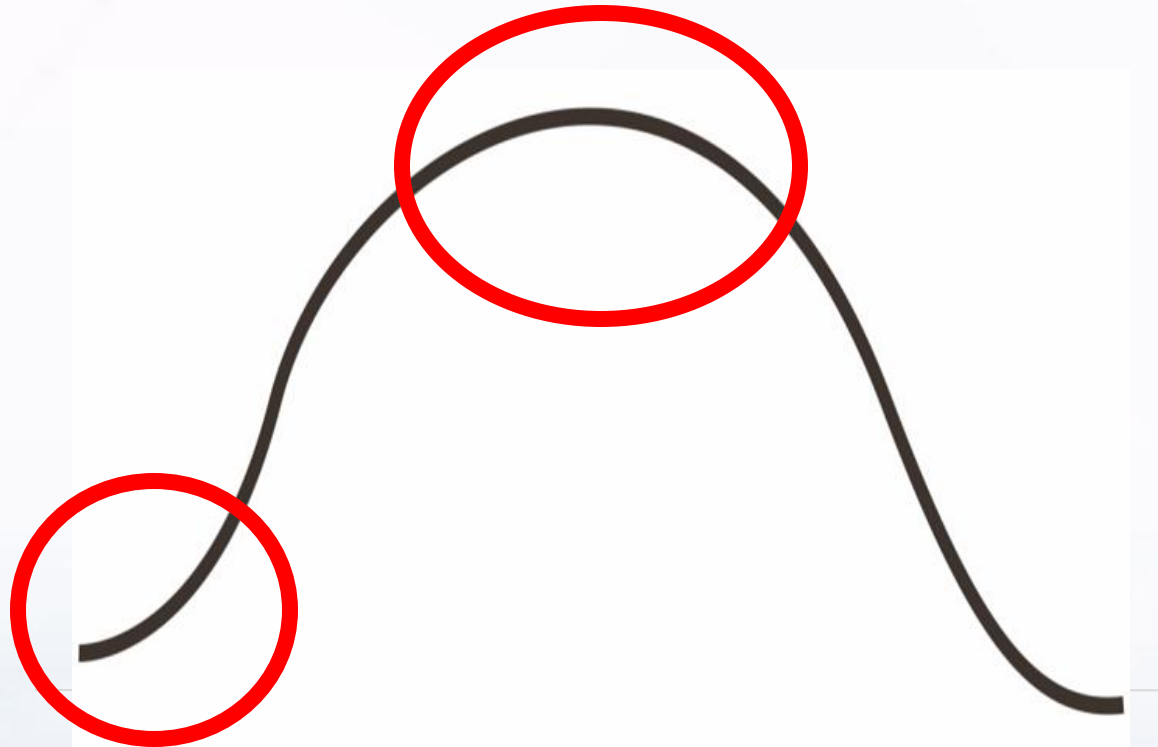
Tug of War

Ageism

- Stereotype that older people are inflexible and unwilling to adapt to change
- May be exacerbated by differences among generations...

The Long Tail

"We have no role models. The older women are just men in disguise."



Tug of War

The Costs of Making It Look Effortless

- Sometimes senior women make it look so easy it demoralizes the younger women
- Remember the curve! Drivenness and indefatigability



Tug of War

Setting Realistic Expectations

- Younger women also need to recognize that sometimes senior women don't help them as much as they think they should because we don't have as much power as they think we have

Strategies

Consider: a panel where women engage in more self-disclosure

Sometimes the older women are hiding what they're doing in order to avoid bias themselves!

“We certainly didn't get all we wanted, but we worked hard to pave the way for you. Thank you goes a long way.”

Tug of War

Strategic Distancing

“I’m not a girl at Google, I’m a geek at Google.”

-Marissa Mayer



If someone is undermining you

“In my experience, the most common situation is that they’re insecure. If—and only if—the person is really inhibiting your effectiveness, you need to take them on in private. ‘I perceive—and I may not be correct in this—that you view me not in the best light always. I’d really like to have a good relationship with you. If there’s something I’ve inadvertently done, I’d love your feedback because my intent is always to be respectful of you and try and have a good relationship with you. So just help me understand if there’s somehow we’ve gotten off on the wrong foot.”

Tug of War

Mommy Wars

"I never went part time and my kids are fine."

"I don't want someone else to raise my kids."

Tug of War

Identity Threat

- The ideal worker...available to their employer
- The ideal mother...always available to her children
- So *most* women feel defensive
- Take yourself out of the equation
- Realize that younger women do feel entitled—
that's our *success*

Strategies

“I’m of the generation that achieved that for them—they have a different range of choices than we had. Their being different is not a rejection of you. I don’t need them to be like me.”

Strategies

“I can understand and respect that other women make different choices than I did. I think it helps all of us if we do that.”

Consider: a panel where women describe a range of choices, and that’s the underlying message

Tug of War

Tightrope Pass-Through

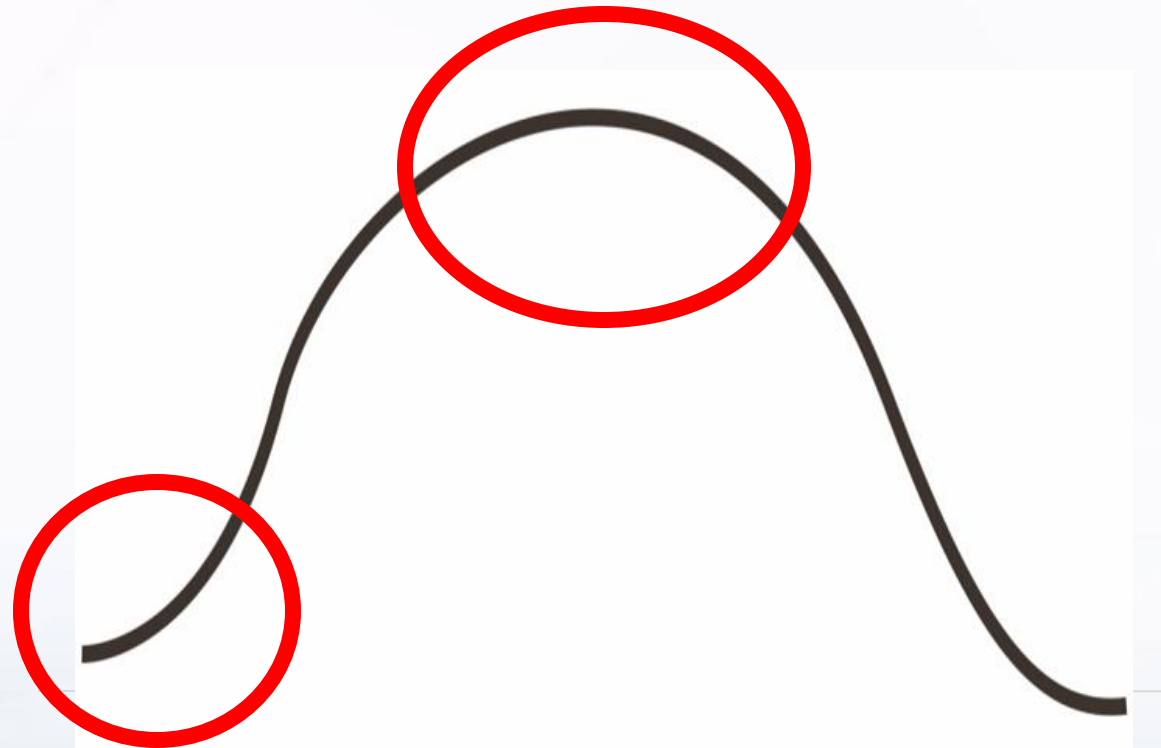
“Those spike heels and girly voices—we worked hard so they wouldn't have to do that!”

Strategies

- 90% of forefoot surgeries on women
- Why does this persist?
- Their own gender judo
- They feel entitled to live up to ideas of femininity

Remember the Long Tail!

"We have no role models. The older women are just men in disguise."





Strategies

“I found those relationships to be really joyful, really interesting....Their experience is different, the way they present themselves is different. Their energy is contagious, their naiveté is sometimes breathtaking. Don't forget the fun of it.”



Leaving a Legacy

Leaving a Legacy

Transitioning Your Work

A common (although by no means universal) pattern

- Senior women's teams are 50/50
- Senior men's are overwhelmingly male
- Look around! This may affect how you handle who takes over your work

Leaving a Legacy

Transitioning Your Work

- Make sure they have the skills – *and* the relationships
- **Skills:** off-sites, special projects, job-sharing, transfers
- **Relationships:** work with key decision makers
- Managing up is important—but so is managing down
- Can be hard when your star isn't working 24/7 for you

Leaving a Legacy

Second Legacy?

Many women also leave a second legacy: the work they have done on behalf of other women

Be as mindful about planning who will take that over as about your work—particularly if you have been doing it on your own time and as a passion project of your own

Either it's institutionalized, or it likely disappears

- Administrative or other support
- Budget
- Can it be a recognized and rewarded performance goal?
- Established role, e.g. always sponsors this activity
- What level of the org should someone have reached to take this on?
- How can this be structured to help that person's career?
 - Building their network
 - Co-lead the work

Interrupters

- Every organization should do formal succession planning
 - Otherwise, in-group favoritism takes over
- Multi-year project for many roles



Retirement?

Why men work...what's a “successful man”

Why women work

Ramping down options may be attractive to both

Retirement

Gender Differences

- Sometimes women are gearing up just when their husbands/partners are gearing down
- Women tend to retire when their male partners retire
- Since women tend to marry older men, this can entail considerable financial sacrifice

Retirement

Finances

If you are relying on Social Security:

- For baby-boomer women, inflation-adjusted, lifetime benefits rise 9-10% if you work until 70 rather than 62 (lifetime benefits for men generally decline)
- Women tend to live longer. Make sure you know how your finances will be affected if you are the longer to live.
- Working 3-6 extra months can raise your income more than saving an extra 1% for 30 years.

Strategies

- If you want to gear up and your partner wants to gear down, have a conversation.
- Did you stay home or cut back when you kids were small?
- That should be part of the discussion

Retirement

Networks

Sustaining a social network is a very strong determinant of health and happiness – people “disconnected to others” 3x as likely to die

Have a plan:

- Peoples' networks shrank 25% when they retired (less so for women & college grads)
- Have a plan for sustaining/renewing your network
- Make sure your partner has a plan (esp. if he's a man)

Retirement

Planning

- People are happiest if they retire when they've planned – not when they have to
- For people who have been very identified with their careers, important to remember that you cannot assume that you will have your good health forever
- If you can afford it, make sure you retire early enough to do things that require good health while you still have it
- You may love your work but—are there other things you haven't spent as much time on as you'd like?

Contrary View

“You can be done in your career even if you don’t know what’s next. You can be done with dinner even if you don’t know what desert looks like. If you listen, you’ll know. It’s part intellectual, part emotional – just feeling jaded. Retirement can be an incredible time of self-discovery. Sometimes you don’t have the headspace to imagine what retirement is while you’re working—at least the way I was working.”

Joyce Norcini, former GC of a tech company



Conclusion

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