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## The Leadership Capacity of Women

Written by Marie Peeler



Successful women—those who build relationships and wield influence—treat people well and seek to build up others, without falling into the trap of needing to be liked at all costs. Their need to achieve objectives is greater than their need to stay safe and to belong to the group. They speak up authentically both for themselves and others, and for the good of the task at hand.

Women can achieve this delicate balance by developing meaningful relationships, creating supportive and successful relationships, and building influence and deepening effectiveness with their co-workers.

To build relationships and true influence, women need to focus on a few key things:

### Establish a connection with others.

Establishing a connection with others also involves developing empathy and emotional intelligence. Part of EI is recognizing and understanding the impact we have on other people. Acknowledging the needs of others and allowing others to feel “heard” is important. Adopting an attitude of curiosity, rather than advocacy, when faced with differing points of view, will help establish a connection.

### Stay authentic.

One’s focus on people can become distorted and we can seek to achieve harmony with others to the point where “pleasing” is more important than speaking up or getting the job done. A huge part of authenticity in organizations is being willing to talk about that which needs to be talked about; the elephant in the room, if you will. That’s one aspect. Another is not being afraid of the truth—admitting that you simply don’t know something, for instance.

### Focus on results (while staying connected).

Sometimes, as women, we focus on people to the exclusion of focusing on results—although sometimes we do the opposite. The key is in understanding that people and tasks are equally important.

Just as people want to follow other people who they think “get them”—that’s the connection piece—they also want to follow people who make things happen and get things done. There is something intoxicating about aligning yourself with a strong woman who knows how to move mountains. What better way to expand your influence than by showing people you are decisive, have a mission, and are focused on getting there.

Some people become so focused on what they are trying to achieve, they become bossy and controlling. That’s why it is so important to maintain a focus on your connection with people at the same time as you focus on the goal. Stay empathetic; develop a keen sense of emotional intelligence that will warn you when you are losing folks. Then, course correct. The idea is to show up, be authentic, and bring value to your work, your team, and your organization while leaving space for others to step up to authenticity as well.

### Work sustainably.

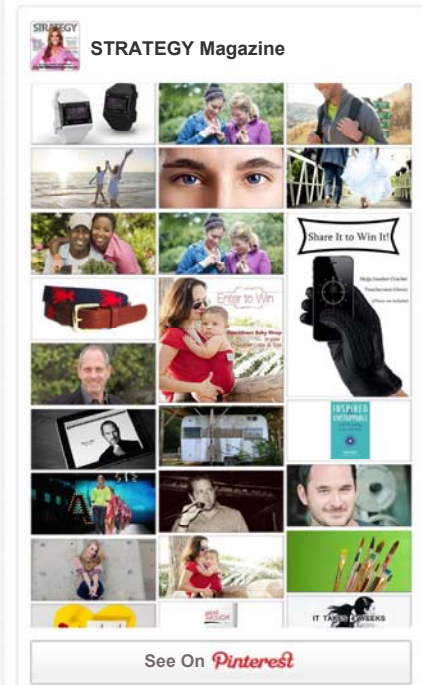
Sustainability is another key skill; yet, in this context, it is a totally foreign concept to many. Think of sustainability as the likelihood that a current course of action or level of effort can be maintained. If you are driving other people or yourself at a pace that cannot be maintained, you are not working in a sustainable way.

Ignoring the sustainability of your efforts and activities can have dire consequences. If an effort is not sustainable, at some point, something will break and the effort will begin to fail. People will become unhappy and disillusioned, or you, yourself, will begin to stress and lose composure.

### Help others succeed.



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Circling back to people, and going hand-in-hand with establishing connection with others, it's important that as you drive sustainably towards your goals, you also give other people a lift. This is simply helping others succeed. It's a big world, but I definitely believe in karma, paying it forward, and the giver's gain. Nothing will help you build supportive relationships more or better than recognizing that others have needs and then helping them meet those needs. If you want to enjoy supportive relationships, be a support.

Whether you are in an official position of **leadership** or not, you have the capacity to be a leader; that is, a person who influences others, one who others turn to for direction, a woman that others want to follow.

*Marie Peeler is a principal of Peeler Associates, a Pembroke, Mass.-based organization that helps leaders clarify objectives, find engagement, improve interpersonal effectiveness, and attain their goals through services that include career planning, executive coaching, team development, custom workshops and seminars, **leadership** assessment, business retreats, and keynote, conference and meeting presentations. As an executive coach and **leadership** development consultant, Marie has worked with both individuals and organizations to increase their business effectiveness through true and lasting transformation. For more information, please visit [www.peelerassociates.com](http://www.peelerassociates.com).*

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