

THE INTERNATIONAL

# Journal of Sales Transformation

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## Build your leadership platform

*Annamarie Neal is Chief Talent Officer, Hellman & Friedman LLC, and has held the same role in both Cisco Systems and First Data Corporation. She is also the founder of the Centre for Leadership Innovation. She explains how having a strong sense of self is probably one of the most essential traits of leadership.*

There are several reasons why women are poorly represented in senior level positions. First, most organisations are poor at architecting systems that effectively identify, develop and promote pipelines of talent. Women lead differently to men – often in ways that are inclusive, collaborative and sharing of responsibility and credit – but this difference can be undervalued by senior men who seek to clone themselves in the C-suite or board room.

Second, we continue to carry the primary burden of caring for children particularly during those critical “on the rise” years of one’s career. Women often opt out: they see what it takes and often step away from corporate roles to pursue entrepreneurial adventures that give them more flexibility. And third, some industries and corporate functions are frankly unfriendly to women.

### Build your own brand.

You’ll never get what you’re worth if you don’t understand what makes you uniquely valuable to your company. I authored a book called *Leading from the Edge* that explains how



having a strong sense of self (knowing who you are and the value that you desire to create in the world) is probably one of the most important essential traits of leadership.

Help define your brand using techniques like 360 analysis either conducted by yourself or an outside executive coach, to get clear on how you’re currently perceived by others. Then, hone your leadership platform and narrative so that you can succinctly explain how your strengths contribute to corporate, social and personal value creation.

### Choose where to engage.

Do you accept the consulting job or the management position? Join a male-dominated industry or seek out a field that’s more gender-balanced? Where you decide to invest your time and professional energy can have a huge impact on your future. Sometimes, the best leadership development (and subsequent exposure) comes from extra-curricular assignments that are beyond the scope of one’s day-to-day role.

### Don’t be afraid to ask.

Sheryl Sandberg urges women to negotiate when they’re offered a job – period. Many women simply accept the first salary offer for fear that the offer will be rescinded entirely if they’re perceived as difficult or demanding. But asking for more is actually a powerful way to cement your brand as high-quality.

Indeed, when Katie Couric joined *The Today Show*, she made a point of asking for a 50-50 split with then-host Bryant Gumbel because she believed asking for less meant she wouldn’t be taken seriously and would be doomed to covering puppies and recipes. (She ultimately received 48% to his 52%, far better than she likely would have been offered otherwise).

### Ensure your brand speaks for you.

The best way to get what you’re worth is to have employers and clients seek you out specifically because of a strong reputation. You can draw them to you by creating insightful content online, which demonstrates your expertise, and by having a “wingman (a like-minded colleague) to talk you up and sing your praises to others. You can do the same for him or her. You’ll get far fewer price objections when someone simply has to do business with you because they’ve heard so many good things about you.

I’m often quoted for saying agility is the new smart. For an organisation to out-create and out-innovate its competitors, it must cultivate talent that thinks in new and different ways. And for organisations to be globally adept, leaders must embrace empathy as a business imperative. To do both, an organisation must be diverse: in thought and mindset, but also in experiences. I believe the leader of the future – and therefore, the organisation of the future – must be polymathic. By definition, this requires one to be diverse in thought.

## The confidence gap

*Trang Chu is an executive leadership coach and founder of Tallgrass Way where she works with high-profile executives in investment banking, private equity and law firms. Previously, she was a managing director at Deutsche Bank and Merrill Lynch. She explains how success correlates as closely to confidence as competence. She can be contacted on [www.trangtchu.com](http://www.trangtchu.com).*

Companies that embrace diversity tend to be more creative, more dynamic and, ultimately, more successful. Research<sup>3</sup> shows such companies are 41% ahead of the sector’s average in terms of return on equity and 56% ahead in terms of EBIT. Yet women continue to be underrepresented at senior levels. One of the reasons for this is unconscious bias.

We are all biased to a certain extent. We naturally gravitate towards those who look like us, think like us and come from a similar background to us, so it is unsurprising that women find it hard to break into the upper echelons of management if the current board is made up of predominantly white middle-aged men.

To that extent, the boys club or network does still exist in lots of guises and is difficult to break down. It’s not only men who need to be aware of their unconscious biases – women too should reflect on their ingrained beliefs to see whether they are actually holding themselves back from reaching the top. With relatively few women in key roles, you may unconsciously doubt that you have the required abilities and strengths to succeed.

Compared with men, women don’t consider themselves as ready for promotions and they generally underestimate their abilities, frequently leading them to not put themselves forward for opportunities. Success, it turns out, correlates just as closely with confidence as it does with competence.

### Networking is critical to career progression.

In general, women struggle to maintain both their internal and external networks and do not network in the way that men do to raise their profile. This is partly due to the fact that the majority of networking occurs after office-hours when many women are rushing home to take care of their families. Also, men tend to see the bigger picture and understand the benefits of doing “face time” whereas women see it as an inefficient use of their time.

### There are five key areas women can focus on to overcome barriers and become successful leaders.

Firstly, believe in yourself. It is important to be direct and confident. Know what you want and make a plan to go out there and get it. Working with a coach can help you decide on and achieve your career goals.

Secondly, find yourself some good senior sponsors as well as at least two mentors (one within the company and one external) and make it known to them that you are ambitious and looking to rise up the career ladder. Thirdly, excel at what you do and ensure to promote your successes. Next, for those women with families, try and seek roles that give you flexibility in your schedule to enable you to spend some quality time with your children. Finally, don’t forget about your physical and emotional health. Find time to

replenish your energy: work out, take a holiday or a mini-break or just soak in a hot bubble bath with a good book and a glass of wine.

With all the demands of family and work, many women do not make their own health a priority. Women often feel overwhelmed, and taking care of their health seems like one more chore on the never-ending to-do-list. When we prioritize our health, we become much more productive, and truly “present” in our roles. When you feel good physically, mentally and emotionally, you are able to bring more to all that you do.

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey & Co. *Women as a Valuable Asset*.

