

FAIR LADY

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Work NOTICEBOARD

By SUE GRANT-MARSHALL

Think your way to success

She says: 'Oh, I've made a terrible mistake. I really am not good at this.'

He says: 'I've made a mistake. I will learn from this'

Sounds familiar? Probably. Women, generally, tend to exaggerate their weaknesses and magnify their mistakes. They also tend to discount their successes, attributing them to 'luck' rather than ability or effort. Most men accept praise for success as their due.

'Women need to change their way of thinking if they are to position themselves for success and for leadership roles,' says Beverley Smallwood, an American psychologist and trainer, who will be addressing the challenges facing women in the workplace at The Working Woman's National Convention in September.

Beverley offers three steps to help you to break old habits and to become more positive.

1 Identify the problem

'Keep a diary of your thoughts and when you're feeling low write down exactly what you are thinking,' advises Beverley. At the end of a week look at your entries and ask yourself if you are being too negative. How accurate are your perceptions? Ask yourself how you would feel if your best friend had described you the way you've described yourself. Is there a pattern to your thinking? 'You need to be systematic about changing the way you downplay yourself and your abilities,' says Beverley.

2 Control emotional reasoning

'Women are sensitive and this is a strength that managers need right

now, but it can also be a weakness if it is unbalanced,' says Beverley. Women make sense of situations by analysing their feelings. 'I feel my boss doesn't like me, so it must be true,' we mutter to ourselves, accepting our feelings as facts. But we need to examine our feelings and ask ourselves if there isn't another way to interpret a situation. Are we guilty of selective perception? Are we responding to a habit? Are there other things happening that we're just ignoring? Maybe something else is upsetting your boss - not you.

3 Act out a new way of thinking

How often have you sat in a meeting and been unable to contribute to the discussion because you felt your opinion wouldn't be worthwhile? Talk to yourself, convince yourself, in the same way you would a friend, that your opinion is as good as anyone else's. Practise putting forward a suggestion in front of the mirror at home. Force yourself to speak up at the next meeting and you'll probably be amazed at the positive response. Participating in meetings will become much easier thereafter.

Beverley stresses the importance of women assuming leadership roles. 'We make up nearly half the workforce, and if it's to be a balanced environment we must lead as well as follow.' Women have traditionally shunned leadership roles because they are associated with aggression and dominance, both of which make many women feel uncomfortable.

'However a true leader does not necessarily have either of those traits. A leader is someone who can motivate people and generate enthusiasm, and women are particularly good at this,' stresses Beverley. 'And that's why we need women's skills as we try to cope with the change that's taking place in the workplace all over the world, not just in South Africa.'

What's contributing to all this



change? Beverley cites rapid advances in communication technology; the marketplace becoming more global; and customers becoming much more demanding in terms of service excellence. To meet these challenges, companies are changing - often streamlining their operations to become more competitive.

'Every change involves an ending of some kind - a loss. And with this there is anger, grief, resentment,' says Beverley. 'Women are particularly good at handling change; men are culturally less used to coping with it.'

You can learn more about leadership qualities and negative thought patterns at the Working Woman's National Convention on September 14 - 15 at the Karos Indaba Hotel in Sandton. Topics include: coping with change, turning stress into energy, managing your image, turning conflict into cooperation, and what the changing economy holds for women. The cost is R1 450 for a single delegate and R1 200 for group delegates. To book, call Audio Word at ☎ (011) 957-2097 or fax (011) 957-3212.

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