

The Catalyst

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Lessons from *One Size Never Fits All: Business Development Strategies Tailored for Women (and Most Men)*

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"If women want to succeed in [law] firms today, they endure the pain of the misfit, but not enough women can or want to endure the pain for very long, and they leave. The void they leave in their wake is a void that hurts them, the firms they are leaving, and all of us who want to see greater gender equality in the workplace. ... [Women] are culturally not included and therefore not advanced into leadership ... [As a result, w]e are missing out on so much brilliance, creativity, innovation and leadership, because we are not hearing their voices."

This passage from Dr. Arin Reeves' most recent book, *One Size Never Fits All: Business Development Strategies Tailored for Women (and Most Men)*, summarizes in a nutshell the challenges which many women still face in the legal profession today. Although we have certainly made numerous advances, much still needs to be accomplished to achieve full inclusion and equality for women who practice law.

The good news is that our overall representation within the legal profession

is increasing. This past May, the ARDC released its 2014 report, which reveals that as of last year, female lawyers accounted for 38% of all attorneys in Illinois. Compare this with twenty years ago, when women made up 25% of all Illinois lawyers.

Although we can be encouraged by the steadily increasing numbers of women **entering** the profession, there also is not-so-good news when it comes to women **staying** in the profession for the long-term and achieving leadership roles in law firms and as in-house counsel. Unfortunately, these results remain discouraging. One report issued by the American Bar Association's Commission on Women in the Profession revealed that although large numbers of women enter private practice after law school, these numbers steeply decline as they ascend the ladder of power. Less than 20% achieve the status of partner, and even fewer are welcomed into the class of equity partners. The same numbers hold true for women achieving general counsel status in large in-house departments.

The troubling numbers reflected in the ABA report call for us to not only examine why women remain underrepresented in leadership positions, but also to create

strategies for positive future change. An important voice in this conversation is Dr. Arin Reeves, who, as a lawyer and a sociologist, is uniquely qualified to weigh in on this topic. She has used her broad skill set for more than 15 years to work closely with personal service firms on issues of inclusion and equality, to pen award-winning columns in the *Chicago Daily Law Bulletin* and the *Chicago Lawyer*, and to create the research and advisory firm, Nextions, which focuses on diversity in leadership. *One Size Never Fits All* is her second book, which followed her 2012 best-seller, *The Next IQ: The Next Generation of Intelligence for 21st Century Leaders*.

Through years of conducting original research—including interviews, studies and experiments—Dr. Reeves has documented how gender differences in business development adversely affect women, particularly that the "one size" traditional and male-oriented business development strategies are very ill-fitting. In *One Size Never Fits All*, Dr. Reeves confronts this phenomenon—which, she opines, has led to the absence of female leaders in many firms—and challenges the *status quo* to create important change benefiting women

attorneys, their Firms and the profession as a whole.

In her book, Dr. Reeves vividly documents the challenges faced by women to develop business using the conventional male-focused models, sharing frank first-person accounts she has gathered from both women and men to reveal why these accepted strategies fail to capture the strengths of talented women and thereby hamper their success. She also offers innovative suggestions to address this dilemma at both the firm and individual levels, and to work towards revolutionizing future business development models which better fit women. Indeed, Dr. Reeves' book is a treasure trove of important lessons for women attorneys seeking to advance in the profession.

For example, one of the many insightful observations she makes regarding female attorneys at the individual level is that different personality traits between males and females lead to divergent perspectives on business development. Although men and women exhibit the same behaviors at the start of the business development process, Dr. Reeves discovered that they were engaging in the process of developing business relationships for different reasons, and this, in turn, impacted upon their success.

The research showed that women developed the relationship for the sake of building the *relationship* itself, meaning that the relationship was the goal of the process. Because of this, women felt guilty when the time came to ask for business from the contact. Many women commented that they did not want to be seen by the other person as a "user," and they found it difficult to "sell" themselves as a potential business referral. In sum, because of the way the women viewed the process, they had great hesitation in extracting business from the relationship.

In sharp contrast, men developed the

relationship as a means to *attracting business*, which was the goal. Accordingly, men experienced no pangs of guilt in asking for business, and, in fact, viewed it as offering a mutual benefit to both parties. Also, rather than believing they were "selling" themselves through this process, the men looked at it as allowing them a valuable opportunity to "tell" others about themselves and what they could do for them.

Another insightful observation made in the book is that women tend to have a strong aversion to self-promotion. Dr. Reeves discovered that "tooting your own horn" is very difficult—if not impossible—for many women. For some, the discomfort was so great that it resulted in adverse physical reactions, such as nausea and sweaty palms. Many viewed it as unseemly "bragging," and cited traditional social norms which call for women to be humble and modest. These women adhered to the view that their hard work would "speak for itself," and, eventually, they would be noticed and rewarded for their efforts and loyalty. Many also shared stories about the double-standard they had seen applied to female colleagues who appeared to have suffered penalties both for engaging in self-promotion and for not promoting themselves enough.

Dr. Reeves' research also shows that women are more likely to attribute their success to external sources, while they attribute their failures to their own internal, personal weaknesses. This is most clearly seen in self-evaluations, where men speak about leveraging their strengths, while women attempt to neutralize their weaknesses. The end result is that men feel positive about their performance, while women feel negative. Overall, women are more hesitant to express explicit ambition, and the indirectness of their approach makes it harder for them to develop and execute ambitious business development plans.

Based upon these and other difficulties faced by women which are outlined in the first part of her book, Dr. Reeves readily admits that "resizing" deep-rooted business development strategies is not an easy task. Nevertheless, she has a strong belief that it can and must be done. To that end, she devotes the second half of her book to discussing detailed ways in which firms and individual lawyers can change their perspectives, methods and goals, and begin the process of making business development fit women far better than the traditional models. With respect to firms, Dr. Reeves shares the results of pilot projects she has created to help firms address this issue, and provides specific suggestions to firm leaders to help begin the re-sizing process.

With respect to individual lawyers, Dr. Reeves strongly advises us to "change our vocabulary" with respect to business development, including focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses, success rather than failure, and self-sufficiency rather than dependence. She noted one experiment in which she asked women to write letters of recommendation for other women and then to write one for themselves. In almost every instance, the women were far more comfortable in extolling the virtues of their colleagues rather than their own. As a result, Dr. Reeves further suggests that each woman have a "ghostwriter"—*i.e.* a trusted friend or colleague—to help draft her bio, professional profile, resume and anything else which describes her to the world. In one instance, a woman who participated in this exercise called Dr. Reeves, crying. She shared that she was so "proud of the woman in that bio ... [because] she sounded amazing and accomplished," and she pledged to start seeing herself the way others do.

In sum, *One Size Never Fits All* raises awareness to the existing problems and provides concrete ways to improve the situation to benefit us all. ■

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