

Taking Charge: Becoming a "Remarkable" Woman



This article appeared in **SAGE Lawyer Marketing – for Women**, a source of ideas for women attorneys who want to improve their business development, move to the next level in their personal marketing and boost their careers by originating more client work. Other articles are available at the web site, where you can also find books, recorded seminars, links to other sites and other useful resources. <http://sagelawyermarketing.typepad.com/women/>

The pathway to becoming a remarkable woman, a leader in your field, is the subject of a book released last year by consultants at McKinsey & Co. (*How Remarkable Women Lead: The Breakthrough Model for Work and Life* by Joanna Barsh and Susie Cranston). It came to our attention because of an appearance by Ms. Cranston at a woman's business conference.

Though it's been critiqued for sounding like a self-help manual at times and demonstrating the value of familiar rather than breakthrough lessons, the many interviews the authors conduct with successful women executives are engaging and helpful. Also, it sure does help to be coached positively at any time with reminders of what you might do and can do.

In the book, the authors derive from their surveys a systematic program of five key actions by which a woman can take control of a career, and enjoy it as well. The five elements of what they call Centered Leadership are: meaning, framing, connecting, engaging and energizing. Roughly, those are recommendations we have heard from our own interviews with women rainmakers (click the bullet point for the article):

- defining what you want
<http://sagelawyermarketing.typepad.com/women/2010/06/rainmaking-lessons-from-a-top-woman-litigator.html>
- forming your game plan to get there
<http://sagelawyermarketing.typepad.com/women/2010/10/five-steps-to-an-effective-marketing-program.html>

- building relationships and relationship skills
<http://sagelawyermarketing.typepad.com/women/2010/09/doing-good-for-her-communities-also-means-doing-good-business-development.html>
- just doing it
<http://sagelawyermarketing.typepad.com/women/2010/07/best-practice-advice-from-the-chair-of-the-aba-commission-on-women-in-the-profession-bobbi-liebenber.html>
- finding the supports to keep it going.
<http://sagelawyermarketing.typepad.com/women/2010/05/lessons-from-hol.html>

In an excerpt available at [McKinsey's web site](#) - where you can also see some interactive features and video - the authors report on an interview with Dame Stella Rimington, the first woman director of MI-5, Britain's intelligence agency. It demonstrates the type of lessons they draw for any lawyer who want to take control of her or his practice, but recognizing likely advantages women bring.

For the authors, Rimington's story is an example of engaging, making things happen in your career. This involves several forms of commitment:

1. Take the risk, including facing your fears and speaking up for yourself, i.e. showing "presence," emphatically demonstrating your capabilities (not just with clients, but with colleagues too).

"You can learn to speak up for what you want, too," the authors say, "It takes knowing what you want. Surprisingly, the secret to success is usually just asking. Our own preconceived notions may be limiting your definition of what's possible. Afraid of rejection, some don't ask. Sometimes we're afraid we're not ready. Maybe some of us are afraid to win. But by not speaking up, no one knows what you want. What's worse, they assume you aren't interested or maybe not even qualified. So dream a little, and then find your voice."

Of course, one of the ways to reduce risk is to strengthen your capabilities, including legal and business development skills. They add, "When you start

from a firm foundation of subject matter expertise and experience, the risk associated with stepping into a new role or assuming increased responsibility decreases."

2. Find ways to create opportunities so you can "own" them. The women rainmakers we have interviewed demonstrate this quality over and over again, finding a marketing opportunity or service niche they can develop and flourish in. This can happen, as you can read in their stories at this site, by currying relationships through leadership of Bar association or practice-based organizations; by launching targeted marketing and service efforts with others in the firm on women-owned small businesses or organizing to handle all the needs of technology companies; and by sheer persistence on one's on behalf.

3. Collaborate. The importance of securing allies within the firm and outside the firm - as referral sources, advisors, mentors etc. - is a recurring theme with women rainmakers, and one they typically feel can be a relative strength for women, if they aim to practice it for their own benefit as well as the benefit of the team. According to Rimington in the book's interview, "it's very important to have colleagues around you who are different from you and who are not scared of you—who will give you advice without fear or favor," she said. "I suppose I don't feel especially convinced that I know the right thing to do on my own" so you need to choose complementary colleagues for positive results.

One key skill of collaborating, especially with referral sources of all sorts or business development teams, was highlighted by the review of the book in Forbes Magazine, "The authors assert that men are better at practicing reciprocity, the principle of "I'll scratch your back and you scratch mine." Women, they surmise, typically practice a "tend and befriend" strategy, a more inclusive method of management that addresses the care and welfare of the group first and foremost. As Denise Incandela, president of Saks Direct, discovered after her initial attempts to launch Saks.com failed, "The way that I am going to get [colleagues] vested is not just by pitching myself or talking about what the business needs, but by actually coming up with something I could do for them." Good advice.

What perhaps makes the twenty-five first-hand accounts within the book so worthwhile, in the end, may be what women have done to gain from such stumbles and setbacks as Incandela faced, the downside of risk taking.

Three interviews cited in the BusinessWeek review of the book particularly come alive on this often ignored, but important theme: "There's a breath of fresh air in the candor of Axis Bank CEO Shikha Sharma's embarrassing tale of a deputy's jihad-themed sales program when she was at India's ICICI Bank (IBN), which landed her in hot water, and in former Qantas Chairman Margaret Jackson's recounting of a botched interview she gave while in the hospital and on medication. Some revelations are both reassuring and amusing: Ann Moore says "forget perfection and balance!" in recalling her failed attempt to be both a media exec and a producer of homemade baby food."

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