Women in Power: Examining the Pathway to the Top

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ABSTRACT

As more women begin to enter the upper management ranks of the business world, researchers have recognized several patterns in terms of common factors which influence career paths and choices. Based on this, I conducted a study with the purpose of identifying those influences and traits which women in the field most attributed to their individual success. This information could thereafter be used as a guide for young women such as myself who are about to begin their own career paths within this field. Through the use of survey and individual interview, my findings indicated that individual background, family support, education, and activities were shown to be the most influential aspects of professional development, while key personality traits necessary to success as noted by the participants included a mixture of both individual (self-motivation, perseverance, etc.) and interpersonal (communication, compassion, etc.) abilities. Advice offered by respondents again emphasized the need for individual motivation combined with the strong interpersonal skills which facilitate professional relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Today, women make up almost half of America's labor force. Within the last decade, more and more women have begun to permeate the upper ranks of the predominantly male business world. Statistics show that in 1995, only 8.7% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies were women. By 2005, however, the percentage had nearly doubled to 16.4% (Catalyst, Inc., 2007). Research indicates that this progression will continue at a more rapid pace in the future as an increasing number of women pursue career paths within this field. In a recent article concerning the developing presence of women in leadership positions, the author states, "Women are entering professions and taking on leadership positions, and it is necessary to learn about those who have succeeded and what affected their growth and development. It is vital for the advancement of women's rights and the development of young girls to understand the foundation of successful women and the early experiences that instilled self-confidence and leadership traits" (Matz, 2002). Clearly, several factors exist that affect the development of career paths undertaken by successful women in all fields. Therefore, it is important to identify these factors in hopes of creating a model for young women across the globe as they embark on their own career paths within the business world.

PURPOSE

As research points out, the presence of women in the business world is constantly growing. However, it is undeniable that women have faced many obstacles as they move into the predominantly masculine management ranks. As a young woman about to graduate college and enter the business field herself, I felt it would be beneficial to recognize the individual elements that contributed to the success of powerful women within the business community. Since, to date, little research has been conducted in this area, I chose to take the opportunity to explore the commonalities and differences between women of differing backgrounds and ethnicities in order to identify the leading and lagging predictors of success. This research strives to avoid the 'woman vs. man' argument, and instead focus on the 'woman vs. herself.' Still, it is important to analyze both the external factors as well as the internal factors that affect these women individually to determine if any patterns exist. I again emphasize the importance of researching a wide array of women, as it is my intent that the end result of my research be used as a prototype for all young women in the same position as myself as a key to success in their own professional development.

BACKGROUND

In her 2006 article, Madsen states, "leaders emerge from the critical interplay of personal values and commitments, special circumstances or historical influences, and personal events that motivate and mobilize people's actions." It is evident that a combination of individual background, inherent personality, and obstacles faced within ones lifetime have a profound effect on the development of individuals both personally and professionally. I will explore research conducted within each sphere specific to the female gender.

Individual Background

To date, much of the research on leadership and management has ignored how the personal histories of people may influence their conceptions of leadership (Madsen, 2006). Further, there have been very few studies which explore childhood experiences, activities, personalities, and perceptions of successful leaders in relation to this (Hennig & Jardim, 1976). In her study, Madsen conducted individual interviews with ten female university presidents focusing on their childhood and past experiences in regard to how it affected their leadership abilities later in life. Her research concluded that these abilities were drawn from several areas, including (but not limited to) family support, individual personality, extracurricular activities, and education. First, extensive evidence supports the idea that "family is one of the most influential contexts of socialization in childhood and adolescence" (Hennig & Jardim, 1976). It is also suggested that "women who enter male-dominated fields such as science often come from families where mothers are working, both parents are highly educated, and success is considered critical" (Adya & Kaiser, 2005). It is evident that the values emphasized by parental figures as well as the choices made within their own careers are extremely influential in the chosen career paths of their offspring. This is supported by Adya and Kaiser, who, based on the results of their 2005 study linking parental decisions to the their children's choices later in life, state, "Our research assessment strongly indicates that parental education and choice of careers are strong motivators for children's career choices as well." In this sense, parents often act as mentors for their child in terms of expectations, values, and other principles set forth in parental behavior. In fact, evidence shows that parental figures

are generally the most significant role models in a young woman's development, whereas individuals outside the family hold little influence. In their study of female IT professionals, Adya and Kaiser assert that "parents, particularly fathers, are the key influencers of girls' choice of IT careers. Teachers and counselors provide little or no career direction" (Adya & Kaiser, 2005). In another study, the author confirms that "women did not speak of any relationships with teachers as role models or mentors to them at young ages. (Madsen, 2006). Clearly, the learned behavior of children from their parents has the most sizeable impact on professional aspiration and mobility.

In addition to this, the personality traits unique to each child may attribute to her degree of success in the future. In her study, Madsen noted that "As children, the presidents were generally obedient, reflective, observant, smart, self-directed, competitive, and moderately to highly confident. It was important for them to live up to their own expectations and those of significant adults around them" (Madsen, 2006). In several studies, these traits were commonly recognized early on among motivated women in positions of power. Adya and Kaiser were able to identify a correlation between personality traits and the activities in which a child participates, affirming that "inherent personality traits and manifestation of different external influences make children unique. Their individual differences draw their interests to activities and content areas such as problem solving, ability and willingness to interact with people" (Adya & Kaiser, 2005). Madsen found that the presidents in her study "were involved in a variety of helpful activities as children and thrived on learning and developing new skills, knowledge and capabilities" (Madsen, 2006). Also, that the women felt many of the activities were helpful in developing important skills and abilities necessary for effective leadership" (Madsen, 2006). The high degree of involvement these children experienced positively influenced the capacity for leadership ability in each.

As for education, it is not surprising that successful women tend to describe themselves as high achieving and motivated students. Consequently, the Presidents in Madsen's study noted that "school came fairly easy for them, and that they 'flourished.'" (Madsen, 2006). Other research indicates that a relationship exists

between personality and education in terms of the decisions made regarding career choice. Adya and Kaiser found that "students attaining a higher level of maturity by college are able to make choices based on a broader perspective of social and structural influences on their careers" (Adya & Kaiser, 2005). Because of this, career paths chosen by women with these qualities are often more defined and attainable due to the variety of factors considered when making that choice.

Personality

When analyzing individual personality, many researchers use the "Five Factor Personality Model" as a base for determining the dominant qualities possessed and their inherent value to the individual. The Model states that there are five broad dimensions of personality, as follows:

1. Neuroticism
2. Extraversion
3. Agreeableness
4. Conscientiousness
5. Openness to Experience

(Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004, p.41).

Each dimension is further broken down into more specific traits; for example, "Conscientiousness" tends to indicate characteristics of "self-discipline, the aim for achievement, and planned rather than spontaneous behavior" (Hellriegel & Slocum, 2004). Consequently, studies have shown that in the business world, "conscientiousness and emotional stability have been the most consistent FFM predictors of performance (Witt, Burke, Barrick & Mount, 2002). In addition to this, conscientiousness is noted as one of the key attributes related to an individual's hirability (Barrick, Stewart & Piotrowski, 2002). Women who display high levels of this quality tend to be "organized, exacting, disciplined, diligent, dependable, methodical, and purposeful. Thus, they are more likely than low-conscientiousness

workers to thoroughly and correctly perform work tasks, to take initiative in solving problems, to remain committed to work performance, to comply with policies, and to stay focused on work tasks (Witt, Burke, Barrick & Mount, 2002). It is clear that a vital portion of Conscientiousness focuses on the skills needed to 'accomplish.' This is further described by Brewer and Gardner who state, "Accomplishment striving reflects an individual's intention to accomplish tasks and is characterized by a high task orientation. Task-oriented employees have a strong desire to accomplish task-related goals as a means of expressing their individual attributes and preferences (Barrick, Stewart & Piotrowski 2002).

While conscientiousness no doubt denotes the success attributed with the "Type A" personality common to so many powerful business women, it is also crucial to recognize the delicate balance between individual actualization and interpersonal empathy, as the two are both necessary skills in the working world. One article supports this relationship, stating that "highly conscientious workers who lack interpersonal sensitivity may be ineffective, particularly in jobs requiring cooperative interchange with others. (Witt, Burke, Barrick & Mount, 2002). In a 2003 article describing the experiences of women directors of Fortune 1,000 firms, the author stresses the importance of these relationships in terms of their impact on mobility: "Other women insiders described more relational strategies such as 'acting political' and 'maneuvering' to advance their point of view. For these women it was primarily the relationships and the building of alliances that was most important" (Zelechowski & Bilimoria, 2003). Again, personal abilities are important, however, innumerable factors pertaining to a woman's career path are dependent on her relationships with co-workers, clients, and any other interpersonal relationships associated with her particular career.

An article written in Online Women's Business Center Daily highlighted the thirteen most essential qualities possessed by successful female leaders, both individual and interpersonal in nature. The list included such traits as emotional stability, dominance, conscientiousness, tough-mindedness, social boldness, team orientation, empathy, and maturity, to name several. (Sleeth, 1997). With these traits, women

are able to remain proactive participants in their careers while at the same time demonstrate a sense of responsiveness associated with the maintenance of human relationships. One study stresses the importance of this balance, asserting that these women "are more likely to exhibit innovation (e.g., actively seeking out change and offering solutions), demonstrate political acumen in their organizations, and take the initiative to develop their own careers" (McCarthy, 2002).

Obstacles

It is undeniable that women in the business world face obstacles of varying degrees every day. In the last decade, however, significant evidence labels the most recognizable obstacle as the "glass ceiling," concerning the limited mobility of women in a predominantly male business force (Bennett, 2002). For minority women this is often referred to as the "concrete ceiling," as they may experience discrimination based on race in addition to gender. Related to this, many women are also faced with the difficulty of balancing increasingly high-paced careers with family priorities (Bennett, 2002). No doubt the complex obstacles faced by women in the business world today reach far beyond these specific issues, but evidence supports that a significant amount directly stem from the two.

HYPOTHESIS

Based on previous research, I feel that several links exist between the backgrounds, personalities, and obstacles faced by successful women regarding the impact of each upon personal and professional development. I believe that a combination of these factors influenced career choices and paths, and affected the overall mobility of each individual. I will strive to identify these commonalities through the comparison and analysis of a diverse sample of successful women.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to best fulfill the objectives of this study, I decided to create a survey which would be administered to women who had recognized a high degree of success in terms of rank and/or position within their career paths.

Survey Design

Using a grounded theory approach, ten open-ended questions were formulated based on my hypotheses and separated into two sections; one section focusing on individual background and the other on individual personality (See Appendix I). The questions were purposefully broad in nature in order to prevent the limitation of results (i.e. women were able to answer open-endedly rather than limiting them to multiple choice answers). The questions within each section addressed several areas pertaining to both background and personality, in order to distinguish those which respondents felt were vital to individual development and accomplishment (i.e. family, education, inherent personal strengths/weaknesses, etc.).

Survey Administration

Because the study focused on a select group of women, it was necessary to find a relevant population in which to conduct the survey while still maintaining the randomness of participants. Based on this, I chose to offer the survey to a group of women attending the Women's Summit at Bryant University, as the program was catered to ambitious women such as I was seeking. Prior to each session the survey was administered by my advisor to those interested in participating. In total, forty surveys were completed.

Survey Analysis

The results were then analyzed manually through a coding system, in which each specific answer was assigned a number to determine the frequency, if any, of responses. For example, if when asked about the activities participated in as a child the respondent answered "sports," or any other team related activity, the answer would be coded as '1,' if activities were individual in nature they would be assigned as '2,' and so on. Specific activities were recorded (i.e. "basketball) as were other relationships as stated above. Numbers were then tallied to determine recurrence.

Individual Interview / Analysis

Based on the found commonalities, I created a more intensive survey to be conducted on an individual basis. Of the forty participants I selected three from different ethnic backgrounds and different areas of expertise in order to diversify the sample, and then conducted phone interviews with each. The questions delved deeper into those addressed on the original survey to gain a better understanding of each woman's background, personality, obstacles faced, and any other entity which affected the development of each woman's career path (See Appendix II). These results were again coded and compared to those of the original survey to identify and validate reoccurring themes.

RESULTS

Surveys (Demographic)

As stated above, the survey was completed by forty women attending the women's summit at Bryant University. An analysis of demographic information found that the majority of participants were between 20-40 years old (twenty-eight within this range), while ten were between 40-50 years old (only two were over fifty, and none were over sixty).

AGE	TOTAL
20-30	13
30-40	15
40-50	10
50-60	2
60+	0

Table 1: Summary- Age of Respondents

As far as education, thirty-three held a Bachelors of Science or Bachelors of Arts, while only three had obtained their Associates. Five either had or were working toward their MBA, and three individuals noted Law degrees. While no doctorate degrees were recorded, other financial certifications such as CFP, CFA, etc., were observed. Surprisingly, not one of the individual participants specifically referenced higher education (Graduate School) as a key element in the progression along her chosen career path.

DEGREE	TOTAL
Associates	3
Bachelors (Science/Arts)	33
MBA	5
Law	3
Other (CFA, CFP)	3
No Response	4

Table 2: Summary- Education of Respondents

The current positions held by respondents ranged greatly, although the majority were within business field. There were only three reoccurring positions recognized: lawyer (3), actuarial analyst (2), and financial manager (2). Beyond this, there were no

recognizable patterns when it came to the job titles held by these women. The breadth of positions recorded suggests that there is no one specific field women today are more inclined to enter in terms of creating a career path, although it appears that a great majority of the women surveyed did hold management positions of varying degrees. A summary list of the job titles held by respondents is listed below.

CURRENT POSITION/JOB TITLE	
Account Executive	Educational Coordinator
Adversity Account Executive	Financial Advisor
Actuarial Analyst	Financial Manager
Analyst	Help Desk Analyst
Associate Director of Academic Support	Instructional Designer
Buyer	Lab Manager
CEO- Home healthcare	Lawyer
Child Therapist	Manager
Dentist	Office Engineer
Director of Human Resources	Operational Manager
Director of Supported Emp. Services	Performance Development Manager
Policy Analyst	Service Associate
Program Coordinator	Software QA Engineer
Senior Engineer	Statistical Analyst
Senior Executive Secretary	Training Administrator
Senior IT Trainer	Training & Development Manager
Senior Programmer/Analyst	

Table 3: Summary- Job Titles held by Respondents. Managerial Positions Highlighted.

<u>Survey (Questions)</u>
Aside from demographic information, the survey addressed five questions:

1.) Any aspects of individual background that may have contributed to respondent's success
2.) Inherent Personality Traits/ Strengths/Weaknesses that were critical to or hindered success
3.) Significant obstacles experienced
4.) Recognition of specific areas within an organization that facilitate upward mobility for women better than others

5.) Advice for young women as they begin their career path

Question 1: Background

In all, fifteen women attributed strong family support and/or familial values to a successful career later in life. Second to this was the credit of individual education in general, with emphasis on undergraduate studies. As stated above, thirty-six of the forty indicated some degree of college education. Four attributed their success to private school at the elementary to high school range. Many addressed the activities they participated in as a child as key elements to their later success; of those who noted this about 75% participated in team activities such as sports, clubs, etc. at some point in their lives (several were also captains of team sports in high school and college), while the remaining 25% took part in activities of a more individual nature (i.e. tennis, student government, etc). Several women discussed the impact of working during their youth- either at a family business or otherwise- stating that it taught them discipline as well as financial principles at an early age. Lastly, fourteen respondents noted individual mentors as key individuals in their paths to success. These mentors were mainly members of their immediate family, specifically parents and grandparents.

Question 2: Personality

The question pertaining to personality traits was divided into two components: the recognition of individual strengths, and the recognition of individual weaknesses. Responses for personal strengths varied considerably. Generally, however, answers pointed most often to characteristics associated with self-motivation, communication skills, and confidence. Several noted the importance of ambition and perseverance as holding vital roles in personal success, while many others focused on the ability to communicate through numerous facets, including person-to-person, writing, and presentation skills. Along with this was the necessary ability to demonstrate respect in personal and business relationships alike by remaining open-minded and compassionate. A summary of Respondents' personal strengths is listed below.

Inherent Personal Strengths	
Individual	Interpersonal
Ambitious	Ability to Adapt
Aptitude	Ability to Accept Feedback
Attention to Detail	Ability to Work in a Team
Competitive	Communication
Confidence	Compassion
Curiosity	Flexibility
Determination	Honesty
Efficient user of Time	Integrity
Hard Worker	Listening Skills
Intellect	Openmindedness
Leadership Ability	People Skills
Motivated	Respectfulness
Organized	Grace
Outspokenness	Self-awareness
Overachiever	
Passion	
Perfectionism	
Perseverance	
Presentation Skills	
Resiliency	
Self-Starter	
Strategic Decision Making Capacity	
Type A Personality	
Willingness to Learn/ Work Hard	
Writing Skills	

Table 4: Summary- Inherent Personality Strengths as listed by Respondents

Only a handful of participants chose to list individual weaknesses, resulting in a smaller range of responses. However, those traits that were listed seemed to be relatively common in frequency. Interestingly, some of those traits that respondents considered “weak” pertained to either extreme introversion (“shyness,” “too nice”), or extreme extroversion (“too strong willed,” “too vocal”). A summary of found weaknesses is listed below.

Inherent Personality Weaknesses	
Individual	Interpersonal
Laziness	Introversion
Self- Doubt	Lack of Diplomacy
Self Esteem	Shyness
Susceptible to Stress	Too Nice
Too Strong Willed	Too Vocal

Table 5: Summary- Inherent Personal Weaknesses as Listed by Respondents

Question 3: Obstacles

The third question referred to any obstacles the respondent may have faced within her lifetime (either professional or personal) that she felt significantly impacted her career path either negatively or positively. Again, several responses were frequent in occurrence. Eleven of the forty either chose not to answer, or recognized no significant obstacles which influenced their careers. Ten women referred to the difficulty of entering a predominantly male organization/field, as well as the presence of the 'glass ceiling.' Others noted the struggle to maintain a balance between home life and work life when it came to families and relationships. In terms of their specific organizations, a few women felt hindered by management and compensation, and experienced limited mobility within the company. Only two experienced racial discrimination; however, five women felt that they were discriminated against based on their young age and/or lack of experience. Four women recognized their biggest obstacle as the actual change in their career path when they decided to switch professions due to various reasons (job dissatisfaction, glass ceiling, family priorities, etc).

Question 4: Upward Mobility

The participants were asked if they felt there were any areas either within their organization or within the business field as a whole that facilitated upward mobility better than others. Responses were so broad in nature (from specific positions to general fields) that few discernable patterns were identified. A sample of answers

suggests that positions within human resources, sales, accounting, and education were relatively mobile for women. However, twenty-three of the forty stated either no area was better than another, abstained from answering, or weren't sure. Four women noted that more and more, roles in upper management are being filled by women due to the current lack thereof (U.S. Department of Labor, 2007). It is assumed this will be beneficial for young women who follow a managerial career path as more women continue to penetrate this field.

Question 5: Advice

The most pertinent question on the survey called for the advice the respondents would give young women who are about to embark on their own career path. Again, answers were varied, but were directly correlated to the aforementioned strengths and weaknesses listed by each specific respondent. For example, if the respondent had labeled her personal strengths as motivation and determination, the advice given would highlight the importance of these attributes (i.e. "remember dedication and priorities"). Those whose strengths focused more on interpersonal skills offered advice such as "be open to instruction," and "learn from other co-workers." The most repeated advice pertained to setting realistic and flexible goals and having a plan to obtain them. A sample of advice given is listed below.

Sample- Advice	
Individual "Be realistic and flexible with your goals" "Never take no for an answer" "Be persistent and positive" "Get your education early. Don't wait. Become mobile" "Have the ability to adapt to change" "Don't be afraid to change careers if you aren't happy"	Interpersonal "Learn from older women and co-workers" "Get involved and volunteer to lead" "Have confidence and speak up"

Table 6: Sample- Advice offered by respondents to young women entering the business world

Individual Interviews (Demographic)

After analyzing the results of each survey, three individual interviews were conducted to gain further insight into the key indicators of success based on background, personality, and obstacles.

Demographic

PARTICIPANT 1:

Job Title: Director of Diversity & Outreach program/Associate Director of Academic Support, Roger Williams University

Age Range: 20-30

Ethnicity: African American

Education: BA Philosophy

PARTICIPANT 2:

Job Title: Manager, Amgen Inc.

Age Range: 20-30

Ethnicity: Asian

Education: BS Microbiology & Molecular Genetics

PARTICIPANT 3:

Job Title: Certified Financial Planner, Merrill Lynch

Age Range: 40-50

Ethnicity: Caucasian

Education: BS

Individual Interviews (Questions)
Questions 1-5: Background

The first five questions were formulated based on specific areas of background listed by respondents in the surveys as key to their success. The interviewees were asked if a childhood friend were to describe them, what would they say? The respondents all described themselves as ambitious children; they were serious and mature and involved in many activities. They were confident and self described "leaders." All three were involved both in team sports and other group activities (basketball, volleyball, academic talent programs) as well as activities individual in nature (student government, tennis, golf, math Olympian). Each participant noted the discipline learned as a result of these activities, and one acknowledged the importance of learning how to be a gracious winner as well as a gracious loser. Academically, two of the three described themselves as "straight A" students through high school. Both also stated that upon entering college they became more average in terms of academics as they dealt with the proverbial challenge all college students face: finding the balance between "work" and "fun." On the other side, one interviewee described herself as an average student until college, at which point she became ambitious and driven to learn.

The fourth question asked each woman to characterize her upbringing in terms of family values, structure, and class. Each stated that they came from 'average' backgrounds- however each respondent's definition of 'average' seemed to be different. One woman described her family as "classically all-American": i.e. strong relationships with both her immediate and extended family, both parents had professional jobs, etc. Another interviewee experienced the death of her father at a young age, but noted that even with a single parent she never lacked for anything. Likewise, the third respondent was raised by her grandparents whom she felt taught her invaluable lessons that her parents could not. This information helped to clarify the importance of the parental role in each woman's success. To validate this further, when asked who they would consider to be their individual role models while growing up, each woman credited the people/person who raised them.

Questions 6-8: Personality

The personality section of the individual interview illustrated many reiterations of the questions posed on the original survey. Similar to the prior question regarding childhood personality, Question 6 asked how each woman thought a colleague would describe her persona in the workplace. One respondent felt she would be recognized for her strong interpersonal skills, while the remaining two were described as confident, hard-working and professional. Question 7 addressed the other side, asking which skill or trait each respondent had to work the hardest to develop. All addressed communication issues- 'being able to read people,' 'public speaking,' and 'client relations.' Another identified flexibility as a learned behavior- the ability to 'multi-task' and work under conditions beyond individual control.

Question 9: Obstacles

It was necessary to address specific obstacles experienced by each woman, and to understand how each handled the unique circumstances. Two discussed the difficulty of losing parents (both literally and figuratively) and recognized perseverance as the underlying mentality in overcoming their losses. Also, both stated they learned independence and discipline as a result. Another issue brought up was that of the 'glass ceiling,' and the difficulties associated with finding success in a 'world of men.'

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

As stated, the purpose of this research was to identify the commonalities, if any, between successful women, and how they contributed to each one's career path within the business world. The findings appear consistent with prior research based on the several elements which impact a persons' life, including background, personality, and obstacles experienced. Using a methodology combining generic survey and individual interview, I was able to derive that there are, in fact, significant commonalities within each of these areas as I had originally predicted. The following will discuss the findings among each component, and will also provide relevant advice offered by the interviewees to young women about to embark on their own career paths.

Background

Both the survey and the individual interviews concluded that the four most influential aspects of a woman's background in creating a lifestyle conducive to success are:

a.) Family Support
b.) Education
c.) Activities
d.) Mentors

An overwhelming number of participants responded that family support, values, and upbringing were the single most influential contributors to their success later in life. One participant asserted, "My family upbringing is the number one reason I am who I am today." Most of these women came from what they described as "average" households- although it should be noted that the definition of "average" seemed to vary between respondents. Very few acknowledged a privileged background. These families encouraged a strong education, and each respondent noted that they were forced to learn independence at an early age. One participant supported this, stating "[There was a] strong emphasis on education from my family, also a strong work ethic instilled by my parents."

Because of this, education also played a major role in the development of these women. As students, they were serious, mature, academically motivated, and ambitious at an early age. Many stated that school came easy for them due to their

higher level of maturity. For example, "I was very serious; very mature for my age. I was ambitious, and a perfectionist. The women were also very involved in extracurricular activities during their youth, further displaying their inherent ambition. Interestingly, they attributed both individual activities as well as team-oriented activities to their later success. One respondent stated that "Being the President of clubs and the Captain of sports teams taught me to be a good leader to others." Another acknowledged the value of individual activities such as tennis and student government in that they "Taught me to be competitive, to be the best I can, to be disciplined, to depend on myself, to try hard- all of those things." All believed that these activities were vital in the development of their personal character.

Many attributed a portion of their success to a mentor, in each case someone within their immediate or extended family. These findings support previous evidence that in the past it has been rare for women to regard teachers and others within the community as role models. This was also verified by the individual interviews in which two respondents held their mother as the most influential person in their life, while another credited her Grandfather. In all cases, their mentors were the individuals who raised them.

<u>Personality</u>
When asked which individual personality traits the women felt most contributed to their success, the top four most commonly repeated responses were:

a.) Self-Motivation
b.) Strong Communication skills
c.) Perseverance
d.) Confidence

These findings support the Five Factor Personality Model, as the answers highlight a combination of individual and interpersonal abilities. The quality of self- motivation undoubtedly pertains to the "Conscientiousness" dimension, while the necessity of communication skills recognizes the importance of maintaining human relations through "Agreeableness." Results of the individual interviews also supported this

balance, as respondents labeled themselves as ambitious, hard-working, confident, and compassionate. In regards to communication and interpersonal abilities, one respondent noted that "People have confidence in me and my ability, but mostly my ability to have relationships with people. A colleague told me today she thinks I can easily go into situations and make people feel at ease." In most industries it is essential that a leader possess these skills, as interpersonal relations are a fundamental element of business. Still, communication was the most common response when asked which skills were most difficult for the women to develop upon beginning their career. In addition to this, they noted the necessity of developing individual 'flexibility.' For example, when asked this question a participant affirmed that the most challenging aspect for her was learning "The ability to Multi-Task. When you are in school, you control your environment in terms of getting things done; at work you have to deal with whatever they throw at you at the time, and your priorities are constantly shifting so you have to be flexible. We have to react to the outside rather than controlling it."

While few responses were generated, the most common answers when asked about personal weaknesses were:

a.) Introversion
b.) Self-Doubt
c.) Stubbornness

In terms of communication, many felt that inherent introversion had hindered their performance and/or satisfaction within the workplace at some point in time. Along with this, several of the respondents admitted to a lack of confidence due to age and inexperience. One stated, "I used to feel, 'I'm so young- what can I provide to all these people who have been in the industry for years?' Sometimes, though, you surprise yourself- sometimes you have more insight than you give yourself credit for." All recognized that confidence was a learned behavior; a quality that inevitably developed for them over time.

Obstacles

Consistent with past studies, the most common obstacle these women faced was associated with the 'Glass Ceiling.' A high percent of respondents identified some situation in which her gender affected how she was treated and/or regarded in the primarily male business world, as well as the limited mobility associated with this concept. One participant identified her largest obstacle as "Being a woman entering a predominantly male finance field ten years ago when women advisors were less common." In addition, several noted the difficulty of balancing work with other life obligations. Another respondent maintained that "Finding a work/life balance with two small children equaled an ongoing reprioritization between career and family." Lastly, many participants considered their age to be the largest obstacle to overcome. For example, "Being the youngest supervisory manager and getting respect off the bat was my biggest challenge. I always needed to prove myself and why I deserved to be in my position." The results of the obstacles section displayed the most consistently reoccurring responses.

Advice

In both the survey and the individual interview, the participants were asked to offer the most valuable advice possible to the young women who would be following in their footsteps. After careful analysis, the five most frequent responses are summarized below with specific participant responses:

1.) Set Goals.

- "Have a dream; understand your goals and go for it. It won't fall into your lap so be creative in all you do to achieve what you want from your career and personal life"
- "Set goals that are both realistic and attainable and have a plan to get there"
- "Do what's right for you and your individual circumstances. There is no "right way" for all"

2.) Find Confidence.

- "Have confidence and speak up"
- "Be confident. Ask questions. Its alright to not know everything; be willing to learn every day"

- "Promote yourself"

3.) Change is OK!

- "Have the ability to adapt to change"
- "Don't be afraid to change careers if you are not happy"

4.) Be Open-Minded.

- "Be open to instruction"
- "Learn from older women and other co—workers"
- "Listen"

5.) Work Hard

- "Hard work never hurt anyone"
- "Work hard for the hours that you work. Be organized and focused so that each hour counts. Leave time for exercise, sleep and relationships."

Collectively, these five categories of suggestions are considered by respondents to be imperative in the development of a young woman's successful career path both personally, and professionally. In their book Seven Secrets to Success: A Woman's Guide, authors …..and….. identify several characteristics of 'successful people' similar to those listed above, including the utilization of a mentor, the ability to develop an effective network, the ability to communicate effectively, the ability to increase visibility, and the ability to balance home and work (Brooks & Brooks, 1997).

In addition, the results of the individual interviews also recognized a combination of confidence and perseverance as key factors in this development. A sample response when asked for advice recognizes determination as a vital player in the development of confidence within young women: "If you don't succeed, try again and again. Be resilient. Be assertive. Be confident. My confidence has absolutely evolved over time, but again, it does take time." Many researchers also verify the importance of efficient goal setting. This is explained in an article linking personality and job performance, which states, "The number of specific goals an individual may choose is virtually unlimited. However, a broadly applicable theory of work motivation requires the identification of a limited number of basic goals that regulate human

behavior in the workplace" (Barrick, Stewart & Piotrowski, 2002). In addition, further research has established that "goal orientation has a consistent, direct relationship with a number of outcomes, including self-efficacy, feedback seeking, learning, and performance" (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002). It is essential to set attainable goals in order to remain focused and facilitate personal development.

However, it is also important to remember that there is no such thing as a perfect career path. In fact, Margaret Heffernan states in her book The Naked Truth, "What will protect [women] is knowing that perfect paths aren't an option. Almost no woman has had a wholly unimpeded career; in fact, careers are beginning to look more and more irregular, interrupted and individual" (Heffernan, 2004). Clearly, the participants in this study have all recognized great success as a result of specific commonalities in personality, upbringing, and experiences along their uniquely disconnected career paths. As more young women enter this complex workforce, it is important they use the concepts described above as a means of developing the key traits which are indicative of such success.

Limitations

In every study there are certain limitations affecting the accuracy of results. Pertaining to this specific survey, the sample itself was taken from a regional group of self-selected women rather than a national, random group. This no doubt reduces diversity among participants. Also, the participants were given the option of taking the survey rather than mandated, further restricting results to reflect only those who chose to participate. A few circumstantial issues arose as well, including inclement weather at the time the survey was conducted which prevented many from participating due to their inability to travel. Lastly, the study recognized several time constraints as a result of necessary deadlines. No doubt a more in-depth analysis would have been facilitated by a greater time frame, allowing more conclusions to be drawn.

APPENDICES

Appendix I – General Survey Template

My name is Erika Rosewell, and I am conducting a survey on successful women and the pathways undertaken to reach success in the business world. I am designing a project that will identify the commonalitites between these women in terms of personality, goals, background, and obstacles. I hope to use this project in the future as a guide to help aspiring young women flourish in the business world. All Answers are confidential.

1.) Age:

20-30
30-40
40-50
50-60
60+

2.) Nationality/Ethnicity

3.) Education (Did you attend graduate school; in what field/s do you have degrees?)

4.) Field of business/Position

5.) Are there any parts of your background that you feel were critical to your success? (private school, family owned business, etc.)

6.) Which inherent personality traits/strengths/weaknesses you feel were critical to your success?

7.) Did you experience any significant obstacles in your path to success? If so, what were they?

8.) Within your organization, do you feel there are any specific areas that facilitate upward mobility for women better than others? (marketing, finance, etc.)

9.) If you had to give one piece of advice to young women on their paths to success what would it be?

10.) Would you be interested in offering more information on your path to success in an individual interview?

Contact Information:

Appendix II – Individual Interview Template

1.) If you asked a childhood friend to describe you as a child, what would they say?

2.) What activities did you participate in as a child, and do you feel they helped to

3.) What kind of student were you, generally (starting with elementary)

4.) How would you characterize your upbringing?

5.) Did you have any particular role models or mentors excluding parents?

6.) If you asked a colleague to describe you, what would they say?

7.) What skill/ability do you feel you most had to develop when you entered the business world?

8.) What skill/trait are you most proud of/ or has helped you the most in your career path?

9.) Have you had significant learning experiences/obstacles that you can think of that motivated you?

10.) What do you feel is the most critical ability/ or personality trait that young women entering the business world should possess

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