

BUSINESS

THE CALL

'Women's Summit' hits home

First-ever event features speakers who offer advice on work, coping

By MICHAEL HOLTZMAN
Staff Writer

SMITHFIELD — There are different routes to success for women in a not-always receptive workplace.

For about 500 mostly professional women at yesterday's first-ever "Women's Summit" at Bryant College, the models, teachings, stories and helpful vantage points were offered in abundance.

"I hope this is going to come back every year," concluded Joanna T. Lau, one of several regional and even nationally noted speakers who this year earned the Boston Chamber of Commerce Pinnacle Award for achievement in business and an honorary doctorate from Bryant.

Bryant President Ronald K. Machtley, whose wife Kati co-chaired the day-long workshop, called Lau, president and founder of Lau Technologies in Andover, Mass., a remarkable success story of hard work and studiousness after she emigrated from Hong Kong at age 18 with her widowed mother and seven



At left, Judge O. Rogerie Thompson, District Court associate judge in Providence, offers her viewpoint on family and work during the "Women's Summit" yesterday at Bryant College in Smithfield. Below, Hazel Henderson, right, futurist author of "Building a Win-Win World," talks to Hang Wang of China, a graduate student in finance at Bryant. Henderson says a civic society is becoming the world's third sector and must change how governments and companies are rewarded. About 500 people were in attendance.

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sionings.

Certainly, the speakers included women who'd pulled up their bootstraps and with support have made impressive marks in the work world. But their tone was not "You can do it, too." Rather, it was: "Here's what I'll share that might help and inspire you."

For instance, Providence Associate District Court Judge O. Rogerie Thompson, addressing one of the smaller workshops, on women's "mission impossible" of integrating their work and families, picked up the ball for women where full-time jobs remained essential, and part time not an option.

"The first thing I'd say is 'Don't have a nervous breakdown,' " laughed Judge Thompson. Bringing a warm southern sense of humor, Thompson told of her own balancing act — with three teen-agers and a husband oblivious to what bombing out of the house with "I'll be home late tonight" means for a wife, mother and judge.

Thompson, whose father died when she was 8 and whose mother sweetly told her "you can't depend on any man," learned to prepare herself for self-sufficiency — and always wanted a family.

But after starting her own law firm in 1980 and leaving her first infant on top of a file cabinet or

with a sheriff at the courthouse between hearings, she came to this conclusion: her life was going to require "some tremendous organization skills."

She said somehow women are expected to completely manage their households — which can be exhausting, she noted. "Prioritize what you can let go, and just get very focused," she advised.

Organize. Focus. And "do the best you can," she said.

Before her, Bryant Assistant

Professor of Management Lori Coakley and Providence College management professor Pamela D. Sherer talked about the adverse impact of women downsizing their careers to part-time status — and how to counter that personally, professionally and economically.

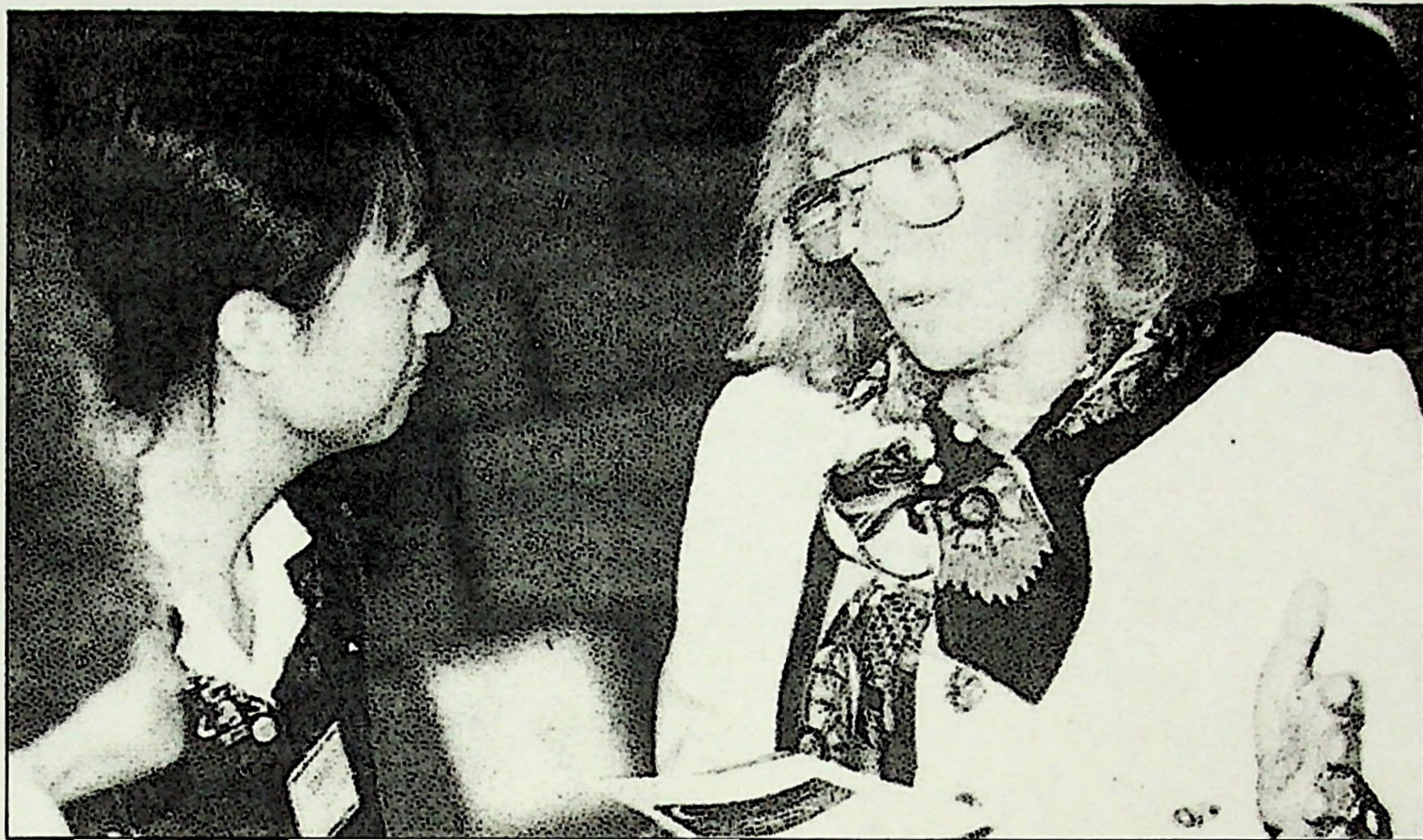
The two professors had interviewed more than 200 women making that transition and concluded: women see seeking part-

time status from their boss as a favor.

They moved the group through six steps — beginning with assessment of possibilities and how to really keep the job part time — to forming strategies and focusing on the work, not the part-time status.

"Anticipate what they're going to object to and find a remedy,"

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Coakley said.

Melinda Lemos-Jackson of Cumberland rattled off her credentials: an undergraduate degree from Brown, MBA from Bryant and a prior full-time job as director of communications and marketing in the health care industry.

The problem? Taking care of her children 4, 2 and 10 months while seeking good part-time work and keeping her skills sharp.

A friend in the same spot worked before at a Big Eight accounting firm; now, she's a bookkeeper.

"A lot of people say, 'Why don't you just say home?'" Lemos-Jackson said. "I think the best parents are the ones happiest with their choices, and I feel happiest when I'm also working."

So, obviously does Lau, who told her lessons of working three horrible days in the New York garment district and scooping ice cream in Chinatown as part of the ladder she climbed.

As an ambitious and talented electronics engineer at General Electric, she recalled getting small raises and much bigger

work loads — and never questioning the combination while others made more. "That's a big mistake," she said.

Earning two master's, including an MBA, she was also cognizant of not falling behind technologically. When she asked her husband of two years whether she should get one of those advanced degrees or have a child, he answered, "it's cheaper to go to school."

Lau also became convinced that "it's people that make a company successful." And she was successful, as a graduate student in 1990, convincing 60 employees at Bowmer Corp., which made the first hand-held calculator, that they should do a leveraged buy-out with her of the \$7million firm in lieu of it going under.

"One of the things that helped me is to set your own agenda, trust your own instincts. Life is too short," Lau said.

Among the other speakers were futurist author and syndicated columnist Hazel Henderson — who like Lau received a rousing ovation — and CNBC "Business Tonight" anchor Sue Herrera, who concluded with the keynote address. Sen. John H. Chafee, R-R.I., was also a conference chairperson.