



Sisterhood in the workplace

Women can help each other to thrive in business

BY ROBIN TRIMINGHAM

If there is one thing that nine years of education in an all-female environment will teach you, it's how to get along with girls. Just as males have their own ways of bonding, younger females have their own natural way of forming and maintaining productive relationships.

Once in adulthood, this powerful form of “sisterhood” can provide a career-minded woman with a reassuring sense that someone “gets her” without judgment, that her sense of humour is not beyond comprehension, that she does have a right to feel anger (but not express it unjustly) and that at least one colleague will instinctively know it's time to invite her out for a drink just by the way she answers the phone. The desirability of having a “work sister” for younger women is supported by a 2018 job site survey by Comparably which revealed that 62 per cent of women between the ages of 18 and 30 had a best friend at work whom they could trust to support them and to tell them the truth. However, this same survey discovered that only 50 per cent of women in their mid-50s indicated that they still had a close friendship in the workplace.

Just as a “rising tide lifts all boats”, finding a “work

sister” to bond with, bounce ideas off and share skills, can elevate the careers of all generations of women by helping them navigate challenges, tackle larger projects, and avoid being mired in corporate politics that might have previously defeated them. It can distinguish them as decisive leaders who are trusted by their peers — qualities that all employers seek when identifying candidates for promotions.

In a perfect world, every woman in Bermuda would have a “work sister” to support and encourage them and nudge them back into the mainstream in the odd moment of insanity, and yet as they rise through the ranks of the corporate world some women invariably make the mistake of viewing their female counterparts as competitors.

“It's tempting to see a competent woman as the person standing between you and your next promotion — particularly if she is currently

holding a job that you aspire to,” said one woman who asked not to be named. “It took me a while to realise that I could learn so much more by asking to work-shadow her, rather than talking behind her back and imagining she was my adversary.”

For years, leadership coaches and HR professionals alike have preached that finding a mentor is key for women seeking advancement, higher pay, professional development or help with their networking skills and making business contacts, yet some younger women are reluctant to seek a female sponsor for fear of being viewed as weak.

Not so, says Kendaree Burgess, chief executive officer of the Bermuda Chamber of Commerce. “Women helping women should be a natural occurrence. We naturally seek out a woman for help or support in our personal life, why should our career be any different? Women need to encourage each other to become secure in their own positions and work together in a productive and helpful manner.”

The recent WeSpeak Boot Camp that took place in Bermuda in mid-April is a perfect case in point. By working together to provide women with the skills they need to become confident public speakers, women can help each other achieve their career goals and ultimately fill more seats on company boards, both locally and internationally.

Women in Bermuda are fortunate that there are opportunities for advancement for those with business skills and leadership abilities. By mentoring their female colleagues and supporting their aspirations to get ahead, everyone wins. **■**



A.F. SMITH
Life's short. Love your work.

7 Tumkins Lane, Hamilton
292-1882 | afsmith.bm