

Interviews: Professional Women Giving Advice

I believe in two principles that have carried me throughout my career that I would like to share with any young leader. Focus on your job, own it, work it, and be accountable to the people you serve and you will go farther than you can imagine. It's the old adage, the more you give the more you'll receive. If you spend more time worrying about your title, your salary, or your status your work will suffer and you're not being fair to your organization, your colleagues, co-workers, and those who rely on you for leadership. Second, as a leader it is critical to listen to others. Listen with the willingness to be influenced, and do as you say you'll do and you'll go far.

- Becky Nelson, Senior Vice President, COO, Sanford Health

Something about your work must connect to a passion. You do not have to save the world. You do need to truly enjoy an aspect of your work. The other is to focus on your strengths. We all have our gifts and talents. Never mind the things you are not good at. Build capacity for those things for which you have a natural affinity. Do not settle. If you are not learning or contributing -- move on.

-Beth Davis, President, SD Rural Enterprise, Inc.

There are many great opportunities in the world so don't sell yourself short. Gather a team of confidants that will give you honest feedback to be successful and to achieve your goals personally and professionally. Take a holistic view of yourself; you need to take care of your physical and mental presence in order to be all you can be.

-Cathy Clark, Community Bank President, Wells Fargo Bank

Find a mentor or friend to discuss business concerns with instead of bringing issues, personalities and work politics home with you.

-Julie Kubisiak, Senior Vice President and Director of Student Loan Services, Bank of North Dakota

Always take the high road, even if it is longer and harder.

~ Lisa K. Fair McEvers, Commissioner of Labor, North Dakota Department of Labor

Work hard -- really hard -- and take responsibility, make sacrifices you can live with, develop your sense of humor, maintain perspective, be sincere and smile; you will gain the confidence and respect of your peers, employers and clients -- gender will be a non-issue.

~Michelle Mongeon Allen, Principal Architect and CEO, JLG Architects

Her top 10 list:_

1. Go the extra mile: Always give more than what is expected.
2. Take risks: Try new things and don't be afraid of failure.
3. Share your vision: Others will help you accomplish it and hold you accountable.
4. Surround yourself with good people: Don't be afraid to hire people smarter than yourself.
5. Communicate effectively and frequently: Poor communication is the root of most problems.
6. Show empathy: Get to know your team and walk in their shoes.
7. Give back to your community: You will always get back more than you give and may learn some new skills you can use at work or with your family.
8. Exercise regularly: You will have more energy, be more successful, and be healthier.
9. Never stop learning: Expose yourself to learning opportunities each day such as networking, reading, attending seminars, job shadowing, etc.
10. Love what you do: Find a way to get paid for what you love to do and 'live the dream.'

~Tammy Miller, CEO and Board Chair, Border States Electric

Interview with Dany Levy, founder of DailyCandy.com:

Published: May 30, 2009 in New York Times

Q. What was your approach when you first started managing people?

there are some basic principle human skills that I learned about this, like the criticism sandwich -- praise, constructive criticism, praise.

Q. How are you trying to improve as a manager?

Sometimes I don't slow down enough to walk someone through why I'm making a decision about something. Also, I tend to be a fairly anxious person. And I've realized that as a boss you can't be. Whatever energy you have is infectious. I'd say in the beginning I was definitely a lot more impulsive and sometimes irrational. And I've learned to sort of slow down, take a deep breath.

Q. What are you looking for when you hire?

A. What I call the figure-it-the-hell-out gene. You know, it's like Occam's Razor – the simplest answer is usually the best, and don't overcomplicate things. It's that kind of mentality that I look for. Also, I have a sensitive radar for cattiness. I have zero tolerance for that. We've got our work to do. This isn't rocket science. As far as I'm concerned, we should all have each other's backs, which is what we've done. I also like people who have a little bit of an off-sense; they are often more creative and can come up with the unexpected. The last quality is someone who's just a good egg. There are a million decisions to be made every day and it's just important that they have a strong sense of right and wrong and good and bad.

Q. Somebody comes to you and says, Dana, what's the secret?

I think the secret is to find and work with really great people, and to stay super focused, to try and understand what you're doing in one sentence or less.