

# The Most Undervalued Leadership Traits Of Women

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It's impossible to respect, value and admire great leadership if you can't identify what makes a leader great. Because of this, the identity crisis I have written about that exists in today's workplace is something that women leaders in particular have been facing for much too long. While the tide is changing and more women are being elevated into leadership roles, there is still much work to do. As of July 2013, [there were only 19 female elected](#) presidents and prime ministers in power around the globe. In the business world, [women currently hold only 4.6 percent of Fortune 500 CEO positions](#) and the same percentage of Fortune 1000 CEO positions. As women continue their upward trajectory in the business world, they have yet to be fully appreciated for the unique qualities and abilities they bring to the workplace.

Like many who grow up with a Hispanic upbringing, I was surrounded by strong-willed, hardworking and purpose-driven women. It is through their leadership that the traditions, values and legacy of our family have been upheld. My grandmother, mother, wife, and sister-in-law all possess natural leadership skills and they are [masters of opportunity management](#) – seamlessly keeping us all in check while running the family household and at the same time supporting our family businesses. They have taught me that a woman's instincts and emotional intelligence can be off the chart. They seamlessly manage crisis and change and are turnaround experts – sensing and neutralizing any signs of danger well before it invades our path. It is because of the women in our family that we are well-organized, full of love, spiritually aligned and well-balanced. We are by no means a perfect family, but we are a modern family who embraces traditions even as we adapt to changing times.

It can be difficult for a man to understand how women think, act and innovate unless he has been closely influenced by the women in his life. I've learned that women may process things differently and in their own terms. Fortunately for me, I've been influenced by great women who made me appreciate their approach towards leadership. I've grown to understand their decision-making processes, the dynamics and subtleties of their personality and style, and other special character qualities that women possess.

The best women leaders I know have circular vision that enables them to be well-rounded people. For example, they have their finger on the pulse of the culture and can talk to you about the latest pop-culture news – but then easily switch gears to give you their perspective on what is taking place on Wall Street. Women leaders seeking a chance to be significant see the world through a lens of opportunity; they are especially in search of those opportunities previously unseen (perhaps this is why the women I know enjoy a good treasure hunt). *My experiences have taught me that great women make it a point to teach men about women.*

I've seen women run the show for years both at home and in the workplace, which has enabled me to recognize behavior patterns and see the value behind their way of doing things. These women are master multi-taskers and highly collaborative (though not afraid to get territorial to protect their domain). They enjoy their own space to test themselves and find their own rhythm. These women leaders are like scientists: many of them want to make new discoveries or solve

for problems where others have failed. The women leaders I've been around don't stop pursuing until the job gets done. This is why I believe they are good collaborative leaders – not afraid of trial and error as long as they continue to build the resource infrastructure around them that gets them closer towards accomplishing their goals. As one of my women mentors told me, “Without enough of the right resources around me, I will not risk the outcome. I know the resources I need to get the job done right. I'd rather be patient than foolish.”

The women leaders I know invest in themselves and become knowledge seekers. They are not afraid to ask questions when given a safe platform to express themselves. For example, during my keynote and conference appearances – more often than not – it is the women who ask me the most questions and they are also more inspired to adopt new ideas and ideals. Though extremely curious, it's often balanced with a bit of skepticism – after all, they don't want to be fooled or taken advantage of. My experiences have taught me that women leaders need to trust a person before they will endorse what they have to say. Many just want to know that there is legitimacy behind the opportunity.

As I've learned from my women bosses and mentors, they want things to be authentic yet practical. These women leaders enjoy a good challenge – and seek to find meaning and purpose from each circumstance they face and opportunity they are given. They like to see and understand the connectivity of thoughts and how they work or why they don't. They want all the facts and figures before making important decisions.

Competitiveness amongst themselves may really be about looking for validation — an identity that matters and a voice that is heard. Successful women leaders don't rely on favors; they earn respect and truly believe they can influence their own advancement by serving others.

Consummate team players, they also seek to prove their value and self-worth by exceeding performance expectations.. Looking for respect more than recognition, the most successful women leaders don't seek to become the star of the show — but they enable others to create a great show. In other words, being in the spotlight is not what drives them – but rather it's the ability to influence positive outcomes with maximum impact.

One thing is certain: these women leaders understand survival, renewal and reinvention. They have grit and are not afraid to fight for what they believe in or an opportunity to achieve something of significance. They believe in what they stand for, but that doesn't mean they won't put their ideas and ideals to the test. For them, doing more with less is simply a matter of knowing how to strategically activate those around them.

While [women leaders have their productivity secrets](#), it's not secret where they come from: the leadership traits that women leaders naturally possess and – based on my personal and professional experiences – are the most undervalued.

## **1. Opportunity-driven**

When confronted with a challenge, the women I know look for the opportunity within. They see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty. They push the boundaries and, when faced with adverse circumstances, they learn all they can from it. Optimism is their mindset because they see opportunity in everything.

Estée Lauder, the child of Hungarian immigrant parents, was quite the opportunist in the cosmetics industry. During the postwar consumer boom, women wanted to start sampling cosmetic products before buying them. Lauder noticed and responded to this shifting dynamic by pioneering two marketing techniques that are commonly used today: the free gift and the gift-

with-purchase. It's exactly this type of inventiveness that other women use to pursue the opportunities in front of them.

## **2. Strategic**

Women see what often times others don't see. As one of my women mentors told me, "A woman's lens of skepticism oftentimes forces them to see well beyond the most obvious details before them. They enjoy stretching their perspective to broaden their observations. Many women are not hesitant to peel the onion in order to get to the root of the matter."

At times they "play the part" to test the intentions of others and to assure that they are solidly grounded and reliable. Successful women leaders know how to play the game when they have to – and can anticipate the unexpected. They know what cards to play and keenly calculate the timing of each move they make.

I wouldn't be surprised to learn a woman leader made the word "organic" a business term. I learned that women who enjoy the ebbs and flows of business activity also know that the best things are accomplished when they are done naturally – and unforced. When things are happening organically, this means that they are functioning within a natural rhythm and speed – that is safer and risk adverse.

This is not to say that women are uncomfortable with risk – in fact, they will often tackle risk head-on in order to get to the root cause of a problem and to solve for it (they value time and money). Women leaders who don't allow their egos to stand in the way of good business are in the mindset of getting things done for the betterment of a healthier whole.

## **3. Passionate**

While women in general were historically viewed and stereotyped as emotional leaders by men, I believe they are just passionate explorers in pursuit of excellence. When women leaders are not satisfied with the status quo, they will want to make things better. These women leaders get things done and avoid procrastination. As another one of my women mentors said, "They enjoy order and stability and a genuine sense of control. Many women have learned not to depend upon others for their advancement and thus have a tendency to be too independent. A woman's independent nature is her way of finding her focus and dialing up her pursuits."

When these women leaders are locked into what they are searching for – move out of the way. Their passionate pursuits allow them to become potent pioneers of new possibilities. No wonder [minority women represent the largest growing segment of entrepreneurs](#). According to a [report](#) by the Center for Women's Business Research, U.S. Hispanic and African American women entrepreneurs grew at rates of 133.3% and 191.4% respectively from 1997 to 2007.

## **4. Entrepreneurial**

Entrepreneurship is just a way of life for many women. They can be extremely resourceful, connect the dots of opportunity and become expert in developing the relationships they need to get the job done. Many women leaders also see through an entrepreneurial lens to best enable the opportunities before them. They know that to create and sustain momentum requires 100% focus on the objective – and so they don't enjoy being disrupted by unnecessary noise and distractions.

As one of my former women bosses told me, "Women can play into the politics of the workplace, and do so if it means adding value to the momentum they are attempting to create."

Many women leaders find excitement and motivation by being extremely creative and resourceful when completing tasks and other duties and responsibilities –. They avoid falling too far behind on projects – knowing that if they do it will disrupt their focus and momentum. That is why I learned never to disrupt a woman’s focus and concentration if I can avoid it.

My former female boss continued by saying, “This is why women like control. Not necessarily to be in charge, but to not lose the rhythm or compromise the momentum they need to accomplish their goals.”

### **5. Purposeful and Meaningful**

I have found that many women leaders enjoy inspiring others to achieve. They know what it’s like to be the underdog and work hard not to disappoint themselves and others. Women leaders in particular often have high standards and their attention to detail makes it difficult for others to cut corners or abuse any special privileges.

Women leaders with a nurturing nature are good listeners and excellent networkers/connectors. They enjoy creating ecosystems and support a [collaborative leadership](#) style that melds the thinking and ideas of others; this is what multiplies the size of an opportunity and/or its speed in execution in order to create a larger sphere of influence and overall impact. Women who don’t have to be right all the time make good consensus builders and will more likely enjoy participating in a team environment.

### **6. Traditions and Family**

Whether at home or at work, women are often the glue that keeps things together and that is why they represent great leadership for America’s future. When they sense growing tensions that can lead to potential problems or inefficiencies, the most successful women leaders enjoy taking charge before circumstances force their hand. Women are usually the ones to secure the foundational roots of the family and to protect family and cultural traditions from wavering. They provide the leadership within the home and in the workplace to assure that legacies remain strong by being fed with the right nutrients and ingredients.

The most successful women leaders are big believers in team building and the enforcement of mission, goals and values to assure that everyone is on the same page with like intentions. This secures a sense of continuity making it easier for everyone to have each other’s backs. [No wonder women are assuming more management and leadership roles in family owned businesses.](#)

To the great women in my personal and professional life, thank you for the opportunity to be inspired and mentored by your leadership (you know who you are). I’ve read many things about women in the workplace and their lack of advancement into senior executive roles and in the boardroom. Rarely have I read something from a man who has been inspired and influenced by the wisdom of a woman’s leadership. Hopefully this perspective helps awaken more of us to the opportunity of learning about leadership from the women in our lives, whether in the home or at work.