Chutes and Ladders

15 ways to climb the corporate ladder and keep your career on track

Featuring Kathy Caprino • Tara Jaye Frank • Stephanie Getz
Shelley Hammell • Michele Hanson • Sally Helgesen • Betsy Hosick
Angela M. Joyner • Simma Lieberman • Lisa Martin • Jo Miller
Neena Newberry • Melissa J. Nixon • Subriana Pierce • Grace Woo

network of executive women
retail, consumer goods & services
A few years back the Network saw a need (and an opportunity). We had great mentors and coaches — and members crying out for good advice. Since then, NEW has provided a blogging platform for dozens of career experts and industry thought leaders. They contribute regularly on topics like “Women & Diversity,” “Next Gen Leaders,” “Male Champions” and “Accelerating Your Career.” These contributors speak from personal experience and from their hearts. I want to thank them for being part of the NEW community, and hope you enjoy this sampling of what they have to offer. For a complete library of these blogs, visit newonline.org/blogs.

Joan Toth
President & CEO
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Starting out
Calculating your career route
by Betsy Hosick

I am asked to provide career advice to many individuals and one of the most frequently asked questions is, “How do I decide what positions to apply for?”

That is a loaded question and can’t be answered directly. The first step is to determine where you are trying to go with your career.

Do you want to be a single contributor and subject-matter expert, or does your passion lie in having a leadership role? Do you like sales and influence or would you rather be behind the scenes helping to make decisions based on strong analytical thinking?

Many times, I hear folks say, “I will just do whatever the company thinks I can to contribute.” I say, “Stop!” You need to take control of your career path and first determine where your passion lies and what makes you excited about going to work so that you can develop a plan for how to get there.

Once you know where you want to go, you can choose the positions that will help you get the work experience and needed skills and exposure to help you along the way. Don’t simply think about the next position. Ask how this position will help you in future roles.

I ask three simple questions about any job I apply for:

1. **Will I be able to contribute?** Can I use my skills and the experiences I have had to be able to do the job? How big of a stretch will the job be? While each new role should stretch your abilities, it is important to understand what you bring to the table. This honest look at your own skills will help your confidence in starting a new role.

2. **Will I learn something?** Taking a been-there, done-that position will help your organization, but won’t teach you much. Be careful not to take a position that offers no development for you. You could become bored and complacent if a position is too easy and has no stretch.

3. **Will I have fun?** Fun? Yes, knowing that you will wake up every morning with the desire to go to work should always be a consideration for any job choice. If you hate numbers, don’t apply for an analyst position,
since you will work with numbers all day! Matching your skill set to the job will make you more motivated and increase your chances for success.

Remember, your job is part of your life, it is not your life. You do have choices to make, for yourself and for your family. To be the best person in the right role for your organization means bringing your best to the job! Asking these three simple questions will help you to get a head start on what should be an exciting career.

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How to build a powerful network
by Shelley Hammell

Networking is essential to business success, yet it tends to be a low priority for many busy professionals. I can’t stress this enough: Establish your network now, when you don’t need it, so it’s there when you do.

People want to help someone they know and trust, not someone who only reaches out when they want something. Think of networking as a bank account. You have to make deposits before you can make withdrawals. Help others and establish yourself as a resource for them; these are your deposits, which you can withdraw in the future.

Networking doesn’t have to be formal; every interaction is an opportunity. Below are five ways to immediately cultivate your network.

1. Speak to a new person in the hall, elevator, break room, cafeteria or wherever you come in contact with co-workers. Remember, every interaction is an opportunity for networking.

2. Invite someone you normally only see in meetings, whom you don’t know well personally, to coffee. A personal connection goes a long way when you are in the midst of solving a tough problem together.

3. Schedule lunch with someone to get to know them better in a more informal setting. Everyone has to eat; this is an easy way to carve out time for networking. Put this on your calendar and establish a rhythm.

4. Target more formal avenues for networking, such as regional NEW events, and identify your passion and find a corresponding volunteer opportunity where you can help others. You’ll feel good while expanding your network. If you have kids, get involved in school activities, donate your time to the girl and/or boy scouts or volunteer as a coach for their favorite sport. Parents can be a resource for one another, personally and professionally.

5. Renew connections and keep them alive through social media — and initiate new connections with people who have similar interests as you through LinkedIn.

Now that you’re ready to expand your network, use this four-point checklist to make the most out of your networking:
• **Establish your purpose.** Ask yourself: What do I want to get out of this interaction? Is there an opportunity to leverage another’s expertise or gain a different perspective? Perhaps you have an open position to fill and want to reach out beyond your own contacts. Or you need help navigating a complex matrix organizational structure. Think through the purpose of your meeting.

• **Do your homework.** Find out more about the other individual and their interests and mention something you have in common when you meet with them. This helps the conversation flow more easily and establishes a connection early on.

• **Make it about the other person.** Ask how you can help them or explore areas where you can be a resource. It’s a great way to establish the reciprocal nature of the relationship from the onset — it’s not just about what you need.

• **Express genuine interest.** Be curious and ask questions. Practice active listening and remain open and curious to what the other person has to say. Being engaged demonstrates you are truly interested in helping them.

Today take at least one step to start — and make the most out of — networking.

*Shelley Hammell is founder of Sage Alliance, which provides coaching, team building and assessments, workshops and speaking on leadership development, empowering teams, communications, lasting impressions, personal branding and building a coaching culture for executives and high-potentials.*
Is graduate school for you?
by Grace Woo

The voice on the phone was filled with equal parts anxiety and anticipation: “Grace, I’ve worked a few years and I’m ready to take my career to next level. Should I go to graduate school?”

Over the years, I have been asked this question by many women who trust my judgment. Having participated in several graduate programs, they expect my ringing endorsement.

Not so fast.

I want to propose something bold here: If you want to have a fulfilling, successful career, you need to be a trailblazer and create your own career path.

I’ve put together three questions for anyone who’s thinking about going to graduate school:

Why do you want to go to graduate school?

“I don’t know, it just seems like the next logical thing to do.” That’s the typical answer. If that’s your reason, I can guarantee that it’s the most expensive and wasteful way to spend two years of your life. Many believe a graduate degree can help us rise above our competitors and lead to life-long career success. But I have seen many graduates from top MBA schools settle into so-so careers. There are other paths. I asked an award-winning movie producer — who never went to graduate school — the secret of her success. She joined the movie industry at the dawn of computer-generated special effects, when digital technology created new creative possibilities. The most logical career progression for a creative-writing major like her was to join a studio’s story department. However, she noticed she had a unique talent: She can get creative and technical types to work together and create critically acclaimed and commercially successful movies. She moved into the role of a producer and was quickly promoted. The secret of her success is having a deep understanding of how her unique talent fit in the shifting industry landscape. Technological changes create opportunities for prepared minds.
Is there something you are passionate about?

I’m not a huge fan of telling pre-college kids to follow their dream. We need maturity and experience to discover that sweet spot where our passion and career opportunity collide. If you have worked for a few years and you find it extremely hard to roll out of bed to go to work every day because your job has zero redeeming interest, it’s time to think about your passion.

Have you talked to your friends about this decision?

We value expert opinions on the all-important graduate school decision. I would argue that you should first speak to your friends who know you well. Your elementary school best friend may know nothing about your industry and your work style, but they know your strengths and weaknesses. You need to know who you are and how others perceive you before you think about passion, career opportunities and whether graduate school is the right choice for you. It’s your first step if you want to blaze your own trail. Ask 10 friends and family members to list your top three strengths and weakness. I did this exercise a few years back, and was shocked to discover a consistent pattern of my strength and weakness emerging from these interviews.

Get to know your strengths and weakness. Find your passion. See where these intersect with the changing environment. Test, learn and blaze a uniquely yours career path.

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Working with others
Learning to listen
by Lisa Martin

Most people believe they are listening when others talk. But believing something doesn’t make it real.

We live in a society where it’s not uncommon to read an incoming text or email while sitting across the table from someone. You may find yourself scanning the news while you’re on a conference call or mentally preparing for one meeting while sitting in another one. You might even praise yourself for your ‘multitasking’ talents and supreme levels of efficiency. But at what cost?

Your to-do list might be shorter, but let’s face it, you are sacrificing real moments of human connection that are far more important.

People with strong relationships get farther in life and work, and they’re happier for it. Thriving doesn’t come from a completed to-do list. It comes from fully experiencing your life and the people in it. This can’t be done without heartfelt connection.

If you are really listening to people (at work, at home or at play), you will hear far more than just what is being said. You will tune into the subtext, which is often far more important. You will hear unspoken concerns and challenges. You will be aware of the hidden interests and talents of people around you.

And you’ll just know people better. It’s one thing to have pleasant, polite relationships. It’s another to see the unique light that shines in each person and to feel a true connection.

So, back to my original question: Are you really listening? Here are a few statements to help you see if you are. How true are these statements for you?

• In conversation, I focus on others and their needs not just my own.
• I quiet my thoughts when others are speaking.
• I resist the urge to plan my response when others are speaking.
• I make sure I’ve understood what someone has said by confirming it with them (i.e. “So, what I’m hearing you say is…”).
• I consciously listen beneath the surface of what is being said so I can understand unstated concerns.
No matter how strong your current listening skills are, I urge you to take them further. This is a key skill that leads to thriving at work and in life.

*Lisa Martin is a leadership coach, speaker and author who has been helping people thrive for the past 15 years.*
Harnessing your passion
by Neena Newberry

Passion motivates us to work hard, to innovate, to drive changes and to accomplish more than we ever thought we could. However, when over-used, it can intimidate or drive people away. Is your passion working for or against you?

One of my recent executive coaching clients is smart and very passionate. “Erin” is a strong advocate for the people, ideas and solutions she believes in. The irony is her passion was working against the results she wanted to see.

As I began coaching Erin, I learned that her communication style could be problematic. When she was passionate about something, she would talk a lot about it. In fact, she took so much air time that others felt like she only cared about her own agenda. Because she had such a strong sense of conviction about what she was communicating, she also had the tendency to frame things as, “You’re either with me or against me.”

As you can imagine, others felt put off by her style. Even though her passions were about helping others and doing the right thing for the company, Erin came off as self-centered because she talked more than she listened. And her “me against the world” tone made colleagues feel as if they were always in win/lose situations with her. Few even recognized that her passion drove a lot of her behavior.

To leverage the power of Erin’s passion, I started by helping her get clear about what she wanted to be known for: her desired leadership brand. She loves to teach others, bring innovative ideas forward and build strong relationships — she is passionate about all of these things. Although these elements influence her approach and decisions on a daily basis, she didn’t convey that in how she showed up with others. Realizing that she was out of sync, Erin started to make some changes.

If your passionate style has been more of a stumbling block than a catalyst for your own leadership, try some of these strategies:

• Clarify your intent. Help your colleagues understand what this is
really about and the intended outcome. Avoid setting up options as “right” or “wrong.”

• **Be curious.** To foster buy-in, you have to know where others are coming from. Listen more. Ask more questions. Seek to understand.

• **Consider relationships.** It’s not just about getting others to say “Yes” or agree with you. It’s also about strengthening your relationships with them.

• **Change the venue.** Talk to people one-on-one instead of in a group setting where your style may make them feel more defensive.

The changes Erin put into action have made a huge difference in how she is perceived and, consequently, her impact. Her boss told me that he, other senior leaders and her peers now see her as more credible, confident, capable and ready to take on more. Erin is still her passionate self — she’s just expressing that passion in a way that works.

If Erin’s story resonates for you, I want to challenge you to notice how you communicate when your passion runs high — and how others react to you.

*Neena Newberry is an executive coach, speaker and author who helps women “think and play big.” A recognized expert with appearances on CBS, ABC and Fox News, she received four Stevie Awards for Women in Business in 2014. A former Deloitte executive, she is president of Newberry Executive Solutions.*
I owe much of my success in business to the efforts of one woman.

I began my career in consumer products as an administrative assistant, and the first female employee I met on my first day of work insisted on introducing me to everyone in the company. With her guidance, I took advantage of networking opportunities. My career developed quickly, and in 2001, I — and a handful of other retail and consumer goods industry executives — founded the Network of Executive Women to provide more opportunities for women to work together and support each other’s careers.

But we don’t always do that, do we? It’s clear that women still have gains to make in the workplace, especially considering we still make 81 percent of what men make in similar professions. Catalyst’s 2014 report reveals that women hold just 18.6 percent of executive officer roles in the U.S. retail trade.

And yet, women don’t work together as well as we could. An Oxygen Media poll reveals that 65 percent of women resent powerful women. Perhaps you’ve felt it yourself. After a promotion, you hear coworkers gossipping about how you made your way up the corporate ladder. Or maybe you’re guilty of it, too: finding ways to put down your colleague when she gets assigned a project that you wanted or talking about a female executive in your company and claiming she’s, in fact, prejudiced against other women.

Women can be prone to this sort of behavior. We interact with our coworkers differently than men, and we can blame biology for our emphasis on feelings and relationships. As young girls, we play relationships games (like dolls, house and school) and we play them nicely. The unofficial “Rule of Female Equality,” an expectation of flatness that is prevalent in female culture, insists that we all remain equal. When one woman has more power than another woman, she violates that unspoken rule.

But, as women, we also are able to rise above this sort of behavior. Instead of tearing each other down, imagine how much stronger we
would be if we consistently built each other up? History is rife with examples of the power of women working together. From Women Together advancing peace in unstable Northern Ireland to the Coalition of Women for Peace working for a more just society in the Middle East, unified groups of women are impacting communities.

Today, you can start creating stronger connections between women beginning in your own workplace with a few small changes:

- Be aware of the female tendency to put down women with power.
- Avoid harmful conversation that tears down others.
- Pay attention to how your own communication and leadership styles might cause other women to resent you, and work to create spaces for healthy conversations.
- Figure out how you can build relationships with women based on trust and then use those relationships to make your organization better.

As Gail Evans states in her book *She Wins, You Win*, the number-one rule is this: “Every woman must always play on the women’s team. Because every time any woman succeeds in business, your chances of succeeding in business increase. And every time a woman fails in business, your chances of failure increase.”

If the coworker I met on my first day of work felt threatened by my presence in the office, she never let on. She pushed me forward, always encouraging, and the gift she gave me helped me succeed in ways beyond what I had imagined for myself.

When we move from women/women conflict to women/women collaboration, we make both ourselves and our communities infinitely stronger.

*Michele Hanson, the first president of the Network of Executive Women, is CEO of ExeculInsight LLC. She provides targeted training opportunities to companies in areas such as women’s advocacy, organizational effectiveness, executive coaching and more.*
Hitting your stride
Letting go, moving ahead
by Sally Helgesen

Being intentional about what you want to accomplish is essential for anyone seeking leadership, but in my experience it can play out differently for women than for men.

Being intentional means knowing what to embrace and what to let go of as you move to a higher level and assume more responsibility — in your job and in the world. In other words, improving your leadership capacity requires mastering certain skills, but also requires knowing what to let go of. And it’s in the “letting go” part of the equation where I see gender differences emerge.

A couple of years ago, Marshall Goldsmith published an enormously helpful book: What Got You Here Won’t Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful. Drawing on decades of experience coaching some of America’s most high-profile executives, Marshall identifies common behaviors that keep high achievers stuck and shows how, by letting go of these behaviors, accomplished people can break through barriers and move to the next level.

Typical detrimental behaviors Marshall cites include needing to win at all costs; telling the world how smart you are; constantly contradicting others by starting sentences with “No,” “But” or “However;” claiming credit you do not deserve; hoarding information; passing judgment on others; speaking when angry; and failing to give others proper recognition.

Don’t be perfect — and don’t be shy

But I’ve seen other behaviors that are much more likely to keep women from getting ahead. Yes, there are women who speak when angry, pass judgment on others and obsessively make the point that they are right. But in my experience these “it’s all about me” behaviors are not the primary habits that hold women back.

I’m more likely to find women who are reluctant to claim their achievements, make sure their contributions get recognized or enlist allies who can help them develop a higher profile in an organization. I find women
who keep their heads down and try to become experts in whatever they are doing before they start developing the kinds of connections that would make their own work easier and bring greater visibility to their efforts.

In other words, I see women who need to let go of hiding their light under a bushel. Rather than claiming too much credit, they claim too little, expecting or just hoping that if they do great work it will — somehow — get noticed.

Instead of talking about how great they are, the women I see in organizations are more likely to expend their energy actually trying to be perfect.

This is not just observation, it is a data point. For example, I once surveyed senior female partners in a range of partnership firms: law, accounting, consulting and investment banking. When I asked them what the female associates who worked for them were best at, the answer was almost unanimous: “The women are great at doing Grade A work. They cross all the Ts and dot all the Is. They are super-reliable and very conscientious.” When I asked these partners what the women associates were worst at, their answer was again almost unanimous: “They are worst at letting people know about the quality of their work.”

If so, you can benefit by thinking about how you might begin to let go of these career-busting behaviors. You can start by declaring your firm intention to do so. Then you need to develop a plan. You might enlist a trusted friend as a peer coach, telling her that you need to work on a specific behavior and asking her to hold you accountable for taking regular action to change behaviors that are holding you back. You could schedule a weekly phone call with her to report your progress and your setbacks. A simple commitment can pay huge dividends whenever we’re trying to change a behavior, but it’s especially powerful when we need to let something go.

Sally Helgesen is the author of The Female Vision and The Female Advantage as well as a speaker and a leadership development consultant. She can be reached at sally@sallyhelgesen.com.
Three common career killers
by Jo Miller

Let’s face it: It isn’t easy to break out and establish yourself as an up-and-coming leader inside a large corporation. Some days you can feel like the best kept secret in the organization.

For more than 15 years, I’ve been training emerging women leaders to break into positions of management and leadership. I have helped women avoid the most common missteps that could be putting a lid on their career advancement. Here are the top three missteps you should avoid:

**Misstep 1: Waiting to be promoted.** Your management may have said if you “work hard” and “do a good job,” you’ll be recognized. But if you’ve already tried that route, you’ll know that it can bring mixed results at best.

You can’t afford to delegate responsibility for your career advancement to your boss. Instead of waiting for a promotion, take charge of your career trajectory by identifying the role you want next and giving voice to your ambition. Let it be known that you are throwing your hat in the ring for that role.

**Misstep 2: Allowing others to define your reputation.** Inevitably, the people you work with perceive you a certain way. They have formed opinions — judgments, even — about what you are good at and not good at.

You already have a brand or reputation, but it has taken place by default, not by design. Don’t wait for others to discover who you really are. Instead, build your brand as an emerging leader. Identify what you want your name to be synonymous with and create a short, succinct brand statement such as “the go-to person for strategy” or “the bridge between engineering and finance.” Make sure it describes something you are passionate about, skilled at, that your employer needs and values.

To build your own leadership brand before others build it for you, create awareness of your brand by adding it to your LinkedIn profile, your email signature and your elevator pitch.

**Misstep 3: Working too hard.** Believe it or not, working too hard can be a career misstep, especially if it’s work that’s neither valued — nor
visible. If you are a hard worker and develop a reputation for hard work, guess what you’ll attract more of? More hard work! And not necessarily the visibility and recognition that is due to you for the work you do.

So don’t be the best kept secret in your organization. In other words, don’t spend 100 percent of your time at your desk, head down, doing your job. Make a point of stepping away from your work on a weekly, or even daily, basis to do activities that make your value visible. Promote your accomplishments as you achieve them, not after the fact.

What action will you take to move ahead in your career?

Jo Miller, CEO of Women’s Leadership Coaching Inc. and founding editor of BeLeaderly.com, facilitates the NEW Leadership Academy webinars designed to help emerging leaders build core skills and prepare for top management roles in their organizations.
Becoming a master communicator

by Kathy Caprino

Coaching professional women for the past eight years, and as a former corporate vice president myself, I’ve witnessed first-hand the communication challenges that block women from being heard, appreciated, respected, valued and promoted.

Women are not “men in skirts” — women have different preferences, values, styles and communication approaches that often contribute to their feeling less than fully valued and accepted.

According to the fascinating book *The Female Brain* by Dr. Louann Brizendine, the differences between male and female brains contribute to significant differences in behavior and perception. “In the brain centers for language and hearing, for example, women have 11 percent more neurons than men,” Brizendine writes. “The principal hub of both emotion and memory formation — the hippocampus — is also larger in the female brain as is the brain circuitry for language and observing emotions in others ... The female brain has tremendous unique aptitudes — outstanding verbal agility, the ability to connect deeply in friendship, a nearly psychic capacity to read faces and tone of voice for emotions and states of mind, and the ability to defuse conflict. All of this is hardwired into the brains of women. These are the talents women are born with that many men, frankly, are not.”

I’ve observed that professional women often experience significant challenges in communicating powerfully, effectively and with command and authority, particularly when other desired outcomes (such as preserving relationships, ensuring equality and connection, defusing conflict, etc.) might be at risk.

Women face these five challenges to communicating powerfully to bring about positive results for their careers and their futures:

1. **Not taking credit.** Women are typically reluctant to stand up and take credit for what they’ve accomplished, achieved and initiated. They often say “we” did this or credit the team and other players rather than claiming “I” made this happen. Men are not as reluctant to state what
they’ve accomplished in terms that make it clear who achieved the desired results and to put themselves in a “one-up” position. If you can’t speak powerfully and compellingly about your accomplishments, I guarantee no one else will. Check out Peggy Klaus’ great book *Brag: The Art of Tooting Your Own Horn without Blowing It.*

2. **Taking things personally.** I’ve seen women (and have been guilty of this myself) ruminate on particular goings-on at work, taking things personally and experiencing them with deep emotionality rather than processing through the challenges analytically and neutralizing their emotions. I’m not suggesting women become less emotional over all. I’m recommending, in the workplace, women strive to critically examine what’s occurring around them from a more neutral, expansive and balanced perspective so that their responses can be as effective and empowered as possible, taking into account all key factors and influences.

3. **Not negotiating effectively for what you deserve.** Studies have shown men negotiate for salary, benefits, position and responsibility significantly more than women. One study revealed that 57 percent of men negotiate for their first salaries, while only 7 percent of women do. Much of women’s reluctance to negotiate and ask for what they want and deserve is influenced by their neurobiology and the inherent goals they have for communication, and by the punitive repercussions they’ve faced by asking. It’s vitally important to make a powerful case for being well-compensated, rewarded and valued for your contributions. What you want and deserve will not just fall in your lap.

4. **Not challenging power.** Challenging the ideas, initiatives or goals of people at higher levels of power and authority can be hard for anyone, but women especially struggle with speaking up. According to linguistics expert Deborah Tannen, “Men tend to be sensitive to the power dynamics of interaction, speaking in ways that position themselves as one up and resisting being put in a one-down position by others. Women tend to react more strongly to the rapport dynamic, speaking in ways that save face for others and buffering statements that could be seen as putting others in a one-down position. These linguistic patterns are pervasive – you can hear them in hundreds of exchanges in the workplace every day.”
I believe this is due in part to the way women and men have been culturally trained, their neurobiology and because of the real backlash that many women have experienced in the workplace when they speak their minds and unabashedly go against those in the majority. (Check out the Heidi vs. Howard Roizen case study). Women cannot ascend to leadership roles if they don’t challenge others and the status quo. The question isn’t “Should I challenge?” but “How best can I challenge authority so that I am heard, understood and valued for my input?”

5. **Projecting self-confidence and a powerful presence.** Your body language, confidence and poise under fire can make or break your ability to advance and succeed in the workplace. We all have what I call “power gaps” — areas in which we feel “less than” — less capable, confident, courageous and contributive than we want to be.

Women feel more shame and vulnerability about their gaps than men do. The key to greater professional and personal success is to uncover your power gaps and work with commitment to close them. Whatever you feel you are missing, endeavor to gain it, achieve it and claim it. If you need more knowledge or training, go out and get it. If you feel ashamed at a large error you made at work, don’t bury it; rectify it.

The quickest path to success is to own where you feel “less than” and strive to accept and appreciate yourself fully while taking positive steps to rebuild your confidence and legitimately bolster your sense of self-worth.

Which of these communication challenges resonates with you? What one step can you take today to close your “power gaps”?

*Kathy Caprino is a nationally recognized women’s career and leadership coach and author of Breakdown, Breakthrough and founder and president of Ellia Communications Inc., Caprino is a contributor to Forbes, Huffington Post and AARP. Follow her on Twitter at @kathycaprino. For Kathy’s original post on this topic, visit her Forbes Leadership blog “Career Bliss.”*
Lessons in leadership
Tune up your team
by Subriana Pierce

If your team members are not as productive, motivated or satisfied as you’d like them to be, it’s time to do something about it. Teams require routine maintenance.

Cultivating a strong team environment isn’t easy, especially in a society that emphasizes individual performance. But with some team-building effort, you can help the group work toward a common goal and improve creativity, problem solving and productivity. Here are five great ways to build more effective teams:

1. **Increase diversity.** All members should be proficient, reliable and in a position to work efficiently with each other. They should also provide diverse skill sets to help the group reach its goal. Encourage workforce diversity and help members see the value of individual efforts toward achieving a common objective. Demonstrate how diverse backgrounds, skills and perspectives could help provide more innovative solutions.

2. **Set responsibility.** Create basic rules as a team and ensure that everyone agrees to them. Clearly specify everyone’s individual position and what he or she must do within the team. Set straightforward team goals, timelines and expectations. Everyone should know their own role and responsibilities, as well as those of their team members.

3. **Encourage collaboration.** As teamwork is built on trust, all members should feel safe asking questions, sharing their ideas and making recommendations. One way to accomplish this is to facilitate communication as a team and between individuals. Each individual’s feedback should be valued and you can set an example by being open to suggestions and concerns.

4. **Resolve conflicts.** Show your position as a team leader by identifying and resolving conflicts. When making an important decision, ensure that all members are up to speed with the team’s progress and that everyone has an opportunity to ask questions and express their opinions. Let your team know that it’s okay to disagree with one another. Develop relationships with members based on trust and respect and encourage the same among members.
5. **Provide rewards.** Celebrate achievements and acknowledge the team for their contributions. Reward your team with a special event and help present their success to executive staff. Spotlight their accomplishments in company publications and showcase your group as a model for effective teamwork.

Subriana Pierce is managing partner of Navigator Sales and Marketing. She previously served in senior roles for Albertsons Southern California Division and Frito-Lay North America. She was honored as one of the 2013 “Top Women in Grocery” by Progressive Grocer and one of the 2012 “Top 100 under 50 Diverse Executive Leaders” by Diversity MBA Magazine.
Fostering innovation
by Simma Lieberman

In this era of speed, competition and globalization, innovation rules all. You never know where the next great product, process or profit builder will originate. Good diversity management and culturally intelligent leadership can make the difference between repeatedly hearing mediocre ideas from the same people or mining the hidden genius in your organization for breakthrough ideas.

Consider these 10 ways that a culturally intelligent leader who practices good diversity management can plant the seeds of self-leadership and accelerate employee innovation:

1. Be conscious of the way you communicate with employees. Ask yourself, “Are they comfortable talking to me about their work, asking questions and giving me suggestions?” If the answer is no, you need to find out why. If yes, keep getting better at it.

   Innovation often comes from the lower levels, but if you don’t know how to communicate with everyone, they won’t share ideas or feel invested in the organization.

2. Make a habit of interacting with the people on your team whom you may not know well, or with whom you are least comfortable. Identify the reasons for your discomfort, so you can move through it.

3. Be informed about your employees, but don’t micromanage. Acknowledge the progress, no matter how small, made by people on your team. Research by Teresa M. Amabile and Steven J. Kramer shows that employees are motivated when their managers are aware of and acknowledge even their small wins.

4. Be introspective and get real about your biases and assumptions. Your behavior that results from those biases and assumptions can impede participation and innovation. Ask yourself, “Whom am I not seeing? Do I greet all of my employees or just the ones who are like me? Do I walk past any employees without saying hello? Who am I not hearing from in team meetings, and whose opinions am I minimizing, due to bias about work level, function or salary?”
Your bias and assumptions about people different than you mean that you give credibility to people most like you and minimize the contributions of others. When employees feel unacknowledged and invisible they lose their motivation, and feel alienated from the organization.

5. Learn and recognize the different ways in which people are intelligent and contribute to the organization. Stop being stuck in recognizing and respecting only one type of intelligence (yours).

6. Let other people share their expertise, talent and experience, even when their ideas differ from yours. You may find their idea is better.

7. Let go of old parameters, limits and processes for innovation. Open your mind, expand your vision and allow for limitless possibilities when people who think differently start thinking together.

8. Create opportunities for employees from different functions, departments, levels of experience and talents to work together as equals. Managers who expect employees to “go along with the program” and just follow orders discourage creativity and innovation. When creative employees feel stifled, they will take their genius to another organization, possibly your competition, where they can flourish.

9. Welcome the excitement that comes from the synergy of ideas flowing from all directions. Employees with diverse viewpoints building on each other’s brilliance will develop “the next big thing” that will set you far above everyone else in the industry.

10. Be a cheerleader for other people’s intelligence when they know more about a subject or work area than you do. Who better to develop a process that makes their work faster, easier and more productive than the people actually doing the work? Who better to suggest a new product that changes lives than the people who will use it?

Cheer for yourself, because you’re the kind of leader who is brave enough to let others shine and stays out of the way of oncoming breakthrough innovation.

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What multicultural employees need
by Tara Jaye Frank

People often ask what I believe would help employees of color thrive at work. Many companies have declared a commitment to diversity and inclusion — to creating a level playing field where all employees have the opportunity to excel and be their authentic selves.

I usually share ideas for how to raise leadership’s collective consciousness to combat bias or emphasize the importance of questioning traditional processes built on dated values and norms. Most longstanding talent strategies were formed by and for the majority, which means they inherently cater to a specific way of leading — namely, the white male way. Working to advance women and people of color in corporate America is, in a sense, like swimming upstream.

Systemic retooling aside, optimizing the potential of employees of color uses the same fundamental enablers required by everyone else. I once wrote a blog titled, “‘What do black people want?’ I’ll tell you.” Several commenters questioned the premise, claiming the wants listed were — in their words — “universal.” They were right, of course. Similarly, the needs highlighted below are universally desired, but not uniformly provided. Every human being will recognize them as meaningful — obvious, even. But it matters that we acknowledge how many are still waiting for the simple benefits others find so commonplace.

Consider, for a moment, that you have the power to make three basic needs available to more people. What would you do differently?

1. Multiculturals at work need to feel connected. We move up and through organizations thanks to our skills and experiences, but also because of our networks. Employees of color need connections to leaders beyond their work teams and immediate spheres of influence. They need mentors — both peer and senior — from diverse disciplines who can provide the broader business context and visibility to other leaders who may open doors for them down the road. One of the most useful gifts you can offer a person of color at work is an introduction. The more connected we are, the more pathways we create for learning and development. Just like everyone else, right? Except
people of color are sometimes isolated at work, because they’re unclear about how to appropriately penetrate existing relationship circles.

2. **Multiculturals at work need to be reflected.** Over the years, I’ve heard white leaders admit they don’t notice when internal communications or advertising campaigns fail to overtly reflect people of color. Nothing is missing for them. Truth be told, they see themselves reflected everywhere, all the time. When a printed or televised representation of a company lacks cultural diversity, those left out feel invisible. What’s more, they quietly wonder whether they really have a place in the company at all — as an employee or a consumer. Even more critical is the need to see themselves reflected in leadership. I visited a company where a white woman told me she attended a town hall with a leader panel of five white males, all over 50 years old. She hardly heard a word they said. All she thought about was the overwhelming visual cue, which appeared as a sign of her limited advancement potential.

3. **Multiculturals at work need to feel respected.** Cultural difference is a hotbed for assumptions. We assume when someone behaves a certain way, they’re doing it for the same reasons we would, but that’s hardly ever true. When colleagues behave in ways you can’t explain, seek first to understand. What's motivating their behavior? Is there a communication gap? A difference in preference or style? Are beliefs or values at play? Is something deeper going on? I know a young man who was overwhelmed at work. Others perceived him as negative and disengaged, because he seemed withdrawn. There’s a big difference between feeling overwhelmed and disengaged, and without intervention, that assumption could have taken root and turned disastrous. Assume and expect the best from people and always treat them with respect.

Everyone can help turn diversity into inclusion by helping people connect, consciously reflecting diversity and assuming the best in others. It’s not rocket science, but it does require awareness and intention.

Employees of color and advocates, what would you add to this list?

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Conquer anything
How to be perfectly imperfect
by Angela M. Joyner, Ph.D.

We are often pulled in many directions. Our calendars are bursting at the seams with multiple priorities and scheduling conflicts. We yearn for balance in our professional and personal lives.

According to Michele Kremen Bolton, the author of *The Third Shift – Managing Hard Choices in Our Careers, Home and Lives as Women*, most of us work three shifts each day. Our first shift is spent at the organizations where we drive results and demonstrate our leadership abilities. Then, we come home, where we are mothers, wives, daughters, friends, aunts and other important roles. While our relational roles are not necessarily bound by time, they require a great deal of emotional and physical investment. Which brings me to the third and sometimes most stressful shift — the third shift. This shift is where we spend our time analyzing, criticizing, worrying and feeling guilty about where we are falling short on the other two shifts. The feelings evoked by the third shift can wreak havoc on our self-esteem, stifle our confidence and leave us feeling unfulfilled.

When we become fixated on what we are not doing well, we rob ourselves of the opportunity to celebrate what we are actually accomplishing. As leaders, we have to give ourselves permission to miss the mark and not get caught in the trap of perfection.

Here are three tips that helped me:

1. **Put things into perspective.** Everything in our lives cannot be an emergency or crisis. Give priority to things that give you the most satisfaction and best align with your values. When you recognize that your life is dynamic and that priorities can shift, you give yourself the gift of choice. You can choose what matters today and accept the fact that your priorities may change tomorrow.

2. **Re-define the word “success.”** It can be emotionally and physically draining to aim for perfection in every aspect of your life. Perfection is a tough hurdle to achieve and unfortunately our society does not promote the value of imperfection. We spend inordinate amounts of time, money and mental energy trying to live up to standards that are impossible, and
quite frankly, unnecessary. When I started on my professional journey, my goal was to learn, make a positive impact to my organization and leave a professional legacy. I did not sign up to work 100 hours, miss family gatherings or run my health into the ground. If I had followed the career examples of people who were deemed “successful,” I would have most likely have been burned out a decade ago. My definition of success today still aligns with what I value most: learning, giving back and family. Give yourself permission to evolve how you define success and ensure it acknowledges what you need right now.

3. Set boundaries. In a rapidly paced and technology-enabled world, we are expected to be “on” every minute of the day. I had to learn to say “no” to many requests so that I could say “yes” to activities that mattered most to me. I had to let go of the guilt I felt when I declined an invitation. It was not serving me well and was negatively impacting how I was showing up to the things I desperately wanted to do. Setting boundaries has been one of the hardest things for me to do throughout my career. I didn’t want to disappoint others, but I also knew that I could not be all things to all people all of the time. It was just as important to stand up for my needs so that I could be effective as a leader and in my other roles.

I am not saying that we should lower our standards or give less than our best effort. I am suggesting that, perhaps, we should redefine “success” and give ourselves some margin for imperfection. I believe when we do, we get more peace of mind in return.

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Thriving in crisis
by Stephanie Getz

It may sound crazy, but having cancer has made me a happier person.

In June 2012, at age 42, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Less than two years later, I took a huge leap and quit my job.

Before taking control of my worklife, I was, quite frankly, miserable in my job, a position I took after being diagnosed with cancer and which I’d held for less than a year. I was a senior executive traveling to a different city every few days meeting with people who hated my company and what we stood for. I was so stressed out, I cried daily. I felt like I was failing.

I remember seeing segments on morning news programs about people who decided to quit their corporate jobs and do something completely different. I always admired them, but continued to do what I was doing because I was comfortable and felt safe.

I had been contemplating doing something different with my life for a few years, but I was terrified to give up my high-paying position. In my mind, my “important” career defined me. But cancer taught me that there was so much more to life and gave me the courage to walk away. It really wasn’t that hard, once I set my mind to it. It was actually quite liberating. I learned to say “No” to things I didn’t want to do and “Yes” to things I usually said “No” to because I was too tired or didn’t have time. I learned how to live happy.

When I finally summoned the courage to leave that firm with thoughts of semi-retiring and starting my own business, my peers and friends said I would be bored. They were worried about me. Well, I’m not bored and I don’t regret my decision in any way, shape or form. I’m doing exactly what I want to do every day and I’m healthy and not stressed. That was the whole point. Less stress to stay healthy.

When opportunity knocks

Earlier in my career, as an executive at shopper marketing firm RGI Inc., my largest client was Dole. I became best friends with my main contact there. When I left my last job to go out on my own, she approached me
about working for Dole as a part-time spokesperson. This was a perfect opportunity for me, since the Dole Nutrition Institute is passionate about their research on how fruits and vegetables can help prevent diseases, including cancer. I feel very good about representing a company that has the same values I do. My gig is exciting and allows me to keep my health insurance and make a little money, but continue my new life.

I have adapted to my new life so well I can’t imagine ever going back to a job that makes me miserable, no matter the title or pay. I don’t need that much money.

I am a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. Sometimes it takes a little time to materialize.

Everyone thought I was crazy when I quit my job. But I had to do that to be free.

Whether your leap means telling your boss what you want from your career, making a lateral move in your company, seeking an opportunity with an organization that values you and aligns with your own values, or switching tracks completely, don’t waste time being ignored, underappreciated and unhappy. Making a change that leverages your talents and experience and allows you to lead the life you want to lead can be scary. But that decision is yours to make. Follow your heart.

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The solution to overload
by Melissa J. Nixon

Do you ever wake up in the morning with a sense of dread? Does your mind race as you think about your hectic schedule, your family obligations and all those deadlines and conflicts at work?

Many of us get a heavy feeling when we consider everything we have to do. Most people act as nothing can be done about today’s crazy pace, a pace that’s seems especially fast for working women.

Here are three reasons you may be feeling overwhelmed — and three solutions you can use to alleviate the stress.

1. Learn how to say “No.” “Can you attend this meeting?” “Would you mind helping us?” “Would you like to be on this board?” These are questions that cause us to overschedule ourselves.

It’s great to be wanted and needed — and there are so many great causes. But just because a request is for a good cause, doesn’t mean it’s good for you.

Here are a few questions to ask before taking on one more role or agreeing to one more meeting: Does it align with my core values? Do I need to be there or can someone go in my place? Does it help bring me closer to where I want to be in the next one or two years?

2. Learn how to ask for help. Has anyone asked you, “How do you do it all?” You may feel that question is a pat on your back, but it could be a sign that you need to ask for help. Asking for help will reduce your stress immediately. Unfortunately, too many people don’t ask for help because: They don’t want to admit they can’t do it all. They feel they are imposing. They feel they could do a task faster than explaining it to someone else.

Ignore these rationalizations and ask yourself: Where do I need the most support? Who do I know that I can call, text or email right now? This person may be upset when they discover you needed help, but hesitated to call.

3. Learn to move on. Are you overwhelmed and stressed because your time in your current role or company has expired? Did you say, “I’ll give it five years,” but it’s now 10? Are you easily irritated at everything and everyone?
When a role aligns with our natural gifts, talents and abilities and we can make an impact, we get energized, not stressed. We can’t wait to go to work in the morning. When challenges arise, we know how to handle them with grace, instead of being disgruntled.

There are seasons in our lives that are naturally more hectic than others, but before you settle into the “busyness” of life, reflect on ways to strike a balance for you and those connected to you.

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Founded in 2001, the Network of Executive Women, Retail, Consumer Goods and Services, is a not-for-profit educational association representing nearly 10,000 members, 100 corporate partners and 20 regional groups in the United States and Canada. Network members come from more than 750 industry organizations, including grocery, chain drug, mass retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers, service providers, associations and universities.

The mission of NEW is to advance women, grow business and transform our industry’s workplace through the power of our community. To support this mission, the organization provides best practices on gender diversity, career development opportunities, research, learning events and networking programs designed to advance women’s leadership in the retail, consumer goods and services industry. NEW is open to women and men, emerging leaders, mid-level managers and senior-level executives.