

International Women's Conference

Workshop 5 – Career Management “Getting to the Top”

Two workshops led by Senior Women:

Day 1: Julie Jones, president of the Association of Directors, Deputy CEO, Westminster City Council, UK

Day 2: Caroline Tapster, Chief Executive, Hertfordshire County Council

Julie started her workshop by asking each delegate to give a percentage rating of how close they thought they were to the top? Answers were in the range of 35%-75%, with some still grappling with where their top was.

One of the most important messages to arise from both workshops was that top is very much self defined and is not necessarily the top position. Personal circumstances often require tough choices for women and, as much as we would like to do everything at the same time, it isn't possible and therefore a women's journey may take longer or a different route. Interesting work and making a contribution rated highly when determining one's personal top.

There is no magic pill for a successful career, however there are things that can be done:

- Taking responsibility for own career:
 - Seek opportunities, and take them!
 - Step outside the comfort zone – take a risk!
 - Manage your own PR – networking; seeking a mentor or engaging in coaching.
 - Invest in your own development
 - Do something different, gain wider experience, and enhance your skills – volunteer, become a non executive board member, school governor, work shadow or secondment.

- Keep Learning:
 - Understand what is going on in your organisation and the wider perspective
 - Set personal goals and monitor
 - Increase self awareness – know your strengths and weaknesses
 - Seek feedback from others

- Qualities:
 - Personal and professional resilience (there will always be times when difficult decisions need to be made)
 - Patience – women's careers travel at a different pace
 - Positive mental attitude and self belief. *Caroline told us a story relating to a job application she didn't make due to lack of confidence despite the fact she had been 'acting up' for some time with positive feedback. A man was appointed and when reflecting on his skills to the job, realised she too could have done the job equally as well. She made a vow to herself, which has guided her through her journey since, in future she would always apply for a suitable job.*
 - Passion – be passionate about what you do

- Insights: This could be described as a 'time for women':

- New working pattern of longer years could work in favour of women
- Skills of leaders are changing to those often associated with women
 - An increased emphasis on relationship building
 - Building collaborative organisations
 - Working in partnership across disciplines, organisations
 - Transactional and transformational leadership and knowing when to use them

Jill left us with a simple acronym (**JEL**) relating to self presentation, which both women thought mattered.

J jacket
E earrings
L lipstick

Staff in Jill's office would ask if it was a JEL event and was used as code to inform staff of the need to be aware they were under scrutiny.

An informative workshop with plenty of opportunity to talk to each other and begin to define a personal 'top'.