



BY HEATHER SUTTIE

A Hymn to Her

How marketing and business development are different for women lawyers

IN THE MUSICAL *My Fair Lady*, phonetics professor Henry Higgins, who has been providing speech lessons to a cockney flower girl in order to pass her off as a well-bred lady, concludes that men – especially himself – are far superior to women. He sings of this in “A Hymn to Him,” which repeatedly asks the question “Why can’t a woman be more like a man?”

The answer is that a woman can’t change her inborn traits to be more like a man. Neither should she try. While changing natural traits may be almost impossible, for most women being flexible is a must-have characteristic. Flexibility, however, is both a blessing and a curse. While it enables most women to handle numerous things at the same time, it also means they can get stuck being multi-taskers.

SICK AND TIRED

For many women, the challenge of juggling work and life is more than a balancing act; it’s about constant prioritization. When priorities get out of whack, daily life can become stressful and tiresome. This is often when women literally get sick and tired of being sick and tired.

One stress often faced by women lawyers is marketing themselves and developing business. One male lawyer I know says he tries to persuade women lawyers to do the things he does to market himself, and is perplexed when they don’t follow his lead. This gentleman’s advice is well-meaning, but the truth is that what works for men may not necessarily work for women.

DOING IT FOR OTHERS

Despite what Annie Lennox and Aretha Franklin sang about in their 1985 duet, “Sisters Are Doin’ It For Themselves,” sometimes women don’t do things for themselves, but instead do things for oth-

ers. While this may seem self-sacrificing, it shows that women tend to be relationship nurturers. By extension, this means that women are wired to excel at business development, which is all about nurturing relationships. They just need to focus on the relationships they want to nurture for business success.

There seems to be a more active interest in this of late. To cite only two examples, I led a University of Toronto Law School business-development session last November where the 30 women lawyers who attended stayed for an extra hour afterward discussing how they develop business. And this April, the Rotman School of Management is offering an intensive two-day business-leadership course for women lawyers.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SEXES

The strategies and tools women use to market themselves and develop business tend to differ from those used by their male counterparts. Being social is one of those strategies, but things can get dicey. In the 1989 movie *When Harry Met Sally*, Harry Burns makes a claim that “men and women can’t be friends because the sex part always gets in the way.” This may have been his personal opinion, but women, as natural multi-taskers, are perhaps better able to balance relationships in a combined personal-professional context.

The name partners at Toronto-based Dykeman Dewhirst O’Brien LLP have found success doing just that. Having been corporate counsel as well as members of large law firms, they founded their mostly female, seven-lawyer firm in 2009 to focus solely on health law.



For them, good business is about understanding that their clients have lives outside work. “We have great respect for the personal time of both our lawyers and our clients,” says Kathy O’Brien. “Our marketing efforts are less focused on after-work and weekend events, and more on providing valuable tools as time savers for our clients.” They also recognize their uniqueness as individuals. “Each of us has different skills and comfort levels with marketing and business development,” says Mary Anne Dykeman. “So we do what works for us and our personalities.”

Their efforts are paying off handsomely, with a strong and nicely balanced practice for both themselves and their clients. As Kate Dewhirst explains, marketing is all about image: “Be conscious of how you portray yourself in all of your business and personal encounters. New files and new clients can come from anywhere.” She also suggests, “Do what you love. Find an area of legal practice that inspires you with clients you respect.”

Sounds like good advice, whether you’re a her or a him. 🍷

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