

## Professional Advancement and Gender Stereotypes: The "Rules" for Better Gender Communications

By : *Andrea S. Kramer\**

In business and the professions it has now become common place to note that gender stereotypes powerfully affect women's career advancement and often lead men and women to "talk past one another." But the critical need to confront these stereotypes and find ways to help women to talk to -- rather than past -- men did not become clear to me until I served on my law firm's Compensation Committee more than 10 years ago.

One of my responsibilities each year was to review several hundred self-evaluations written by my partners. Almost immediately, I was struck by how differently men and the women talked about themselves. There were such fundamental differences in the content and tone of the self-evaluations that I started to play a game: without looking at the partner's name, I would write down whether I thought the self-evaluation was written by a man or a woman. I was never wrong. Another of my responsibilities was to review our senior lawyers' performance evaluations of our junior lawyers. Again, I was struck by how differently senior male lawyers described the performance of the men and women who had worked for them.

My experiences on our Compensation Committee left me with no doubt that the advancement of professional women was being negatively affected by largely subconscious gender stereotypes and the communication differences that play into them. Since that time, I have been working to help women better navigate the rocks and shoals of career advancement created by these stereotypes. By and large I believe women can do this by mastering a few simple rules for gender communications. With that objective in mind, I have given dozens of speeches, webcasts, workshops and other presentations (mostly, but not exclusively, to women); I wrote an article entitled "Bragging Rights: Self-Evaluation Dos and Don'ts"; I put together a practical list of "Self-Evaluation Dos and Don'ts," which has gone through multiple iterations; and I have edited close to 1,000 self-evaluations for female friends, colleagues, and strangers across North America. In what follows, I summarize my recommendations for professional women, lawyers and others, about how they should think about gender stereotypes and the "rules" they need to follow to level the playing field in what I refer to as the "gender communication game."

As a starting point, we need to recognize that men still largely control women's advancement within most law firms, legal departments, and professional service firms. Because of this context, when women become frustrated with the pace of their advancement within these organizations, they are often counseled to "just hang in there," "suck it up," "develop a thicker skin," or "man up." Apart from these suggestions contributing to a hostile work environment, they are just not very helpful. The only real pay-off for women is successful career advancement. And as a practical matter that depends not on women "sucking it up," but -- first rate job performance taken as a given -- on their effectively engaging with their male bosses and colleagues by carefully avoid the multiple traps set out for them by gender

stereotyping. In my view the first step in that process is for women to better understand gender communication and its "rules."

### Common Gender Stereotypes and Self-Evaluations

So what are the common gender stereotypes? Men are aggressive, assertive, adventurous, competitive, courageous, dominant, self-confident, problem solvers, risk-takers, action oriented, incisive, and strong. Women, in contrast, are nurturing, kind, collaborative, democratic, team builders, sympathetic, gentle, sensitive, kind, friendly, supportive, nice, and consensus builders.

I have found that men and women's self-evaluations play directly into these stereotypes. Men are on the whole self-laudatory, carefully recounting their strengths and successes; they are comfortable singing their own praises, and display no modesty in describing their achievements. Men go out of their way to make their career and compensation expectations clear. They frequently write sentences that begin "I accomplished X" and "I successfully completed Y." And women? Women write about themselves tentatively and with diffidence; they are not only unwilling to boldly recount their successes, they actually downplay their personal contributions. Women are reluctant to use the word "I," but tend, instead, to talk about "we." Women almost never write sentences like "I accomplished X" and "I successfully completed Y."

Professional men and women by and large seek the same career objectives, but they generally have very different views on what is "appropriate" to say and do in pursuing those objectives. Men are prone to describe their personal performances as "exceptional" or "exceeding expectations." Women in the same situation with the same accomplishments are prone to say "we did a good job." A woman might say "our team delivered a win for our client," when a man would say "I led a team of two income partners and three associates that achieved a major win for our client."

Compounding the problems created by these differences in communication styles is the stereotype of a successful leader. This stereotype maps closely on the common male stereotype: self-confident, assertive, able to take charge, problem-solver, inspirational, risk-taker, and action oriented. Which means of course that when women present themselves in ways that play into their common stereotypes -- diffident,



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supportive, careful, team players -- it is as though they are announcing that they are not cut out to be leaders; they are telling their mostly male evaluators that they do not have the leadership “stuff.”

The differences in gender communication have a variety of causes: some might be rooted in brain development, others might be conditioned on experience, others are ingrained culturally, and still others are tied to the ways in which physical and mental capacities are reinforced. As far as I am concerned, until the world is ruled by philosopher-kings, we are not likely to be able to do much about these causes. We need to work with the world as we find it. This means that regardless of the causes of the initial, ostensibly “instinctual” differences in gender communication, if women will just learn to utilize some basic gender communication techniques, I believe they can overcome many of the hurtful effects of these stereotypes.

A number of years ago, I had lunch with a female friend who is a Managing Director at a major investment bank. I told her about my observations of gender stereotypes and communication differences. She passed on my thoughts to her male boss – a wise man I am told. He replied that my observations helped to explain a situation that had puzzled him for sometime. Each year during the firm’s annual promotion cycle, the male candidates for promotion would seek him out – some daily, others weekly, but all at least once – to tell him why this was “their year.” But during most promotion cycles, not a single woman candidate would reach out to him to make such a “pitch.” When I heard this, I was certain that the problem was that the women simply did not know “the rules.”

During the next promotion cycle, my friend and I had another conversation and she mobilized her women colleagues. She got them moving into the Managing Partner’s office to make their “pitch.” Those women wanted to be promoted just as much as the men did. When encouraged to tell their boss about their accomplishments, they did so with conviction and were able to explain in no uncertain terms what they wanted and why they should get promoted. In other words, they started to play by the “rules.” And my friend reported back to me that that year more women were promoted to Managing Director than ever before.

A woman science professor wrote an article several years ago that made much the same point. A group of women graduate students had complained to her that all of the plum teaching assistant assignments had been given to male graduate students. Outraged, the professor demanded an explanation from her male Department Chair. The answer knocked her for a loop: “The men asked for the positions. The women didn’t.” When she reported this back to the woman graduate students, they were shocked: “We never got the memo.” But, of course, there was no memo. The women had simply waited passively, assuming there would be a “fair” advancement process. The men asserted themselves by asking for what they wanted. They knew the rules, the women didn’t.

So the first rule for professional women is simple: be clear, direct, and compelling about your achievements and then ask for what you want. You cannot assume that your supervisors and colleagues know your desires and accomplishments unless you tell them. As women, we must learn to promote ourselves even if this means stepping out of our comfort zones. Without question, this means communicating more like men: being clear, self-confident, forthright and proud of

our accomplishments. But I am not suggesting that women “act more like men.” Quite the contrary as I will explain in a minute, but I am suggesting that women learn to utilize communication techniques that they have become accustomed to and that are now second nature to most men.

To that end, I have developed a set of specific “Dos and Don’ts” with respect to preparing self-evaluations. (See them at pg. 27). I have used various iterations of these “Self-Evaluations: Dos and Don’ts” in counseling literally thousands of women. They work. They don’t guarantee that a woman will get to the top of her law firm or professional service firm or become the next general counsel of her company. But if they are followed, they will guarantee (subject to overcoming the “double bind,” which I discuss below) that she will not be playing into the common female stereotypes and out of the common leadership stereotypes in ways that not hold her back in her pursuit of her career objectives.

### **Moving Beyond Self-Evaluations**

Let’s look at some other gender fraught situations within law firms, legal departments, and professional service organizations. I want to point out how ever-present gender stereotypes are often reinforced in various situations by women’s learned communication traits, with negative effects for women’s career objectives. Again, I believe that by learning the “rules” of the gender communications game women can break this pattern and substantially improve their career advancement prospects.

### **Getting Assignments**

When women get assignments, they tend to ask a lot of questions: “Do you want more or less? Are you interested in this or that? When do you need it? How many hours should I spend?” This is women’s normal communication style. Not men. They tend to say “Yes, sir. Got it. I’ll get right on it.” Men give out many, if not most, of the assignments in professional organizations. These men came up under other men. So there is a man’s way of giving and getting assignments. Women need to learn it and adjust to it -- and make it work to their advantage. When a woman doesn’t know the “rules” for getting an assignment, a senior male lawyer, who has made the assignment, may well think that she is “scatter-brained,” “not a self starter,” and “needs too much direction.” In other words, a woman’s numerous and immediate questions about an assignment cause a senior lawyer to start thinking that she “doesn’t get it,” is “too needy,” or requires too much “hand holding.” In this way, a woman’s excellent work product can be, and too often is, discounted because an initial meeting with her senior colleague left him apprehensive about her focus and independence.

What is the take away for a young woman lawyer receiving an assignment? Act confidently. Resist the urge to ask questions immediately. Get enough information to orient yourself with respect to the project and then say something like, “I’ll get right on it.” (There are no magic words, but you get the idea.) Back in your office, outline the assignment, identify the steps required to complete it, and then – and only then if necessary – go back to the assigning partner with your questions in an organized, focused way. You are then, “just checking in” or “making sure we’re on the same page.” (Again, there are no magic words.) This approach can make a big difference in a man’s initial

impressions of you as some one working for him. And, of course, you then need to be sure to get the project done competently and on time. This approach is likely to result in your receiving far more additional assignments.

### Giving Assignments

What about the reverse situation: a woman (who is very likely to be a senior associate or junior partner) giving an assignment to a man? A woman in such a situation tends to want to be more inclusive than would a man: she is prone to try to achieve a sense of partnership or joint ownership of the project, rather than just give directions. Thus a woman assigning a project is likely to say something like, "You might want to consider reviewing the XYZ line of cases." A man is more likely to be more direct, "Be sure to include an analysis of the XYZ line of cases." The difference, and the dangerous difference for the woman, is that the junior male professional may interpret the statement: "You might want to consider ...." as a mere suggestion, rather than an instruction. As a result he may not include the analysis of the XYZ cases in his work product. When this happens, the assigning woman is likely to be angry and criticize the junior. He, in turn, is likely to feel unfairly treated -- it was only a suggestion, after all. He then starts talking about the woman who gave him the assignment in unflattering terms. She doesn't know what she wants; she's a "bitch." For her part, she says he is "inattentive" and not very bright. The result is pretty much a disaster all around.

A woman giving assignments to men needs to remember: be clear, direct, and unambiguous about what you want to see when the work product comes back to you.

### Meetings

In meetings involving peers, two separate dynamics are often at work, both of which can work against women. First, when a good point is made, the men tend to keep making the same point again and again; they "pile on" to show agreement and solidarity. In contrast, women are uncomfortable "piling on"; they tend to draw distinctions, not to echo agreement. But, when women don't "pile on," they are often perceived by the men at the meeting as not being on the team or, worse, as "contrarians" or "problem-makers" or "pessimists." This is a dynamic that is difficult to change. So women need to be alert to when "piling on" is occurring. At such a point, if a distinction or clarification needs to be made, really needs to be made, go ahead and make it. But once consensus has been reached, the women need to be sure that it is known that they are firmly on board -- or very much off -- the ship.

The second meeting dynamic is more insidious. When a woman is the first one to make a good point, the men often will not immediately pile on to "her point." They will wait until a man has made the same point and then pile on to "his point." In many professional meetings, it seems that men only hear other men. Sometimes, of course, women are lucky enough to be in meetings chaired by someone who will not tolerate idea theft. I know a man, the former chair of a major consulting firm, who was a stickler for recognizing the person who originated an idea. I've watched him look directly at Fred and say, "Thanks, Fred, for restating Wilma's point. I thought it was a good one too. Now, Wilma, do you have anything to add?" It would be great if all meeting leaders were as perceptive -- and fair. But, of course, they are not.

When a woman has made a good point but it is not accepted as such by the group until it is made again by a man, that woman has a fundamental choice to make: she can either assert herself by claiming ownership of the idea or she can forget that the idea was hers and proceed as if nothing had happened. I strongly believe that to make the latter choice plays into the common gender stereotypes. To make the former choice is to play against the stereotypes. I don't think that women should stand for idea theft. If your idea is stolen, you should pleasantly but immediately respond with something like, "Fred, you did a nice job of explaining my point, so let me elaborate ....." Otherwise you will leave the meeting angry -- and for good reason. Stand up for yourself in the meeting; claim ownership of your ideas then and there; and live with (and be proud of) the consequences of your "aggression."

### Recognizing Non-Verbal Differences in Gender Communication

Body language, facial expressions, speech patterns, and word choice are also areas of differences between men and women. Studies show that people generally get more than 90 percent of the meaning of a message from the manner of its delivery. In other words, the objective content of what we say counts for about 10 percent of what the people we are addressing take away. As a result, it is precisely non-content specific aspects of communication that are most fraught with the potential for reinforcing stereotypes and fostering gender misunderstandings. Let's look at a few of these traits, how they affect male/female communication, and what women can do to make sure that the non-content specific aspects of their communications work for -- and not against -- them.

#### Body Language

We don't know whether differences in body language are driven by genetics or learned gender roles. Probably both. But what we do know is that men and women have and use body language in quite different ways. We also know that body language is hard to change. Consequently, women should understand these differences and become aware of their own behavior so that they can present themselves and their ideas in ways that reduce the chances of misunderstandings.

Take physical space. Men tend to take up more space than women, and "high status" men tend to take up the most space. At meetings, men tend to spread out; women tend to shrink back. Men tend to gesture away from their bodies; women tend to gesture towards their bodies. When listening, men tend to lean back; women tend to lean forward. Men tend to increase their space; women almost always tend to retreat from the space they were initially given. Beyond simply being aware of this tendency, women need to claim and hold their share of personal space. You should be sure to take up as much space at the table as the men do. If this means you need to bring a large pile of books and papers to your meetings, do so; bring a pile of papers; spread them out, even if you never refer to them. By claiming and hold your (rightful) share of personal space, you are again playing against, not into, the common gender stereotypes.

Men and women generally listen differently. While listening, women often nod to acknowledge that they are paying attention; men generally nod only if they are in agreement. I remember, as a young lawyer, walking out of a meeting with a senior male partner who immediately criticized me for "supporting" the position advanced by the other side.

I was flabbergasted because I had not even spoken. His response was telling: I had been nodding during the other side's presentation. Women need to be careful about their learned tendency to express agreeableness. We need to watch our nodding and be sure that if we are nodding it is being interpreted as we mean it to be.

One last body language point is the all important handshake. Make it firm and look straight in your counterpart's eye. Avoid the limp "puppy paw." A woman with a firm handshake is likely to be viewed as self-confident. A limp handshake is a first sign that a woman is not to be taken seriously.

### Expressing Anger

Men and women display anger in distinctly different ways. Men tend to look away when talking unless they are angry, in which case they tend to stare straight at whomever they are angry with. Women, on the other hand, tend to seek eye contact when talking unless they are angry, in which case they tend to look away. There is nothing wrong with a woman being angry. But, I think we have to acknowledge that within a business context the bar for justified anger by a woman is set higher than it is for a man. So, as a woman, if you are angry, justified in being angry, and want to be taken seriously, two things are needed: (1) look directly at the person with whom you are angry and (2) be prepared forcefully to explain the reasons for your anger without raising your voice. I know that this is a disproportionate burden for a woman in relation to a man, but if a woman is to use her anger to her advantage, she must be prepared to play by the rules, and this means that she must be able to articulate clearly the reasons for her anger without raising her voice.

Studies show that men can yell in the office and get away with it; in fact, they can be admired for it. In today's world, however, women who yell or appear to "lose it" are likely to be roundly criticized by men and women alike. Such women are viewed as "emotional," "unsteady," "out of control," "incompetent," and "crazy." Is that fair? Of course not, but it is the world in which most of us live at the moment. Timed and controlled anger can be a powerful tool for a woman. But women should never confuse controlled anger with emotional outbursts. If you find yourself starting to yell or you are on the brink of "losing it," walk around the block; call a trusted friend; have a cup of coffee. But if you are really angry and ready to show it, make sure to express it forcefully and in a controlled, purposeful manner. And, remember, don't cry. When women are angry – really angry – they often cry. Don't do that in the office. If you need to get out of the office and sleep on it to be sure you can express your anger without tears, then, by all means, wait until tomorrow.

### Speech and Voice Patterns

The different speech and voice patterns exhibited by men and women are extraordinarily difficult to change. Men have deep "authoritative" voices; women have higher, often "weaker" voices. Perhaps with intensive training (think "The King's Speech") voice and tone can be changed but unless a woman is royalty or an actor, it is unlikely that she ever is going to be successful in the effort. So, is there anything to be done?

Let me give you one of my favorite examples. Men speak in three octaves

while women speak in five. I've been in meetings after which a man will comment that a woman participant was "emotional" or "excited" or even "irrational." Yet, I hadn't seen that at all. What I had heard was that a woman was using five – not three – octaves of sound. Men often interpret the use of this range of sound as emotional imbalance. But it would be foolish for a woman to worry about her five octave range. That is just the way she talks. Indeed, at various times, whether before a jury or an appellate court, or in negotiating a contract or lobbying a congressman, that range may be a great advantage. But on her way up as a junior lawyer, a woman might well find that it works against her. If that is the case, she needs to focus a littler harder than a man might on the content of what she says. It will do no good to attempt to affect a deeper voice in search of more authority and credibility. A young woman must find the source of her authority and credibility through the force of her reasoning and the logic of her arguments -- not the pitch of her voice. That said, it is generally helpful for women to slow their speech down, use inflection rather than pitch to provide emphasis and avoid long sequences in the "higher registers."

### Language Style

Men tend to speak in a direct manner; those that are going to advance don't beat around the bush. By contrast, women tend to avoid speaking directly; they often take a long time to get to the point. I find that women are often reluctant to speak directly for fear of appearing confrontational. As a result, they are too often discounted by men as lacking a keen mind and the advocate's instinct to "go for the jugular." For example, a young woman lawyer might go into a senior lawyer's office and say something like, "I don't understand the assignment." What she really meant was, "there are three key pieces of information missing from what you gave me. Do you have that information, or should I call the client?" Because she was concerned about appearing confrontational, she came across as confused, needing too much help, and wasting his time. Women need to say what they mean. It is much better to come off with a bit of an edge than to be viewed as weak and ineffective.

Another gender style difference is the way some women tend to start sentences in ways that immediately diminish the force of their message. Such phrases as "I may be off base here but..." or "I don't know if this is helpful but..." or "Maybe I'm wrong, but..." are a woman's enemies. Women need to understand that they can sabotage the effectiveness of their best thinking by using such self-deprecating statements. Their male colleagues are likely to discount what they have to say after such a lead-in, no matter how brilliant the follow-up analysis. Women need to preface their comments and presentations with confident, interest provoking opening remarks.

Another frequent gender style difference in the use of language involving the phrase "I'm sorry." Women often say "I'm sorry" as a way of expressing sympathy and connection with the person with whom they are talking, not just when they are apologizing for an occurrence for which they are responsible. "It's raining today." "I'm sorry." "The client is upset." "I'm sorry." "We lost the case." "I am sorry." Men, on the other hand, often find it hard to say "I'm sorry," even in those situations in which an apology would be appropriate.

When a woman repeatedly says she's sorry, her male colleagues are likely to start thinking that she has something to apologize for, that she

has, indeed, done something wrong. Women who use “I’m sorry” in this way need to stop doing it. Remember to say “I’m sorry” only when something has gone wrong for which you had personal responsibility -- and are the one who made the mistake. As women, we need to find another phrase besides “I’m sorry,” to express sympathy and connection. Try something like, “that’s too bad,” or “that’s terrible news,” or “I’m sure you are disappointed.”

One last language style point is the use of humor. Woman can often diffuse an awkward or difficult situation with a little humor. It is hard to identify these situations in advance, but it is important to keep in mind that a sense of humor can go a long way.

### **The Double Bind**

In the preceding sections of this article, I have offered suggestions for how women can learn and effectively follow the “rules” of successful gender communications. But even women who have learned the “rules” and succeeded in avoiding playing into the common female stereotypes can often be stymied in their careers. When this happens, the problem is likely to be what is now generally referred to as the “double bind.” By playing against, rather than into the common female stereotypes, women can be perceived by men and other women as “too masculine” and consequently evaluated quite negatively. The double bind means that women who succeed in exhibiting the stereotypical characteristics of a leader -- aggressive, decisive, competent, take charge, take risks, solve problems -- are often viewed by men (and women) as “not likable,” “unfeminine” and “too aggressive.” Consider the likelihood that the following descriptions would be applied to male and female lawyers who are equally talented and equally effective:

- He’s assertive; she’s pushy.
- He’s a good networker; she’s chatty and gossipy.
- He’s decisive; she’s impulsive.
- He knows his worth; she’s a self-promoter.
- He’s incisive; she’s abrasive.
- He’s “in demand” and busy; she has trouble with deadlines.
- He’s thoughtful; she’s tentative or hesitant.
- He’s a go-getter; she’s too aggressive.

The double bind is real and it is a serious problem for women seeking to advance in their professional careers. The challenge for each such woman is to develop a credible leadership style that does not violate her own sense of authenticity, on the one hand, or result in her being perceived as “too aggressive” or “too controlling,” on the other. I have argued that women should learn to feel comfortable writing, speaking, and acting in accordance with my suggested “rules” of gender communications. Often that means communicating “like a man,” which may be both unnatural and highly risky. I stand by my advice, but in doing so I must caution women about the double bind. It is because of the double bind that a woman needs to carefully “pick her shots” and not waste her “likeability” on the small stuff. In other words, a successful professional woman cannot communicate “like a

man” all of the time. She must prioritize her objectives with a keen awareness of the need to avoid both the common female stereotypes and the double bind.

By way of example, I once worked closely with an income partner on a memorandum explaining why this was “her year” to become a capital partner. Because the head of her office was not familiar with her work, I suggested that she share her memorandum with him in advance. When she sat down with him, the very first thing he said was, “don’t you think you are being too aggressive?” Her immediate response was the correct one. She said in a calm voice and with a smile, “But, I am just being accurate. I can prove every point.” And she could, and she did, and she was promoted. I view this as an instance of picking the right shot and using it in the right way.

### **Mentors and Sponsors**

*Harvard Business Review* published an interesting article last year entitled, “Why Men Still Get More Promotions Than Women.” Its key conclusion was that men and women tend to advance at different rates because they have different types of mentors. Women are “overmentored” and “undersponsored” relative to men. Men tend to have mentors who are committed “sponsors.” Mentors who act as sponsors present their mentees to other senior leaders; they make sure their mentees are noticed; they put their mentees forward for promising opportunities and challenging assignments; they protect their mentees when they are criticized; and they fight for their mentees when it is time for promotion.

By contrast, women’s mentors tend to provide caring and altruistic advice and counseling but then tend not to be willing -- or able -- to pull their mentees up through the system. Women’s mentors provide emotional support and thoughtful feedback; they offer advice on how to improve; they serve as role models for “corporate citizenship”; and they focus on their mentees’ personal and professional development. But they typically don’t take the steps (or have the power) necessary to assure that their mentees get the most promising opportunities, assignments, and promotions.

It should not be hard for an ambitious woman to choose the kind of mentor she would rather have: a thoughtful and empathetic confidant focused on her strengths and weaknesses or a dogged fighter for her promotion. Women need to find (or be assigned – should they be so lucky!) a mentor who can and will go beyond giving feedback and advice and use his or her influence with senior management to advocate for them. Easier said than done, I know, but it is hard for anyone, man or woman, to advance in the professional world without a sponsor. So look around, find the right person, and latch on.

### **Conclusion**

I am committed to gender equality and the realization of women’s professional potential. The challenge for women is to fulfill their potential without giving up their unique insights and capacities. Studies show that diverse teams come up with better solutions than teams of people that all think and act alike. There is much work to be done. I believe that women can do much of this on their own, but if we are to truly level the professional career playing field, women and men must work together to create gender neutral evaluation and advancement

processes. Unfortunately, such an achievement is still a long way off. In the meantime, women who learn and follow the “rules” for effective gender communications stand a far better chance at “making it” than those who do not.

## Self-Evaluations: Dos and Don'ts

*By: Andrea S. Kramer\**

### Before You Start

1. Think about whether you see yourself differently from how you believe others see you. Do you want to be seen differently from the way you believe others see you? If so, develop a plan for explaining and presenting your strengths and contributions that are insufficiently recognized.
2. Ask yourself: If someone doesn't know me, what do I need to include in this self-evaluation to make sure that they do?
3. Are your objectives clear? How are you going to let your boss and those who set your compensation know in an unambiguous way your expectations for career advancement and promotion?
4. As you think about what you want to say about yourself, are you proudly recounting your successes without undue modesty? If not, think again. But keep in mind, you must be prepared to prove every point you make.
5. Are you approaching this self-evaluation as you would a presentation on behalf of a client? You should be. Take the time you would for a client and give yourself the thoughtful consideration you would for a client project.
6. Your statistics for the evaluation cycle are important. Assemble them and think about how best to work them into your self-evaluation.
7. Confirm that all personal performance data in the organization's records are consistent with your own records.
8. Do you have a file with all of the information relevant to your evaluation cycle. If not, you should. It needs to include achievements, compliments, thanks, praise, and gratitude from clients and colleagues. Remember that women (often unlike men) are expected to prove the statements that they make about their accomplishments.
9. Identify all senior lawyers/executives and others with whom you have worked who could provide evaluations of you. They need to be formally notified to provide performance evaluations for you. Be prepared to remind them of submission deadlines and provide them with statistical data about projects you worked on for them and favorable outcomes. Be sure they submit their evaluations on time.

### Possible Basic Orientations.....

- “This has been a year of phenomenal growth for me and my practice because of \_\_\_\_\_”

- “The projects I've taken on have greatly increased my ability to do the following \_\_\_\_\_”
- “I have expanded my practice in the following ways: X, Y, and Z.”
- “I took on a lead role in this trial/transaction by handling the \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “I have worked with a large number of partners, associates, and staff [executives, managers, and staff] to \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “All of my assignments were completed in a timely manner and cost efficient.”
- “I work independently”
- “I seek out assignments from other offices and departments.”
- “I have immersed myself in the following [specific] activities: X, Y, and Z.”
- “On this transaction/case, I effectively handled \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “I took on a key role in this significant matter when \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “I have successfully completed the following [specific projects]: A, B, and C.”
- “I have been very active in \_\_\_\_\_.”

### Dos.....

- **Carefully read and follow the instructions before beginning your self-evaluation.**
- Organize all statistical information on all of the client and administrative matters for the evaluation cycle.
- If you spent a lot of time on key projects, include your hours in your description of those projects.
- If you managed other lawyers, include their hours or collection in your descriptions.
- Include collections on key projects or matters.
- Put the size and importance of your projects in context.
- If you managed projects and people, put the importance of the projects in context.
- State the dollar value of transactions/trials/projects you have worked on (if helpful) and identify the benefits to your organization.
- Be sure to explain the significance of increases or decreases in your numbers.
- Some self-evaluations are submitted through an on-line program that will only accept a limited number of character. When you reach the maximum number of characters, you cannot input another letter or word. You need to be sure the final version of your self-evaluation is of the correct length, accurately inputted and addresses all of the points you want to make.

- Examine your organization's business plan or marketing materials to make sure its goals and the way you present yourself mesh.
- Identify your key strengths and be sure they lead your self-evaluation.
- Be enthusiastic about your accomplishments.
- Write with authenticity and pride.
- Focus on your important assignments, your goal is to highlight your strengths, not to provide a detailed account of everything you did that year.
- Use action words that identify you with positive results. Organizational, leadership, interpersonal, and communication skills as well as initiative and creativity are likely to be the traits valued by your organization, so focus on them.
- Include any cross-selling you have engaged in and mention the type, quantity, and value of the work you were able to secure from clients and other departments/colleagues at your organization.
- Discuss the people you work with: executives, partners, peers, junior colleagues, and staff at your organization. Your interactions with the individuals you work with can help showcase your professional development.
- Step into the spotlight and rightfully claim credit for your successes.
- Be specific about your management skills and how you use them.
- If you have had health or family problems mention them, if at all, only at the back of your evaluation, unless they accounted for a significant amount of lost time, in which case address them right up front.
- Ask a more senior colleague or good friend to review and comment on your self-evaluation once you've written and carefully edited it.
- Ask yourself, if someone didn't know you, how well would they know you by reading your self-evaluation? If the answer is not well, you have a lot more work to do.

#### **Don'ts.....**

- **Don't turn your self-evaluation in late!**
- Don't wait until the last minute to start writing your evaluation! This is an important part of your career advancement. Give it the time and thought it deserves.
- Don't assume anything! Be explicit! The readers do not already know your successes or their significance to your practice, "clients," or the organization.
- Don't let your numbers do the talking. Tie your responsibilities and accomplishments to your numbers and explain why your numbers show important contributions.
- Don't use emotional words (such as "disappointed" or "hope").

- Don't express anger or frustration, no matter how justified. A self-evaluation is just not the place for it.
- Don't use vague terms or sweeping generalities. Your language should be clear, direct, and specific.
- Don't be afraid to take credit for your accomplishments
- Don't down-play your accomplishments by using terms like "we" or "I was on the team with X, Y, and Z" – unless you believe that is the only honest way to describe what happened.
- Don't exaggerate – be sure you are able to prove every one of your key points.
- Don't spend a lot of space in your self-evaluation on activities outside of your organization.
- Don't get off track. Your focus needs to stay on your core responsibilities and "mission critical" accomplishments.

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## **Additional Things Women Can Do For Themselves**

*By Andrea S. Kramer\**

Apart from learning the "rules" of the gender communications game, avoiding the double bind, and finding the right mentor, there are a number of things that women can do so as not to make things even harder for themselves. These are generally simple and obvious. Get the most out of first impressions: a firm handshake and eye contact are important. Dress professionally; women might have more latitude than men, which makes it all the more complicated for woman. In meetings, make all of the points you really care about and forget about the rest. Don't wait for "your turn" to speak: it may never come.

Get yourself known. Don't live by email alone. Talk frequently face-to-face with your colleagues. Learn how colleagues and clients prefer to be contacted. Build strong personal relationships.

Acknowledge mistakes and move on. When something concerns you, don't stew about it. Speak first to a trusted colleague or friend – a more senior one (or someone who might have a broader or different perspective if possible) – because there is often more than meets the eye to situations that strike us as problematic. So it is important to learn about whether there might be some hidden issues that need to be considered. Women tend to keep things bottled up inside so that by the time they are ready to say what it is that is bothering them, it is often too late to fix the problem. When a woman lawyer says she's leaving her professional organization, she is leaving. When a man says he leaving, he might be simply ready to negotiate for a better offer.

Develop a "positive buzz" about yourself. Stay in touch with those

with a “say” in your career. Be sure they know your accomplishments as the year progresses, not just at compensation time. Participate in organization-wide women’s alliances and mentoring activities. Build friendships and join committees outside your department. Show off your strengths in ways that work best for you. Teach and lecture; participate in professional committees; market to your target client groups; be seen out of the office in your professional capacity; and be involved in community service activities. Get engaged and energized by participating in local women’s bar associations and national women’s groups, such as the National Association of Women Lawyers (<http://www.nawl.org>) and WLMA, The Women’s Leadership and Mentoring Alliance (<http://www.wlmaconnect.org>).

Women need to help each other by referring projects, business opportunities, speaking opportunities, networking, and other connections to each other. Women need to think about ways that they can help other woman, both those in and outside of their own organizations, advance their careers. These are just some of the things women can do for themselves to enrich their professional opportunities and environments.

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## What Professional Organizations Should do to Advance Their Women Leaders

*By: Andrea S. Kramer\**

The playing field for professional advancement will never become truly level until our professional service organizations make some quite needed structural changes. Let me suggest a few that are well within our grasp. The first is that organization-wide training in gender stereotypes and communication differences should be mandatory for men as well as women. Studies show that simply understanding how these stereotypes operate can actually help alleviate their consequences. This one simple step can make an enormously positive difference in women’s career prospects. For once, both men and women within an organization would become aware of the subtle and not so subtle consequences of their unconscious biases and preconceptions, and a vocabulary would become available that can be used to bring “gender neutrality” to the process by which the organization evaluates, assigns projects to, and promotes its professionals.

Performance review policies and evaluation forms need to be revised to make it difficult for reviewers to respond to evaluation questions based on unconscious stereotypes. Reviewers need to be asked questions that force them to respond in an even-handed way. They should be asked to address the competencies -- skills, knowledge, and performance -- of junior lawyers, by evaluating their performances in particular roles.

Young women need mentors who understand gender communication differences and the stereotypes that negatively affect women. But beyond that, these mentors must be every bit as effective as advocates

for their mentees – real sponsors and not just counselors -- as those mentors who mentor the women’s male counterparts.

More women must move into senior leadership positions. Young women must see women as role models for their paths ahead. They need to see, and not just be told, that real success is possible in their organizations.

Because men now far outnumber women in senior positions at professional service firms, those women who do hold senior positions have a particularly acute obligation to advise, mentor, sponsor, and fight for the advancement of the young women within their organizations. These senior women need to take responsibility for career advancement of the young women coming up through the ranks of not just their organizations but also other professional organizations in their fields and communities. It is time for all of us to recognize this need and to do our part to fill it.

And, professional organizations should invest in women’s leadership development programs that are tailored to increase the likelihood that more women will actually advance into senior leadership positions within their organizations

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WBAI President Deane B. Brown, partner at Beerman Swerdlove, LLP and Andrea S. Kramer, partner at McDermott, Will & Emery, with actress America Ferrera on Monday, October 3 at the Chicago Foundation For Women’s 26th Annual Luncheon at the Chicago Hilton. Picture taken by Kat Fitzgerald and provided courtesy of the Chicago Foundation for Women.