

Winning circles

SALLIE DON DISCOVERS A PROGRAM WHOSE CIRCULAR LOGIC IS PROVING HIGHLY EFFECTIVE AT BOOSTING THE NEGOTIATING SKILLS OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN.

Women seem to be quite comfortable negotiating with friends, partners and families when it comes to everyday matters, but for some reason they consistently fail to bring those skills into the workplace, according to those involved in a new mentoring program.

The successful, experienced women in the group are not only challenging their professional perspectives, but trying to increase the number of women in top management roles through the Executive Women's Business Pipeline Program.

The project was the brainchild of Orijen Group chief Jenny Morris, whose background in leadership training spans almost three decades. She has created mentoring and training programs for women in companies such as Macquarie Group, Commonwealth Bank, Westpac and Qantas over the past 12 years.

By establishing external workplace mentoring groups, or "success circles", for women from different industries but at similar professional levels, Morris has helped women share, learn and support each other through the tough challenges of male-centric work environments.

She believes developing professional female talent is not simply a "women's issue", but a critical requirement for the long-term growth of any organisation.

"I want to show how women can play the game they need to play to get to the top, yet be authentic and keep a sense of their own integrity," Morris says. "At the executive level, we have a long way to go in increasing the number of women. It seems to be shifting, but slowly."

Former chairwoman of RailCorp in NSW Elizabeth Crouch has worked in federal government and private sector executive roles for more than 30 years. She now sits on a number of boards.

Crouch is in what she labels the "third stage" of her career. As a moderator of one success circle, she has witnessed the very rapid growth in women's self-worth



that can be achieved through challenging the expectations of employers and of the women themselves. "We tend to undersell ourselves dramatically. For some reason, we think our qualifications are worth less than those of our male colleagues. After these discussions, women have negotiated very differently for packages or training."

After five years with Telstra, executive director of strategic marketing Gloria Farler was deciding whether to remain with the company. She joined a circle in the hope that other participants would have dealt with the awkward and difficult task of leaving a corporation.

"I felt I was at a crossroads," Farler

Orijen Group chief executive Jenny Morris wants to show women how to "play the game" while keeping their sense of integrity intact.

PHOTOGRAPH
ADAM KNOTT

says. "Telstra had gone through a significant restructure. It was throwing up massive issues and disrupting many people in the Telstra family, and sometimes these large organisations don't get it quite right."

Farler describes the mentoring group as being a "personal board of directors" "The group showed me how to package my exit to make the whole thing easy for everyone involved. It is about negotiation, really, but I wanted to keep positive ties." Farler finished at Telstra last month.

Jane Counsel, Westpac senior media relations manager, is in the same circle. In May, she returned from a program for executive women at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, where she gained negotiating tips she has passed on to the circle. "My Stanford experience was certainly life-changing," she says. **td**

HOW TO GET A BETTER DEAL

- › Women have the choice to negotiate in many situations in life, but fail to recognise this, often because they don't know it's an option and women are uncomfortable with negotiating.
- › There are significant consequences of a failure to negotiate, particularly when it comes to salary and resources.
- › The most powerful weapon in negotiation is the ability to say no, but women are neither comfortable nor experienced in doing so.
- › Negotiation requires a strategy. Being unprepared is not an option.
- › Ask yourself how much you are willing to pay in order to be nice and avoid the discomfort of negotiation. Women typically ask less for themselves than men, but will get a better outcome when they negotiate on someone else's behalf.
- › Negotiation is a two-way process. You can't get a bad deal unless you agree to it.
- › Always have options.

Source: Stanford University Graduate School of Business leadership course, May 2011.