Women leaders build unity in the workforce

The leadership in America began to shift dramatically on Dec. 30, 2009, as women officially crossed the threshold of being over 50 percent of the workforce in the United States. This month in our country, eight young women will walk across the commencement stage as compared to one young man.

With an 8-to-1 ratio, regardless of what people want to admit, as Rach Dylan would say, “The times they are a changin’.” The visual of the hard-working Rosie the Riveter from World War II or the single mom in the “9 to 5” has changed and corporate women are now being depicted in movies as power-wielding narcissists, like Meryl Streep in “The Devil Wears Prada” and Sandra Bullock in “The Proposal.”

I think everyone is aware that not all successful women in business are cruel, cutthroat and void of compassion; but we are the majority now and we need to take pause and reflect on our personal actions within the workplace. With women now representing 52 percent of the U.S. work force, it must be acknowledged by us that our personal actions do influence Corporate America and ultimately affect the quality of living for generations to come. This shift in the U.S. economy is empowering for women, but it comes with great responsibility. There are far too many examples of women in the workplace who do not play appropriately and women can be particularly worse to the other women in their organization. The “Mean Girls” mentality is perhaps why there are so many movies that depict successful women in a horrid light.

Women in today’s workforce must accept their responsibilities of leadership while simultaneously managing their workloads, climbing the corporate ladder, juggling relationships, raising children and trying to keep some form of balance in their lives. Women once were challenged by how we brooked through the glass ceiling; however, years and generations later, we have built the foundation and scaffolding and have arrived. Women’s responsibilities in leadership are not and should not be limited solely to helping women arrive in the C-suites. We have a far greater responsibility to influence by example, engage in mentoring and commit to build unity in the workplace with inclusive leadership regardless of an employee’s tenure or position.

Meg Whitman, the CEO of Hewlett-Packard, is a perfect example of a successful leader who manages to ignore the norms of old business traditions and builds a nurturing team environment while managing to take risks with her “can-do” attitude. Like Meg Whitman, great female leaders will understand and accept their roles and importance as generational leaders. It is not a Pollyannaish notion to think that with a concerted effort, women can positively affect all the women within our own organizations and subsequently affecting our quality of life at home.

This does not mean that every woman is designed to become a CEO or in a management position, but everyone can be encouraged to maximize their strengths and manage their weaknesses for personal and professional empowerment. We must commit to not encouraging (and using the other way is still encouraging) and ultimately eliminating the “Mean Girls” behaviors within our work environments/community. Community Unification is the clarification of women in a nurturing workplace with support and encouragement while teaching professionalism with defined work expectations and KPIs (key performance indicators).

In my opinion, the event is fantastic because it is designed for working women to come together to engage with other women who know how different backgrounds and businesses with the emphasis on building community outside of their current workplace. The advisory board works very hard to pick topics for discussions that are relevant with speakers who are authentic and inspiring. It provides women with the opportunity to build their personal network while leaving the event feeling invigorated by the palpable camaraderie and energy.

There is a “no holds barred” tenet and I think that every topic that can affect a working female has been discussed at the forum. Past keynote speakers have discussed sending breast milk via FedEx from China to their baby in the United States with great laughter from the crowd, to an extremely open and emotional speech with a successful, more seasoned executive sharing her painful conversations and seeking advice from her therapist as she navigated her career in the ’70s and ’80s within a male-dominated organization while aspiring to pave the way for female generations to come.

This forum is real, transparent and relevant to all women who work or for those who are even seeking to enter/re-enter into the workforce. Attendees will be comprised of women from the C-suites to students seeking nuggets of knowledge from generational leaders. The breakout sessions provide several options for attendees to figure out what they need on that particular Friday and there are many opportunities to ask questions/advice from any of the presenters.

I am very excited this year that my friend, Kat Cole, president of Cinnabon, will be presenting as the keynote speaker. Kat is obviously brilliant, but she is also real, transparent and humble. Kat is wise beyond her years and in my opinion will become one of the great female leaders of our generation.

Please do not miss the opportunity to hear Kat and all of the presenters at this year’s Women’s Leadership Forum. It is my hope that in the near future the ABC – Women’s Leadership Forum will become so large that we will require a larger venue. Please encourage and support all the women in your workplace or circle of influence to attend the forum.

Thank you to the Atlanta Business Chronicle and the Robinson College of Business for your commitment to women in business and for providing the opportunity for us to strengthen the sisterhood, personal networks and ultimately enhance the impact our leadership abilities within the business community.

By Lisa R. Schoolcraft

Axion BioSystems Inc. of Atlanta was among 18 small businesses recently honored by the Small Business Administration in Washington, D.C.

Axion BioSystems, founded in 2008, received the Tibbetts Award, given by the SBA, which honors outstanding small business research and development. Axion BioSystems was recognized for participating in the SBA’s Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program.

Axion BioSystems Inc. receives SBIR award

By Lisa R. Schoolcraft

Axion BioSystems Inc. of Atlanta was among 18 small businesses recently honored by the Small Business Administration in Washington, D.C.

Axion BioSystems, founded in 2008, received the Tibbetts Award, given by the SBA, which honors outstanding small business research and development. Axion BioSystems was recognized for participating in the SBA’s Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program.

Axion BioSystems, Inc. receives SBIR award