

# Career Navigation: Toolkit for Women

Mary L. Bennett, CIA, CEC, MBA

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CPA Canada's Women's Leadership Council is a voice of women CPAs. We act as a catalyst for change, promoting a work environment within the accounting profession that provides for the retention, promotion and advancement of women to positions of leadership without bias, unintended or otherwise, based on gender.

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# HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

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We've all asked the same questions about our careers:

- What should I do next?
- Do I really want that promotion?
- Why didn't I get that promotion?
- Why does it seem like others are moving past me?
- Is having a family going to affect my career aspirations?
- Is there something else that I should be doing to help advance my career path?
- What exactly should I be doing to get ahead?

While these are great questions, sometimes trying to answer them alone can have you going in a vicious circle. Not to mention, there's the work to be done.... Who has time for all this heavy thinking? Isn't there a place that puts it all together?

Yes, and this is it. Think of this toolkit as a mentor in your back pocket. You can use it on your own, with your mentor, or with colleagues or friends to help navigate your career.

Each chapter outlines documented barriers and challenges women face in their careers, including some you might not even know exist—which might help explain some of your frustration.

Each chapter includes exercises to help you reflect on your own personal experiences and how they relate to the topic. The exercises are blueprints for finding the answers that are right for you.

You can work through this entire toolkit, or just focus on a particular section that's important to you at this point in your career.

The CPA's Women's Leadership Council is a voice of women CPAs. We act as a catalyst for change, promoting a work environment within the accounting profession that supports the retention, promotion and advancement of women to positions of leadership without bias, unintended or otherwise, based on gender.

We are committed to bringing you the very best resources from knowledgeable sources that will ultimately help you advance within the profession. We want to share our experiences with you because collaborating for success is what we do best!



# INTRODUCTION

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The potential career paths for women and men in the accounting profession contain a tremendous amount of variety. There are, however, commonalities among those who have been successful in terms of skill sets and leadership attributes. Strong technical knowledge, solid judgment, critical thinking, interpersonal and relationship building, persuasiveness and influence, client service orientation, team development, integrity and adaptability are a few of the common skills and attributes possessed by successful leaders in the accounting profession.

So, why offer a specific toolkit for women? After all, men and women need to develop the same skills to be successful in this profession, don't they? The answer is yes, men and women do need similar skills to achieve success; however, the manner in which women experience their career journeys varies greatly from that of their male counterparts. These variations are often due to a combination of factors that include both the women themselves and the environments in which they interact.

Most organizations have been led, in majority, by men. This is simply the result of the ratio of men to women in the early and mid years of modern business and the accounting profession. Due to a number of factors that will be discussed throughout this toolkit, women commonly experience the cultures of business and the accounting profession differently from men. This unique combination of influences accounts for the fact that although women in Canada have been in the accounting profession in equal numbers to men for over 10 years, only 15% have risen to a partnership position.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Why Should Women be Leaders? Why Not!"; CPA Canada's Women's Leadership Council, CICA.ca.

Women encounter challenges and barriers to success that are well documented but not well known by the majority of both men and women in the profession. There is much agreement in concept about what these challenges are, although the exact terms or language may differ. The primary differences in the career experiences of women are most prominent in the following three areas:

1. Career advocacy and navigation.
2. Visibility of female role models.
3. Career/life integration.<sup>2</sup>

Women who have built quality career navigation relationships (and, therefore, navigation clarity and advocacy), women who have access to a variety of female role models and women who have the opportunity to build career/life integration skills and draw from successful role models in these areas are the ones most likely to achieve career success. Conversely, when these three elements are not present, we see slowed or blocked career progression for women. Each of these elements will be discussed in greater detail in this toolkit. In addition, several key areas of development that often differ for women in the profession will also be discussed. These areas include business development, networking, personal development and career planning. The toolkit contains self-study reflections and exercises to personalize the lessons included within and to enable actionable learning from these concepts. Please begin by completing the initial reflections exercise.

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<sup>2</sup> "Organizational Sustainability: Retention and Development of Female Leaders", Mary L. Bennett, AICPA WIEC, 2007.

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# INITIAL REFLECTIONS

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In order to explore personal and professional desires for the future, it is beneficial for women to explore the answers to the questions listed below. Designate a journal for the work you will complete using this toolkit. It will be helpful, convenient and effective to refer back to the exercises if your reflections are all recorded in one place.

Give yourself the gift of reflective time for candid and thoughtful responses. This work is important for you to derive full value from the toolkit. Your reflections will not remain static. Revisit these questions and your answers periodically, as the degree and type of change in your answers can be as enlightening as the answers themselves.

## Initial Reflections Worksheet: Questions

1. What do you most want to gain from this toolkit?

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2. What would be a successful outcome of your engagement with the content, reflections and exercises included in this toolkit?

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3. What can you do to ensure a successful outcome?

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### Initial Reflections Worksheet: Questions

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4. What choices, opportunities and challenges are you currently contemplating as you consider your career journey within the accounting profession?

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5. Do you have a vision of where you wish to be in the next three to five years?

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6. Do you have a vision of where you wish to be in the next 10 years?  
Record your vision of the future in as much detail as possible. Creatively designing and painting a picture of your desired future may aid you in achieving a deeper reflection.

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# CHAPTER 1

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## COMMON SUCCESS FACTORS FOR WOMEN IN THE ACCOUNTING PROFESSION

There are a number of factors that are common among women who have been successful in the accounting profession. While it is true that many of these factors are also important for men in the profession, there are aspects of these elements of success that are unique to women. Some of the reasons women experience their career journeys differently from men are, in part, due to the differences in the ways in which women are socialized, the roles that women often play in society, unconscious bias regarding women in business and the still-prevalent masculine cultures of many organizations. This section of the toolkit will introduce the seven key points relevant to each of the factors often shared by successful women in this profession:

1. Access to key relationships with influential members of leadership.
2. Access to a variety of role models.
3. Career/life integration skill building.
4. Leadership and career development.

5. Knowledge of the importance of personal branding and authenticity.
6. Networking skills.
7. Understanding the power of frequent reflection and planning.

Note: Several of these factors will also be explored in greater depth in subsequent sections of the toolkit.

### **Success Factor One: Access to Key Relationships with Influential Members of Leadership**

A key element in career progression for both men and women is access to influential members of leadership. There is a long list of factors that individuals must become aware of regarding an organization in order to help increase their value proposition to that organization. The most common and effective tool for learning these key lessons is gaining access to relationships with senior leaders, which will provide you with critical opportunities, experiences, assignments and organizational learning. Without access to senior leaders, your career is like a journey traveled without a map or GPS. Men more spontaneously gain access to these vital individuals due to ease of networking that naturally takes place between people who identify with one another. We tend to most identify with those that remind us of ourselves. In business, natural developmental relationships germinate between senior influential leaders (who are still predominantly male) and emerging male leaders more often than with emerging female leaders. Women less frequently find essential career relationships forming naturally. These dynamics are usually not intentional; however, men in the profession may have access to a “roadmap”, which is a very real and tangible advantage on this career journey. As a result of these natural organizational tendencies, women who strategically seek out these mentoring and advocacy relationships are often the ones most likely to succeed in the profession. Please see Chapter 2 for more detailed information, reflections and exercises on this topic.

### **Success Factor Two: Access to a Variety of Role Models**

People instinctively look for role models. We look for individuals we can observe, learn from and emulate. We look for clues to a path we might follow. In the end, we forge our own unique path, but it is most often comprised,

sometimes unconsciously, of a mosaic of the experiences of others. Women who see other women with diverse paths and experiences who succeed within the organization begin to believe that they are also able to succeed. Without these role models, it can sometimes be difficult for women to aspire to ownership and leadership roles within the firm.<sup>3</sup> The impact of this issue should not be underestimated. All women are not alike, either in their aspirations or in their desired paths to successfully reaching those aspirations.

Access to models of success that represent a variety of roles, leadership styles, career/life circumstances and paths to reaching aspirations are essential. With diversity in these role models, women can experience a benefit in their career journeys similar to men who have a multitude of role models. Without varied role models, women are often constrained in their progress.

In most organizations, the leadership ranks are still very male-dominated. Men have had the benefit of observing many individuals they may identify with and, therefore, choose to emulate as they develop their technical, interpersonal and leadership skills. Women do not imagine themselves in roles that have historically been male-dominated, and they are often unconscious to the fact that aspirations have been limited. In addition, the organizational leaders have an image of the “type” of leader that is “right” for a role. Organizational leaders often fall prey to their unconscious bias and experiences, just as the women observing the roles might. The manner in which the roles are executed often have a traditionally masculine stamp, framework or approach. Women frequently do not consider adding these roles to their potential list of ultimate aspirations, and they are not consciously aware of the limitations they have set forth or why they have done so. There are, of course, women who strive to be the first; to be the one that breaks the barrier and provide a new vision of how a role might be executed. If we rely exclusively on these women to be the force that provides the diversity in the leadership that our communities and organizations need, we will be on a very slow path; one that is much too slow for the impact needed to support succession planning, especially in light of baby boomers retirement. In addition, there is evidence that a diversity in leadership approach creates a stronger organization with greater sustainability.<sup>4</sup>

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3 “The Aspirations of Women”, Mary L. Bennett, WomenOnBusiness.com and MLBennettConsulting.com, 2010.

4 “The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women’s Representation on Boards (2004–2008)”, Nancy M. Carter and Harvey M. Wagner, Catalyst, 2011.



There can be either a positive or negative ripple effect of visible female role models on the progress of women in an organization. Women leaders should be visible to other women coming up through the ranks. In organizations that do not have many role models, it is possible for emerging female leaders to connect with networks outside the organization to gain access to role models and learn about examples of success that are not immediately apparent within. This can have a huge, exponential impact. Women begin to believe, imagine and aspire to roles they have not considered in the past. Those who may have convinced themselves they could not succeed in certain roles, due to the manner in which the roles have been executed, begin to shift their behaviour. In the past, all the role models have been male, and the emerging female leaders have not been able to execute this role according to expectations without sacrificing a great deal of personal authenticity. Often, there can be dramatic changes in the aspirations of women who have access to a female leader in a role previously held exclusively by men. Immediately, women can envision a different, more authentic path for themselves that now includes a role they had never formerly considered.

It is important to note that many senior female leaders do not wish to be visible role models. This is a common issue and before we criticize these women, it is essential to understand the reasons behind their viewpoint. The majority of women who have succeeded early in the history of the profession had no choice but to assimilate into the established masculine structure and style. They speak of being very careful regarding blending in and not standing out in any way as females. In fact, many early success stories are founded on a woman's ability to "fit in" and "be one of the guys" as a primary survival technique. While small percentages of women have succeeded in the past using this model, it is not expansive enough today to provide for the sustainability of our organizations. Women comprise more than 50% of the workforce and accounting graduates. Cultures that broaden and accept a greater diversity of style, approach, career path options and skill building will be stronger and more sustainable, because they gain access to all top talent. In addition, it is important to note that women leaders do not choose their role-model status. Women leaders in the accounting profession are role models by virtue of their presence and success. These women in positions of power are the pioneers of the future. Others will look to them for clues to a successful style approach,

career/life integration strategies, political skill and more. Most importantly, women leaders must understand that the impact of their presence is real and powerful. Their visibility as female leaders creates tangible change within their organizations and the communities in which they live. Each woman makes a difference by being who she is and making visible the manner in which she executes her roles.

### **Success Factor Three: Career/Life Integration Skill Building**

The art of integrating life and career is more commonly called work/life balance. In the accounting profession, the term “work/life balance” has become synonymous with part-time or “flex-time” programs. Creating true integration of career and life is much broader than adjusting your work schedule. Career/life balance is not just a woman’s issue, especially given the generational differences regarding the role of work in broader life satisfaction. It is very true that men and women both express a desire for better integration of work and life. In today’s society, however, women’s day-to-day schedules still frequently involve a greater responsibility for roles outside of work (such as care of children, home and elderly parents) than their male peers in the accounting profession.

Career/life integration is most definitely about choices and how these choices are combined, especially regarding career. Integration is about bending work satisfactorily with the other priorities of life. However, career/life integration is not only about choices, it is also about skill building. Individuals interested in their quality of life do not simply make choices and then sit back to see what will happen: they manage their choices to accomplish the outcomes they most desire. There are a number of skills, tools and strategies that women can use to enhance the ways in which they integrate their careers into their lives, including support systems, regular reflection and review to build clarity, careful management of capacity limitations, communication, relationship building and improving soft skills and technical skills. Work/life integration concepts and skill building will be presented in more detail, along with reflection and exercises, in Chapter 5.

## Success Factor Four: Leadership and Career Development

Building leadership skills and engaging in active and empowered career development are key success factors. Regardless of position, success is often derived from one's ability to influence and persuade others to accept a point of view and move into action. Honing leadership capabilities can impact everything from the profitability of a project, to the accuracy of a client's financial statement, to the successful integration of our career and our life. On a daily basis, we will be called to formally and/or informally lead others. One develops these skills primarily through experience and examples of role models. There are many leadership theories and books available on the topic of leadership to help you gain the insight and background into the development of leadership skills. At the end of the day, however, the skills are built through trial and error, experience and the various types of feedback that come from that experience.

How is the active development of leadership skills different for women and men in the accounting profession? Meta-analysis studies of gender and leadership suggest that female leaders:

- focus more on people and relationships, while men focus more on tasks;
- more often engage in systems thinking, considering all factors versus fast action based on initial prioritization;
- strive for consensus in conflict resolution more often than win/lose competition;
- operate with more emotional expression;
- strive for network, inclusion and connection versus hierarchy;
- operate under the guideline that the journey matters as much as the destination; and
- focus on broader global responsibility due to nurturing and inclusion orientation, resulting in increased concern for future generations or longer-term issues.

Transformational and transactional leadership, a well-known leadership theory, outlines two major styles or approaches to leadership that have been widely researched.

Transformational skills include:

- motivating respect and pride from association with the leader;

- communicating the values, purpose and importance of the organization's mission;
- exhibiting optimism and excitement about goals and future states;
- examining new perspectives for solving problems; and
- focusing on the developmental needs of followers as individuals.

Transactional skills include:

- rewarding satisfactory performance by followers;
- addressing mistakes and failures to meet standards;
- postponing interventions until problems become severe; and
- sometimes, adopting an absent or demonstrated hands-off approach during critical junctures.

A recent meta-analysis by Alice Eagly found that women are slightly more likely to demonstrate transformational leadership styles.<sup>5</sup> Most leadership development experts agree that appropriate leadership style is based, in part, on the situation requiring leadership. While there is no one perfect style, in today's business environment, transformational skills seem to be sought after more often than just transactional skills, mainly due to:

- diversity of workforce and marketplace;
- changing nature of competitors versus alliances;
- complexity of business landscape and increase in relative factors; and
- leadership being not only the skilled actions of a few leaders at the top of the hierarchy but also the actions of many individuals placed throughout an organization.

Some have labelled this transformational skill focus "post-heroic", because it emphasizes not the charismatic leadership of a single individual but, instead, the shared processes of social influence.<sup>6</sup>

Women who have been successful in the accounting profession seek out opportunities to learn about, and experience, many leadership styles. A variety of experiences will best support leadership development. Stretch assignments, where new skills and attributes are required and the goals and outcomes are a "stretch" beyond what the individual has accomplished in the past, are a

5 "Do Women Have What it Takes to Lead?", Alice H. Eagly, *Institute for Policy Research News* (Northwestern University), Volume 26, Winter 2004.

6 "The Paradox of Post Heroic Leadership: Gender Matters", Joyce K. Fletcher, *Center for Gender in Organizations*, 2003.

common element of formal leadership development programs. Seeking out stretch assignments is an important step to take, particularly for women who may not receive these assignments as naturally in day-to-day interaction as their male peers would. Quality stretch assignments always include a designated support system of influential sponsors to regularly assist the individual in key learning points and to protect against major failure. Successful women try out different styles in the development of personal leadership approaches that are most authentic, yet effective, in a variety of situations.

### **Success Factor Five: Knowledge of the Importance of Personal Branding and Authenticity**

Branding and authenticity are particularly important and challenging for women in the accounting profession, because women in leadership roles remain a minority in this field which makes those who succeed more visible. In other words, there is more scrutiny of, and attention paid to, those that are successful in the profession. Women leaders are still, in many ways, pioneers in terms of the path, style, accomplishments and changing perceptions of what a leader in the profession is. Thinking critically and purposefully about the brand you wish to convey is an important tool for achieving success. Along with branding, we must also address authenticity: an accurate assessment, integration and representation of identity, values, beliefs and judgment. Authenticity is the capability to relate to others in a genuine and courageous manner, reflecting high integrity to personal values and belief systems, yet simultaneously being adaptable to change. Followers align with leaders because they practice what they preach, and this establishes a foundation on which to build trust.

Leadership involves a daily quest for integrity, wholeness and authenticity. Women and men can, and should be, one person at home and at work. Creating a brand that does not represent authenticity will not be effective. A personal brand is an overall impression people take away from an encounter with an individual. Leaders should think about how they present themselves to the world and to their business colleagues. Leaders can hone certain aspects of their presentation and/or image (such as confidence levels, articulate speech and quality communication). Leaders cannot, however, attempt to create a new

personality but, rather, must find the core authentic aspects of their existing personality from which to build a solid business brand. A leader's success is just as much about *who* they are as a leader as *what* they do as a leader.

There are lost benefits of diversity of thought, background, approach, education and socialization when women do not bring their authentic brand into the workplace. The organization loses in this situation, and the women themselves also lose. Organizations face the following issues if women are forced to assimilate their authenticity to survive or be successful:

- Increased chance of turnover.
- Organizations may not survive in an ever-increasingly complex world without a broader, more diverse response pattern, which is lost with assimilation.
- The best talent is driven to apply their skills in an environment where they feel they can be authentic in their leadership style and approach, and where their unique contributions will be accepted and leveraged.

Women also lose as individuals when they submerge portions of who they are each day as they walk through the office door. Successful members of the accounting profession pour a tremendous amount of time and personal energy into the organizations for which they work. It is very difficult to devote this energy while simultaneously holding back portions of who we are and, therefore, portions of our talent. Women often report this phenomenon of being fragmented and, as a result, may experience:

- role incongruity;
- “darned if you do, darned if you don’t” mentality, resulting from cultures that call for strong traditionally masculine traits which are simultaneously, and sometimes unconsciously, not acceptable when demonstrated by a woman;
- conflict between the generally accepted and expected role associated with their gender and the current generally accepted model of a leader;
- energy drain;
- barriers to reaching their full potential due to their attempts to assimilate to cultural norms;
- resentment and/or anger; and
- isolation.

## Success Factor Six: Networking Skills

Networking skills are essential for success in the accounting profession. Networking relationships are mutually supportive relationships. This topic will be introduced in this chapter and further discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Networking is critical not only for business development but also for personal and career development. Considering all the possible uses and outcomes for networking may serve to ease some of the anxiety that people tend to have about engaging in building a network. Networks can be used for initial job hunting, career advancement, talent attraction, client relationship building, prospect relationship building, referral source development, targeted information gathering (such as for a niche practice), special projects and new market development. Networking can even be used to learn more about networking.

The accounting profession is heavily influenced by the outcomes of networking. As individuals move through a career, they repeatedly hear the term “network”. But what does this really mean? It is important to remember that each person you meet has the potential to become part of your network, and each person you currently know also has that very same potential. The number of people with which you are able to maintain an active network, at any given point in time, will be determined by you. Networking skill-building tools as well as exercises to enhance your professional network are included in more detail in Chapter 3 and Worksheet C of this toolkit.

## Success Factor Seven: Understanding the Power of Frequent Reflection and Planning

For women in business, regular reflection is a critical success skill. Women who set aside time to think deeply about the journey they have been on, the current road on which they are traveling and how these compare to where they want to go are often those who are not only successful, but they are also those who feel a deep sense of peace and satisfaction with their success. Women have many choices but seem to be less inclined to devote the time to invest in themselves in a mindful manner. Women may be socialized to believe they are selfish if they take time for themselves. They often have many roles to simultaneously play at work, at home and within their community. As a result, most

women in business are very rarely without an extensive “to do” list. A constant focus on “getting things done” can paradoxically cause us to lose sight of what we are actually doing.

Thinking as strategically about personal life planning as you would about business planning is an important skill that successful women employ. Engagement in annual financial and client planning is considered a solid business skill. Successful female leaders regularly engage in annual personal reflection as well as planning. This skill keeps leaders close to the career and life plan that will be most authentic and, therefore, most satisfying. Please refer to Worksheet A for reflections and personal exercises that are designed to provide a deeper and more individual understanding of the success factors presented in this chapter.





# WORKSHEET A

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## SUCCESS FACTORS

In order to explore personal and professional desires for the future, it is beneficial for women to explore the answers to the questions listed below.

Consider the content of Chapter 1 on Common Success Factors for Women in the Accounting Profession as you complete the following exercises. Give yourself the gift of reflective time for candid and thoughtful responses. This work is important for you to derive full value from the toolkit. Your reflections will not remain static, so ensure that you revisit and update your answers periodically.

**Worksheet A—Exercise One**  
**Strategic Relationships, Networking and Role Models**

1. How often do you think about the relationships you are forming for business?

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2. Have you ever created a plan to adopt mentors, seek sponsors or develop advocate relationships as a strategy to support a successful career?

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3. Are there individuals who recommend you for assignments, raises and promotions on a regular basis? How do you know this is taking place?

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4. Are there individuals that you aspire to emulate as you develop in your career?

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**Worksheet A—Exercise One**  
**Strategic Relationships, Networking and Role Models**

5. What are the most important attributes you seek to emulate in role models as you develop your career? Why are these particular attributes important to you?

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6. Have you ever actively searched for role models who are connected to a certain aspect of your career?

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7. Have you ever created a strategic networking plan?

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8. Do you have a business network? How often do you use your network? What do you use your network for? How might you more effectively develop your business network?

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**Worksheet A—Exercise Two**  
**Career/Life Integration**

1. Do you have a vision for the optimal integration of your career and your life?

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2. How often do you reflect upon, and update, this vision?

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3. Do you have active strategies to bring your career into greater alignment with your life goals?

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4. Do you have role models and mentors in your network that represent aspects of your career/life integration goals?

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5. Do you actively attempt to improve your skills in the area of career/life integration?

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### Worksheet A—Exercise Three Leadership and Career Development

Note: *Leadership*, for the purpose of this exercise, is broadly defined as the ability to influence others to accomplish a goal or task (formal or informal) in the workplace. Anyone can demonstrate leadership everyday, regardless of official title and role.

1. What leadership attributes do you regularly exhibit?  

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2. What are the ways that can help you discover how others experience your leadership style (even if you have not had formal leadership assessments or feedback experiences)?  

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3. What primary impression do you want people to associate with you and your leadership? How does this compare to the attributes of the leaders you most respect?  

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4. When do you feel most “on mission” (i.e., most capable of making a difference) as a leader?  

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**Worksheet A—Exercise Four  
Authenticity and Personal Branding**

1. Do you feel that you bring your whole self to the workplace?

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2. Do you feel that you demonstrate authentic behaviour at work? What are some of the things that lead you to hold back authentic aspects of yourself while at work?

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3. Do you feel that you need to submerge aspects of who you are in order to be successful in your career?

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4. If you were to market yourself with a tag line, what would it be?

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**Worksheet A—Exercise Four  
Authenticity and Personal Branding**

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5. Think of key leaders with whom you work or interact. Is there a common image or set of attributes that others would independently identify as the brand for these leaders?

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6. Would others say that you have a personal brand? Is that brand what you wish for it to be? Is it effective and in alignment with your goals?

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**Worksheet A—Exercise Five**  
**Personal Reflection and Planning**

1. Do you regularly review your career aspirations, plans and current progress?

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2. How often do you engage in organized career reflection?

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3. Do you ever feel you may be in the wrong career or in the wrong organization?

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4. Are you concerned that you may follow a path that will ultimately not represent success or provide you with career satisfaction?

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5. What changes might you implement in planning more effectively for your career?

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# CHAPTER 2

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## CAREER ADVOCATES AND MENTORS

Much has been written in leadership development circles about the topics of mentoring and advocacy. This chapter will discuss these two critical elements of career navigation and outline the differences between them. In addition, the chapter will address the reasons why mentors and advocates are often less prominent in the career experiences of women than of men in the accounting profession. Discussions will include why the lack of these relationships underlies some of the differences we see in the numbers of women versus men at the highest levels of organizations. Exercises aimed at the development of these relationships are included in Worksheet B.

Best practice programs aimed at helping women to advance professionally are business focused. An important element is leveling the current playing field that fails to provide equal career development opportunities for all top talent. The uneven field has not been created consciously and is not something most people can see without the benefit of awareness-raising activity. Women within the organization are often those unable to realize subtle aspects of how the organization functions. Women are sometimes unaware of how to develop successful career navigation strategies, because they do not have access to key information. In other words “you don’t know what you don’t know” and,

in this case, “what you don’t know can hurt you”. There is a long list of factors that individuals need to know about an organization in order to increase their value proposition. The most common and effective method of learning these key lessons is through access to relationships with senior leaders. These relationships will bring forth critical opportunities, experiences, assignments and organizational lessons that will provide career path guidance. Without this information, a career in this profession becomes a journey taken without a map or GPS. Regrettably, guidance and advocacy in the skill development and career advancement process is often missing for emerging female leaders.

In most organizations, men still hold the majority of the roles of influence and power. Men are, therefore, in the positions that represent deep knowledge of the unwritten rules. We often reach out to those with whom we can identify. This is also true of natural mentor and protégé relationships. In many cases, senior male leaders reach out to younger males as protégés. This is not the result of men excluding women deliberately or even consciously. When asked why emerging female leaders are not equally represented in their circle, senior male leaders are often not aware, to a very great degree, that this is even happening. When pushed to more deeply explore the question, they often respond that they do not feel they can be mentors to women due to a lack of understanding of how to communicate or how to deal with specific issues (such as career/life conflicts or female styles of leadership). In addition, networking opportunities (such as attending sports events or heading out for dinner and drinks after work) can be uncomfortable venues for senior male leaders and female protégés. Many senior male leaders have also expressed that they worry that others might interpret the mentoring relationships inappropriately. These concerns all impact the access many women are able to have to naturally-developing relationships with senior leaders in their organizations.

On the other hand, men regularly gain access to mentors in senior leadership positions through networking, mainly due to their ability to identify with these individuals. This phenomenon is known as affinity bias. In business, it is common for developmental relationships between senior influential male leaders and younger male professionals to naturally germinate. Women less often find essential career relationships forming naturally. Therefore, our male counterparts frequently have access to a career navigation map, which proves to be a very powerful but often unseen aspect of the uneven playing field.

Seeking advancement within an organization is a very real and demanding journey; one that requires careful navigation and strong advocacy. Women must more proactively think about the experiences needed to increase their skill levels and overall personal balance sheet of talents. However, they must first understand what their organization looks for in a leader. These desired leadership attributes or skills are not always (in fact, not often) written. A sponsor or guide helps protégés understand what the advancement criteria look like and if they are currently viewed as being in alignment with those criteria. Once there is clarity regarding the activities that protégés should be engaged in, they are not often in a position to acquire access to these experiences without some advocacy on their behalf. In some cases, it is nearly impossible to broker career experiences (such as committee assignments, overseas promotions and profit and loss responsibility) without advocates in positions of influence actively providing recommendations. Many emerging male leaders have mentors in senior leadership roles advocating on their behalf. Many emerging female leaders do not. This disadvantage slows the progress of female leaders, creating material distinctions in both the opportunities to which women have access and the opportunities for learning and skill development.

While this may be heresy to state, when an explanation is presented claiming that there were no qualified female candidates for a promotion, it is often true. However, this is not due to a deficit of natural ability but rather to the lack of exposure female candidates have had to the experiences necessary to qualify them for the role. Much of this activity is woven into the fabric of the culture to the degree that long-time members forget it even takes place. Organizational leaders unconsciously assume that those who have had the experiences necessary for advancement possess the highest potential for having procured these assignments as well as having successfully completed them. Leaders often forget how advocacy relationships significantly influence the process through which opportunities become available to top talent.

In the early stages of their careers, women often describe the road to their professional destination as straightforward, assuming that with steady and hard work, they will reach their goals. Without access to organizational knowledge, many women remain unaware of the need for side trips and the existence of short cuts along the journey to success. Women who succeed in the profession strategically seek out key advocacy or sponsorship relationships, all the

while well aware that these relationships may not form naturally. These women are willing to work harder than their male counterparts at establishing these relationships, because they understand the dynamics of natural organization tendencies and are not offended by them. They will, however, often work to change these dynamics as they gain influence within the organization.

When we hear male leaders lamenting about how they would hire and/or promote women if only they could find any that are qualified to do the job, they are not always simply making excuses. Women are frequently taking a less focused career journey than men, without the benefit of the advocate relationships required to reach their final destination. As a result, women may, in fact, not be as qualified as their male counterparts. In addition, research has shown us that women are very often evaluated on past experiences while men are evaluated on future potential,<sup>7</sup> which further multiplies this phenomenon. Women who work to understand the value of developing career guidance and advocacy relationships with influential leaders are developing an indispensable skill for success in the profession.

Women's unequal access to career sponsorship is not only a result of affinity bias, but it is also due, in part, to stereotyping. Research validates the alignment of male leadership styles and abilities with expected leadership styles and abilities. These expected "norms" are based on a population of largely male leaders that has unconsciously influenced our perception of leadership. In many organizations, a masculine style of leadership has become synonymous with the correct style of leading. As a result, norms or stereotypes regarding effective leadership styles negatively influence the careers of many women who aspire to leadership positions.

Unequal access to targeted career development and advocacy can significantly hinder the success of many women in our industry.<sup>8</sup> Access to high-influence career advocates is essential for navigating through the culture and career stages within the organization and reaching the next stages of the professional journey. Advocates provide valuable information regarding strategies to

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7 "The Female Leadership Advantage: An Evaluation of the Evidence", Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli, *The Leadership Quarterly*, Volume 14, 2003.

8 "The Leadership Styles of Women and Men", Alice H. Eagly and Mary C. Johannesen-Schmidt, *Journal of Social Issues* (Northwestern University, Department of Psychology), 2001.

increase individual value proposition to the organization. Lack of access to this differentiating asset will significantly impact a career over the course of time. High potential rarely develops in isolation.

It is important for women to realize that navigating a successful career is not accomplished through effort alone. Performance is merely one aspect of career success. It is very possible to stall the progress of your career with years of hard work on projects that are not fundamentally important within the organization. Talented individuals need to strategically accomplish the right tasks at the right time and with the right audience as witness to their efforts. Over the course of a few years, the experiences each individual gains begin to vary from one person to the next. It is these variations that can ultimately either serve as advantages or disadvantages in your career. Relationships with influential leaders in your firm directly impact the type of experiences you have as an emerging leader and the manner in which you develop your talent portfolio.

It is critical to have access to career advancement assets (such as challenging assignments, roles that provide the targeted experiences necessary for advancement and networking opportunities that enhance the participant's knowledge of the organization, its clients and market place). Without targeted efforts, women continue to have uneven access to these important assets, which results in them being perceived as more inexperienced and unprepared for advancement than their male peers.

The issue of advocacy is so prevalent all around us, it has become like water to the fish that swim in it. Advocacy, and its impact on career development, remains misunderstood in many organizations. It is, however, one of the most important concepts to master if we care about diversity in our leadership ranks and advancement of all top talent. Advocacy is often subtle and requires a closer look at how individuals move through the organization. How do they advance? How do they become visible? What is considered an increase in value delivered that places an individual on management's "radar screen"? The answers to these questions are unwritten. The presence of advocates is critical to helping you understand these subtle but essential rules and advance to your desired career goal.

As individual female leaders, we need to understand that there is a great deal of inside information within the profession that we do not yet know. The most effective means to access this information is through forming relationships at the senior levels. This task is difficult, yet essential. The good news is that this information may be gained from multiple relationships and sources. It is also important to remember that hard work alone is not a ticket to success; it is simply the price of entry. In order to advance within an organization, you must understand what contributions are most valuable, become involved in these areas and ensure that your involvement is visible to those in positions of influence. Without advocates, these steps are often not feasible. Individuals with strong advocacy relationships advance more quickly than those who do not, in large part, because their professional efforts are more directly on target.

Organizations that possess a solid understanding of the above-mentioned success factors often take a hard look at their assignment, promotion and advocacy processes. Uneven access to senior leadership can be addressed through awareness-raising advocate or sponsor programs and improved promotional processes, with interventions to capture any built-in bias. Up to this point, we have been primarily applying the term “advocate” rather than “mentor”. Advocacy is a term being used more and more often, particularly in describing the relationships that have been lacking in the progress of women in business. There are significant differences between advocates and mentors.

Mentors may be inside or outside of the organization. They are often aware of career goals and act as a sounding board while serving in an advisory role. Mentors may be personal acquaintances who are not connected with your organization or business community. As a result, a mentor often does not directly impact the career advancement of a protégé. However, through their roles as supporters and advisors, mentors remain valuable resources in the pursuit of career and life satisfaction.

Advocates tend to work inside your organization or business community, allowing them the opportunity to directly impact your career. Advocates are generally aware of the long-term career ambitions and the broader life goals and values of their protégés. This deep level of awareness is necessary to place advocates in a position where they can identify opportunities that are appropriate not only in terms of timing and content but also in terms of visibility.

Advocates will use their personal reputation and political capital to assist protégés in obtaining key assignments, promotions and opportunities, helping open career doors that would otherwise not be accessible. This pivotal point is at the center of career progression in the accounting profession and, unfortunately, what is still missing for many emerging female leaders.

As you reflect over the professional relationships in your network, think about the nature of these relationships. Women who are successful in the accounting profession become very strategic in relationship development. Understanding the difference between an acquaintance and a mentor or an advocate in your network is crucial. Appropriately developing and utilizing these relationships is a career skill that is as critical to your success as the development of any technical skill.

In order for advocates to effectively play their roles, they must be high influence, high impact individuals in your organization or business community. A protégé should have regular connection points with an advocate, who can be either male or female. This development includes both a short-term and a long-term focus. Generally, the short-term focus is only on the activities protégés should partake in today in order to add appropriate experiences towards their long-term goals. Advocates engage in very customized and targeted planning with protégés regarding their life and career vision, identifying the points where the protégé is on track and those where further development or experience is needed. Advocates are most valuable in assisting protégés to understand how to focus their actions in order to increase their value proposition to the organization. Their aim is to help protégés engage in projecting two or more years into the future and thinking critically about the experiences and skills they lack which result in missed opportunities, assignments and promotions. Helping protégés to think through what they may need to let go of in order to focus on the necessary activities for the current time period is also a very valuable function of advocates. Advocates assist in obtaining access to the opportunities necessary to support this effort.

Many women also play a valuable role in being advocates for emerging male and female leaders in the profession. Advocates, whether you are male or female, are accountable for the retention and development of their protégés and willing to use political capital to help them reach their short- and



long-term career goals. Advocates also commit to actively keeping their protégés on the immediate radar screen. They are willing to facilitate networking opportunities and provide assistance to access important resources. Their role is to continuously be informed about each protégé's progress, successes and challenges and act as a barrier to exit, helping to retain the individual against the temptation to flight. Advocates may even help broker new arrangements (such as flexibility in schedule during critical life cycle junctures), while ensuring the protégé is not unconsciously placed on the non-career track within the organization. Very importantly, advocates will give regular, honest feedback about protégés' developmental progress and about any gaps in the progress towards accomplishing goals. Protégés must effectively utilize this feedback to adjust their behaviour, hone their skills and choose their direction.

One of the most important skills that successful women learn is how to effectively prepare for career discussions in order to maximize the benefits of the advocate's time investment in their goals. Consider this from the point of view of the senior leaders, who are often male. We have established the hesitations, conscious or unconscious, of male leaders regarding mentoring or sponsoring women, mainly due to their inability to relate to women coming up through the ranks. This is partially driven by men's limited professional experiences with women, as the career journeys of women may, in many ways, seem foreign to them. Despite common barriers, senior male leaders will sometimes take initiative and reach out to women in an attempt to provide career navigation assistance. These leaders report frustration when the women they seek to guide appear less than focused regarding their careers and what they want or need in order to move forward.

Women have more choices and less clarity regarding their careers due to changing societal norms, the lack of female role models and the inadequacy of requested information from advocates. Often times, women need much more information concerning career paths and opportunities than their male counterparts. They are frequently receiving mixed cultural messages at work about what is possible for them to achieve in their careers. All of these issues contribute to major differences in the career conversations between senior male leaders and emerging female professionals. To maximize career developmental planning, it is, therefore, critical for women to focus on personal planning for these discussions. Engage yourself in an in-depth aspirations reflection (see

Chapter 6 and Worksheet F2). It is not essential to have all the answers when asked what your long-term career goals are; however, it is essential to know which questions you need answered. Fear and distrust generally hold women back from engaging in honest, in-depth career planning discussions. This is one aspect of career planning that frustrates senior male leaders who may have had very few career counseling experiences with women and, possibly, absolutely no experience working with senior women executives. As a result, male leaders may draw incorrect conclusions regarding women's apparent deficiency in clarity and inquisition in career planning, attributing these unfamiliar patterns to a lack of focus or commitment.

Research also shows us variations in brain chemistry between women and men that may drive more systems thinking in women.<sup>9</sup> The two sides of the brain have been shown to have greater simultaneous connective firing in female versus male brains. This increased connectivity is thought to be a possible foundation for the tendency women have to think more in terms of complete systems (focused on all issues relative to a given scenario) compared to men who tend to be linear thinkers (focused on a more narrow aspect of a scenario or issue). It is important to note that neither of these biological patterns is better. However, a team which possesses both styles of thought may be the reason why organizations with both women and men on leadership teams outperform those with no gender diversity.<sup>10</sup> Both patterns of thinking are valuable independently, but they are most valuable when combined.

Women tend to mentally ruminate on the career questions and challenges they face. Very often, they keep this rumination to themselves, rarely bringing it out into the open where they can examine it and move forward in their thinking. It is very important, therefore, for women to prepare for career discussions with in-depth career aspirations reflections (see Chapter 6 and Worksheet F2). Engaging in organized and strategic sharing of career navigation planning can tremendously reduce career anxiety. Please refer to Worksheet B for reflections and exercises designed to assist you in developing opportunities to enhance advocacy relationships.

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<sup>9</sup> *Leadership and the Sexes: Using Gender Science to Create Success in Business*, Michael Gurian and Barbara Annis, Jossey-Bass, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> "The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity", Catalyst, 2004.



# WORKSHEET B

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## ADVOCATES AND MENTORS EXERCISES

In order to explore personal and professional desires for the future, it is beneficial for women to explore the answers to the questions listed below.

When answering the questions, consider the material presented in Chapter 2 on Career Advocates and Mentors. Give yourself the gift of reflective time for candid and thoughtful responses. This work is important for you to derive full value from the toolkit. Your reflections will not remain static. Revisit these exercises periodically, especially when you feel that you are ready for a new challenge and/or need assistance to move forward.

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### Worksheet B: Advocates and Mentors Exercises

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1. Have you had mentoring relationships in your career journey? How did these relationships form? Have you had sponsorship relationships? Do you feel there is a difference between the two types of relationships?

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2. Where do you feel you most need assistance to jump-start aspects of your career? Is there an area of business that interests you but on which you lack information? Is there a career milestone you have not been able to accomplish? Are there aspirations you have for your career that you are unclear as to how to achieve? Is there a pertinent skill which you need to further develop? (Consider using Chapter 6 and Worksheet F2 to help create clarity in your goals and aspirations.)
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### Worksheet B: Advocates and Mentors Exercises

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3. Make two lists: one of all the aspects of your career with which you need assistance; the other of individuals who have expertise, experience and/or a successful track record in each area you listed. Try to identify more than one person for each area. Do not limit your list of individuals to only those you know personally.

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4. Review the list of individuals you created in Question 3 and develop an action plan for contacting the people you currently know. Make a request for a short and very specific meeting over lunch or coffee. A personal phone call is more appropriate than an e-mail, unless you know the person very well. Set a timeline to make each contact. Determine exactly what you wish to discuss and learn in each meeting. Developing relationships with mentors, and especially advocates, takes time, so be patient. Always attempt to identify something you might be able to give back to each individual, such as making an introduction, helping with a project or referring an article or book on a particular topic. Your efforts do not need to be grand, only sincere.
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### Worksheet B: Advocates and Mentors Exercises

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5. Review your list of individuals and consider who in your network might be able to introduce you to the people you do not currently know. It is particularly important to have a plan for meeting these individuals. It is also critical to be respectful of their time and to be very specific about your objectives when contacting them for the first time. Many people choose not to mentor others due to concern regarding devoting substantial amounts of unfocused time and effort to a process that may ultimately prove to be inadequate in assisting their protégés. If you are specific about what you wish to talk about and how much time it will take, it helps alleviate the mentor's anxiety.

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6. Consider how you will keep your list of potential mentors up-to-date. At what point will you review this list? How will your networking (see Chapter 3) efforts specifically assist you in developing advocacy relationships?

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# CHAPTER 3

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## NETWORKING

Developing professional support systems is essential for career success in the accounting profession. Despite how it may appear from the outside, no one makes it through the organizational and career navigation maze on their own. As noted in the preceding chapters, there are unwritten rules that can be most effectively learned from those who have previously walked this road. The issue of developing professional support systems is particularly critical for women, as they do not have access to naturally forming mentoring and advocacy relationships to the same degree as their male counterparts (see Chapter 2).

Every organization is a community with a complex set of norms and rules developed over time. How an individual performs is only one factor in reaching their potential. Potential is rarely developed in isolation. High-potential individuals who maximize their potential do so as a result of navigation assistance. Coaches, mentors and members of your networks are guides to understanding how to increase your value proposition to the organization

Organizational norms and rules, particularly those that are unwritten yet deeply woven into the fabric of our culture, are created by majority groups who have been historically dominant in society. These norms can be particularly difficult to navigate by those in the non-dominant group, including women in the



leadership ranks of the accounting profession. Women can be locked out of the organizational community without even being aware of it, which can ultimately impact talent development within the organization.

Leaders must work personally and purposefully to facilitate inclusive behaviour. Support systems are critical to the retention and development of high-potential talent. However, these support systems do not form naturally with a diverse population. Leaders may unintentionally provide uneven “survive and thrive” training. Those supported are those likely to survive and thrive. Women are often excluded from some traditional relationship development opportunities and, therefore, challenged in the natural formation of networks. This exclusion is not purposeful nor is it even readily apparent. Post-work activities and sports-related events with clients or team members are two examples of traditional relationship opportunities that, today, routinely continue to exclude women. In addition, “water cooler face time” (that is, general networking time occurring in the office) often takes place outside of business hours. This networking time is traditionally essential to developing relationships, increasing visibility and, therefore, gaining influence. Face time may be reduced if women cannot expand work hours informally and spontaneously as has been the custom in the past with an all-male workforce. Networking after work hours is an example of a career/life integration challenge intersecting with relationship development that is critical to learning and advancement. For many reasons, women have less access to networking contacts, yet they are in greater need of the information gained from those relationships, because they lack opportunities to naturally access this crucial knowledge in their day-to-day interactions. As a result of these realities, women must be very strategic about developing networking skills and actively working on forming a strong network.

We hear so much about networking, but how does one form these relationships and what, exactly, does one use them for? Networks have many uses, including, but not exclusive to, initial job hunting, career advancement, talent attraction, client relationship building, prospect relationship building, referral source development, targeted information gathering (such as for a niche practice), special projects and new market development. In addition to thinking about all of the ways in which you might call upon your network, it is important to think about incorporating the input you will receive into your career development plan. It is essential to practice critical thinking skills when accessing your network for

information. There will be times when you use your network for assistance in decision-making research and other times when you seek the network in order to multiply and broaden your avenues of thinking. We naturally surround ourselves with individuals who think much like we do, which can actually hinder our creativity, problem-solving skills and ability to navigate political waters. When forming a business network, it is important to intentionally seek out those who think differently from you. As previously mentioned, networking can help you understand an organizational community, be it the culture of your organization, your clients or the target market or niche practice you wish to pursue. One very significant use for a network is to share your passions, interests and achievements. This is particularly important for women, who tend to be less forthcoming about their successes. It is difficult for someone in your network to act as your liaison or advocate if they do not know your accomplishments and aspirations. Sharing what you wish new acquaintances to remember about you, while using a natural, non-egotistical approach, is an important skill to develop and one that will serve many purposes in your career development.

Envision a circle that includes your family and another circle that includes your friends. Imagine these circles as interconnected with you as the common member. Now, continue creating circles of contacts that you have from various sources (such as work, school, community, hobbies or church). Each of these circles of contacts is part of your network, and each person has a network of their own. For anyone involved in social media sites, the concept of networks is well understood. There is power and influence in every network, which have increased exponentially with the dawn of business social media tools (such as Twitter and LinkedIn). Society and business communities are still learning all of the ways in which the virtual networks can be harnessed for tangible outcomes.

Emerging leaders are often sent out to connect with people at “networking events”. This may result in a nice collection of business cards but not much more, unless we build our skills and learn to strategically harness the power of networking in order to support our priorities. Think deeply about what you are trying to accomplish, about your most critical goals and about your greatest challenges to succeed. Regularly and consciously connect with what expertise you most need to add to your network at any given time. This conscious approach will help you successfully add missing resources to your network, as

it will allow you to recognize a new contact's value immediately upon meeting them and, subsequently, lead you to make a stronger effort towards forging a solid connection.

Creating mutually beneficial relationships is the goal. Start by thinking of ways in which you can help others. It's not all about what *they* can do for *you*. Offer genuine compliments, good listening skills, introductions, referrals and other less tangible (but equally valuable) gestures of kindness and generosity. As long as you're sincere, you will establish good relations with people and open channels for mutual benefit. In the process, find out who knows whom by enquiring about what people do for a living and what they do recreationally, as well as what their spouses, nearby family members and close friends do. It will be helpful to make note of this in your electronic contacts so you don't lose track of what you have learned from each individual in your network. Keep track of contact information beyond phone, e-mail and social media information. Utilize the electronic notes function present in most electronic contact storage and record the following when entering the business card information you have collected:

- where you met;
- who hosted the event;
- major topics discussed;
- activities mentioned;
- things you most have in common;
- people you know in common; and
- potential future actions, meetings and connection points.

The above information can and should be used to refresh your memory before you reach out and reconnect with the individual in the future. Having this information at your fingertips at networking events allows you to quickly access and review facts relating to an individual whom you've previously met, and it creates a sincere entry point to begin a new conversation.

Make it a practice to invite people out for lunch, coffee or a drink. You may also invite people to participate in activities related to your shared interests (such as attending another networking event, association luncheon or referral meeting). The more you do this, the more natural it will become. The

objective is to establish a connection beyond your initial meeting and take the relationship to the next strategic level. Who we know matters, because this increases our access and visibility in the marketplace.

To begin a more strategic effort at networking, refer to the exercises in Worksheet C. These exercises have been designed to support the material in this chapter by engaging you in a customized exploration of your networking strengths and developmental needs.



# WORKSHEET C

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## NETWORKING EXERCISES

In order to explore personal and professional desires for the future, it is beneficial for women to explore the answers to the questions listed below.

When answering the questions, consider the content in Chapter 3 on Networking. Give yourself the gift of reflective time for candid and thoughtful responses. This work is important for you to derive full value from the toolkit. Your reflections will not remain static, so ensure that you revisit and update your answers periodically.

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### Worksheet C: Networking Exercises

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1. How many personal contacts have you added to your business network over the past year? Business contacts are defined as individuals whom you would feel comfortable calling for lunch, coffee, a virtual meeting, an introduction to a prospect, a referral discussion, etc. While social media contacts are a great start, they need to become more personal before they can truly be a useful part of your business network.

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2. How do you usually network? Are you comfortable in networking situations?

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3. Do you feel you are successful in taking these initial networking contacts to the next step in terms of developing an active business relationship? How do you plan to do this?
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### Worksheet C: Networking Exercises

4. Brainstorm as many answers as possible to the questions listed below.
  - What business issues interest you?
  - Whose style of leadership interests you? Consider those similar and dissimilar to yours.
  - Who has recently achieved business successes that you can learn from?
  - Who is involved in organizational or client issues that interest you or align with your strengths and passions?

Do not second-guess your ability to access the individuals listed in your answers. Seek out these people and gather their opinions, input and ideas. Be memorable—Ask varied questions—Search for ways to help your contacts in return—Follow up personally after a meeting—Discern natural ways to stay in touch. Networking is a skill that requires experience and practice similar to the development of any technical skill.

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### Worksheet C: Networking Exercises

5. Using your network, you can move to the next level by creating your own personal board of advisors. Begin by assembling the personalities that will be most beneficial to you in this stage of your career journey. Below are best practices to employ when making initial contacts and developing relationships.
    - Focus on one area of interest or one question to explore.
    - Be very specific in your request for a meeting.
    - Keep the first meeting short and to the point.
    - Be respectful of the individual's time.
    - Offer to give something back to that person and follow through on your offer.
    - Do not expect to receive all the information you seek from only one person.
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# CHAPTER 4

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## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Selling ideas, concepts and recommendations is important in the majority of roles in the accounting profession, whether it is assurance, consulting, corporate or governmental. Business development with new and existing clients has always been central to a career with accounting firms. This chapter will outline critical business development skills and concepts and examine how these elements may be different for women. Reflection and action planning regarding business development skills will also be included.

Business development is one aspect of the accounting profession where women remain less involved than their male counterparts. This has often been one of the reasons why we find only 15% of owners in accounting firms to be women and a comparable percentage in leadership roles in business and industry. Yet, as of 2011, over 50% of all accounting students and 32% of all CICA members were female.<sup>11</sup> In addition, after the recent recession, business development became even more important in the equation of career progression in accounting firms as a result of the increased focus on new and existing client growth. Women are often not included in business development outings. They are also not conscious that this is a significant difference between male and female manager-level contributions. Senior leaders within the firm are often unaware that women are less frequently invited or encouraged to

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<sup>11</sup> "Why Should Women be Leaders? Why Not!", CPA Canada's Women's Leadership Council, CICA.ca. .

participate in business development activities than their male counterparts. Yet, during promotion processes, we commonly hear management express that the area of development missing for high-potential female candidates is more involvement in business development.

Many of the referral sources or contacts that senior men work with in the marketplace are also male. The networks that accounting executives find themselves dealing with at banks, at law firms and with prospective and existing customers are still primarily male. This is not because all of the potential contacts are male; it is because the circles or networks that senior male leaders most often interact with are male. In reality, the gender diversity of the leadership ranks of these referral and prospect organizations are changing. For example, over 24% of all senior officers in finance and insurance companies in Canada are now female.<sup>12</sup> Large networks of female executives flourish in most mid to large cities. Men are not frequently engaged in business networking in these circles nor are they even aware that these networks exist. The networks they have always dealt with do not reflect the degree to which women are moving into influential positions. Senior male leaders continue to bring emerging male leaders into their traditional business development circles, which perpetuates the lack of gender integration. This also limits the networks in which the firm is visible, subsequently hindering the potential growth of the firm.

It is often difficult for women to emulate the styles of men regarding business development. A recent Caliper study shows that female leaders are actually more persuasive than male leaders.<sup>13</sup> After encountering rejection, women learn from the experience and rebound. They are more inclusive in their leadership style and score higher in urgency and risk taking. The women leaders studied were more interested in considering all points of view in order to reach the best and most informed decision possible; a decision which did not need to be in keeping with their initial point of view. These findings have interesting implications for women and business development. For many years, the traditional style of fostering prospect and referral relationships and bringing in business has been considered the right, and only, approach. That is not to suggest that the traditional methodologies or networks are not effective but, rather, that there are styles, approaches and networks that need to be added to the

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<sup>12</sup> "Women in Canadian Finance and Insurance", Catalyst, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> "The Qualities That Distinguish Women Leaders", CaliperCorp.com.

business development effort in order to expand and enhance it. A broader approach in a complex and changing marketplace is common sense if the goal is to continue to grow the organization. Women stand at the center of the elements that can, and should be, added to the business development efforts of many firms. They bring their own style, which is often much more relationship focused and much less assertive, charisma-centric and win/lose oriented in approach.

Key elements of business development that are often learned through interaction with mentors and advocates and from field experience in prospect calls are often missing from the day-to-day experiences of emerging female leaders. It is important for women to be aware of the questions they should be asking of the business development leaders and mentors in their firm. Below are some critical areas to familiarize yourself with as you prepare to engage more deeply in business development within your organization.

It is essential to first understand the organization's target market, which includes the targeted clients, geographic locations, ideal engagement size and content, niche practice elements and more. Most firms have determined the criteria for a "target client". Do you know the profile of an ideal new client for your firm and for your practice area in particular? Do you understand the geographic priorities of your firm and practice area? What products or services are you most qualified to sell and deliver? (It is important to be able to answer this question taking into account both your personal skills and your firm's overall requirements.) What are the processes your firm uses for key elements of the sales cycle? Familiarize yourself with the processes for proposals, cross-selling services from other practice areas and new client approvals. Ask questions about additional business development processes that may be in place.

An important part of understanding the target market is understanding the competition. How well do you understand your competition? Who else provides the same services as your firm and your practice area? Who does your firm often bid against in the target market? What are the factors that differentiate your firm from its competition? In which factors does the competition hold an advantage over your firm and how might you overcome their advantages?

Do you know what your sales goals are and what level of activity is needed to achieve those goals? For example, how many leads do you need, how many initial calls must you make and how many proposals usually result in a sale? What is an average sale for your practice area? Breaking down your sales goal in this manner can help you to budget your time each month, so ensure you are on track and that you are devoting the level of effort necessary to hitting your target. Each firm has a different approach to marketing that will bring in your leads. Some firms may have complete and sophisticated marketing programs, other firms may require you to do the marketing and lead generation work as well as the actual selling. It is important to ask these questions so that you understand where your initial leads will come from. Networking is also a key element in business development (see Chapter 3), as it allows you to leverage your business and personal connections and acquire a regular supply of new business leads. Just as with the virtual social networking systems we use today, each time you work to develop a personal relationship with someone in your network, you open the door to hundreds or thousands of potential contacts that may need your business assistance or know someone who does. The possibilities are endless.

Another potential source of relationship development is community involvement. This can be particularly satisfying for women in business, because women more often express a need to derive greater meaning from their work. Connecting networking with activities that are personally meaningful is a strategy many women leaders in business use to integrate work and life more fully. Accomplishing both goals with one activity can also be a time-saving strategy for women who have many roles competing for the hours in their day. To take advantage of this strategy, pursue interests and activities that are personally meaningful to you. The web is the quickest and easiest tool to use in order to research community activities, local events or meetings that are likely to attract those with passions and interests similar to yours. Non-profit board services are an excellent example of networking sources that simultaneously provide leadership development opportunities.

# WORKSHEET D

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## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

In order to explore personal and professional desires for the future, it is beneficial for women to explore the answers to the questions listed below.

When answering the questions, refer to the content in Chapter 4 on Business Development. If you do not know the answers, make it your goal to inquire about, research and discuss these topics in order to obtain the required information. Give yourself the gift of reflective time for candid and thoughtful responses. This work is important for you to derive full value from the toolkit. Your reflections will not remain static. Revisit and update this form as your needs in the area of business development change.

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### Worksheet D: Business Development

1. The target market of your firm includes the targeted clients, geographic locations, ideal engagement size and content, niche practice elements and more. Do you know the profile of an ideal new client for your firm and for your practice area in particular?

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2. Do you understand the geographic priorities of your firm and practice area?
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### Worksheet D: Business Development

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3. What products or services are you most qualified to sell and deliver? It is important to be able to answer this question taking into account both your personal skills and your firm's overall requirements.

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4. What are the processes your firm uses for key elements of the sales cycle?

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### Worksheet D: Business Development

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5. Do you understand your competition? Who else provides the same services as your firm and your practice area? Who does your firm often bid against in the target market? What are the factors that differentiate your firm from its competition? In which factors does the competition hold an advantage over your firm and how might you overcome their advantages?

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6. Do you know what your sales goals are and what level of activity is needed to achieve those goals? For example, how many leads do you need, how many initial calls must you make and how many proposals usually result in a sale? What is an average sale for your practice area?

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### Worksheet D: Business Development

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7. Break down your sales goal by the timeline and the associated activities that you believe are necessary to accomplish that goal. How many meetings are required in order to generate the number of proposals needed to accomplish the goal? Budget your time each month to ensure you are on track and that you are devoting the level of effort necessary to hitting your target.

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8. Do you understand where leads for new business will come from within your organization? Do you need to generate all leads on your own? If so, what level of networking is required to generate sufficient leads to support your goals? If not, how do you effectively tap into the existing lead-generation mechanisms within your firm?
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# CHAPTER 5

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## CAREER/LIFE INTEGRATION

“Work/life balance” is one of the most commonly discussed aspects when examining the lack of progress of women in the profession. Frequently, we hear that work/life conflicts are the sole reason we see less women at the leadership level in the accounting profession. As discussed in previous chapters, this is clearly not the case. There are a number of factors impacting the progress of women in the profession, with work/life challenges being only one of these factors.

This chapter will outline why attaining work/life balance may not be an effective goal and why “integration” is more achievable. In addition, the section will outline important career/life skills that may ease the conflicts that drive women away from the profession. This section will also reinforce the reasons why career/life challenges comprise only one element of career navigation, and how engaging all aspects of strategic career navigation may positively impact the blending of a successful career into an overall satisfying life. Exercises regarding choices and customizing ultimate career/life goals are included in Worksheet E.

Balance is a problematic term, implying a specific point where work is evenly or equally balanced with the rest of one’s life. This approach can create more frustrations than solutions. In fact, there is no magical point where career and life come into perfect balance, at least not in a way that is consistent. Career/

life integration, on the other hand, implies weaving life elements to create a tapestry that represents your values. Integration is accomplished through the deep understanding of what you presently value and using that to create a clear vision of your desired future, taking into account life cycles and the potential shifting of priorities during those cycles.

We also know that career/life integration issues are a significant factor in turnover among both men and women within our profession. We still find that women are more intensely impacted by these issues due to societal norms related to child care, elder care and home responsibilities. Eighty-three percent<sup>14</sup> of all firms have implemented some type of policy that includes flexible hours. In the future, flexibility programs will not be limited to structured flex time. Progressive firms will adopt a flexibility philosophy that becomes part of their culture. Many individuals wish to work full time and desire only some control over their schedule, hours and travel in order to assist in managing their career/life conflicts and improving their quality of life.

A flexibility philosophy is a cultural issue that cannot be dealt with by simply implementing formal programs. The solutions to career/life integration involve flexibility not only in schedule but also in career path models. Historically, career paths have been designed for individuals with non-working spouses and a traditional career trajectory in mind. Today, there is misalignment with the largely traditional workplace and the largely non-traditional work force.<sup>15</sup> These traditional models no longer address the needs of all career-driven employees nor do they address the needs of the majority of female employees. Any cultural changes that result in solutions that mitigate career/life integration challenges will present firms as more attractive to both male and female talent pools. This makes investing in solutions and programs that aid in shifting culture a good use of resources and a proactive measure to maximize access to the best talent pools.

Career/life integration is not solely a woman's issue; however, it is one of the critical business concerns we must address if we are to retain and develop female talent. Due to societal norms, this issue continues to have a more significant impact on women. There remains evidence of bias and stereotyping in

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14 "WIEC 2010 Benchmarking Survey Results", Louise E. Single, AICPA WIEC, 2010.

15 *Mass Career Customization: Aligning the Workplace With Today's Nontraditional Workforce*, Cathleen Benko and Anne Weisberg, Harvard Business School Press, 2007.

our society and workplace environments relating to women's and men's roles at home and at work. While these stereotypes are slowly changing, research shows that they still have the power to negatively impact career advocacy and targeted career development for women.

In the accounting profession, the term "work/life balance" has become associated with flexible or part-time schedules. In reality, career/life integration is not a schedule change but rather a goal that can be enhanced by strategic skill building. Male and female executives who indicate they have built quality work/life integration cite the development of support systems as one key strategy. There is no doubt that there will be conflict at times between the personal and professional priorities of an executive, whether male or female. We have previously discussed the importance of regular reflection and planning to create clarity in both life and career priorities. The struggle between these priorities is frequently more intense for women than men due to the multiple roles women play at work and at home, the smaller percentage of women with non-working spouses, the shortage of female role models and the lack of career guidance relationships.

Consequently, it is critical for women to focus on developing support systems. Building a strong team at work with talented members who can function independently and act appropriately in your absence (whether that may be due to personal priorities or other professional priorities) is an essential process and a valuable skill. Strong executives are strong because they can rely on a solid team that is capable of functioning independently should circumstances call for it. Such a team should not require the executive's or partner's attention to oversee every matter. A strong team is an essential support system that can ensure you have coverage so that you do not need to be on the job twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Of course, there will be times when your presence is needed, and this may interfere with personal priorities. However, it is logical to conclude that the number of times true conflict occurs can be reduced by building a strong team of managers.

Consider, also, the strength of the support team in your personal life. Many women believe that if they have children along with an unsupportive spouse that their ability to thrive in the accounting profession will be blocked. While it can be advantageous to have a spouse that shares the home and family

responsibilities, not having this type of support in your life is not prohibitive to your success. You must, however, have some other type of personal support system in place. Consider recruiting other family members, close friends or professional contractors to be part of your personal support team. Many women have built support systems that do not include their spouses. There are single mothers and divorced parents thriving in the accounting profession. There are also women who have personal priorities other than children (such as elder care duties). Many of these women do not have spouses that support their efforts. Understanding what your responsibilities outside of work are and where you are most valuable is part of the skill building required. Each of us has different viewpoints on where we feel our time allotted to personal priorities is most valuable. It is important to consider your value systems and understand what you can let go of without compromising those values.

Conflicts will arise and at times, you will need to attend to work priorities. This does not mean you must suffer tremendous stress during these times. Ensure you have backup if you should be temporarily called away from situations where your family needs you. Look for activities in your personal life where your time might be spent more wisely elsewhere (such as in the case of yard work, house cleaning or laundry). Even grocery shopping can now be outsourced in most major metropolitan areas. You may initially be horrified by, or at least resistant to, the thought of contracting out some of these tasks. You may even enjoy doing these things yourself. However, you have to remember that we are talking about priorities. What are your immediate priorities and where is your time best spent? During a career, as you progress into higher levels of management, you must delegate or relieve yourself of various responsibilities in order to spend your time more effectively. The same concept applies when building support systems in your personal life. In some cases, women tend to come to this realization slower and more painfully than their male peers. Spending quality time on the activities that no one else can do or that you feel are most critical in your life, while delegating those activities that you may have felt to be “part of your duty” in the past, can significantly increase your quality of life. Building support systems with careful thought as to how these systems will help you better achieve career/life integration is an important skill used by successful women in the industry.

We have previously discussed the importance of developing advocacy relationships (see Chapter 2). How does this relate to quality career/life integration? Advocates provide the career “GPS” that helps us avoid unnecessary miles, barriers and hurdles that slow our progress. Advocates assist us in establishing what priorities to set at any given point in our career journey. These elements of the advocacy or sponsorship relationships directly impact how we are spending our time and how satisfying or frustrating the journey is. In addition, advocates can often help us build credibility should our career/life integration require any type of non-traditional flexibility arrangement. Advocates are also an excellent source of information regarding which activities we can let go of, either permanently or for a defined time period, without impacting our career progress. Taking on new challenges is an excellent career strategy but only if we carefully manage our bandwidth.

Successful female leaders demonstrate the ability to recognize capacity limitations. Over the long run, there is no limit to what we can accomplish; however, in the short run, we are all bound by capacity limitations as human beings. We must take care of ourselves before we can take care of others. Men are twice as likely as women to advance at each career transition stage. One rationale is that men are more likely to take actions that help their personal well-being at work, thus negating burnout. Men are 25% more likely to take time throughout the day for personal activities, 7% more likely to take walks, 5% more likely to go out to lunch and 35% more likely to take breaks “just to relax”.<sup>16</sup> Every person has long-term capacity limitations. Despite the myths and outward appearances of the super human beings that roam our hallways, everyone must organize their time. Time is a finite resource and, by definition, it must be managed. This is particularly true for individuals with fully packed lives, like many women who work in the accounting profession. It is critical to regularly reflect on your current direction in order to maintain clarity regarding your upcoming choices.

It is also vital to strengthen your communication and relationship building skills. Both of these skills will improve your ability to successfully integrate your career into your life. In a professional manner, regularly communicate what you desire, and establish how this might work for both you and your organization. Build strong relationships with people who come to understand your current and potential contributions in order to create a solid foundation for building

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16 “Why Millennial Women are Burning Out at Work by 30”, Larissa Faw, *Forbes*, November 2011.



credibility in times when your career focus and your life focus shift. In the process, continuously work to broaden both your technical and soft skills. Soft skills (such as organization, delegation, coaching, supervision and training) are critical for building a reasonable workload by leveraging yourself through others. The more skilled you are in performing your day-to-day work duties, the more options you create to diversify your career path. In light of these new choices, you must have more focus when it comes to deciding how you will personally spend the hours you have each day.

Remember that integration is not measured daily. At any given point in time, you may feel you are “out of balance”, with demands at work or at home overshadowing each other. The key is to assess the trend of your integration path long term. Are you generally headed in the right direction, with only occasional conflicts and challenges? On the other hand, do you feel you are on the downslide, with less and less focus and control? Are you acting as the lead fireman called to put out fire after fire? Do you find that you never get to the priorities on your own list? You should have a well-researched vision of what successful integration of career and life goals means to you. The choices you are making should be leading you on a path trending upward towards your vision. We all have a bad day or week; however, when this turns into a bad month, quarter and year, it may be time to take a closer look at your approach. Remember that alignment is felt in weeks, months and years as opposed to the path any given day has taken.

Most firms have implemented flexibility programs for individuals who wish to work a non-traditional schedule. Women who opt for some type of flexible work arrangement understand that it is important to research and submit relevant information to support their request. Many firms have an application process in place that requires the individual to put forth a business case for the proposed new schedule. Not all flexibility involves reducing total hours. Organizations that recognize the need for a flexible culture are further evolved in regard to the career/life integration needs of their current and future workforce. Given the fact that the accounting profession is a knowledge profession, our workforce is our inventory.

There are many schedule options that have been implemented successfully by women in the accounting profession. Some arrangements involve part-time work year round, others involve full-time work during the busy season(s) with part-time schedules in slower times of the year, while others involve full-time hours annually with flexibility in when, where and how these hours are worked. The options are endless. Flexibility is *not* exclusively about part-time work; it can involve absolutely no reduction in the amount of hours worked. In fact, many types of flexibility pertain to only one dimension of work structure (such as location, amount of travel or timeframe of the hours worked). There are many dimensions to work structure, each of which can be considered when presenting flexibility options to team members. This, in turn, creates more options for the organization and its employees.

The days of flexibility centered on “flex-time” programs and individual “accommodations” have passed. Old school flexible work arrangements are not the answer, because they are not systemic solutions to the structural issues of aligning the workplace with an evolving workforce. The mental model is a career lattice, opposed to a career ladder.<sup>17</sup> This new model presents employees with the ability to personally customize aspects of their careers in tandem with transitions in their personal lives. Organizations that are creating successful flexible work cultures are doing so by building these cultures as a business strategy that is designed to actively support their business goals. Each organization will have a slightly different emphasis in their business case for customized careers. However, any business case should be directly tied to the strategic plan of the organization, which will drive the prioritization of the case components specific to each organization.

Flexibility at the cultural level can assist in the accomplishment of strategic business goals. Business goals should be prioritized based on applicability to the organization and customized with actual organizational data when formulating the business case for specific organizational flexibility. Examples of business goals that can be supported by building a flexible culture include:

- employee attraction and retention;
- improved productivity;
- improved customer service and satisfaction; and
- effective operational management.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Mass Career Customization: Aligning the Workplace With Today's Nontraditional Workforce*, Cathleen Benko and Anne Weisberg, Harvard Business School Press, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> “Flexibility - The Business Case”, Mary L. Bennett, 2011.

Reflections and exercises to increase clarity and build skills related to your career/life integration journey are included in Worksheet E. Please utilize these tools to create a stronger vision for yourself and to enable a specific action plan to support this vision.

# WORKSHEET E

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## CAREER/LIFE INTEGRATION

In order to explore personal and professional desires for the future, it is beneficial for women to explore the answers to the questions listed below.

When answering the questions, refer to the content in Chapter 5 on Career/Life Integration. Give yourself the gift of reflective time for candid and thoughtful responses. This work is important for you to derive full value from the toolkit. Life cycles are particularly influential in the careers of female executives. Your reflections will not remain static. It is important to revisit and reassess this material at a minimum of once per year.

### Worksheet E: Career/Life Integration:

1. What is most important to you now? What is most important to you for the future? Do you have a clear vision of the desired future state of your life?
  - Make a list of 10 values that you feel are most important to you at this time in your life (e.g., financial security, family, authenticity, freedom, achievement, health, spirituality, power, etc.).
  - Narrow the list to your top five values and rank them in order of importance. Though your life cycle elements may shift in priority over time, your values will generally remain much the same.
  - Write a statement for each of your values in order to specifically outline what you truly want in relation to each one of those values.
    - What I really want is \_\_\_\_\_.
    - What is most important in relation to \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.

#### Example 1, related to family as a value:

- *What I really want is a happy and healthy family life.*
- *What is most important to me regarding my family is to spend quality time with them, to be there when they need me most and to share joyful experiences with them.*

#### Example 2, related to financial security as a value:

- *What I really want is to feel financially secure and not worry about money.*
- *What is most important to me regarding financial security is knowing that I can pay all of my bills and retire comfortably in 15 years.*

The exercise output is like a fingerprint. It is unique for every person and there are no wrong answers. Your values are what they are, and it is best to be honest about what you really want and what is important to you. Values motivate your actions regardless of whether or not you honestly acknowledge them. It is best to be aware of what your motivations are in life. It is possible to shift your values if you choose, but you must first be aware of what is driving your behaviour.

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**Worksheet E: Career/Life Integration:**

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**Worksheet E: Career/Life Integration:**

2. Review what you have identified as values and what is most important to you about each value. Consider how this relates to the path you are currently on. How does this information align with the areas where you are satisfied with your life and career and those where you are dissatisfied? What are the steps you can take to work on the areas where you are dissatisfied? Are there choices you can make that more authentically represent your leading values? Are there trails you can blaze as a pioneer in order to execute your job in a manner that better honours your values?

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3. If you feel you need to take steps to better integrate your career with your life goals, who do you feel best represents the integration you are trying to achieve? Is there a connection you can make to add this person to your network?
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**Worksheet E: Career/Life Integration:**

4. Do you perceive conflicts between certain values (such as financial security and sharing time with family and friends)? What steps can you take to mitigate these conflicts? How might you balance the emphasis on these values to create a greater sense of comfort and peace in your life?

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5. Do you have solid support systems at work and at home? How might you strengthen these systems? Make a plan to build up the support systems you rely on to reduce the conflicts you might experience in achieving career/life integration.

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# CHAPTER 6

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## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND CAREER PLANNING

This final chapter will draw on the content from the prior sections. Summary reflections will be facilitated with exercises to draw out conclusions from the toolkit as a whole. Creating a template for personal development will be the final exercise.

The topic of personal development and career planning is particularly crucial for women in the accounting profession. Women have many choices as they look down the road of their career. In society today, the path a woman may take is still more varied in approach than that of her male peers, as there are choices women routinely face along their journeys that men face infrequently. Women encounter choices about taking roads where very few women have succeeded and, therefore, must carefully consider the possible results of their decisions. They are faced with choices about marriage and family and the timing of these life changes. Many leaders still report the sense that marriage and family are viewed as positive life changes for a man's career and negative life changes for a woman's career. This is a very powerful bias that drives behaviour, and women are acutely aware of it. Women ruminate extensively on the pace of a given path and how it will intersect with other life priorities they may have. They are much more driven by personal meaning from their work, which only lends itself to creating additional choices to be made along their career paths.

In a recent Mergis Group study, women and men were asked to rank important factors for career satisfaction. It is interesting to note the similarities and differences in the rankings. Men ranked top career satisfaction factors in this order: compensation; challenge; and flexibility. Women ranked top career satisfaction

factors in this order: challenge; compensation; and flexibility.<sup>19</sup> These are all examples of the variety of choices women frequently discuss in confidential career planning. Men may face some of these challenges, but the degree to which these impact decisions and the frequency and intensity of the consideration of these factors is much greater for women.

In addition to the differences noted above, women are navigating their career paths with less information and guidance due to a lack of access to sponsors and advocates in positions of influence (see Chapter 2). With fewer role models to draw examples from and emulate as they traverse through unfamiliar territory, many women find their career journeys off to a discouraging start and/or face barriers that slow their pace along the way. Women also often have less personal time due to the numerous roles they play inside and outside of work as the “go to” person or caregiver, which leads to them neglecting their personal priorities and aspirations. When considering the above information, we see the making of a “perfect storm” in relation to the strong need women have for reflection and strategic career planning and the lack of access and time they allow to fulfill that need. This scenario exponentially contributes to the frustration many women feel with their careers and the potential for burnout that we commonly see among female professionals.

Most of us have heard individuals around us state that they were “on autopilot”. The phrase “autopilot” is used to describe the interesting phenomenon of engaging in tasks without conscious awareness of either the activity or the time going by. Driving is one of the most common “autopilot” activities people engage in. Have you ever driven to a familiar place only to arrive and realize you have no memory of the road, stop lights, traffic or turns because you were so deep in thought? Your subconscious mind was executing tasks while your conscious mind was engaged elsewhere. Occasionally, we find that we have taken a route to a destination that was not where we originally planned to go. This phenomenon is possibly also reflected in areas of your life where you are not satisfied. Sometimes, when we dig deeply, we find that these are the areas where we are not living consciously and, therefore, allowing the “autopilot” to take over and navigate us to an unintended destination.

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19 Mergis Group, Women in Finance Study, 2011.

Success is not success if you wake up one day and realize you are having a “near-life experience”. To draw another analogy, are you climbing the ladder of success only to find your ladder leaning on the wrong building? Somewhere along the way, the life you have created may not be a life that brings you happiness, satisfaction or peace. Or, at the very least, you may realize you are beginning to head in the wrong direction. Course correction early in the journey is much less challenging than major course correction later on. One way to avoid getting too far from the road you wish to be on is to set aside time (at least once a year but ideally once a quarter) to reflect upon the aspects of your life that are most important to you and to consider whether you are living the life you desire. Many people carry a sense of dissatisfaction or longing for something different, even when they appear to have successful careers and lead full lives. The sense of being stuck comes either from not knowing what we want or not knowing how to move towards what we want, or both.

At any given point in time in our lives, we are at varying levels of satisfaction with all major life areas. Work, relationships, money, spirituality and health are examples of some of the major areas to be considered in life. Rarely are all areas simultaneously in alignment. Possibly, this constant striving for the next part of the journey is what it means to be human. Whether you are a linear thinker or more creative in your approach, it often helps to use unfamiliar methods to delve into your conscious and unconscious dreams and goals (see Worksheet F1).

It is critical that your reflections and goal setting come with accountability and with identified support systems. Accountability can be as simple as milestones you set for yourself using support systems to keep you on track (such as an executive coach, family members or co-workers who check in with you to see how you are doing). Mechanisms we use to keep ourselves on the right path and moving at the right pace can get as sophisticated as our preferences dictate. Plans need to be well thought out, so it is pivotal to allow quality time for reflection and inspiration. We need to put these reflections, goals and plans into writing and we must have a support system or community of goal seekers to travel the journey with us in some way. Only then will we possess the elements of success for personal planning and, subsequently, success for career planning.



# WORKSHEET F1

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## LIFE AREAS REVIEW

In order to explore personal and professional desires for the future, it is beneficial for women to explore the answers to the questions listed below.

Give yourself the gift of reflective time for candid and thoughtful responses. This work is important for you to derive full value from the toolkit. Your reflections will not remain static. It is important to revisit and reassess this material at a minimum of once per year.

Find a quiet and comfortable place. Close your eyes, take time to breathe and let go of everything on your “to do” list at this moment. In this reflection, you should use words or pictures to tap into how you see each major area of your life. Try to utilize a method of recording images that you would not ordinarily use.

Consider all of the major elements of your life:

- work;
- relationships;
- money;
- spirituality; and
- health.

Take a few moments to picture each area of your life separately. Candidly record any words or images that come to your mind in association with each area.

After considering each life area, review all the thoughts that you have recorded. Patterns will emerge in terms of the areas about which you feel confident and those that may not be as fully developed as you wish.

Use this exercise as a starting point to help you identify one or two specific areas which you plan to improve upon in the coming months and/or years. Your next step may be obvious, revealing a clear path of precisely where you want to go with what you have uncovered. On the other hand, your path may prove to be foggy, leaving you uncertain as to how to move forward despite

your awareness that you are not where you wish to be. If your direction is unclear, begin with small steps. Think about the questions you need answered before you can determine where you want to go. Seek to answer these questions for yourself. Sharing your discoveries with a friend or coach can often bring new insights to this work. Your pace is determined only by your sense of urgency in creating the life you want.

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**Worksheet F1: Life Areas Review**

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# WORKSHEET F2

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## ASPIRATIONS REFLECTION

When answering the following questions, consider your unique values, interests and challenges and how they align with the goals of the organization for which you currently work. If you are not employed, consider the type of organization you aim to target for employment.



## Worksheet F2: Aspirations Reflection

1. What are your ultimate career aspirations?

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2. When you think of the impact you can make with your talents, what outcome would be most satisfying for you? What would you consider to be an amazing career accomplishment?

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3. What do you need in order to move forward in achieving your aspirations?

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4. What are the personal and organizational constraints that you believe are preventing you from reaching your aspirations? Is it possible that some of these barriers might only be perceived barriers (i.e., barriers that may actually be rooted in your belief system or current perspective)?

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## Worksheet F2: Aspirations Reflection

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5. Assuming you could eliminate your current personal and organizational constraints, would you then broaden your aspirations?

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6. Evaluate your readiness to move towards your ultimate goals:

- Are you prepared to take the next step?
- Can you identify what this step is?
- Are you willing to identify and move forward towards your goals?

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7. How does each of your goals support your personal values? How do your goals support the needs of the organization for which you work?

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8. Do you feel that you have adequate personal and professional support systems to assist you as you move towards your aspirations? What might you do to strengthen these systems?

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### Worksheet F2: Aspirations Reflection

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9. How will you know when you are successfully moving forward? Are there small steps with milestones you can measure and celebrate along the way? Please record these in your journal and refer back to them, formally recording each milestone as you reach it.

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10. Are there additional options for research, training, skill development and/or education that would support your goals? How might you access these opportunities? Who can support you in your effort to acquire additional skills and/or knowledge?

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## About the Author, Mary L. Bennett, MBA, CIA, CEC

Mary is a well known expert on topics related to the sustainability of the accounting profession including succession planning, practice management, leadership development, diversity and inclusiveness, and the progress of women as leaders in the profession. For the past twenty five years Mary Bennett has been a practicing client services consultant and leader in the accounting profession. Mary has spent the majority of these years with a top ten global Firm at the partner level where she led practice areas, office locations, and large engagements consulting with clients in risk management and organizational development. Mary is an expert in Women's Leadership Initiatives, Diversity & Inclusiveness Programs, Executive Coaching & Development, Succession Planning and Leadership Development. Mary is the founder of MLBennett Consulting LLC and now works full time as a consultant to organizations and a coach to individuals within these firms.

Mary has won several awards for her work in making a difference: Women of the Year, ASWA; Presidential Citation Award, AWSCPA; Torchbearers Award, Indiana Commission of Women; and more. Mary has worked with hundreds of companies and thousands of leaders on practice leadership & development, advocacy & mentoring, career-life integration skill building, developmental coaching, executive development, emerging leader training, coaches training, women's initiatives and much more. Mary has been active on the executive boards of many charitable organizations including Youth Services Bureau, UNITED WAY, and YWCA. Mary is also the current chair of the AICPA Women's Initiatives Executive Committee.

Email: [mbennett@mlbennettconsulting.com](mailto:mbennett@mlbennettconsulting.com)

Website: [mlbennettconsulting.com](http://mlbennettconsulting.com)

Twitter : [mbennettwil](https://twitter.com/mbennettwil)

LinkedIn : <http://www.linkedin.com/in/mlb60>

LinkedIn Groups :

- Women in Leadership Public Accounting
- Women in Accounting, Finance and Risk Management

