Learning How To “Fit In and Stand Out”

McGarvie said her mantra for success is “Fit in and stand out, but do it in a way in which you can achieve the consequences you expect.” At the start of her professional career, McGarvie said she was told to go into sales because of her outgoing nature, but instead was drawn to the more analytical side of things. McGarvie decided to give herself a test: if she could pass the grueling CPA exam on the first try — only 15 percent of all applicants pass on the initial try — she would pursue accounting as a career. Pass she did, but not without a lot of sweat and toil: McGarvie devoted 40 hours a week for four weeks to prepare for the exam. Passing that rigorous exam also helped McGarvie gain confidence. “Setting out to reach a goal and achieving that goal gave me the confidence I needed to go to the next step.”

The CPA, who, not surprisingly, is very big on measurement and accountability, said to get to the top you need to ask yourself: what is the one thing I want to do that I haven’t articulated? She added, “To become, to do, to have, we need to articulate what it is we want. We need to share our dreams and then they will happen.”

Knowing Where You Want To Go

In addition, McGarvie added that you need to know where you want to go. “Know yourself and start to measure how you can get there.” She referenced the familiar adage: if you don’t know where you’re going, it really doesn’t matter which path you’re on.

Gaines agreed and added that you also need to figure out how you are going to get to where you are going. “I’m not sure we’re as evolved as we think we are. A lot has improved but, there are still a lot of people who would rather work with a man than a woman.” She added that it’s important to recognize this fact and the idea that women may still have to do more than others, for example, be more vocal or more creative to gain attention. Gaines also mentioned that a lot of business still takes place on the golf course. And, make no mistake, said Gaines, that kind of socializing still makes a difference in the board room.

The Challenge Is in the Balance

Lansing echoed the sentiments of her fellow panelists, acknowledging that she was a passive participant at the beginning of her career and had to work at changing her own mindset. “I had a lack of self esteem, coupled with the need to be something. A very contradictory set of goals.” However, Lansing said times have changed and admitted it was a different time when she began. “In those days you never asked for more. Women were not expected to want to be heads of studios, for example. Today it’s still difficult to progress, but for different reasons. There are very few barriers to break down. Rather, the challenge is in learning to balance your life because of all of the unlimited options available.”

Lansing spoke candidly about how she dealt with her own low self esteem, and mentioned that she was able to conquer her demons through psychotherapy. “You might find encouragement in other things: church, family, or friends. For me, therapy was a lifesaver. I had to relearn the habits of a lifetime and learn how not to be afraid to fail. I had to learn that if I failed, I failed not as a person. Rather, it was the action that failed.” Even still, Lansing said the demons return from time to time, and added that the key is to know those demons and work through them.

Corporate Responsibility: Taking Care of the Triple Bottom Line
Moderator David Gergen, editor-at-large of *U.S. News & World Report*, and professor at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, asked the panel to speak about corporate responsibility to the triple bottom line, i.e. the community and the environment. And if there is a difference between men and women executives when it comes to focusing on that triple bottom line.

McGarvie said her company does measure itself on return on profit and growth, but added it is only in growing and having a successful bottom line that companies are able to maintain the cash flow to invest in the community or the environment. Gaines said, in her professional experience, giving back is very important. In fact, she noted that community involvement was a performance objective for many senior level executives at the Diners Club. In explaining that giving to the community is just good business, Gaines mentioned the Los Angeles riots and the fact that McDonald’s storefronts were not harmed because, as a company, they have a very positive association within the community.

Lansing added that part of the problem stems from our culture and its emphasis on financial growth. “There is something in our corporate culture that needs a course correction. As a whole, we tend to overvalue triple growth and undervalue giving back to the community. Consequently, there is undue pressure on some executives to reach these goals.”