

## LEADERSHIP

# Stereotypes are out as women assume more leadership roles

Confidence crucial for female leaders, experts in field say

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SPECIAL TO U-T SAN DIEGO

Women need to shake off the old stereotype of being submissive people-pleasers who need to be liked, and display more confidence if they want to rise to the top of the business world, says Dana Bristol-Smith of Speak for Success Women's Leadership Institute in San Diego.

"I think (the old stereotypes) are outdated," Bristol-Smith said. "Women are starting businesses at a faster rate than men in California. I think in terms of being self-assured and confident, you have to be to take a risk like that to start your own business. ...

"Things are much more equal now than they've ever been. Women are more focused in building their education, building their careers and starting businesses."

There's still a long way to go. Women make up 53 percent of the workforce but occupy only 35 percent of leadership positions, said Grace Killelea, of the Half the Sky Leadership Institute in Pittsburgh. She, in part, blames that on raising girls with the wrong message.

"We tell little girls they need to be nice, they need to share, they should put others first," Killelea said.

"That makes them reticent to speak up ... more risk-averse. And that

SEE **STEREOTYPE • 4** translates over to their professional lives."

We see it in the phenomenon of the "princesses" movement, Bristol-Smith said, adding, however, more and more girls also are identifying with superheroes.

### Negative self-talk

Killelea said the best way for women to feel more confident is to act more confident.

"Some of us don't even have the awareness. Women will minimize a success. If someone says you did a fantastic job. The response will be, 'I just got lucky,' or 'Every squirrel finds a nut.' We don't realize we are doing it ... and how this negative self-talk is affecting us," Killelea said. "I have women tell me, 'I look in mirror and pick out flaws.' Clearly there are good things."

### Act with confidence

Killelea said women should be aware of how they project themselves when they walk into a room: head high, shoulders back, purposeful walk.

"Your body and mind are so connected," she said. "If you move with power you can reset your mind's chemistry. Literally taking up more room, so you're not apologizing for the space you're in. You can't wait until you feel confident. Sometimes you just have to act with

confidence. ... Women raise their hands; men stand up. Women have to start standing up."

Then there's how you say things, not just the words, but the tenor. Killelea said women tend to sound tentative, raising their voices at the end of a sentence so it sounds more like a question.

"It resonates with people if you're not using that uptick," she said.

A confident, competent woman is a "one-two punch that is powerful," said Killelea.

### Figuring it out

One organization helping businesswomen is the Hera Hub in San Diego. Bristol-Smith said it provides a nurturing environment for women who don't need their own office space but want to be in an environment where they have access to resources and can be surrounded by motivated, encouraging women. Members include women who are starting businesses or working as independent contractors but who want to feel they are part of a community.

"We are women who are figuring out how to do it. We're making it up as we go along and we're learning from others. We like to collaborate. We don't like to feel alone or isolated," Bristol-Smith said.

Both Bristol-Smith and Killelea cited Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg's book "Lean In" as a road map to success.

"It's reinventing the idea of the old boys club," Bristol-Smith said. "We

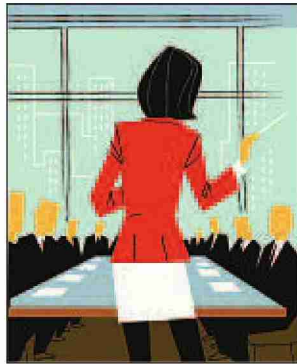


need to create communities that encourage and support women to develop their own leadership potential.

For more information on Speak for Success Women's Leadership Institute, visit [www.speakforsuccess.net](http://www.speakforsuccess.net). For more information on Hera Hub, visit [www.herahub.com](http://www.herahub.com).

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Grace Killelea • Half the Sky Leadership Institute



**Women should be more aware of how they project themselves.** THINKSTOCK

**35%**

Leadership positions occupied by women