



# Sophia Associates

executive coaching for wisdom

## ***Leadership Skills for Women***

Pick up any magazine or newspaper and you will likely find some article on Leadership and Management styles. You will also notice a movement from technique and results to intuition and relationships. It is not so much what you do but who you are that makes up leadership potential. And perhaps, it is also, how far you are willing to expand your “learning container”, to include all aspects of self: mind, body, soul, and heart.

Things are changing. Witness the explosion of books expounding what has been called “soft” leadership skills. (I personally don’t consider them soft but pretty difficult, as there is an element of vulnerability associated with these.) We have books on Principle Centered Leadership, on Emotional Intelligence and The Power of Positive Relationships. The premise is based on behaviors and attitudes that until recently were criticized and invalidated, particularly when related to women in business. Let’s take a look at three concepts outlined in these types of books and how they relate to a new, perhaps more feminine style, of leadership. We will look at collaboration, emotional intelligence and relationship.

**Collaboration:** the word collaborate is derived from the Latin “laboro” meaning to work and the prefix, “col”, meaning together. To collaborate is to work together. Recent research has shown that women are particularly adept at working in collaboration with the emphasis being on a desired result achieved collectively. The perspective shifts from winning as an individual to benefit to the whole. It is an inclusive perspective that goes beyond the polarity that dictates for me to win you must lose. It is not so much that women are not competitive but more that women may view results from a different perspective, from a place of interdependence or as a collective win or collective success. In this context, collaboration would be the model used to produce this kind of result. With a business environment requiring more work with fewer resources, the collaborative model is poised to increase productivity and sales while maintaining morale and commitment.

Daniel Goleman, who coined the term “**emotional intelligence**”, defines EI as a combination of self-management skills and the ability to relate to others. Included in his definition are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. In his studies, Mr. Goleman determined that emotional intelligence proved to be twice as important to leadership as cognitive skills, (such as long-term vision), and technical skills, (such as business planning). Some studies suggest that the style demonstrated by men and women in leadership positions is different, with women having better social skills. This could be attributed to women’s socialization and based on culturally prescribed gender role expectations. Women in leadership positions need not apologize for the “emotional” component of leadership, but



instead consider the EI quotient as a component for leveraging performance in themselves and others.

**Relationship** now has meaning for business in terms of marketing, branding and leadership and is no longer the exclusive domain of dating, marriage and friendships. Ken Blanchard, in his book *Whale Done: The Power of Positive Relationships*, encourages managers and executives to catch people doing something right (as opposed to doing something wrong), reinforcing good habits, and using praise and redirection as motivators and for mentoring. This builds trust and strengthens relationships, something that would be paramount in times of extreme stress and change. Women have been brought up valuing connection with others, and generally have an intuitive understanding of the value of relationship in all aspects of their lives. Where this had been a point of criticism in the past, now the ability to value and build trust and relationships is seen as critical to a business's ability to grow and expand. We have witnessed the painful and costly results of betrayal in the Enron scandal. We have also seen a female warrior in Carly Fiorina, Hewlett Packard's CEO, maximize internal and external relationships to win the recent battle at Hewlett Packard.

Instead of looking to make one set of qualities "bad" and another set of qualities "good", astute executives and professionals will recognize the need to be holistic in their approach to leadership and management. Emotion and intellect, analysis and intuition, are not mutually exclusive and each have their place in the business environment. Ask yourself, what is that place? Where can one or the other be most appropriately used? And above all, do not invalidate one set of values based on abstract and antiquated business leadership models or imposed cultural constraints.

In her commencement address to MIT 2000 graduates, Carly Fiorina did not speak of being a CEO. She did not speak of technology. She spoke of her personal "journey". Instead, she urged the graduating class to listen to their "head, heart and gut" when making life decisions. "Engage your whole self in everything you do...trust your whole self and don't blink". She told the class, "Leadership in this new landscape is not about controlling decision-making. We don't have time anymore to control decision-making. It's about creating the right environment. It's about enablement, empowerment. It is about setting guidelines and boundaries and parameters and then setting people free."

"Leadership is not about hierarchy or title or status; it is about having influence and mastering change. Leadership is not about bragging rights or battles or even the accumulation of wealth; it's about connecting and engaging at multiple levels. It's about challenging minds and capturing hearts. Leadership in this new era is about empowering others to decide for themselves. Leadership is about empowering others to reach their full potential. Leaders can no longer view strategy and execution as abstract concepts, but must realize that both elements are ultimately about people."

Good advice for future leaders, male or female.

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With over twenty years business and coaching experience, Ms. Rodriguez has assisted many individuals at all levels of management and in all phases in their lives to clarify their intention, define goals, and achieve results. She has coached them to develop their potential through rewarding work, by stepping into leadership roles and through personal development. Ms. Rodriguez is an ICF Professional Certified Coach and is trained as a Certified Leadership Coach through [Georgetown University](#)'s prestigious certification program. She is founder of **Sophia Associates**, an international executive and leadership coaching practice dedicated to increasing leadership competencies, strengthening executive performance levels and creating opportunities for personal learning and development.

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