

hopes & fears

RENEE MYERS



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→ How one woman found she had a surprising amount in common with high-flying classmates



At Wharton, I soon found that these high achievers had the same fears about measuring up. Our bond was instant; we were cut from the same cloth. The lessons we learned during a rowing activity helped us work as a team and also fostered our unity as a group. We learned that none of us needed to have all the answers – our strength was in our diversity. My strength is bringing people together and getting them to believe in a vision.

After Wharton, people said I was different, more confident. This extended to my personal life: I took on community leadership roles, starting an organisation for residents in the New Jersey town outside Philadelphia where I live with my husband and two daughters.

I needed to continue to learn and grow and in December 2013, SDI, a third-party supply chain integrator in Bristol, Pennsylvania, hired me to oversee inside operations. Coming to a new industry, I focus on leveraging the skills of the people around me. Wharton

was transformative and gave me confidence in the collective ability of people to overcome challenges.

Women at my old company continue to reach out to me and it is exciting that we have maintained a special relationship but sad that they aspire to leadership roles but do not have mentors to guide them.

I often wondered what keeps women from progressing up the ladder. I believe it is not a lack of talent but more a lack of mentors who can give them confidence and teach them to navigate and move up.

Women bring so much to the table

– but they have been taught from a young age that those qualities are weaknesses. In reality, they are strengths. Male leaders tend to go strictly with fact and not take into account perceptions and emotions. Women have stronger interpersonal skills and are more in tune with information around facts and use it to persuade and take risks. Mentors can also assure women that they need not repress assertiveness if it makes others uncomfortable.

I was blessed with mentors in the small group of women in my class. They taught me how to reinvest in myself and in my family. Too often, people think you have to choose between being an executive or being a wife and mother – that you cannot be all three. That is not true. You can be an executive without sacrificing a personal and family life – that is where mentoring becomes so critical.

The women I met at Wharton taught me that. **B**

As told to Anne Wainscott-Sargent

I remember thinking: “This is way out of my league.” It was the first day of my advanced management programme and we were divided into small teams to prepare a presentation.

My group, which had to launch a business initiative, included the senior vice-president of a large pharmaceutical company, the president of an electric supply company, the president of a Russian investment management company, and the managing partner of a Swiss global wealth management firm. I was not sure that I could fit in with such a high-powered group.

It was October 2010 and I was beginning a five-week programme at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania that brought me together with 45 executives from 25 countries. Only six of us were women.

I thought my fears were a result of 18 years at one company. I worked at a New Jersey finance company, and did it all – human resources, sales, operations, client services and portfolio management, eventually becoming the only female executive. While my male peers and I embraced each other’s differences, I had no female role models, because our parent company had no women executives. Mentoring was important in my career and I enjoyed helping other women.

Female employees, managers and emerging leaders would say: “You’re my role model.”

It was my mentor, the company president Rich Palmieri, who suggested I attend an executive education programme rather than pursue an MBA. I wanted to learn how leaders outside my industry overcame professional or personal obstacles.

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Made in America

Renee Myers is director of operations for SDI, a provider of integrated supply services for maintenance, repair and operations in Pennsylvania. She worked for 20 years at a New Jersey finance company, where she held several executive roles including director of client services and portfolio management.