

FEATURE ARTICLE

Succeeding in the Meetings Industry

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Historically, there have typically been more women than men working as PCOs. This strong female representation in our industry says a lot about women's sensibilities, their abilities to steward events, and their outstanding people skills. Within AIM



Group International, the workforce is predominantly female, with only slightly more than 18% of employees being men. Additionally, the female workforce is younger, and women fill more executive positions – for example, we have more women than men in leadership positions such as Country Manager or Managing Director. I recently had the opportunity to attend a panel discussion with the American Society of Association Executives during this year's IMEX that was focused on 'Women's leadership' – it was a moment of revelation for me, and I want to share some tips from the discussion, which was attended by women climbing our industry's 'ladder'.

Be aware or beware!

The first suggestion to aspiring female executives is to choose your industry carefully. Considering the level of stress, the demands on our time and energy, and the travel requirements, individuals should approach a career in the meetings industry with their eyes wide open. Like many executives, my job is '24/7' and I am always 'on call'. This is the nature of the meetings industry, as we need to 'take care' of our on-going projects and clients. Meetings, congresses and events don't happen without a

lot of effort – it just needs to appear that way! This business is one of the most competitive in the world and we need to be passionate – it is hard work, but rewarding. Success is more likely if we are comfortable with the expectations of and the commitments needed to the industry before stepping in. It is important to take time to define your career hopes, identify some goals, and make a plan. Just as we need a map when travelling to help us reach a destination, we need a map for our careers.

Take risks

We need to put ourselves forward for opportunities and tasks that are outside our comfort zone. It will help to get us noticed and will set us apart. Volunteer for the most challenging assignments and take control!

Be confident

To help others appreciate our leadership capabilities we must believe in them ourselves! In order to lead an organisation we need to feel perfectly comfortable in our own skins. The more we value ourselves, the more we build confidence in ourselves and in others.

Work hard, but be balanced

Nothing can take the place of a great work ethic, dedication and appropriate focus. Studies confirm that flexibility in job and career options is important to women. I always strongly encourage women to strive for a healthy balance between their work and their personal life. A balanced blend of work, family and social life, as well as having an understanding partner, is crucial to attaining an appropriate work-life balance. Partners can be our best advocates and our strongest supporters.

Be focused

This is so important that I have restated it here! We must understand the priorities of those we are seeking to influence and must be focused through being proactive and constructive.

Delegate

Sometimes a person's inability to rely on someone else is based not on their lack of trust in others but on a lack of trust in themselves. If we are able to share work with others we get the time to focus on what we do best. It is amazing but true – we gain power when we give it away.

Have a mentor

Managers and mentors provide key professional support for women who transition into executive roles. Typically, more women than men recognise the contribution mentors have made in their careers.

Keep learning

Developing our careers is a life-long process. Cultivate a strategic process for your career plan, and identify those skills that you need to obtain or build upon. Articulate your career goals early, and then invest time in building the right networks both inside and outside of your organisation. Manage your expectations of what can be achieved, and recognise your limitations. Embrace mistakes – and learn from them. Indeed, never stop learning... remember that roadmap?

My final advice for women who aspire to be future leaders is to understand that success can only be achieved through this combination of your dedication, enthusiasm, self-confidence, and ability to adapt to your organisation's vision and goals.