



Leadership for Women — And for Men

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Clearly, neither Kathleen Ozsvath, MD, nor Sherene Shalhub, MD, listened when each was told, more than a decade apart, that “women can’t be surgeons.” Now they’re holding a breakfast session that encourages women to be not only surgeons, but leaders as well.

“Men and women have different approaches to leadership and style,” said Dr. Shalhub. Medicine was male-dominated and therefore the leadership style was as well, she said.

Despite the title, the presentation is not for women only. “We want the session to be inclusive of all people interested in leadership, not just women,” said Dr. Ozsvath, who helped organize the session. Women, she said, don’t always ask for opportunities; they wait to be offered. It’s “more intuitive for guys to promote themselves,” she believes. “This is really for everyone. We want people to learn that, yes, you can do it, yes you can ask and there’s nothing wrong with that. It’s OK to look for mentorship. It’s not a weakness, it’s a good thing,” she said.

Dr. Shalhub envisions the session as starting “difficult conversations” that can help everybody rise, while also gaining a deep appreciation of others’ experiences and points of view.

They want women to be able to get positions they seek. “But you don’t get it just because you’re a woman,” Dr. Ozsvath cautioned. Dr. Shalhub recommended people should consider where they want to end up. “Then backtrack from there. What do I need to do pragmatically to get from here to there?”

Dr. Ozsvath feels fortunate her experiences have all been inclusive. But, she said, she didn’t realize she should seek out promotions and positions of power. She had female mentors who supported her, told her she was ready – or not – to seek the next step. “It wouldn’t have crossed my mind,” she said. She wants to do the same for other women now coming up through the ranks. “I want to empower people to think they might want to do it. We need to be there for those who don’t know what their next steps, so they have resources and can ask questions.”

Not everyone knows choices – resources – are even available, said Dr. Shalhub. For example, people sitting at the back of the plane are offered one snack; but in business or first class, there’s a choice, said Shalhub. Many people “don’t even know that resources, such as choices in snacks, exist, let alone to ask for them,” she said.

Change is coming, both predict. “This generation, especially the one coming up, want to look at a board room and see that they fit in,” said Dr. Ozsvath. “They want to see diversity. If it’s a monotone look, they’re not interested.”

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