



Why Many Women are Stuck in Mid-Management Positions

By Nadeen Hachem



This semester, the very first Women in Leadership seminar was introduced and co-taught by two extraordinary women leaders at the School of Social Work, Su Crabb & Barb Hiltz. In a program that consists of a majority of female students, you would think that a class like this would have already been integrated into the Social Work curriculum, however it has not. After recognizing this gap, Su & Barb brainstormed and organized plans for this class and piloted it as a 1-credit minicourse this past January. It was exactly what we needed. Though roughly 75% of women make up the workforce in health care and social services, only 14.6% are executive officers and 12.4% are board directors. The Women in Leadership class highlighted how women leaders are working to advance in today's society despite these unfavorable numbers.

How about The Missing 33%™, heard of it? The Missing 33%™ is a concept that was developed by Susan Colantuono. It explains why women leaders are often stuck in middle management positions and looked over when considering advancement to C-level and executive level positions. Colantuono explains that there are three elements that contribute to exceptional leadership: (1) use the greatness in you to (2) achieve and sustain extraordinary outcomes by (3) engaging the greatness in others.

In preparing for leadership positions, women are often taught to focus on personal attributes including self-confidence, assertiveness, self-image branding, but are often left out of the conversations about the second element of leadership: achieving and sustaining extraordinary outcomes. Colantuono translates this second element as business, strategic, and financial

acumen, an element that is often discussed exclusively with males, but not their female counterparts. The lack of advice and mentorship in the elements of business, strategic, and financial acumen, The Missing 33%™, directly contributes to why 75% of workers in nonprofit organizations are women and a significantly lower number of women serve on boards and in executive positions.

Although The Missing 33%™ is a concept that exists, I often reflect on the women in leadership around me who lead departments, offices, programs, and groundbreaking research at The University of Michigan and at my field placement. I often reflect on how we can teach young women how to succeed in a male-dominated society. And I often reflect on how to teach myself that I, too, can make it to the top.

During my field experience at Public Allies Metro Detroit (PAMD), my supervisor, Caitlin Manzano, MSW, challenges and supports my growth as a strong women leader. Caitlin challenged me to take on the activities that she knew would impact my professional growth, including evaluation work that would contribute to strengthening PAMD. It is with Caitlin's support, encouragement, and constant affirmation that I was able to learn how to create different measures of evaluation, assess and analyze data results, and report them in a significant way to different stakeholders. This experience gave me the confidence and knowledge to support my abilities and highlight it during future professional interactions. Without women like Caitlin and other women in my life, I, and many other emerging women professionals would struggle to relate to mentors to guide us in our careers. This is not to say that there are not many wonderful male mentors supporting their female counterparts, but when a woman uplifts another woman, it is truly an empowering exchange.

What else can YOU do to advance your leadership skills? One that comes to mind is joining a professional leadership group within your community like the Young Leaders Society of the United Way of Washtenaw County. If one does not already exist in your community, create one! This means simply organizing together with other leaders – men & women alike – and creating plans for impact. These professional organizations could be organized in many different ways and could include special interest groups, including Women in Leadership, or workshops around building business acumen.





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Sources:

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