



Breaking the Glass Ceiling

by Phyllis LeFevre, Certified NLP Life and Wellness Coach, phyllis@inspiremomentum.com

Every professional woman knows the term Glass Ceiling, and as NLP practitioners offering professional coaching for business women we hear the term all the time.

To be clear: a Glass Ceiling for women does in fact exist within many businesses, industries and more broadly throughout American business culture. But simply recognizing that does little -- or nothing -- to help an individual business woman achieve her goals.

We believe that a more detailed examination of the concept of the Glass Ceiling in business -- and an examination of factors for it other than simple male bias -- are useful first steps in overcoming a perception of professional limitations, whether they are external...or internal.

While the exact origin of the phrase is disputed, the term Glass Ceiling entered common usage and discussions of the workplace in the early 1980's as a description of the circumstances of many professional women: they could see up to the highest echelons of business, but were prevented from getting there by gender bias.

Legally, gender-based discrimination in employment was outlawed in the United States by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but culture is less malleable than law and despite decades of progress the glass ceiling clearly continues to exist.

In my home town of Houston even a brief review of senior management and business leaders demonstrates the persistence of unequal outcomes for women.

According to Houston Chronicle data compiled by Longnecker & Associates, all of the 100 highest paid executives in Houston are men and only 4 of the top 200 -- beginning with Janet Clark, executive vice president and chief financial officer of Marathon Oil at #150 -- are women.



While data for Houston is clearly somewhat skewed by the dominance of the energy sector -- traditionally a very male industry -- the broader picture within many parts of American business is depressingly similar: in 2010 only 12 CEO's of Fortune 500 companies were women.

While some business women are denied advancement as a result of gender stereotyping -- such as the assumption that a female employee can't or won't accept an overseas assignment because of family obligations -- the reasons for the persistence of the Glass Ceiling in American business are complex, and not always solely rooted in persistent male bias.

One obvious problem is that in many cases women entering an industry suffer from the legacy -- rather than the current reality -- of gender discrimination: there are simply fewer female senior management role models to emulate, or be mentored by.

But beyond lingering male bias or a shortage of role models and mentoring, many business women have internal conflicts that affect positive self-image and strong self-confidence -- characteristics that are very important to business advancement.

According to Leanne Atwater, Chair of the Department of Management at the University of Houston's C.T. Bauer College of Business, there are important differences between the way that men and women view themselves in business settings.

As reported in the Houston Chronicle, Atwater is assembling research data that illustrates some of the substantial differences between how women and men imagine they are viewed in business, and is quoted as saying that the initial results are "scary."

For example, when rating their own skills, men and women rated themselves roughly equally.



But when predicting (as we will see, more accurately projecting...) how their bosses would rate them, men usually predicted they'd be well-rated, whereas women often believed that their bosses wouldn't give them high ratings.

In fact, the supervisors of the employees -- who were also surveyed -- rated the women about the same as the men.

That difference in how women and men imagine they are viewed by others -- particularly by more senior members of firms and bosses -- leads Atwater to believe that women tend to undervalue themselves, which she believes has negative repercussions for career advancement.

"Women didn't think their bosses will see them as good compared to their male counterparts," she said. "So how willing are they to go ask for a raise or promotion?"

How does a business woman transform her self image? To begin with, changing yourself begins with changing your mind -- and NLP can help!

Various NLP processes have proven to be very helpful tools that have enabled countless professional women come to a healthier understanding of how they are perceived by others in a business setting, and to craft, refine and achieve professional goals.

But goal setting is really the easy part.

The hard part is the steps involved in re-training your brain to have a more positive relationship with your professional goals and clearing away internal issues -- particularly regarding an inaccurate perception of how others view you in business -- that are roadblocks to success.



As our clients achieve greater professional success we continue to nurture their self-confidence; help guide a continuous re-examination of their professional goal-sets; help them monitor their progress and celebrate their successes; and intervene when the inevitable small bumps in this self-healing road are encountered.

We encourage you to consider how NLP can help you smash your personal Glass Ceiling once and for all!

Phyllis LeFevre is a certified NLP Life Coach and Wellness Practitioner based near Raleigh / Durham, North Carolina, who develops individualized programs for permanent lifestyle change. Her company, Inspire Momentum NLP, works with clients in a one-on-one setting designing customized coaching programs that will ensure success. You can contact her at (801) 244 8333 or phyllis@inspiremomentum.com