

Women executives discuss career challenges, success strategies, mentorship

by Sara Janak

Women make up almost half the workforce in the United States but they're still largely underrepresented in business leadership roles. Women held about 10 percent of the top executive positions at U.S. companies in 2016-17, according to a Pew Research Center analysis.

A study by the Women's Fund of Omaha found that women still face barriers to leadership roles, and these obstacles are compounded for women of color and LGBTQ women.

Despite this, there are several women leading organizations in Omaha.

One of them is Josie Abboud, president and CEO of Methodist Hospital and Methodist Women's Hospital.

Becoming a CEO is not something that she always imagined for herself, Abboud said, "rather, I was always excited about new opportunities and expanded leadership roles. As I would grow and develop in a role, I would learn and become aware that I could be more. In addition, along the way, I've been very fortunate to have wonderful mentors."

She said Steve Goeser, Methodist Health System president and CEO, was always encouraging about her work, talent and abilities.

"He believed in me and told me that. I



Zetzman

have had other mentors that have done the same," she said.

Abboud is deliberate in doing the same. "I'm intentional about seeking others out and letting them know that I believe in them," she said.

Women leaders can often be perceived differently than their male colleagues. When women possess certain attributes, such as being confident or passionate or assertive, they can be viewed as arrogant or emotional.

Amee Zetzman, EVP/CFO of All Makes, said she's experienced this double standard.

Zetzman recalled when a man once told her she "had too much emotion."

"That's when I said to him, 'you would not tell my brother [who's also involved in the business] he had too much emotion, you would say he was very authoritative,'" she said.

When something like this happens, she doesn't let it slide.

"I will openly call someone out if I feel that I am being treated differently than a man would be," she added.

Zetzman sees it as her duty to help foster the career advancement of other women professionals.

"I think that as a woman in management it is my job and role to bring other women up through the organization and mentor them," she said.

Jamie Gutierrez, CEO of Midwest Maintenance, started working at a young age for the company she now runs.

"During my college years I found that I had some talent in business and I had a great mentor in my father," Gutierrez said.

Her father, Paul Gutierrez, taught her

about business accounting, contracts, legalities and managing people.

"He really believed in me and always gave me motivation to succeed," she said.



Kracher

Building relationships with people you look up to in Omaha's business community can pay off.

"There are plenty of great female and male leaders in this city who will support you, give you advice, and maybe give you an opportunity to serve," Gutierrez said. "Surround your-

self with good people, who are doing great things, people you admire."

Mentors are an invaluable resource for young professionals who want to become leaders.

Beverly Kracher, CEO/executive director of the Business Ethics Alliance, recommends women seek mentorship from both men and women.

"Each will have a different kind of strength and a different kind of door they can open," Kracher said.

Additionally, women shouldn't be afraid to make bold demands.

"Huge generalization, but women don't tend to ask for big amounts or talk in terms of big impact. Go big. If you are going to build something, ask for \$3 million rather than \$300,000," Kracher said. "Men ask for the big amounts. Get used to doing that, too."



Josie Abboud, president and CEO of Methodist Hospital and Methodist Women's Hospital.