Boy Scouts of America Forum Highlights Women in Leadership Opportunities
Empowering women to become leaders in the workplace

Last October, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) held its first national conference for women professionals, “Women in Leadership Forum,” in Chicago, Illinois. Approximately 100 of the BSA’s top-performing women professionals currently serving in leadership roles around the country gathered to share, mentor and inspire each other while serving in a traditionally male organization.

Although messages varied, the theme was consistent: empowering women to become leaders in the workplace. The forum’s purpose was to:
- inspire, encourage and empower women to achieve their full career potential and continue to grow the Boy Scouts of America’s competitive edge;
- redefine and articulate how women can support their leadership growth;
- obtain a fresh and actionable perspective to leverage women’s best talents and leadership abilities;
- learn how women’s focus on the quality of day-to-day experiences, rather than abstract measures of achievement, can restore balance to a workplace; and
- gain insights into how women’s penchant for viewing work in a larger social context can reinvigorate employees’ engagement at a profound and authentic level.

Forum Offerings
The forum featured several nationally known speakers, an interactive panel discussion about work-life balance, a discussion of Sheryl Sandberg’s bestselling book, Lean In, and the sharing of best practices.

“No one is going to invite you to the leadership dance—you have to invite yourself,” said Anne Doyle, author of Powering Up! How America’s Women Achievers Become Leaders, and one of the first women journalists to gain access to professional men’s “locker rooms.”

“If you never go for it because you think you’re not ready or you’re afraid of being embarrassed if you fail, then you’ve eliminated yourself,” Doyle pointed out.

Doyle told attendees that her initial response to being invited to speak at the forum was one of surprise. “I wasn’t as nervous as when I was asked to go to Saudi Arabia, but I did think, ‘Boy Scouts, women’s leadership’—what an oxymoron!” she said.

“Every woman for herself’ is a losing strategy. They [men] have understood for centuries that they have to support each other. The ‘Brotherhood’ is a well-oiled machine,” Doyle explained. “Seeing things through the eyes of a woman is not a weakness; it’s a strength.”

Diversity Breeds Innovation
Diversity was represented on all fronts at the conference—from generational, racial and ethnicity to geographical—which provided interesting perspectives and even more insight into the diversity of women.

Risha Grant, CEO and founder of Xpansiv, Inc., an Oklahoma-based diversity communications firm, brought a fresh perspective on diversity-and-inclusion strategies by saying, “Progress is nasty. What we are really talking about here is humanity and how we respect what everyone brings to the table.”

“People who won’t happy don’t work hard,” Grant observed. “I’m all for kicking in the door of the glass ceiling. Diversity breeds innovation.”

To help illustrate her points, she had attendees participate in an exercise called “Identify Your Bias Synopsis.” She passed out paddles face that read “This is my R.S. [bias synopsis] on one side and “This is not my R.S.” on the other. She read statements such as, “Sometimes, I never know what to say or to not to say to offend those who are different, based on
diversity," and "I feel that women who wear short-cut skirts or such are using more than knowledge to get ahead." For every statement, the attendees had to raise their paddle fans, thereby making them aware of their individual biases.

"I now "get it." The concepts have forever changed the manner in which I interact with others and especially the advice I give to other women," said Carol Whitebook, scout executive for the Cherokee Area Council in Bartlesville, Oklahoma. "I'm meeting with the most influential women in our community and will begin an 'exploring post' centered on principles shared that week. I've invited more than 200 young ladies to take advantage of this opportunity. This forum has changed the manner in which I interact with others."

Anne Barab, CEO, Leadership Development/The Resilience Expert, guided everyone to understand the difference between optimist and pessimist thought processes and then gave the attendees behavior tools to improve their adaptability and resilience. "The faster we adapt, the less stress we experience," she said.

Barab also pointed out that the key to true leadership is the gift of listening. Building from Mother Teresa's quote, "I look through their eyes, drawn into the heart of the person standing before me to see their greatest need, and if it is within my power, I grant it"—a component of her "Listen with Your Heart" principles.

In addition, the attendees enjoyed some great laughs about the disparity between gender-based communication styles. Business communication is patterned after the anglo male preference for getting to the point as quickly as possible. Female, African-American and Hispanic communication is more of a story-telling approach.

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"Women must learn to get to the point in business discussions, because if you're mired in too much detail, you may not be perceived as having a solution to the problem," Barab stated.

Dottie Gandy, co-author of Choice, The Role That Choice Plays in Shaping Women's Lives, and co-founder of The National Association of Women Business Owners, presented an interactive session focused on how women have choices that they sometimes do not use to their advantage.

"Wonderful mission! I have been inspired by this forum and will look forward to sharing the messages received with others to recognize the exceptional qualities women bring to the table, whether they are volunteers or executives. I hope we can carry on the vision.

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About Boy Scouts of America
The Boy Scouts of America is one of the nation's largest (2.7 million youth members and more than 1 million volunteers) and most prominent value-based youth development organizations. The BSA provides a program for young people that builds character, trains them to be accountable and responsible to the responsibilities of participating citizenship, and develops personal virtue.

For more than a century, the BSA has helped build this country's future leaders by instilling educational activities and lifelong values with fun. The BSA believes...and, after every century of experience, knows...that helping youth is a key to building a more constitutional, responsible and productive society.

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