



Petty Principles: Practical Branding Strategies for Women in Higher Education

Tanjula Petty, EdD • December 2, 2019

Many women aspire to leadership positions in higher education. Yet research reveals that women continue to be underrepresented among deans, chief academic officers, provosts, and presidents (Gallant, 2014). Additionally, researchers have identified numerous motives for the persistence of this underrepresentation. For women to progress toward leadership positions in higher education can be a complicated, intricate, and multifaceted process (Johnson et al., 2010). Unfortunately, many are not afforded the opportunity to lead due to lack of knowledge, skills, or political maneuvering. According to Thomas, Bierema, and Landau (2004), women have not made advances in the academy, and they have not climbed career ladders with the same speed or ease as their male counterparts. The White House Project (2009) implied that having women leaders in higher education is much more than a mere gender parity issue: women leaders will potentially have a significant influence on institutions' knowledge and scope of

research. The presence of women in higher education leadership roles will contribute to positive and unique experiences for students that they will not have under gender-homogenous leadership.

Consequently, Strayer (2018) cited research conducted at the Pew Research Center documenting that although women have advanced in the workplace, they account for only a small percentage of top leadership positions. In the same study, 94 percent of female participants who were focused on moving into higher-level positions identified personal brand as being very important; however, 75 percent acknowledged that they do not have a personal brand vision for themselves. Additionally, compared to their male counterparts, women do not strongly advocate for themselves. Women who desire to seek leadership roles must be willing to explore their personal, organizational, and community spheres of influence to empower themselves to embrace practical strategies to maneuver successfully within institutions. To this end, creating a personal brand provides women with the stability, empowerment, value creation, and recognition critical to success in an increasingly dynamic marketplace (Jayabalan, 2015).

Your personal brand tells those you aspire to lead and influence who you are (Tagore, 2017). It says what you stand for and helps you get noticed for your performance and work. Developing a personal brand can help provide leverage for a leadership position you seeking and make it likelier that you will ascend to it. Leadership branding encourages women leaders to see themselves as integral and vital components of the organization. It helps them to develop a clear and deliverable picture of what they want their employees and students to know them for (Mirza, 2012).

As women climb the leadership ladder, others see that opportunities are present for women. A number of recent efforts have the potential to bridge the gender gap; however, there is still a lot to be desired. As women seek to grow in leadership capacities at their respective institutions, implementing the following six practical branding strategies can help.

Establish a leadership brand statement

A leadership brand is a clear statement supported by leadership behaviors that respond to the questions *Who are you?* and *What is your leadership philosophy?* As you build a leadership brand, everything you do either contributes to that brand or takes away from it (Tagore, 2017). Make sure that you are building and contributing in a positive way.

Know your expertise

Ensure that you have a clear understanding of your area of expertise and what differentiates you and your marketability from others. Brand yourself by understanding your value set.

Participate in leadership development programs

A number of professional development programs across the country are offered to focus specifically on women leaders in education. Women should be strategic about developing and nurturing their future selves as leaders. Therefore, they should participate in leadership development programs to help them make more effective decisions and assist in implementing the most appropriate leadership styles for their respective organizations.

Be open to networking

It is true that making professional connections is critical. It is vital to understand that networking means more than attending events at which you exchange information and develop professional contacts. Be open to expanding your network across industry lines, which can lead to new opportunities to establish

your leadership brand—including business partnerships, speaking engagements, and writing articles that promote your thought about leadership.

Be mentored and mentor others

As women in leadership, we have opportunities to inspire other women who are around us and want to get to where we are. Therefore, serve as a mentor and role model to women starting out on the path to leadership. Also remember that you need wisdom. Thus, seek out a mentor whom you can bounce ideas off of and who is instrumental in your professional growth. Mentoring can have a positive impact on your leadership and increase your value.

Be strategic in your social media touch points

Every interaction is an opportunity, specifically as you navigate the world of social media. You have control, and you must control everything you post on social media channels as you are developing your leadership brand. You do not want to post something that is contradictory to what you are trying to develop. Social media is one of the most powerful tools for expressing your brand and engaging in conversations with others who will benefit from your brand. Therefore, make your touch points meaningful.

As women pursue leadership roles in higher education, there are opportunities that can come from leadership branding. Leadership branding will also help women gain confidence in making career and leadership choices and understand the importance of building a support network.

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