



“It’s lonely at the top” – executive women need someone to talk shop and shopping to.

Women in senior positions are often the lone woman on the executive team and, from my experience, of working with several of them, will acknowledge that they are, in fact, alone and sometimes, lonely. Many of their existing women friends, while sympathetic and supportive have little experience of life in the “upstairs office” or of negotiating the guy networks.

These women often encounter tricky situations that they need to resolve. It is well documented that talking to a willing pair of ears can help us work out strategies to deal with many business and personal conundrums. We need a safe place to talk and that is not usually an easily found option for a lone executive woman. For example, we might have someone working for us that we need to have a difficult conversation with. Talking with a person outside the organization, ahead of that meeting can help develop strategies. We can review how the meeting went after the event, revisiting what went well and, also, what could have gone better. From this evaluation, we can develop strategies for the next time. We all know that when we are trying to change our behaviour, we are usually more successful with a small-steps approach over several weeks, checkpoints along the way and tangible support for our attempts to change.

Setting up a regular contact point with a person you trust, who can both objectively listen to you and has the business background to suggest options, can be a really useful resource for any business person. In addition to the usual weekly phone calls, another strategy I have found rewarding for my clients, is to organize an early dinner for two or three executives from different organizations with me as host. If they hit it off, great and if not, the investment is limited. Finally, another effective strategy has been to take the time to join and attend formal networks of Executive Women. With these strategies, combined with a personal “friend” (albeit paid) any executive woman can usually find the support that she needs.

Some of us may feel that it is a sign of weakness to express a need to have someone to help us, but most people can gain value from having a person to talk to with whom they relate well and, most importantly, feel they can trust. Frequently when we get very busy we push our personal needs to the back of our “To Do” list. That’s really a mistake because women can be a source of strength to each other, whether it’s to talk shop or shopping.

Jane Durant

Jane loves to share her wisdom and experience with executive women and host dinners for small groups of them. To talk with Jane, call her at 604-872-7761, email jdurant@direct.ca and for more information, visit www.janedurant.com

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