

## Women in Leadership Highlights April 30, 2010



**April 23: “Power Shift: The Redefinition of Power and Success”** – featuring Laura Lee Gentry, Managing Partner of Egon Zehnder’s Atl. Office and the firm’s leading expert in the SE on talent and organizations across the Technology, Media, and Telecommunications Sectors. Prior to joining EZI 9+ years ago, she was an operational and strategic leader in the Communications industry with companies like Steadfast.net and BellSouth International. Her work spanned Latin America as well as Denmark and Germany. Laura Lee is also a civic leader, serving on the Boards of the Commerce Club, Hands on Atlanta / Hands on Network, and Points of Light. She received her MBA at the London Business School and her BA Cum Laude in Finance from UGA. She’s also a devoted wife and mother of three.

She wrote an article for Pink Magazine entitled: “Power Shift: Woman are Redefining It. How to Get More of It” – In the article Laura Lee referenced David C. McClellan and David H. Burnham who implicitly acknowledged the relation of collaboration and influencing skills to power. Writing in the Harvard Business Review, they identified three kinds of managers. “Affiliative managers” want to be liked more than they want power. By contrast, ‘personal power’ managers need power more than they want to be liked. Lastly, ‘institutional’ managers – the most effective of the three types – care most about using power for the benefit of the organization rather than for their own self-aggrandizement.”

Egon Zehnder International’s research pinpoints four core skills critical for successful executives:

- Results orientation
- Team leadership
- Collaboration and influencing
- Strategic orientation

Laura Lee says: “...the ability to collaborate and influence becomes literally a ‘higher power’ as you move up in the organization. Women and men who embrace this higher power can transform the organization as well as their careers. Unfortunately, far too many of us remain in thrall to these traditional images of power. But simply understanding that the route to power shifts dramatically above the mid-manager level can help make those images irrelevant. When you think power, remember that the road to long-term career success doesn’t run from star performer to four-star general, but from highly competent contributor to influential collaborator.”

Another way of putting it: There’s the influence of power and the power of influence. Women may be more successful by using influencing skills rather than just focusing on “how to be” powerful.

Other key lessons from Laura Lee's personal and professional journey:

- She's a Southern girl who started to work when she was only 15 with the idea that she wanted the ability to be independent. Said she did a lot of different jobs and didn't feel too good for any.
- Graduated with honors from UGA with a BBA
- Career path led her to Wall Street where she learned from a strong male mentor how to be a successful financial consultant. She went through an apprenticeship program in the highly male-dominated industry. Her advice: go beyond your comfort zone; learn to be a mentor yourself; don't be complacent.
- Having become restless as a WS trader, she decided to prepare herself for a broader role in business. She pursued the best advanced degree she could get –even going into debt and taking a risk to pursue it out of the country. Going to London was both scary and exhilarating and her advice to other women coming along: do what you have to do to get your advanced degree whatever it takes.
- Next career: BellSouth where she held positions as Director, Operations Strategy, BellSouth International in Buenos Aires Argentina and Santiago Chile and also Director, Strategic Management Unit for BellSouth in ATL.
- Offered a position in Austin TX with a start-up she at first said, "I'm not qualified. I don't take myself seriously enough." But her boss disagreed and she became VP Operations, Steadfast.net, Inc. in Austin
- During her time at BSI she had another great mentor: Carol Carter who taught her many valuable lessons in leadership...about influencing and collaborating
- Another opportunity came her way: Egon Zehnder International (EZI) and she decided to take it because she researched the company and liked the culture that they had...took a leap of faith and has been very satisfied with her decision
- Her advice: stay open-minded
- In her personal life Laura Lee also had challenges along the way. Married with 2 children, her husband passed away when she was only 37. A very tough set of circumstances, difficult to be both mom and dad and to work full time, but she did it.
- Now she's happily married to her 2<sup>nd</sup> husband and has a third child (3 children now ages 5-14). They are her pride and joy and her first priority.
- Other words of wisdom:
  - "You don't have to be ignorant to be an optimist."
  - "You can have it all but need help along the way."
  - "Be bold. Need smarts and drive to be successful."
  - "Make your own judgments."
  - "Do push beyond your comfort zone but be kind to yourself also."
  - "Work for great companies. If you don't believe you are, go somewhere else."
  - "Use the ability to compartmentalize so that when you're at work, your focus is 100% business; when you're at home, be 100% there for your family."
  - "Use your mind and your gut, your intellect and your intuition or instinct."
  - "You need 'white space' – time to think."
  - "There are no mistakes in life, just lessons learned."
  - "Make a list of your top few priorities – and guide your daily activities accordingly. You should spend the most time on your highest 'value add' items."