

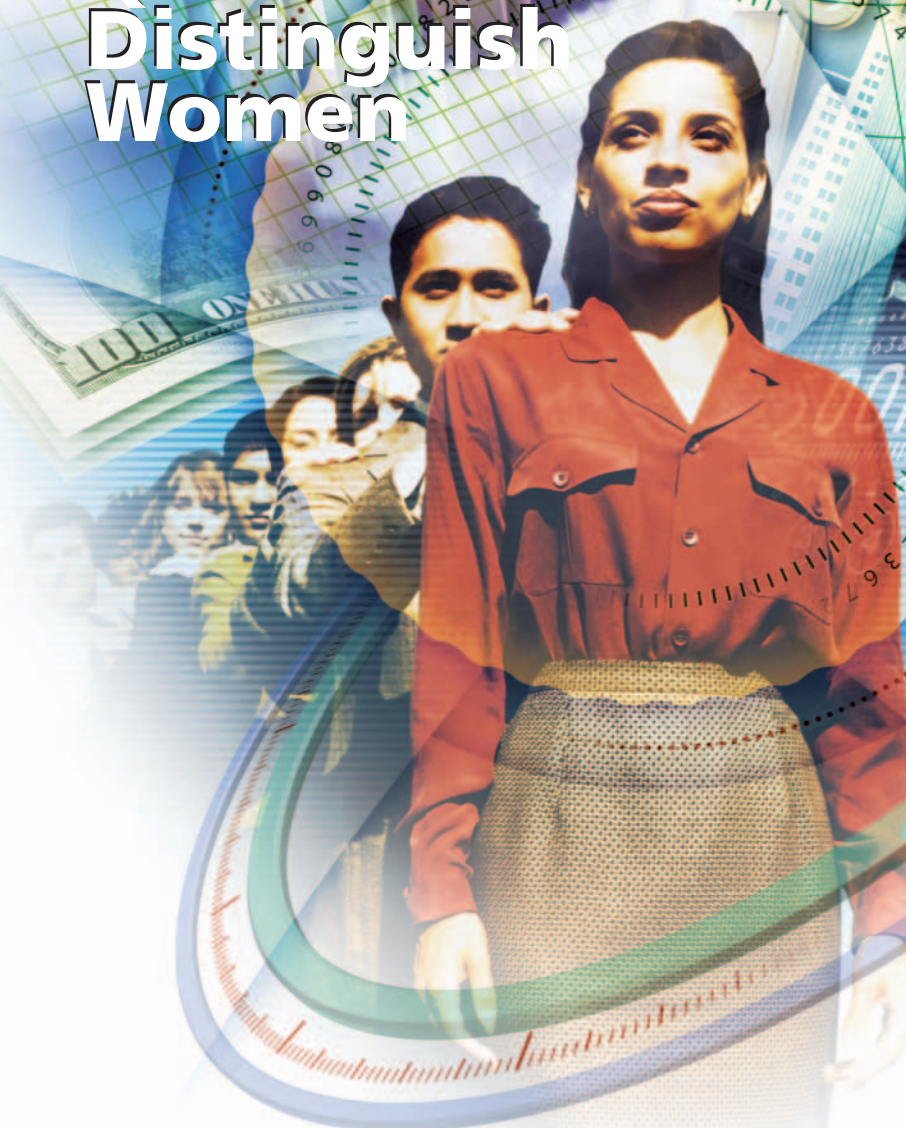
For Today's Global Business Leader

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## LEADERSHIP:

### Qualities That Distinguish Women



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When a woman leader, like Dun & Bradstreet Inc. CFO Sara Mathew, talks about her career-defining moments, her success is not what comes to mind first. Instead, she, like other women leaders who participated in a Caliper Corp. survey, says she views her defining moments as those times when she weathered unexpected storms that tested her severely.

In both a written survey and some follow-up interviews, women leaders shared — with enormous candor — details of failures and mistakes they've made, which could have derailed their careers. They also reflected on what they've learned through adversity, and how they carried on with more determination, focus and a clearer understanding of their own strengths.

What emerges is a sense that the best women leaders, inside and outside finance, have taken leadership to a new level. That's not to say that men don't excel at being leaders, or that a more hierarchical, traditional "male" style is passé. But the survey does suggest that a new paradigm is evolving, and that women are in the forefront of creating it.

Mathew recalls one of her defining moments, which came in a previous

position with another Fortune 500 company. She had decided to completely revamp the firm's investor relations program and make it one of the most enviable in the country. As part of the introduction for this pro-

gram, she coordinated the firm's first live webcast, to which hundreds of investors tuned in. But the webcast fell apart at the seams.

gram, she coordinated the firm's first live webcast, to which hundreds of investors tuned in. But the webcast fell apart at the seams. "I did a terrible job, as nearly every major financial publication in the country cited," laments Mathew. In a heartbeat, she says, everyone in the industry knew who she was, but not as she wanted to be known. "I could go on and on, citing what went wrong. It was years ago, and I can still remember every detail like it was yesterday," she says. Ultimately, however, she was able to turn the situation around, and

the investor relations program she succeeded in creating for the company several months later has turned out to be one of the best available.

Following the fiasco, she says her CEO was immediately firm about one thing: "that we would never do this, ever again." She knew she had to convince him that the company needed this program, needed to do it right and that the company's stock would eventually rebound.

Mathew says it probably took her a week or two to pick herself back up, shake off the dust and figure out what needed to be done differently. She knew her window of opportunity had closed, and she had to get it open again.

Time was finite, and not on her side.

"The most important time [to act] is immediately after something goes wrong," she says. "It's recognizing the situation and admitting that, yes, I made a colossal mistake." Then she went back and figured out exactly where, when and how things went wrong. She examined how she could have handled the situation differently, what resources she had within the organization and, most importantly, how to convince her CEO to ignore the media and the stockholders and give her a second chance.

## Leadership: Qualities That Distinguish Women

Results from a recent survey provide evidence that women bring distinct personality and motivational strengths to leadership roles — and do so in a style that is more conducive to today's diverse workplace.

“The first part was helping him understand how the world was changing around us, and that we couldn’t continue down our current path, regardless of how safe it felt,” Mathew argues. She let him know that the problem was not the strategy. “It was the poor execution — and I owned that, and my team and I could fix it.”

Finally, she expressed her unwavering belief in the project and how it could distinguish the company from its competitors. Mathew says she believes strongly that passion goes a long way in persuading people to try certain things, and its sheer strength brings others to your corner. In this situation, she believes her passion helped to open a door that had been closed and locked.

Ultimately, the qualities she demonstrated — belief in herself and her cause, her disappointment in its failure, her feeling the sting of rejection very personally, her ability to learn quickly from her mistakes, her persuasiveness, her open style of problem solving, her carrying on with a new-found confidence and her willingness to take risks — are those that helped her win.

Coincidentally, those qualities embody the findings of a year-long study that Princeton, N.J.-based management-consulting firm Caliper has recently conducted on the qualities that distinguish women leaders.

The study assessed personality qualities and conducted in-depth interviews with 60 women leaders from top companies in the United Kingdom and the U.S. Participants included women from such firms as Accenture, Bank of America, Deloitte & Touche LLP, Deutsche Bank, Dun & Bradstreet Inc., The Economist Group, Enterprise Rent-A-Car UK Ltd., Ernst & Young LLP, International Business Machines Corp., International Paper Co., JPMorgan Chase & Co., Johnson & Johnson Co. Inc., Kohler Co., Lloyds TSB Scotland, Molson Coors Brewing Co., Morgan Stanley and Pella Corp.

For comparison purposes, the female leaders in this study were matched to a representative sample of male leaders drawn from Caliper’s

extensive database, representing similar industries and job titles. While much research has been published comparing the leadership styles of women and men, this study specifically focused on the personality qualities and motivational factors that serve as the core to the underlying gender differences.

Essentially, key findings show that women leaders are more persuasive, have a stronger need to get things done and are more willing to take risks than their male counterparts. When women leaders combine these qualities with their openness, flexibility, empathy and strong interpersonal skills, a leadership style is created that is inclusive, consensus building and collaborative. It should be emphasized that the male leaders in this study were also exceptional in these areas, but the women set a new standard, as this is the first time such results can be attributed to women leaders.

Leadership, in Mathew’s view, is not defined simply by a position, but rather as the ability to set and articulate a vision; then to energize people to go after that vision. And to create results. “Leadership is about results,” she says.

The core of this type of leadership starts with having the qualities that can be identified and developed. It starts with courage, the willingness to take chances, the ability to motivate people, being willing to stand up for those people, knowing how to win frequently and lose gracefully and being able to learn from one’s mistakes and come back to win again.

These are all qualities of character — core components of what an individual is made of. Part of it comes naturally, and part of it is what leaders work on because they have certain dreams. Many of these qualities are those that male leaders are known to possess. Now, however, in assessing the qualities that distinguish women leaders, certain other qualities of character take on a unique clarity. Some of these are discussed in the following.

### **A Distinct Persuasive Style**

First and foremost, strong people skills possessed by women leaders

enable them to read situations accurately and take in information from all sides. This willingness to see all sides of a situation enhances their persuasive ability. They can zero in on someone’s objections or concerns, weigh them appropriately, address them effectively and incorporate them into the grander scheme of things, when appropriate.

Women leaders are able to do this because they genuinely understand and care about where others are coming from. This allows them to come at a subject from their audience’s perspective, so that the people they lead feel more understood, supported and valued. Jacqueline Dout, CFO and secretary to the board for Pella Corp. says that when she is trying to convince someone to go in a certain direction, she will assess their perspective, rather than push hers.

“First, I ask them what they see as the challenges and issues. Then I ask what direction they think we should pursue and why. Then, I’ll share with them what I feel about those aspects.” In that way, she says, “everyone is clear about the issues and why we ultimately take a certain path.”

Likewise, Susan Webb, executive vice president of JPMorgan Chase & Co., says the most important part of convincing someone is to make sure that they are fully educated on the subject and that they understand all the issues and ramifications. “Then, together, I like to think through all of the options available to us.”

Webb says she doesn’t like to go in to a decision-making scenario with a single option and insist, “This is what we need to do.” Rather, she believes persuading is as much about listening as it is about directing. “I want people to be open to different viewpoints, challenge their initial ideas and to be onboard with a solution that we’ve arrived at together,” she says.

This engaging style of persuasion possessed by women leaders differs from that of male leaders, who tend to start from their own point of view. Because they are not as flexible or sociable, male leaders will often force their point of view, convincing

through the strength of their position, rather than by actually persuading.

### **Rebounding and Learning From Setbacks**

These women leaders also demonstrate a unique approach toward dealing with disappointment, rejection or situations that don't work out their way. They feel the sting of being set back. They may even dwell on it, and tend to be a little self-critical. But then they will muster their assertiveness, shake off any negative feelings and learn what they need to do to carry on. They've expressed a phenomenon that is almost like a voice in the back of their heads saying, "I'll show you," which pushes them forward.

Essentially, women with talent and ambition to move ahead, yet who receive signals — whether subtle or overt — that others think they will not make the grade, use this technique, in a sense, to further fuel their ambition.

Webb relates a story of how a crucial mistake became a major learning point for her. She, like Mathew, says that while it happened over a decade ago, she remembers it vividly. She was presenting a new incentive plan to her boss and her peers. She and her team had been working on it for a long time and just assumed that everyone in the room was onboard with the plan and that the presentation was just a formality. She expected her boss and others to just listen to the final details, compliment her and her group for a job well done, sign off on the plan and execute it.

It soon became obvious, however, that she misread her audience. "They started saying things like, 'Did you think about this?' and 'We're not sure about this.' And my initial reaction was to get quite defensive. I was feeling a need to protect the project that my team had worked so hard on."

About halfway through that meeting, Webb decided she was going about this entirely wrong and losing the battle completely. At that point, she changed gears and began to listen, but it was too late. "I really had infuriated my boss at the time, and he actually didn't speak to me for a couple of

days following that meeting."

Subsequently, her boss spoke to a number of people, calmed down and invited her to have breakfast with him. He told her he was committed to her success, and believed she could go far with the company. But, he warned, "I think you've also got a major blind spot, and if you don't fix it, it could derail your career."

Webb describes the statement as an incredible way for him to start off a session of negative feedback. "All of a sudden, I was able to listen," she says. "Then he related that he had spoken with some of my colleagues about what happened and found this wasn't just one episode, but rather part of a pattern, which was something serious that I needed to work on. He then essentially said, 'You need to learn how to push me and others along with you and not pull us behind you.'"

She says she got it. "That was a turning point for me," says Webb. "Now, whenever I'm in situations like that, I've learned to present our project or findings in a much more open, inclusive style, honestly seeking out the opinions of others to help improve the final results." Another benefit, she says, is that this style has actually made work much more fun.

### **Inclusive, Team-Oriented Approach**

When it comes to decision-making and problem-solving, women leaders in the study demonstrated an inclusive, team-building leadership style. They were genuinely interested in hearing all points of view, then making the best possible decision, and the final decision did not necessarily have to be their initial point of view. They were able to read situations accurately, take in information from all sides and then make the most informed decision possible.

This difference in style between men and women starts with listening. The women leaders are not just listening to form an answer, but really listening, learning, reflecting, then implementing a plan that incorporates the best of everyone's ideas.

This inclusive style of leadership is based on open lines of communica-

tion, according to Susan Rice, CEO of Lloyds TSB Scotland. "To learn, you have to keep asking," says Rice, who says she is always asking questions. "The people I work with will say the process of me asking them questions helps to clarify their own thinking and they actually come out a little sharper. That takes a lot of trust." She sees her job as setting a clear strategy, asking the right questions and encouraging managers to be the experts in their business.

Because women leaders are more willing to share information, they will also talk decisions through with many more people than their male counterparts. For example, Pella's Dout says she spends approximately 40 percent of her time motivating, challenging and coaching people. "As a leader, I believe the biggest challenge is to make sure people are motivated, involved and contributing, because that diversity of thought is what brings value to an organization and helps make it successful."

### **A Willingness to Take Risks**

One of the most surprising findings from the study is that women leaders are more likely to push back if they are overly bound by regulations and rules, and they will engage in more risk-taking than male counterparts. Women leaders are venturesome and less interested in what "has been" than in what "can be." They will run the risk of occasionally being wrong in order to get things done. And with their fine abstract reasoning skills, they will learn from their mistakes and carry on.

Several of the women pointed to taking on assignments that nobody else wanted, and that succeeding in those high-risk situations helped to catapult their careers. Indeed, many women in the study say they took on risky assignments early in their careers to gain recognition.

Webb says in 1994 she was asked to take on the role of what was called "Alternative Delivery." She was then in the branch banking system, and something called the "Internet" was about to happen.

"We didn't quite know what it was, but we thought the branches were essentially going to go away. What was critical was to build the alternative channels that customers would use for doing business with us." So she was placed in charge of this new delivery system, which has turned out to be a perfect training ground. It was up to her to figure out what she needed — in terms of staff and equipment — and how to make it happen. A year later, she was recognized for her success and placed in charge of a major operating group.

#### **Creating a New Leadership Style?**

So, are women creating a new style of leadership? The answer may be "yes."

The study provides preliminary evidence that women bring distinct personality and motivational strengths to leadership.

Jeannette Lichner, managing partner of Bank of America in the U.K., says, "The strong leadership profile exhibited by these women executives points to the future. The female view that we strengthen ourselves by strengthening others is re-defining leadership," she argues. These women leaders share a strong profile. They are assertive, persuasive, empathic, willing to take risks, outgoing, flexible and have a need to get things done.

These personality qualities combine to create a leadership profile that, one could easily argue, is much

more conducive to today's diverse workplace, where information is shared freely, collaboration is vital and teamwork distinguishes the best companies. And, while these women may be creating a new paradigm of leadership, Dun & Bradstreet's Mathew believes she has "only scratched the surface of what true leadership really means."

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