

Career boosters



Women can energize their career with these tips from Denise Knutson, senior consultant at the HS Group in Green Bay and Appleton:

Get to know people. "I don't think any of us do enough networking both inside and outside the company," Knutson says. "Build a solid group of people who are good resources."

Know your coworkers' interests. Engage people in conversation by being knowledgeable about things they enjoy. On a business trip Knutson knew she would need to make small talk with men who liked hockey, so she kept up with the sport. "Maybe I didn't become a hockey fan, but knew when the Stanley Cup was going on," she says.

Network wisely. "Be the person asking good questions rather than the person trying to get to know everybody," she adds. "If you're promoted, you want people across the organization to say that makes sense. They know, respect you and have interaction with you." It helps to be comfortable with people from all levels of the organization. "I often see women align themselves with other women who may be administrative," she says. "Maybe one day sit with an administrator and other days sit with a senior level contributor. Mix it up a little bit."

Embrace womanhood. "Don't be afraid to be female," Knutson says. "It doesn't work to try to act like one of the guys." Women tend to be more compassionate and have strong interpersonal skills, which bring balance to a management team or organization. "Understand that without trying to be everybody's big sister or mom," she notes.

Be supportive. "One of the worst enemies women have is other women more so than men," Knutson notes. "Women don't help each other enough. Reach out to other women to help them up the organization."

Be visible. Pursue opportunities that will get noticed, taking on projects that will be presented to the executive committee. "Women are more likely to assume that if they do good work those things will come," she says. "That may or may not happen."

Be willing to learn. Know about your company's business as well as your specialty. An accountant should also understand industry trends, and can seek out information from others in the company. "Be a sponge," Knutson says. "It can be as simple as sitting with someone in the cafeteria and asking them more about their job."

Don't isolate yourself. Women trying to balance career and family may unconsciously tune out coworkers in an effort to get their work done on time so family obligations can be met. Eating lunch at her desk, for example, limits a woman's ability to network. "I've worked with a number of women who were great performers and got their work done, but maybe sometimes to their own career detriment," Knutson says.

Understand politics. Be aware of an organization's unwritten rules and issues between departments. "There may be hidden agendas and almost competition between departments," Knutson says. "You want to be careful not to be pulled onto a side. You want to understand the dynamics that could work for you or against you, but keep the whole organization in mind."

Denise Knutson is a senior consultant in the career transition field.

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