

WOMEN & POWER

What I wish I knew then: 11 tips for success from powerful female executives

They offer some of their best advice for the next generation of women leaders.

By **Alison Goldman** , Updated November 8, 2019, 9:45 a.m.



Clockwise from top left: Laurie Leshin, president of WPI; Myechia Minter-Jordan, former CEO of The Dimock Center; Mindy S. Lubber, CEO of Ceres; and Sheila Lirio Marcelo, founder of Care.com. LESHIN BY MATTHEW BURGOS FOR WPI; MINTER-JORDAN BY RENEE DEKONA; LUBBER FROM SKOLL FOUNDATION; AND LIRIO MARCELO FROM CARE.COM

CHRISTINA SEVERIN

President and CEO of Community Care Cooperative

Learn from every example (even the bad ones).

“In many ways, every boss that I had was enormously influential on me for what they did well or what they didn’t do well. And some of the stuff was technical, like the way they could work with data. Some of it was ways not to have a conversation; some of it was ways to have a conversation. Some of it was just observing what an enormous heart many people had or how much they had my back; how they were [willing and] not willing to be vulnerable; ways that they supported diversity and inclusion in the workplace, or didn’t.”

MYECHIA MINTER-JORDAN

Former president and CEO of The Dimock Center, now executive vice president and chief impact officer for DentaQuest

If you’re at the table, you’re supposed to be there. Remember that.

“Never question whether or not you are supposed to be in a room or at a table in a place where you’re contributing to decision making. There were so many times where I recognized that if I wasn’t at a table and I wasn’t representing the underserved, that the decisions made may have gone in a completely different direction. Leveraging and using your voice to represent those who may not have the opportunity to be in that room is really important.”

[> FOR MORE: Check out this year’s list of the Top 100 Women-Led Businesses in Massachusetts](#)

LISA RHODES

President and chief merchant of Rue Gilt Groupe

Focus on the work, not the title.

“My aspiration in life was to be a CEO, and I had that role, and I did not like that role. I had a target, I had a wish, I had a dream, and it was about a title. The moral of the story is, know where you can have the greatest impact. That’s about passion, that’s about [being] who you want to be. Be confident in the place that you’re best. I add more value to the company in the role I am in today than I think I would in a different role. I learn every day.”

JANE KAPLAN PECK

Owner and COO of Kaplan Construction

Be your own champion.

“One time [when I was just starting out], a female architect — I was at her office — said, ‘Jane, can you get coffee for everybody?’ And I looked around, and I said yes. And I still, to this day, wish I hadn’t. Because no, that wasn’t my role. I was there to help with the meeting. I know nobody would have ever asked a man to do that. I think at the age of 22, it’s hard to realize that you have the right to [advocate for yourself]. “

[> MORE: Six things successful female entrepreneurs do](#)

CHRISTINE LIN

President and CEO of Cambridge Network

Take moments to stop and give yourself credit.

“I think it’s important that we memorize happy moments. We have to give ourselves credit for things we have achieved, and [for when] we went above and beyond. Record

those memories in a way that will fuel [your] energy in down times. When times are difficult, bring yourself to those happy and encouraging moments. Say, ‘Hey, I did that once. I can do this again. I can do it even better.’ ”



From left: Jane Kaplan Peck, owner and COO of Kaplan Construction; Lisa Rhodes, president and chief merchant of Rue Gilt Groupe; and Christina Severin, president and CEO of Community Care Cooperative. KAPLAN PECK BY ROBYN IVY; RHODES FROM RUE GILT GROUPE; AND SEVERIN BY NICK SOKOLOFF

MINDY S. LUBBER

CEO and president of Ceres

Don't worry so much about making the wrong choice.

“It used to worry me that I might make the wrong decision. I'm less worried about that now. People need to take risks in the workplace — calculated risks, thoughtful risks, or even just do your best in an imperfect information world. I don't want anybody to think that if they make the wrong decision, they failed. Sometimes you make the wrong decision. Own it, fix it, be honorable about it, and that's OK, too.”

DOROTHY A. SAVARESE

Chairman and CEO of Cape Cod 5

Put your game face on for salary negotiations.

“My father always said to me, ‘A salary is a company’s perception of what you’re worth.’ And one of the things that I know, statistically speaking, is women tend to not negotiate on salary. So I ask women to think of business as a sport because you take it a little less personally when it gets to salary negotiation. Think: Here are my qualifications. Here’s the position. What should a person — don’t think of it as you — get paid? Think of [a company’s] offer as an opening offer. You’re not going to hurt their feelings by saying, ‘It seems like, from my perspective, it should be X. Would you consider that instead?’ ”

[> MORE: Massachusetts isn’t always as progressive as it seems. Our female leaders are fighting to change that.](#)

SHEILA LIRIO MARCELO

Founder, chairwoman, and CEO of Care.com

Redefine work-life balance.

“Interviewing for my first jobs out of college, I was afraid to share that I was a young mother. I bought into the notion that I’d be seen as less committed than other candidates, that I wouldn’t be considered for the tough assignments, that work and life were two separate ledgers in zero-sum competition with each other. But that’s not how life works. I’m not being my authentic self if I can’t bring my whole self to work. Kids get sick at school and need to be picked up early, and clients sometimes have an urgent question that can’t wait until Monday. I focus on integration and a purpose-driven life, because both work and life deserve the best version of ourselves.”



Clockwise from top left: Dorothy A. Savarese, chairman and CEO of Cape Cod 5; Lyndia Downie, president and executive director of Pine Street Inn; Christine Lin, president and CEO of Cambridge Network; and Lisa A. Brothers, chairman and CEO of Nitsch Engineering. SAVARESE BY DAN CUTRONA; DOWNIE BY JOHN RICH PHOTOGRAPHY; LIN FROM LIN; AND BROTHERS BY FRANK MONKIEWICZ PHOTOGRAPHY

LAURIE LESHIN

President of Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Don't just find a mentor — build a mentorship network.

“When I was 19 years old and I was interested in a summer internship at NASA, I cold-called one of the only women full professors in astronomy. Not only did she talk to me about it, she picked up the phone and called the person who was running the program. When I was a young faculty member, one professor in our department could teach anybody anything, so every time before I would go stand up in front of my 225-student intro geology class, I would go see him. But he wasn't going to help me on the research grant side because he didn't really do that, so I had another mentor [for] that.”

LISA A. BROTHERS

Chairman and CEO of Nitsch Engineering

Create your own opportunities.

“When [Nitsch Engineering founding principal] Judy Nitsch announced she was going to start her own company, I was 26 years old, and I followed her into her office and said, ‘Not without me.’ Judy had a non-solicitation [agreement] with her partners. If I hadn’t approached her, as much as she wanted me to be with the new company, she never would have approached me. Women, especially in a male-dominated field, sometimes think that if they just work really hard, they’ll get noticed and they’ll get promoted. You have to step forward.”

LYNDIA DOWNIE

President and executive director of Pine Street Inn

Go ahead and change your plans.

“When I first came to Pine Street, I had applied to law school, [so] I applied for a six-month job for the winter. At the end of that six months, the woman who hired me asked if I wanted to stay. And I thought, I will defer law school and stay for one more year. If you had said to me when I first came here I’d still be here, I would have said, ‘Absolutely not. I have another plan in mind.’ But you sometimes just have to be opportunistic about what’s in front of you and go with your heart.”

Note: Interviews have been edited and condensed.

Alison Goldman is freelance writer in Chicago. Send comments to magazine@globe.com.

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