

“creative captions”

There is never a void of ambitious, go-getting women in South Jersey. In fact, we often devote features and sections of certain issues to highlight these women. We are inspired by these female professionals because they seem to do everything with ease—caring for family, expediting executive tasks, managing companies, juggling social calendars. But even we know that some women find it difficult when they can't do everything—and everything perfectly (a.k.a. “The Superwoman Syndrome”). We reached out to one of our recently highlighted Women in Business execs, Sandy Spadaro, and asked for some pointers on how we can help women lose the superhero capes and keep their cool in the boardroom and in life. Sandy discusses the book to which she recently contributed, “Overcoming The Superwoman Syndrome.” For the overextended professional woman, you might as well call it the bible.

— Interviewed by Lara Webb-Barrett

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How do you think Superwoman Syndrome was born?

The Superwoman Syndrome is born within each and every one of us! Even during early times when “gathering” (a.k.a. “work”) and childbearing (a.k.a. “domestic work”) were prominent, we were responsible for multiple facets of our existence. This hasn't changed; we've simply added more to our plates. The idea of the book content was born from hours, months and years of speaking with women who suffer similar challenges and realizing that, in sharing our coping methods, we might be able to promote solutions.

Do you think it is the individual or society that exacerbates the Superwoman Syndrome?

As women, we learn to be super women from both our innate female strengths and from the examples of those around us. We have natural capabilities to take on pain, endurance and challenges. Society has been responsible for widening the role we might each potentially play. As voters, workers, managers, CEOs, entrepreneurs, spouses, mothers, caregivers, et cetera, there is no limit to the areas we can introduce into our lives. The challenge then becomes balancing it all in an effective manner (which means different things to different women) such that our lives are still providing us with joy, love and comfort.

In your section of “The Superwoman Syndrome,” you discuss why communication is so important for women in the workplace—when done correctly. Explain what makes us poor communicators at times.

I am very adamant about the avoidance of “male-bashing.” That's not what our differences are about. Honestly. However, it needs to be said, with the purpose of comparison, that in the workplace a male professional's gesture, reaction or simple change of voice pattern can be seen as an acceptable act of aggression and strength. For the female counterpart, that very same reaction or change of voice may be dismissed as either emotional, volatile or unstable. We have the added challenge of portraying ourselves with assertion and level-headedness, while maintaining the common practices of effective communication.

When having a conversation, what is the importance of non-verbal communication?

Non-verbal cues (tonality, gestures, physical contact and pace of speech) can often lend different meaning to the message one is attempting to relay. Women have the added burden of protecting reputation along with building

character and rapport. Utilizing every avenue of skill available to us means mastering the use of these non-verbal cues to ensure that our recipients are getting the messages we want for them to receive, with little or no room for misunderstanding.

Women are often generalized as being too emotional. However, how can a woman's emotional capacity help her to make decisions in the workplace?

The myth that women are “too” emotional downplays the very valuable positive of having heightened emotions. The fact is emotion can be utilized in a controlled manner to guide us with natural instinct, sensitivity, trust and a sense of honesty and compassion in our messages. The practice of keeping “volatile” emotions (jealousy, anger, lack of confidence) in check is a skill that needs continual attention.

You cite the following quote from Thayer White in your section: “The average two-year-old is a great beacon for emotional health, displaying a full range of emotions, and moving beyond them once they are expressed.” Explain the significance of this quote.

I love this quote because it reminds us that our methods of communication to a young individual are distinctively different than those we use on adults, peers and associates. We often assume that when someone doesn't understand us, stating the same in perhaps a louder voice or emphasis on different syllables will magically help them get our point. The fact is, as a two-year-old would, that recipient needs for you to seek other words in another phrase in order to understand your message the way you intend it. Once that understanding has been achieved, effective communication can commence without the emotion and baggage that comes from a miscommunication.

How can you effectively communicate electronically even though you are lacking the physical connection?

Emailing has indeed become a quick and easy way to communicate in both personal and professional areas, but can be so detrimental if used carelessly. Because emails lack non-verbal cues, tone of

voice and emotion, it's up to the sender to write clearly and directly without using ambiguous terms. Synonyms and acronyms need be specific to the message intended. Always know thy receiver! Some folks don't mind the “LOLs” and the smiley-faces if they know you well enough to “hear” your voice and giggle in the right places. However, in business transactions, when one never knows who the message will be forwarded to, the best idea is to keep it neat and clean with verbiage that applies directly to the topic, harbors no judgment and promotes a good reputation.

How have good communication skills worked in your specific job and line of work?

Communication has become a way of life for me. Aside from building my own personal relationships, I continually build my business on providing services that “communicate” messages. Whether in my professional training seminars, my published articles or book projects, the point I keep in mind is to relay to the audience a message that they can understand and in turn use for their own growth and benefit. The knowledge in my own head won't help anyone but me if I don't do my best to communicate it effectively...and frankly, it's no fun keeping it all to myself! ■

