

Get Out of Your Own Way

*Essential Strengths and Strategies for Women
Entrepreneurs Who Want to Grow Their Business*

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Foreword

A Tribute to Women Business Owners

Not long ago, my city endured one of the worst ice storms in its history. Fully one-third of the city was without power. We had tree limbs falling on roofs, on cars and blocking streets. Schools and state offices closed, icy roads caused tragic accidents and one school burned to the ground. The governor declared a state of emergency.

Due to the dangerous weather, I had to reschedule one of our EWF International Forum meetings. (Our peer advisory groups are called Forums and our members -- women business owners -- meet monthly to support one another with strategy, problem solving and accountability). I called each of the twelve members to discuss new dates.

Guess where I found most of them?

Eleven out of twelve were at work! Only one was home, because she has three small children and school was cancelled. Some had no electrical power at their homes; some had no power at their office and were working by candlelight, bundled up in quilts!

Apart from being concerned for their safety, I have to say I was both amused and inspired.

The situation made profoundly clear to me the mentality of the female business owner: simply put, we have work to do and the show must go on. We have clients who need us, promises to keep, and employees who depend on us. While school children celebrate an ice storm as an unexpected gift of a day off, the business owner knows from a place deep within that there is work to be done, and if they don't do it, no one else will.

Some of our members run businesses that must operate, regardless of weather, 365 days a year, twenty-four hours a day. During the storm, I talked with Umi Chahal, owner of Choice Home Health and Choice Hospice. Though the power at her office went out, the business did not miss a beat. *“We saw every patient we could get to,”* she told me. *“Our first priority is patient care and we can’t let the weather stop us.”*

Nancy Hyde owns a CPA firm. Her clients had payroll and tax deadlines to meet. *“We have to be there for them,”* she said. *“We have to get these computers up and get to work.”* She quickly borrowed two generators and bought another, which was enough power to run the heat, the lights, and ten computers.

I’m convinced that women entrepreneurs share some sort of common DNA, despite their diverse backgrounds, personality types and skills. Inherent in this DNA is what people in the horse industry call “heart.” Ask thoroughbred breeders and they’ll tell you that a horse with heart has this rare combination of energy and courage. It won’t give up, won’t quit, no matter what the challenge. Heart has nothing to do with the size, beauty or pedigree of the horse. It’s an internal quality -- a generosity of spirit that compels it to keep trying, to master the challenge no matter how much effort it takes.

Women business owners have heart.

I believe business owners (male or female) don’t get enough credit or validation for the courage it takes to be in their role. We take for granted the tremendous pressure an owner feels for being responsible for the livelihoods of their employees and being responsible for the bottom line. The women entrepreneurs I know are not “greedy capitalists,” thinking only of their own profits or how to get rich. They are driven by a genuine passion that even they cannot always articulate. They are determined to do an excellent job at whatever they do. They have a work ethic that is unmatched.

We underestimate the diversity of expertise a business owner needs – they have to be competent at an incredible variety of skills. Unlike large corporations that have specialized departments to handle specific responsibilities, women business owners

have to be knowledgeable about everything from accounting to employment law, from management to marketing, from technology to teamwork, from website design to strategic planning.

You rarely see women business owners in the pages of your newspaper or featured in television interviews. They humbly go about their daily lives, putting one foot in front of the other, doing the best they can to take care of their families, their customers and their employees, not looking for recognition or accolades.

And yet, as hard as women entrepreneurs work, the hard truth is that most of them do not achieve financial success equal to men. Setting aside the gender comparison, they do not achieve the growth they dream of, or the financial success they deserve.

I wrote this book to help close that gap. The strengths women entrepreneurs bring to their work can work against them. We can be our own worst enemies. We have to learn how to get out of our own way first, so that we can learn and implement the business skills that will allow us to grow. We have to transition from our vocational roles (graphic designers, CPA's, nurses, trainers, dog-sitters, web designers and a whole slew of other technical professions that led us to owning a business) to becoming businesswomen. Becoming CEO's of our own companies.

This year marks fifteen years of EWF International helping women business owners grow and succeed while the Alpha Mare Academy introduced online training, designed to make learning more affordable and more accessible for women entrepreneurs around the globe. Both services demonstrate my commitment to strengthen and support women business owners.

I hope you'll join me in appreciating and honoring every woman entrepreneur you know for the unsung contribution she makes to her family, to her community and to our economy.

For those of you who are women business owners and leaders, this book is a genuine tribute to you. My hope is that this will be your best year ever!

Darci Harris

The Facts

The Center for Women's Business Research reports:

- 8.3 million firms are owned by women (50% or more), employing more than 7.7 million people, and generating \$1.3 trillion in revenue as of 2012.
- Women-owned firms (50% or more) account for 40% of all privately held firms.

According to the Department of Commerce report:

- From 1997 to 2007, the number of women-owned businesses grew by 44%, twice as fast as men-owned firms.
- Women-owned firms added roughly 500,000 jobs while other privately-held firms lost jobs.

That's the good news...now for the other statistics:

- Only one in five firms with revenue of \$1 million or more is woman-owned
- 1.8% of all women-owned firms have revenues of \$1 million or more, compared with 6.3 % of men-owned firms
- While the number of women-owned firms continues to grow in number at rates exceeding the national average, they are not moving along the growth continuum.
- Only 13% of women-owned businesses generate more than \$100,000 per year in sales, compared with 30% of businesses owned by men.
- In 2007, the sales of the average women-owned business were only \$153,000, a quarter of the \$612,000 of the average business owned by men.
- Self-employed women earn only 55% of what self-employed men earn.

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About the Author

Part I

Strengthen Yourself First

“I think self-awareness is probably the most important thing towards being a champion.”

Billie Jean King

When I first began consulting and coaching with women entrepreneurs, I naively thought that it was simply a matter of teaching women business principles, tools and skills.

I was wrong.

As the months and years went by, I realized that women could learn the latest, greatest business ideas and concepts, yet some were unable to apply what they learned. They knew in their heads what to do, but action didn't follow information.

That's when I realized that I could teach all the business skills I could put my hands on, but if women were going to achieve their own personal goals and dreams, we'd have to focus on strengthening the woman first.

Our self-beliefs shape our leadership style and our ambitions. What holds women entrepreneurs back is not lack of skills. It's lack of confidence. This connection is how I help women rethink how they lead. I help women entrepreneurs see themselves so they can grow their business.

Finding strength and purpose is a powerful turning point. It starts with simple “aha's” & grows with concrete actions. This knowledge helps women stand in their strength first, then take real forward steps in their business.

There is an immeasurable depth of spirit that comes from knowing who you are, what you believe in, what you love and what your life is about.

The most important investment you can make is in yourself. Grow yourself. Grow your business.

Chapter 1

Power: Embracing the alpha mare

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”

Alice Walker



My experience with horses led me to completely rethink my perceptions of power. I’ve asked many women what they think about the word power, and most of the time, their reaction to the word is uncomfortable at best, and often negative.

Many women don’t want the word power to be associated with them. Women want to be seen as compassionate, fair, understanding. We are the “helpers” of the world. For many women, to think about power seems a bit unfeminine. Or worse, crass, as though power is associated only with personal, selfish or material gain.

It’s almost offensive. Many women have an aversion to power or a fear of power.

I’ve seen women walking on eggshells with their staff, or nearly held hostage by employees, fearful of articulating expectations or accountability. I’ve seen women make excuses for employees who do not live up to expectations, don’t produce enough, or simply do mediocre work while the company suffers and the bar gets lowered for everyone on the team.

When we notice issues of power in movies, literature, television, or in the news, the dynamics of power are dramatized or heightened, and only noticed because power is overused, misused or abused. When power is appropriately used, it's often invisible.

But if power is bad, then what explains our reaction to the word powerless? Think about the last time you felt powerless. It might have been as simple as being caught in heavy traffic on the way to an appointment, and knowing you will be late. It may have been as critical as finding out a dear friend has cancer, and feeling completely helpless. Regardless of the level of significance, feeling powerless doesn't feel good. Does anyone aspire to be powerless?

As women we sometimes struggle with our own legitimate power. We avoid power or feel averse to embracing a powerful role. Like a mouse caught in the sunlight, we shrink back into the woodwork, hoping we won't be seen. We end up giving away our power and we may not even realize it.

Take a look at these six common ways women avoid or give away power. Any of these apply to you? (I know I have my personal favorites!)

1) GOSSIP: Let's get the one that's the hardest to face out of the way first. We give away our power when we talk about others, especially when we criticize or talk trash about other women. Maybe it's because I've worked with women in small groups, where it is part of the culture and expectations to be supportive of one another, that this pains me so much. When we gossip or criticize other women, we do nothing other than contribute to the ugly stereotype that "too much estrogen" is the source of workplace problems and catfights.

There is nothing we can say about another woman that will make her look as bad as we look when we talk trash or gossip about her. If you're wondering what qualifies as gossip, one checkpoint is to ask yourself, "*Would the woman I'm talking about be completely comfortable with me sharing this information with*

others?" Or, "Would I be saying the same thing about this woman if she were standing here listening to me?"

Perhaps Madeline Albright says it best: *"There is a special place in hell for women who don't help other women."*

2) UNCLEAR EXPECTATIONS, LIMITS OR BOUNDARIES: As women, we want to be seen as understanding, compassionate and fair.

Sometimes, above all else, *we want to be liked*. And because we want to be liked, we can be timid about saying clearly what we expect. We don't want to risk being labeled as demanding, controlling or hard to please. We most definitely don't want to be seen as that awful "B" word (which gets tossed around pretty lightly now). Underneath, *we're afraid of what others might think of us*.

Women tolerate or go along with inappropriate behavior because they are afraid to rock the boat. To define boundaries brings the fear of confrontation.

In the workplace, not having boundaries shows up as not making expectations clear and not holding people accountable. I've seen women hire people without clearly defined job descriptions and without being up front about what they expect new employee to accomplish.

It's understandable that we want to be liked. We get into trouble when that desire to be liked causes us to avoid or abdicate our appropriate and legitimate power out of fear of what others might think or say. When we abdicate our power we create a vacuum of leadership, without recognizing that our team members and staff would respect a more assertive, confident position.

When we give away appropriate, legitimate power, we inadvertently do more harm than good.

3) BEING A VICTIM OR AVOIDING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR CHOICES: I know a woman who hates her job. She's a workers' comp attorney, and I can imagine that's one of the most unpleasant jobs a person can have. Her work is always adversarial. People arguing over everything; people who try to scam the system; people who are legitimately hurt being denied benefits. She's extremely bright and could be successful in so many other situations.

But she won't pursue other options. There's always an excuse. She likes how much money she makes and thinks she can't replace her current compensation. She's not trained to do anything else. She's too busy to explore other options. She just keeps complaining. She sees herself as a victim and is stuck. She has an education that I'd give my right arm for: a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and a law degree. But she's giving away her power, by believing she has no choice.

When you behave as if you have no choice, you become a victim. It's true; sometimes all of your choices look unpleasant. Sometimes you really are between a rock and a hard place. But you *always* have a choice. When you find yourself saying, "*What else could I do?*" or "*I didn't have a choice?*" or pointing fingers or blaming others, you're on your way to being a victim. And that means you have given away your power.

4) NOT LEARNING: It takes a tremendous breadth of skills and knowledge to run a business. You have to know at least a little bit about a lot of things. Small

business owners wear a bunch of different hats. I often see women who don't understand their own financials, yet hear them say, *"I just don't like numbers."* Or their sales are flat, and they say, *"I really don't like selling"* but pass up workshop opportunities to learn. No matter what your profession, technology skills are essential now.

And what about current events? How often have you heard (or said!), *"I don't listen to the news; it's just too negative and depressing."*? When we don't educate ourselves about current events and important policy issues, we end up taking on the opinions and values of others. We don't create our own opinions; we just become sponges for others' opinions, without gathering information ourselves. Or we end up living with laws (or the absence of laws!) or policies that affect our quality of life. Knowledge is power. Refusing to learn is giving away your power.

5) NOT BEING AUTHENTIC: Nothing damages trust more than lack of authenticity. And sadly, there's a long list of ways we deny our own authenticity. We go along to get along. We don't voice our opinions. We speak sweetly when we're really seething with legitimate anger because nice girls don't get mad. We allow social pressures to dictate what organizations we join, even if we don't enjoy them. We engage in people pleasing, saying Yes when we really wanted to say No. We end up in unsatisfying professions because of family or parental influence. In short, we settle for someone else's version of how we live.

6) CHARGING TOO LITTLE: One of the primary factors contributing to the fact that self-employed women earn 55¢ on the dollar compared to men is that they underprice their services and products. I've seen it time after time, especially in service firms (and been guilty of this myself!). Often what leads women to

charging below market prices is lack of confidence or low expectations. Sometimes the cause is noble – women often bring an inherent sense of compassion and natural gift for helping into their work. We root for the underdog. Yet sooner or later, shortchanging yourself on a regular basis leads to resentment and anger. So the “helping” strategy backfires and you just end up cynical and cranky (and strapped for cash!).

I think fear is the core of all these ways we give away our power. We may not feel comfortable or capable of exerting authority. Maybe we don't feel we deserve to. Sometimes we just don't want to rock the boat.

To get more comfortable with your own legitimate power, look to the natural world. In every herd of horses, there is a dominant horse, the horse recognized to be “in charge.” This horse is always a mare, commonly called the “alpha mare.” Her duty is to tend to the safety and well being of the entire herd, to signal the entire herd when to move, sleep, eat, drink, or run for safety. She frequently disciplines unruly youngsters, teaching them respectful behavior. The alpha mare has a great responsibility and the herd depends on her to make wise choices and enforce reasonable rules. The entire herd looks to her for leadership, structure and discipline.

Just imagine a herd of horses grazing peacefully in a pasture. Now picture that alpha mare. She smells a coyote in the wind and knows she'd better signal the herd to run. But she hesitates, and wonders, *“They are all munching so happily. I hate to interrupt their dinner. Will they be mad at me?”* Pretty ridiculous, isn't it. I doubt that alpha mares are squirming over their very legitimate power, wondering what the other horses think of them, feeling uncomfortable, or trying to avoid or give away their power. Through the laws of nature they step comfortably into their roles as alpha mares. If they do not lead with confident, legitimate power, their herd can suffer grave consequences.

For another equine example of appropriate power, look at women equestrians. Pair up a 125-pound woman with a 1,200-pound horse and the woman's appropriate

use of power becomes critical. The rider must be in charge or serious injury can result. Being in charge does not mean being abusive, cruel or domineering. In fact, it means just the opposite. Through the gentle, consistent use of boundaries, alignment, timing, and learning to communicate in the horses' language, a woman's power can be used to direct and channel the horse's energy into a magnificent display of teamwork, cooperation and athletic ability.

How can we be more like the wise alpha mares?

We can begin with accepting and embracing our own personal power as a gift, a talent and an honor. We can shift our perception of power from negative to positive, seeing our ability to use power for good, and letting go of the fear of what others think of us.

Think about the power of Rosa Parks who, in making her decision to not move to the back of the bus, changed the course of the world. Think about the power of Oprah Winfrey to inspire women to live their dreams. Think about the power of Malala Yousafzai, the fourteen year old girl who was shot in the head by the Taliban because she spoke out against their campaign to prevent girls from going to school. Yet she recovered and continues her campaign. She did not give in to fear.

As business leaders, our power can be used for noble purposes as well! We have the power to create jobs, to facilitate teamwork, to inspire, to foster creativity, to improve our communities. We have the power to help our employees learn and grow, to discover their talents and pursue their dreams. We have the power to influence others, to lead others to achieve what they might not accomplish otherwise.

Maybe we can all agree on just one principle: power isn't bad -- abuse of power is. It's quite an honor to be the alpha mare. How can we embrace that power and use our power for good?