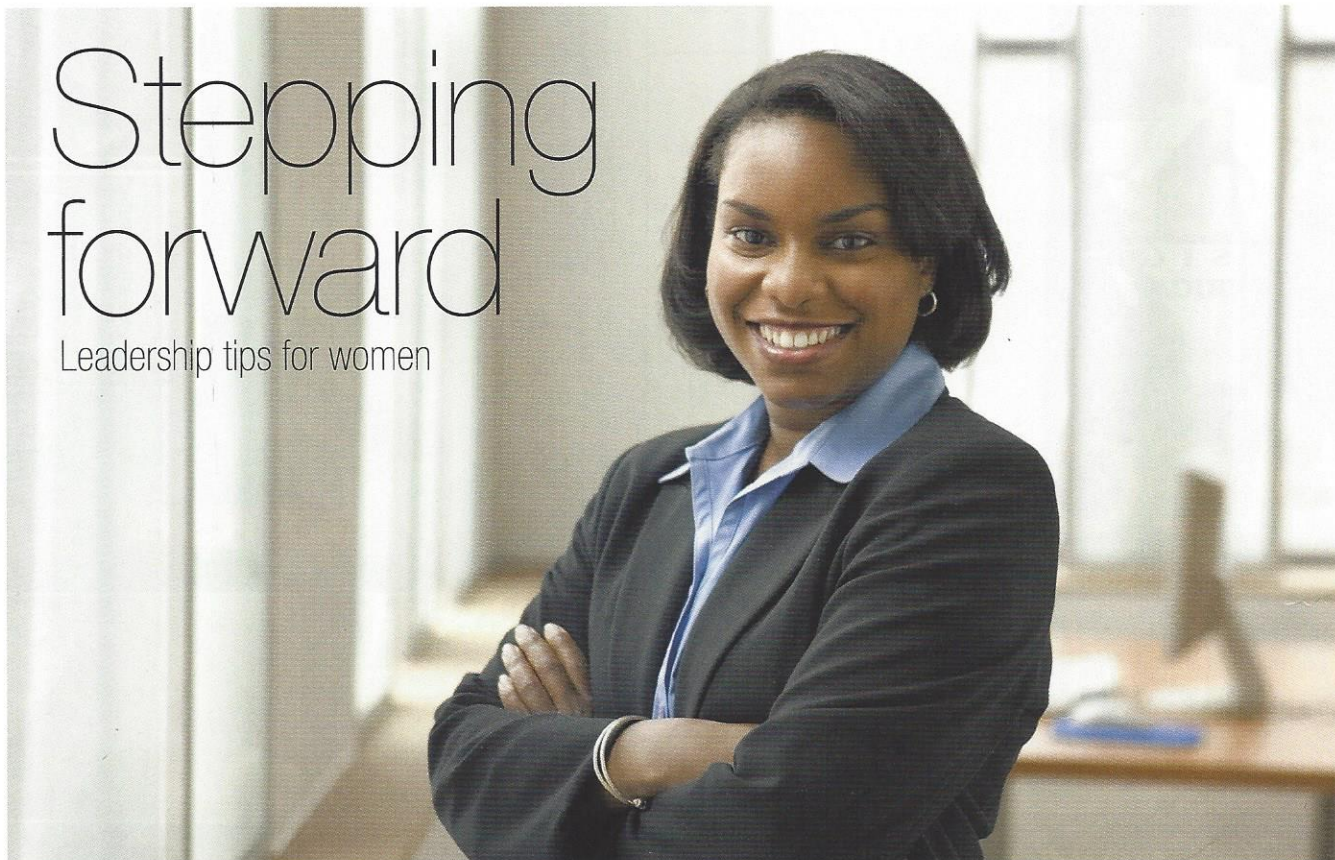


Stepping forward

Leadership tips for women



How does an executive woman on the move cope with a demanding lifestyle?

women in leadership roles have many competing demands impacting on them constantly. They sort out the washing, listen to the children, stack dishes, make urgent business calls, brush their hair, smear on lipstick and yet calmly walk into the boardroom minutes later. Female leaders often take challenges like this in their stride.

Seeing the bright side and treating problems as challenges are just some of the characteristics that enable female leaders to achieve remarkably. Juggling our business and personal lives prepares us for the 'war zones' we often face. And if we acknowledge that every one of us is a leader in at least one aspect of our lives, we have a great deal to be proud of.

As an executive coach, I find that women (and men!) benefit from simple relevant practices and I'm going to share two tips with you.

Tip 1 Breathing practice

This simple practice works well if applied consistently. All it takes is commitment to doing the practice every day at roughly the same time for at least three weeks. If done properly, this three-minute practice can change your life. It becomes a tool which you can use in the moment.

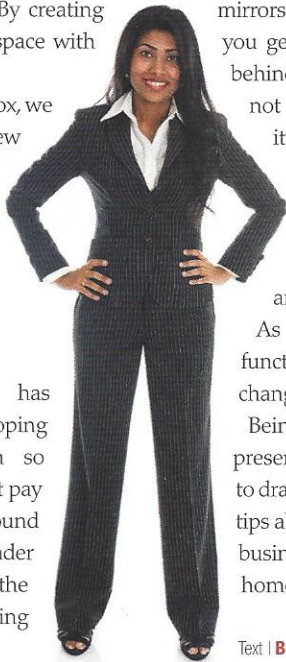
Instructions: Stand against a wall, making sure that as much of your body is connecting with the wall (or door) as possible. Now take a deep breath, making sure the air fills the bottom of your lungs first. Slowly take in air, filling to the top. Hold your breath for a few seconds. After that, slowly release the air. Empty your lungs from the top down until your lungs feel empty. Take one or two normal breaths and repeat. Your goal is to get up to five deep breaths with no normal breaths between.

So what is the point of this practice? Firstly, it helps you develop a posture of confidence. When we are stressed or tired our bodies often sag forwards. This upright posture counteracts that. It also helps us to feel more in control. In addition, by opening up, we benefit through taking in more oxygen. And by concentrating on our breathing we can't think about much else. So this helps to clear our minds and immediately after the practice, we can respond

to situations rather than react, as we have reduced the emotion that is making us feel stressed. By creating a pause in our activities, we can fill that space with positive thoughts.

However, to add this practice to our toolbox, we need to do it every day in order to create new pathways or habits. This tool becomes our default so that when we need to use it, we remember and do this self-correction automatically. This practice works well in all domains of our lives.

Tip 2 **Peripheral vision** Another practice that has helped many of my clients involves developing our 'peripheral vision'. We are often so engrossed in the task at hand that we don't pay enough attention to what is happening around us. As a leader, this is important in the broader context. We need to constantly scan the environment, assessing change and looking for threats and opportunities.



To encourage awareness, simply examine all three mirrors in your car when you get in. This way you get the different views of what is happening behind you. Do this each time you stop (obviously not while driving!). This sounds so simple, yet it is surprising that most of us don't do it automatically. Again, do this every day for three weeks to create new habits. It is interesting how developing our peripheral vision impacts on all aspects of our private and business lives.

As leaders, we are in the driving seat – let's function more effectively. We need to notice changes and be able to tune in, using all our senses.

Being effective as a female leader in business presents many challenges and we need to be able to draw on our inherent strengths. By following the tips above, we can enhance our leadership skills in business and this can translate into benefits in our home and community lives as well.

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