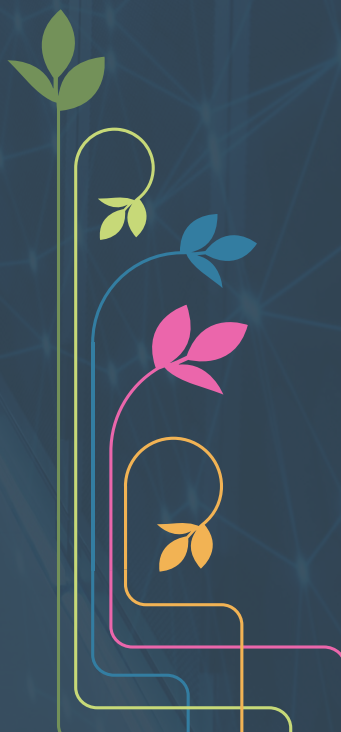




**PIERCE
WASHINGTON**

ESSENTIAL SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

Ellen Daley—Pierce Washington Board Member





Pierce Washington board member Ellen Daley draws on her experience to share insights to help women succeed in the workplace.



Ellen Daley is a Pierce Washington board member and has a leadership background that is both impressive and unique, obtaining an undergraduate degree in Physics at a time when it was almost an entirely a male-dominated field; in fact, she was the only woman in her graduating class and the only woman with an underwater acoustics specialty.

Undeterred, she went on to obtain a M.S. in electrical engineering. Her leadership journey includes prominent roles in consulting, as CEO, and member of several private company boards.

Drawing on her own experiences and insights, Ellen offers actionable advice for women in all stages of their careers. Whether you're still in school, in the middle of your career, or just need some advice on navigating professional relationships, these tips will help you develop your own leadership skills:

Be authentic.

Authenticity is an essential trait that benefits you both professionally and in your personal relationships. It's based on honesty and knowing who you are and who you want to be.

A lack of authenticity in the workplace can not only hinder your professional development, but it can put you at odds with your own identity and core values. It's a trap Ellen has seen often among women in what she calls the reflection or reverberation of male colleagues. For example, you may see a male colleague acting boorish or strident in meetings and think you need to act the same way to be heard.

"It's easy to fall into the trap of being the chameleon in the room, and you try to mimic it because you want to be heard," Ellen says. "My advice to people who are doing that is to come back to your center—who you are, who you want to be perceived as—and then act in accordance with that."



Focus less on differences and more on similarities.

Being the only female or minority in a group or work setting can be intimidating for anyone. The contrast became evident to Ellen as she began pursuing a career in a male-dominated field.

“In the first few years of my career, I was really focused on being the only woman,” Ellen says. She found herself contrasting the differences in the way her male colleagues said and did certain things and then ruminating on them. As a result, she became nervous about speaking up in meetings or volunteering her opinions.

Eventually, Ellen realized this mindset was holding her back and sought advice. She recalls a particularly helpful suggestion she received from a friend who told her, “At some point, you’re going to get exhausted thinking about it. Instead of looking for the differences, why don’t you focus on what you have in common?”

This shift in focus was a turning point. “A lot of times, as women or a minority of any nature, you focus a lot on the differences in communication styles or in the way you look or act,” she says. “I feel that when I focus on that, I don’t bring my best self.”

By training your brain to seek out similarities—such as common goals you share or problems you’re trying to solve—you’ll begin to see yourself as a team rather than the odd one out. Doing this will help improve your confidence about participating and allow the team to benefit from your unique personality and capabilities.



Don't fall victim to imposter syndrome.

Imposter syndrome is loosely defined as people who doubt their abilities or feel they're underqualified for the role they're in, and it disproportionately affects high achievers and women.

“I think women fall prey to the voice in their head that says, ‘I’m faking it,’” Ellen says. “These thoughts can be incredibly counterproductive, and you have to turn that voice off.”

If you do find imposter syndrome thoughts continually coming into your head, Ellen advises distracting yourself, whether it's through exercise, reading, or another task. It can also be helpful to share your feelings with someone you trust, like a loved one or mentor. The negative self-talk can often be countered by more accurate observations from people who know you and your abilities well.



Build your critical thinking skills.

With a background in STEM, Ellen is a staunch advocate for promoting STEM careers for a variety of reasons. In addition to being a lucrative field, it's also vastly underrepresented by women—although they make up nearly half of the workforce, only 27% of people in STEM occupations are women.

Not only that, but STEM fields help develop core skills such as critical thinking and problem solving that are useful in all facets of life. You can apply critical thinking by making decisions based on facts and evidence rather than emotion or assumptions both in and outside of the workplace; for example, developing a campaign at work based on data rather than assumptions, or stopping to check the validity of an article you read online before sharing it to your social media.

“It's really important to learn how to think logically,” says Ellen. “And that's what the STEM fields do for you. It doesn't even have to be your career, but learning core skills like those taught in science, technology, or math that focus on logic is a really great life skill.”

Hone your negotiation skills to help close the pay inequality gap.

One area where women lag behind men is pay equality. According the U.S. Department of Labor, women earn about 82 cents for every dollar. What's more, women earn less than their same race and ethnicity counterpart at all levels of education.

While there are many factors that play into pay inequality, one reason is that women are less likely to negotiate their salaries than men; one study of Carnegie Mellon graduates found that 8 times as many men as women negotiated their starting salaries. Ellen, who has coached many women in salary negotiation tips, says this often comes down to a lack of confidence. “Most women don't think they're fully qualified,” she says.

However, negotiating pay is an expected as part of the job search. “It's a negotiation,” Ellen says. “It's not personal; it's a process.” With that in mind, Ellen recommends finding out the salary parameters of the role, and then asking for the maximum.

“The person on the other side is expecting that,” she explains. “They're not going to think any less of you. Freeing yourself of the burden of what someone might think of you is very helpful in the negotiation process.”



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Build diverse teams.

Diverse teams that include different genders, ages, ethnicities, and races lead to better business outcomes; companies with diverse workforces are 35% more likely to experience greater financial returns than non-diverse competitors.

“The world composition is changing,” Ellen says. “The best teams in the world are those that bring all of those different strengths together. When someone can see themselves in someone, there’s a connection and an elevation in what’s possible. Without the explicit focus and thinking about promoting diversity, you’ll have a less powerful team.”

A diverse team will also help women tackle feelings of inadequacy, or “imposter syndrome,” which can also be the result of company culture or setting. For example, a workplace setting made up entirely of one race, gender, or age group can make underrepresented individuals feel like they don’t belong or deserve their place.



Take care of yourself to avoid getting overwhelmed.

Stress doesn’t discriminate; women and men both experience the same stressors in life, whether it’s with work, home, or family. Even so, the American Psychological Association reports that women are more likely than men to report increased stress levels and more physical and emotional symptoms of stress.

And while there’s no question that traditional gender norms and roles have evolved, even in balanced relationships, women tend to feel pressure to take on more.

“Sometimes we take so much on because we feel like we’re being good people or that’s what we’re supposed to do,” Ellen says. “But then you wake up one day and realize you’re tired, exhausted, and resentful. You have to take time to figure out what you need and actually do it, whether it’s exercise or a massage or not cooking dinner every night, because the resentment isn’t going to do anyone—including yourself—any good.”

For Ellen, sitting down with her husband and allocating and assigning cooking nights was helpful. In addition to asking for help, being comfortable saying no, delegating your workload, and taking time for yourself every day can help keep you from feeling overburdened at home and work.





Give back.

When it comes to helping others and giving back, Ellen is a prime example of practicing what you preach. In addition to mentoring young women in the workplace, she has been involved in the Big Sister/Little Sister organization for over 15 years, the National Alliance of Mental Illness, and sits on the Board of Trustees for the non-profit UP Education Network in Massachusetts.

At work, Ellen suggests getting started by approaching your HR department and seeing what opportunities are available. Most large organizations have mentorship or diversity and inclusion programs. Even if your organization doesn't have formal programs, informal mentorship is beneficial too.

"I feel very responsible for promoting women," Ellen says. "I would implore people to think about the next generation and how they can help and give back on whatever level. It's very easy to live in your bubble, but by doing non-profit and volunteer work, it opens you up your aperture to things you don't see every day."

Another way you can start volunteer work is to reach out directly to worthy charities and organizations by visiting their websites and seeing what opportunities exist. Ellen recommends the following organizations:

[National Alliance on Mental Illness](#): This grassroots, nonprofit organization provides advocacy, education, support and public awareness so that all individuals and families affected by mental illness can build better lives.

[Big Brothers Big Sisters](#): Through the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, you become a 'Big' to a 'Little.' This well-known organization provides one-on-one mentorship to children and teens.

[Cradles to Crayons](#): If you're in the Boston, Chicago, or Philadelphia areas, Cradles to Crayons provides essentials to children in need, free of charge. Volunteers can organize collections or work preparing donations for distribution in their Giving Factory.

[Volunteer Match](#): Volunteer Match lets you search for volunteer opportunities in your area that are a good fit to your interest and skillset.

