

Lift Up The Women In Your Organization

In the book *How Women Rise*, by leadership expert Sally Helgesen, she mentions that women are, in general, more forthcoming with the praise and recognition of their team members, a quality that makes them excellent leaders. But she also mentioned the darker side of that praise. Quick to recognize coworkers, she says, women don't always recognize themselves, and that can cause them to become overlooked during the next round of promotions.

PRIME INSURANCE COMPANY has solved for such a challenge by making recognition and flexibility a central part of their ethos. So too do Jaime Gustafson, SVP of underwriting, and Lauren Benson, VP of regulatory affairs. These two women shun traditional hierarchical structures and opt instead for a more central or horizontal approach—with healthy amounts of feedback along the way.

"I'm a leader, but my main service is to pave a path for the ones around me," says Ms. Gustafson. "It's about the people we're serving. For women it's less ego-driven, it doesn't matter if it's Lauren's name being mentioned or my name being mentioned, it's about creating a team. I'm an assertive person so I'm pretty open about where I think my strong suits are, but I also have to mention that I couldn't do what I do without the 30 people I'm leading."

Ms. Benson agrees. "My team is smaller so I can raise up my team members fairly easily," she says. "My team members are friends, we talk daily about our personal lives, and that's a super important way to connect with a team and understand what they are going through. We've had conflicts, of course, but it's important to recognize the humanity. That someone might be having a hard day, or a hard year, and leaders have to balance that with the task at hand."

Of course, both women believe that the more support leadership teams give to women in their organization, the more those women are able to step up into leadership roles themselves. "I think it's a big struggle, as a woman, to have a full-time career and a full-time family," Ms. Benson says. "But what I've loved about my position at Prime is that I've been able to grow my family, and grow my career at the same time. I've been able to have two children, and to work from home when necessary, so for me personally, I find extreme support being a woman at work. And that is very rare at companies."

"People make comments about strong women," says Ms. Gustafson. "And I appreciate strong women. But I don't feel I'm being treated specially as a woman. Our company just celebrates everyone as a person. It's simple and basic, but it's rare."

Because these women are empowered by the company they work for, and given the flexibility, they need to succeed, these women have become powerful leaders for their organization. And in so doing, they will rise up, not only themselves but all of those working for them. And that is the true definition of a leader.



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