

A woman in a light-colored business suit and dark blue top is looking down at a laptop screen. The background is a bright, modern office or boardroom with large windows. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**FIVE WAYS WOMEN
CAN BOOST THEIR
CONFIDENCE
IN THE BOARDROOM**

Harnessing your authentic leadership style: Five ways women can boost their confidence in the boardroom

Studies show the majority of women believe confidence is key for leadership, but it's something they struggle with themselves throughout their careers - especially when it comes to being authentic to themselves and their colleagues.

Today, we outline five ways leaders, especially women, can drop the mask and, in doing so, enhance their presence in the boardroom.

1. Discover your authentic leadership style

There is no specific personality that is best suited to effective leadership. However, a trait that the most effective leaders share is that they are true to themselves at all times. They lead in their own style, consistent with their own personality.

Role models are extremely important, but mimicry does not wash if you are not being yourself. The challenge many women can have in coming to terms with this is that, historically, leadership roles models have predominantly been men. This can become a hurdle that women leaders must overcome when developing their authentic leadership style.

The key to developing your authentic leadership style is to first take a look at your own values and personal history. What are the key events that have molded who you are today? What lessons have you learnt on your journey? What shapes who you are? Perhaps you are a mother, partner, business owner or experienced career woman. Whatever your background and experience is, make no apologies for it, and turn it to your advantage.

By taking your true self as a starting point, you can then learn how to apply your inner strengths to develop your most effective leadership style.

2. Own your emotional intelligence and clarify the impact you want to have in the boardroom.

Once you understand who you are at your very heart, the next stage is to be clear in your mind about exactly what you want to achieve.

At Maynard Leigh, we encourage clients to focus on developing their professional presence, with physical, vocal and practical exercises, which originated in the theatre. We also champion that female leaders can use their emotional intelligence to their advantage in work and the boardroom.

We believe women are now, in fact, at an advantage in the working world. These are times of transformational leadership, where emotional intelligence, being aware of emotional cues, having empathy, support and integrity are of huge value.

Being confident and clear in your own mind about what you want to achieve will help your natural, authentic leadership style to flow.

3. Be alert to what's going on around you.

Once you have developed your core style and impact, it's time to bring it into the here and now. Leaders do not operate in a vacuum. Being alert to all the different people above, below and all around you, will help you to apply your leadership in context.

Open your eyes to the fact that, just like you, everyone has their own style, their own history, their own motivations, and you will be able to confidently walk into a room full of senior executives and know that you are the equal of those around you.

Knowing who you are, what you want, and who you're dealing with, means you will be secure in your added value. That way, you can be confident in delivering your message, influencing at the highest level, and building relationships with senior people.

4. Impress and establish credibility

Although there is no particular style that makes someone a leader, there are specific techniques you can use in establishing your leadership credibility. And these work at their very best when used in the context of your authentic self.

Again, it all comes back to being the true you, with a clear set of goals, and an understanding of your environment. With all that in place, your credibility will flow naturally. It is not the loudest, the deepest or any other physicality of voice that wins credibility. It is the one that comes from a natural position of truth.

A voice in which people can hear the truth is one that will most likely lead to transformational leadership.

5. Use your whole self and your power

While all of the above is as true for men as it is for women, it's worthy of a final reminder that women have an extra challenge in applying the above points due to the comparative lack of historical role models. Once you have developed your authentic style, it is reassuring to be able to see a historical role model that has applied that style successfully.

While men may look to recent history, from Winston Churchill, to Nelson Mandela, to Steve Jobs, to Richard Branson, and find a wide variety of role models from whom they may draw confidence, women's choices are currently restricted in comparison. It is also unhelpful that some potential female role models (from Margaret Thatcher to Angela Merkel), may be accused of a certain level of male imitation.

But as more women come to understand themselves, and that authentic self-femininity is its own strength, then perhaps the women of today will embrace their leadership qualities, and the future women of the 21st Century will have as many natural role models as today's men.

In our course Boardroom Presence, delivered to C Suite level professionals from multinational companies since 1989, we encourage leaders, especially women, to tap into their authentic leadership style through theatre-based techniques. To find out more, email simonew@maynardleigh.com.

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Abi has been coaching executives for ten years and designing and leading development programmes throughout the UK and Europe for nineteen years. Her work with all managerial levels, heads of departments, directors and partners, across a range of sectors, enables her to bring sector insights and best practice to her coaching clients. She holds an MA Coaching and Mentoring Practice, Post Graduate Diploma Coaching Practice (Oxford Brookes), ICF Certificate in Professional Coaching Practice, CIPD Advanced Facilitation, BSc. (Hons.) Sociology, HND Business Studies.

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