

Today's Daughters and Granddaughters, Tomorrow's CEOs



Annette Walker, president of City of Hope Orange County, believes future female business leaders should embrace their feminine qualities every step of the way to the top.

"I'm not afraid ... I was born to do this." —Joan of Arc

One chat with Annette Walker, president of City of Hope Orange County, and it's easy to see why this is her favorite quote. It's something she could have said herself. A national leader in the healthcare industry, Walker is excited—and fearless—about her massive new project: the creation of City of Hope's new \$1 billion comprehensive cancer campus in Orange County. The campus is scheduled to open in 2021.

But even with such a huge project underway—or maybe because of it—there's something even greater on Walker's mind: the future. She's thinking about how to help open doors for the next generation of women business leaders. She wonders how she can help them, how she can impart a piece of that fearlessness, and how she can help them see their value not just as smart people, but also, specifically, as women. She's passionate about serving as a role model and helping the

next generation of women leaders not only take their seats at the table, but find the courage to use their unique voices.

Recently, Walker was asked to share her thoughts about this. She did so gladly.

Uniquely Female Strengths

To start, Walker says, girls can learn to recognize their uniquely feminine traits and embrace them—not suppress them. She notes that they're powerful tools when we know how to utilize them.

"Women think they need to act like men to be successful, but that's not true," Walker says. "Many of our feminine attributes are the very qualities that can make us successful in the workplace. Instead of trying to tone them down, we should learn to leverage them."

One of those qualities, Walker says, is a natural sense of community. "Women are good at harnessing the power of groups," she explains. "When we need to accomplish something, we're inclined to engage others and take ideas from the collective group wisdom. By doing that, we make more insightful, informed decisions."

Female intuition is invaluable as well, Walker notes. "Intuition plays a major role in work and leadership," she says. Along with helping us detect employee strengths and weaknesses and helping guide us in decisions, it can help us sense how to motivate individuals or read a room. In one amusing example, Walker, who's technically inclined, fixed a faulty wiring connection at a meeting. Although she was a prominent vice president in the



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Sponsors are successful business people who can open doors and present opportunities for ambitious young people. They make all the difference.

Here are Annette Walker's four top tips for finding one:

1. Volunteer for projects that will give you exposure to senior leaders.
2. Choose someone you admire, study their behavior, and try to emulate them.
3. Don't be afraid to ask someone. At worst, they'll say no. But most will say yes and want to help.
4. Be authentic about where you are and where you want to go. Sharing your goals can be the key to enlisting a sponsor.

"The wisdom we gain from parenting is an invaluable aspect of becoming a business leader."

company at the time, a male colleague misunderstood her action, assumed she was an assistant, and introduced her to the group that way. "After that, when there was technical trouble, I sat on my hands," she laughs.

"Unfortunately, there were times in my career that I had to choose who to talk to about my children," admits Walker, a proud mother of six. "Even though they've been a major asset in my career and my life, there were people who doubted that I could handle the responsibility when they learned how many children I had."

However, Walker emphasizes, choosing to have children while working is a major advantage for women in the workplace. "Being a parent teaches us to recognize skill and aptitude in others and how to nurture and encourage those skills," she notes. "The wisdom we gain from parenting is an invaluable aspect of becoming a business leader."

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance—and how to attain it—are popular topics among professionals. Walker feels that successful executives do set boundaries between career and personal life but that a perfect balance isn't the goal. "It's not going to be 50-50," she says. "I have a saying: Be

fully present wherever you are. When I'm at work, I'm not taking calls from the kids all day. When I'm home, I'm off email from Friday night to Sunday night."

With a husband, six grown children, 12 grandchildren, and a \$1 billion project at hand, Walker is living proof that balance is attainable. "But it takes a continual effort," she says.

The Role of a Leader

They say life is about the journey. However, some journeys do have a destination, and by any measure, Walker has arrived. Before City of Hope, she was

President of Strategy for Providence St. Joseph Health, the country's third largest healthcare system. Among her many awards are Modern Healthcare magazine's Top 25 Women Leaders, Los Angeles Business Journal's Executive of the Year, and Orange County Business Journal's Top 50 Orange County Influencer and Top Woman in Business.

So what makes a leader great while doing the job?

Walker begins by clearing up a common misconception. "It's not about telling people what to do," she shares. "It's about asking, 'Could I have done this better?' Being the boss should be seen as a position not of privilege but of stewardship. You're the custodian of the organization. How you behave impacts everyone."

In fact, for Walker, the bottom line is about people and relationships. "The poet Maya Angelou said, 'People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel,'" Walker says. "I try to live by that. Never be afraid to express to people that you love them."

Maybe most importantly, Walker believes in choosing work that gives one a sense of purpose. "If you're doing work you love, work that aligns with your values, it lifts you up. It drives you over the bumps in the workplace. It inspires you. And that's when you're able to accomplish great things—when you're doing what you were born to do."