

The Big Problem With Climbing The Career Ladder

A recent study conducted by Catherine Mosher of Duke University Medical Center and Sharon Danoff-Burg at the University of Albany (see <http://www.cnn.com/2008/LIVING/personal/01/04/career.relationships> for more) found that 51 percent of undergraduate women prioritised romantic relationships over achievement goals, while more than 61 percent of men did the same.

While that margin might not seem that large, just think how this same study would have turned out 10 years ago or even 5 years ago. This is a pretty new and exciting phenomenon, and it's seeing young women making a massive impact on the workplace. It shows that women are prepared to make tough choices and work hard to get into their chosen fields and organisations, and it's clear that things are shifting.

I could talk about why it's happening - the fact that today's women grew up in an era when around 50% of marriages ended in divorce, and as Washington based psychologist Ellen Klosson comments, "*Women have been aware of the time pressure to establish themselves in a career before starting a family, because of the difficulty of starting this task in their thirties and forties.*" - but I'm more interested in what it means.

There are two significant impacts of this shift.

1. Women are thinking about families later and starting them even later. There's a bunch of apparently conflicting studies out there on whether this is a Good Thing or a Bad Thing, and for now it's an issue I'm going to park to revisit another day (do let me know your thoughts though).
2. The bigger concern I have is that there's a very real pressure for women to perform and deliver consistently. Nothing wrong with that on the surface and you're more than capable of doing just that, but I can't count the number of times I've heard women say to me "*You know, my colleagues and my friends would all describe me as confident, but I don't feel it.*"

Here's what happens. You focus on what you want at College, you get a good job that pays well and challenges you. You enjoy what you do, get promoted quickly because you're talented and deliver consistently and you might make a couple of career moves into other organisations with bigger and better prospects. You achieve a hell of a lot in a short space of time.

Then, when you start getting closer to that big 3-0, something interesting happens. You start asking if where you are is what you *really* want. You start asking just how long you can keep running. You start asking what else there is for you. And importantly, you start asking just who you are underneath all that achievement and success.

Sure, I'm generalising a little here, but let me be really clear - I see this *every day* when I'm working with clients and I asked myself the very same questions.

The desire to succeed and deliver is one to be applauded, but only if it *means something* to the individual who's putting the hard graft in. Time and time again I've worked with women who have achieved great things but who don't *feel it*. There's a transition where the desire to achieve, move forwards and succeed in their field shifts from being a genuine desire into habit - and that's where the danger is.

The bottom line is that when the challenge and the success stops being personally relevant the meaning and purpose behind everything you do is lost - let that ride for a few years and the price you pay is a compelling sense of who you are and what's important to you.

Don't fall into the same trap.

About the Author

Steve Errey writes confidence advice and works one on one with a new generation of professional women. A confidence coach with hundreds of clients under his belt from all around the world, Steve's had articles in magazines on both sides of the Atlantic and regular expert slots on television and radio. www.theconfidenceguyonline.com

Source: www.isnare.com

Source: <http://articles.exospy.com>