

Leaders Tackle Workplace Bullying.

What Works in a “Mixed Skirmish?”(Tips on Navigating the Double Standard)

Senator: "I'll treat you like a lady, so act like one."

Congresswoman: "I am a lady."

This bizarre exchange between a male United States Senator and a Congresswoman was recently played out on the public stage during a debate broadcast via radio.

But what was really going on here? In my opinion, the man was essentially telling the woman to “sit down and shut up.” Since he saw himself as superior to her, he scolded her for not being obedient to him.

On any given day, expressions of supremacy are played out in workplaces across America. Such a display of disrespect goes well beyond an accepted professional range. Even so, most men rarely speak to each other in a condescending manner as the Senator did with the Congresswoman. The male radio host over-talked the Senator too, but he was not chided to “act like a gentleman.”

In the face of such a double standard, just what can a woman do?

First, take comfort in knowing that you do not have to feel berated or belittled by someone else’s words or actions. A person who attempts to “talk down” to you says more about who they are than about you.

Second, avoid stooping to a level of name-calling which essentially places you in the same “little league” as the striker – but it doesn’t mean you have to be a doormat either.

Now, here’s one way to confront a person that tries to distract you while you are speaking. A savvy conversant at times will ask what I call “designer questions” which are crafted to box in an adversary. The idea is to ask a question wherein any response is likely to expose the ill-conceived intentions of a contender.

Here are 3 winning comebacks sure to expose intimidation in its true light:

“We were just discussing “this or that”, now what are we discussing?”

“If you were me, and I asked you to act like a man – what would you say?”

“What prompts you to say such a thing?”

The key to responding to attacks is to keep your cool and avoid becoming defensive. While an opponent may have chosen to resort to appalling tactics to unnerve you, you can stand your ground while remaining professional.

Come up with your own emergency responses “in the unlikely event that there is that loss of cabin pressure” brought on by a bully’s attempting to lower your altitude – just don’t let anything bring down your attitude.

As a hard working leader committed to the mission of your organization, don’t fall for a “fake out” designed to throw you off of your game. Properly addressing open workplace harassment will not only deflate an opponent’s arrogance, but also engender understanding among spectators.

Remember, you are the only one in charge of your self-esteem.