

Lead, Follow or Get out of the Way? Smart Women Lead. (Navigating the Double Standard)

Women leaders who follow or get out of the way are subject to fierce criticism.

Social Secretary Desiree Rogers inadvertently found herself “out of the way” recently at a White House State dinner. The spotlight on her comes with scrutiny of how party-crashers were able to circumvent White House checkpoints manned by Secret Service personnel.

So why is Ms. Rogers’ getting so much flack for sitting as a guest at the State Dinner? Some are critical because no one from her staff worked along side the Secret Service to eliminate the possibility of uninvited guests slipping through. True, that planning issue is a problem. But an equally important concern about Ms. Rogers’ being seated during dinner is the fact that she was in the picture, which crippled her ability to see the picture.

As the boss, there is no one to tell you where you should be – it’s up to you to decide. Relying upon what your counterparts may have done before you and got away with won’t work. The double standard that women face ensures that few will come to your defense if you make even a repeated tactical error. This taken with the high stakes for failure often accompanying executive positions (in this case, danger to the President and his guests) makes it essential to figure out the best spot to enhance your ability to lead during special events and operations.

What’s a woman to do? Try this tip. First, find the one place where you can see the most. Go for as much of a panoramic view as possible. Next, ensure that you are perched someplace that makes you as accessible as possible to the people that report directly to you so they can depend on your leadership.

To be able to “call the shots” you have to be informed, attentive and reachable.

Whether it is in an operations post, at the door, or standing next to your own boss only you can decide. But know that the more you are in the picture, and the more hurdles placed in the communication path of those expected to discharge duties you assigned them, the less likely you will be able to apply direct fixes; thereby increasing chances that things can blow up.

Flawlessly executed operations only appear that way from the outside. It is rare that any important event or operation goes off without a hitch regardless of how well planned. Unforeseen situations arise. Success is assured only when as fires attempt to erupt, there is an equipped fire-fighter (like you) available to extinguish them.

Avoid positioning yourself in the worst possible place. It is a mistake to paint yourself in a corner by doing a job you should assign to a subordinate. Hint - if you are working, the more exciting a spot is, the more distracting it can be to discharging your duties.

Women and men who knowingly, or unknowingly shirk their leadership responsibilities by “getting out of the way” are doomed. When “ACTION” is announced, go for the director’s chair instead of the blinding limelight – you’ll have a better vantage point and thus edge to success!