



Leading by Example: Empowering Others by Being Yourself

Women in finance and business often believe we only can become effective leaders by keeping our “true” emotional and intellectual selves under wraps. Don’t mix business with pleasure. Separate and compartmentalize. If you want to compete and succeed, craft an image of strength and capability, keep your “silly side” in check, and don’t ever let them see you cry.

Yet is it really constructive to approach work, where we often spend more hours than we do at home, in such an uninspired way? Do we have to leave what are possibly our best traits at the office door because we believe that to get ahead, women must project invulnerability? I say no. Stop hiding our feelings and, instead, validate our entire selves. “Let it go,” as the pop song coaches.

What value would that bring to the workplace? In my experience, it adds a lot! We benefit from recognizing that an honest “this-is-who-I-am” approach can be appropriate at work – if we let



Lisa Shea is a senior vice president and product manager at Northern Trust

personality, disguising who we really are. We could bring a lot more dimension, authenticity, pride and teamwork to projects if we accepted and encouraged our co-workers to leverage their entire skill sets. “Letting it go” can make a difference in our effectiveness as manag-

ers in our most natural and effective ways.

As we mature, however, we realize that the most-successful managers and leaders embrace who they are and, by displaying their own vulnerabilities, also show their teams that they genuinely care. Building a feeling of community in a team helps boost employee engagement and retention. Pride in one’s professional community translates into pride in our work and better service for our clients, resulting in strong alignment and long-term partnerships that benefit the companies we represent.

Nancy Grady, senior vice president and head of fund administration for Northern Trust’s North American global fund services team, concurs. “As a senior manager, I know that I am only as good as the people around me,” she says. “I make it a point to participate, listen and engage with all levels in my organization so that I can be an effective advocate for clients and for my team, even if the position we take may not always be popular.”

ALI BLEECKER, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER FOR NORTHERN TRUST ASSET MANAGEMENT, HAS BEEN NAMED AMONG 2014’S TOP WOMEN IN ASSET MANAGEMENT BY MONEY MANAGEMENT EXECUTIVE. CONGRATULATIONS TO ALI, WHO DEMONSTRATES THAT AUTHENTICITY CAN BE A PROFITABLE BEST PRACTICE FOR THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY.

it. That doesn’t mean behaving in ways you wouldn’t want to acknowledge later, but I believe fostering an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion of our diverse “whole selves” can promote camaraderie and teamwork, encourage creativity and – potentially – increase productivity.

None of us are perfect, yet too often we feel obligated to build a workplace

ers and leaders. A culture of candor, support, and (dare I say it?) fun can all translate to a workplace that works.

Early in our careers, we hear many messages. Who should we emulate? How should we behave? Must we fit a specific mold to succeed? We may act the way we believe people expect us to act rather than expressing our-

I wholeheartedly agree. What does being authentic buy us? Trust, loyalty and the confidence to tackle even the most-daunting challenges as our business rapidly evolves and competition heats up. Challenge yourself to “let it go.” Laugh, cry, commiserate, and celebrate with your team. You might be pleasantly surprised by what unfolds. ■