

Book Review

At Long Last—A Comprehensive Look at Women in Law and Leadership

Women on Top—The Woman's Guide to Leadership and Power in Law Firms by Ida O. Abbott, Esq., 316 pp. West/Association of Legal Administrators All visitors to the WILEF web site, receive a discount on this book. The link can be found at

<http://west.thomson.com/store/ad.aspx?promcode=622502G88747&promtype=external>

When Ida Abbott told me that she was writing a book about women in law and leadership, I remember saying: “good luck” but thinking that if anyone could do the definitive book on women in law and leadership, Ida Abbott was probably the right person. And indeed, after reading this book I am happy to say I was “on the money”. *Women on Top—The Woman's Guide to Leadership and Power in Law Firms* demystifies everything you ever thought you knew about leadership but were afraid to delve into.

The Introduction poses the question: “Why do we need a book on leadership for women in law firms?” The answer: This book is written in “real time” and will tell the reader how to become a leader without waiting for law firms (slowpokes to be sure) to change and how women can become more effective in carrying out their responsibilities and change agenda when they become leaders.

The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 looks at the challenges that women face and for the most part men do not, i.e., stereotypes, biases and other factors that create obstacles for women. Part 2 studies leadership within the context of law firms and how a law firm structure, culture and politics create special challenges. Part 3 gives women a framework for becoming successful leaders. To help with the framework, Ida uses the acronym ASPIRE. The letters stand for six elements essential for women's leadership success:

- **A**mbition'
- **S**trategy
- **P**ersonal Power
- **I**nterpersonal Dynamics
- **R**esilience
- **E**mpowerment

Each of the elements has a chapter devoted to it. In *Ambition* we learn that “having a clear vision of who you are, what you want, and where you want to go is the beginning of your journey to leadership.” It is interesting to note that the Women in Law Empowerment Program tackled the subject of ambition in its inaugural program in Washington, DC. Ambition can take on many facets and in this book it becomes crystal clear how ambition can inure to one's benefit on the

road to leadership. In *Strategy* we learn how to create a strategy that works and then how to use that strategy to walk down the two parallel paths to leadership: rainmaking and law firm management. *Personal Power* can be summed up in one sentence in this chapter: “If you want to influence change you have to collect power and use responsibly,” *Interpersonal Dynamics* focuses on communication, the power of persuasion and yes, dealing with difficult people (including partners). As a perennial optimist, the chapter on *Resilience* has a section on optimism that I found particularly interesting. I guess I never realized that it is hard to find optimists in law firms because optimism is not a common trait of lawyers. I somewhat disagree with this because I have found a lot of optimism among lawyers. It is the reason why I have championed women in law firms for almost two decades. That said, the good news here is that optimism can be learned. When I got to the chapter on *Empowerment*, I scanned it because as the National Chair of the Women in Law Empowerment Forum, my personal mission for the Forum is to make women in law feel empowered and over the years, I have found that my own voice has empowered many women. What I was interested in is the section on succession planning for law firms who are notoriously bad at this. I found this section very worthwhile.

There are some particularly intriguing aspects to Ida’s book. She has chosen some fabulous quotes from famous men and women to introduce chapters and certain sections. I’m a huge fan of using quotes. After I finished reading the book, I even sent Ida a congratulatory note along with a box of cards showing famous quotes relating to women. As an avid baseball fan (Yankees) my favorite quote is from Yogi Berra “If you don’t know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else.”

Another truly powerful part of this book are Tables interspersed throughout the book. The Tables range from “Questions About Firm Culture” to “Questions for developing a home and family management plan”. These tables provide an effective step-by-step method to achieve one’s career goals.—an invaluable tool!

Ida has interviewed a myriad of women for this book and while many of them remain anonymous the valuable information that is imparted in this book will provide the reader with a true depiction of leadership.

This book is a reference book of unmatched quality. This book is a “must read” for both men and women in law who think they have it right when it comes to leadership generally and more specifically leadership for women in law. My advice: *Read it, digest it and then embrace it!*

Elizabeth Anne “Betiayn” Tursi, is the National Chair of WILEF.