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Essential Themes from the 2013 Women in Leadership and Business Conference

By Sylvia Adriano and Kim Lawton

In April, [Sylvia Adriano](#) (a partner in our real estate group) and [Kim Lawton](#) (an associate in our securities group) attended the [2013 Women in Leadership and Business Conference \(WILB\)](#) – a national learning forum designed for female leaders, managers and entrepreneurs. Both women attended keynote speeches, panel discussions, networking forums, interactive workshops and learning presentations focused on the twin goals of leadership and business development for women. This article aims to contribute to the conversation by highlighting the top themes from the conference:

(1) Ask the Right Questions

Asking the right questions was a theme that resonated throughout the conference. The opening keynote speech by CBC journalist, Amanda Lang, focused on how innovation was generated through asking “why?” and several workshops emphasized the importance of effectively asking “how?”, through reaching out to others for support, mentoring, and coaching.

(2) Know Yourself (and Others)

Overall, the conference landed squarely in the middle of the so-called “Lean-In Debate” sparked by recent writing from Sheryl Sandberg and Anne-Marie Slaughter. It hosted speakers who focused on individual-centric growth through self-knowledge, the development of resilience-building, and caring for your mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual self. At the same time, some speakers zoomed in on the cultural constraints facing women in leadership and business and did not mince words when describing the difficulty of confronting gender stereotypes. Finally, other speakers focussed on the importance of realizing, celebrating and knowing how to market your abilities and successes.

(3) Present Well

Another theme that emerged was the importance of presenting well. Both when doing formal presentations in a professional setting and when representing yourself online. The world is an inter-connected web and “managing your personal brand” (both online and offline) is now a basic leadership requirement.

(4) Build a Great Team

“Team Building” was also a main theme and, in particular, taking stock of who you work with and their strengths and weaknesses. Emphasis was placed on consciously building your team with people who have complementary skills and abilities rather than simply hiring the people who are most like you. There was also a useful discussion (with practical advice) about how to motivate your team, get them focused on achieving common goals, and create high levels of job satisfaction.

(5) Connect in the Digital World

Perhaps the most interesting theme of the conference was the significance of connectivity in the digital world. From workshops on how to market your company’s website to speakers educating delegates on how to navigate social networking sites – the conference was inescapably digital. But what was really exciting was watching people connect with each other over Twitter and LinkedIn. Instead of just swapping business cards, participants swapped [Twitter handles](#) and added each other to [LinkedIn](#). These tools provided incredible opportunities for conference delegates and speakers to connect and share throughout the conference and to stay in touch thereafter.