REALLY??!! By Brent Mulgrew 2/20/2024

The luxury of being retired is you can discover and study things you didn’t perceive during your work years. As Jim mentioned, I had an interesting career for 43 years with the Ohio State Medical Association. My responsibility from day one was to identify issues, policies and proposals that had a possible impact on current health care programs and physicians’ practices. I was in the fortunate situation of working with many knowledgeable men that had extensive experiences in dealing with critical subjects and political issues.

During my undergraduate period I spent spring semester in 1969 in Washington, D.C. studying the legislative process. That summer I worked as summer staff person on the US Senate Public Works Committee. I got to go to Alaska for 10 days with 5 U.S. Senators including Ohio Senator Stephen Young to hold hearings on the proposed designs of the new Alaska pipeline.

At OSU law school I participated in a legislative seminar and then volunteered as an intern with The Ohio Council of Retail Merchants, one of the most powerful lobbying groups in Columbus.

John C Mahaney, CEO of that organization had gotten his job in 1958 on the recommendation of the CEO of the OSMA, Hart Page. When Hart asked him to recommend someone for OSMA’s first lobbyist and in house lawyer… he recommended me and I was hired in September 1974!!

The reason I am explaining my early work experiences is because when I started, everyone I worked with was a man. At that time there were very few women involved in medicine, law and politics.

During my career more women began to participate, became visible and more effective, but the primary players on critical issues were almost always men. I was fortunate to work with several women who were successful and expanded their effectiveness and visibility.

Last year I heard an interview with Katty Kay, a BBC correspondent on the new book, The Power Code, by her and Claire Shipman. The theme of her presentation is the fundamental differences of how women and men perceived and operated their power.

I bought the book the next day because I felt I had no comprehension of the differences she described between successful men and women in handling power. I am confident that every man in this room knows women who are successful in their work environment.

**But do you know how those women use their power to be successful?**

Kay’s book presents the fundamental basic differences between successful women and men in using their personal power.

The more I thought about her book, the more frightened I became that I had spent my life without any comprehension of the defined female differences.

She wrote why women were often frozen out of program because men did not respect, comprehend or accept women’s approaches to using their power.

She stated most men refuse to “share power” because men think their power is not for sharing but exists for them to direct others to perform whatever they direct to be done. Tonight, I am going to describe the fundamental power activities of some successful women I interviewed.

As I began my Kit Kat research last year, I discovered a huge increase in the last fifty years of books and articles about women and their power that I had not seen when I was a history student in graduate school.

Even Herb Brown’s new play, The Drums of War, includes insight in the impact of Eleanor Roosevelt on Harry Hopkins and President Franklin Roosevelt as they deal with the war issues facing the U.S. and Winston Churchill in 1940-41. She is recognized as a powerful woman and now studies show she had her own personal impact on critical issues both during and after Roosevelt’s years as President with both women and men..

Kay’s analysis begins with this question: **“Is the version of power we have been fighting so hard to acquire even fit for our purposes?”** Her opinion is “**For women, power more often lives in the blur of our action, in the residue of our value-laden and emotional attuned decision making, in the cracks of our endless efforts to stitch schedules, families, enterprises, humanity together against life’s forces…She says: Women don’t see power or use it the way men do. Women think of power to others while men think of power over others.”**

She believes most men view power as the opportunity to get others to do something they want, need and can direct others to do. **But women believe power doesn’t have to be intimidation. It should be about encouragement, sharing credit or getting the whole enterprise to move better. Less ego, more joy.”**

Kay’s analysis of perspective of power is women working **together with collaboration, not by using their personal direction or control over others.”**

As I tried to apply her power analysis to my memories of my history of women’s power actions, I concluded I needed to research some women’s beliefs of their use of power. I wanted to learn their opinions of personal power development and their individual experiences in using their power in their work. I wanted to determine whether Kay’s assumptions are valid because I am still mentoring law students. I want to be sure that I understand differences today between men and women’s use of their styles of power.

The first reality I learned was most of the women I knew and worked with had existed in environments where there were few other women. That meant they had to determine how to personally function and understand the men’s perceptions, overt comments and covert actions. I began my interviews of women I had respected in my career to learn their experiences of their ways of using power.

One interview was with the first woman doctor elected in 1994 as President of the OSMA. After her second road trip with me she gave me a 1994 book by Deborah Tannen, Talking from 9 to 5, Women and Men at Work.

The book describes how women and men talk differently about issues at work. She wanted me to focus on her unique needs as our first woman leader.

She explained “most women like to compromise and to work out better solutions rather than just take it or leave it.” She always asked others for their opinions. She believed there were several roads available to get to the desired results, and her questions to all were how to choose the best road to achieve success.

She said that although women talk differently than men and are often very individual in their personal analysis, they should always solicit other thoughts before making her decision. Her experiences with most men were that they would only say “Let’s do it this way…”

Recently OSMA has had three women Presidents and each approached their power differently than men.. She saw their leadership styles were to constantly listen to all, both men and women board members and staff. Her advice to those women leaders was to use their power not to cry or whine in public discussions, but to be strong, forceful and efficient, and listen to everybody. Then determine the best cooperative conclusion and implement it..

I interviewed another women physician I met decades ago when she was having a difficult residency. She was getting her PhD and MD residency at the same time. She was the only woman resident at that hospital. The chairman was constantly negative to her because he could not comprehend her capacity to do both professional activities successfully as a woman. At that time most other male physicians refused to be involved.

She recognized that the man’s power view did not accept or encourage participation by others who disagreed with his perceptions and beliefs of the ways to execute his perceived unlimited and irreversible powers.

She got personal support from other physicians outside the residency program and achieved success by maintaining her independent approaches to achievements outside the chairman’s attacks.

Later she successfully created an independent individual practice organization and now employs several other physicians.

She is now a leader who has her absolute power, but she uses it quietly and often convinces others to present their opinions before deciding a course of action. Then she encourages the others to embrace and support the decision because they participated in it.

She has adopted a combination of male and female power roles that gives her success in multiple activities with both men and women. The biggest problem she had originally was the limited number of women who embraced desire of leadership and utilization of power to be successful.

She agreed with Ohio Speaker Jo Ann Davidson’s statement: “If there are more women in politics (or any organization leadership) there would be more equal negotiations. We would have more ability to reach conclusions because our leadership is different because our life experiences are different.”

And in two months this woman doctor will become the President of another state medical organization where she will continue to apply her power style.

I also interviewed several women lawyers. One had served as Counsel at several hospitals over decades. She started by saying “some women might feel more comfortable leading in a way that resembles a male style.” But she rejects that concept. She believes men and women think differently, even on the same subject.

She felt she had to reframe her delivery of her power because she was both black and a woman in a world of mostly white men decision makers. She often felt she had to challenge prejudice, personality temperaments and perceived incompetence before she could exercise her authority and power.

It didn’t always work to her advantage. She had to figure out how to navigate through her own hot reactions and avoid personal meltdowns to achieve success with men. During her work in multiple organizations, she figured out how to navigate her strong sense of power and responsibility to achieve cooperation from others. She insisted that the others participate in the analysis and discussions rather than her just directing them.

But she also experienced that some men didn’t want her to participate equally. In fact, one man got her removed because she wanted to participate equally in issue analysis, and he just wanted to direct her to do what he alone decided. She felt it was important to challenge his prejudice and temperament with her previous successful experiences. Her inability to positively impact his failure to engage her caused her to lose her position.

She feels even today there are men who don’t want to share power or comply to a women’s power.

I interviewed a woman engineer who explained her experiences were affected by the fact she was almost always the only woman in the meeting or dealing with the issues. She believed her family experiences prepared her to be effective when dealing with men above and below her authority. Her father and mother encouraged her to focus internally. She accomplished results like the men did but she didn’t direct others without creating cooperation.

Because she did not have other women working with her, she personally focused on what needed to be done by herself. Today she does her work as it needs to be done and uses her power neutrally with the men above and below her.

She uses her power to convince others to focus on both the work that makes them happy and not only on what they need to do. She doesn’t use her power to achieve increases in her authorities, responsibilities or activities. Her attitude is to be confident and comfortable in her analysis and then perform her implementation. She said, “Don’t try to meet someone else’s expectations. Meet your own analysis of what needs to be completed. Then do it!

Her conclusion is that a woman must determine how to be effective in a pressured relationship due to the fact she may have more/less power than the men will recognize or accept.”

Another woman shared with me her experiences dealing with her power as a state legislator 1985-1996, then as one of the first women CEOs of a state medical association 1994-1999 and then a national and international successes as CEO of a major national medical specialty society for 25 years.

She said her skills and talents that made her successful also made her personal life happier. She realized early that her goals were to provide others with opportunities to achieve success in organization issues by challenging them to determine what they needed to do. Not to have them do it for her, but also for all the others involved.

Once when she was promoting a staff person he said,

“I don’t know anything about this health policy!” She responded by not answering the question but saying, “You will become knowledgeable.”

And that man ultimately became the director of the health policy programs for her organization.

She directed another employee by refusing to tell him how to get through A-B-C- to get to D. He was used to a man supervisor telling him how to do all A-B-C-D. She said that supervisor’s role was like a military officer who would give an order and only expect a “yes, Sir” response.”

Her use of her power was to help others participate, not just to direct them to her conclusion. She had experiences where men officers didn’t want her opinions or respect her analysis. Her goal was to treat each person equally, but the men held the traditional power view that they would decide what to do and then direct her to do it. Her solution was to learn more about their backgrounds, both work and life. That information helped her be successful most of the time by her using their experiences as a component in achieving her power conclusions.

Jo Ann Davidson was the first woman elected speaker in the OHIO House of Representatives 1995. I had the fortune of working with her when she was first elected to the legislature in 1980. During her early years she was a quiet and thoughtful participant who ultimately became respected by several older male Republican legislators. At the time I did not understand her effectiveness was based on both her commitments of time and energy, but also her unwillingness to start a fight to simply try to make a point.

In her recent interviews she described how her experiences developed what and how she was going to do things in the future.

Her first job was working in the Chamber of Commerce in Findlay. She immediately perceived that good strong people working together would make the community better. But in those days there were very few women participating in leadership. Watching the men in the Chamber she concluded that most failed to review their materials before the meetings.

That experience created a fundamental issue that was part of her success.

She said, “Women have to prepare in advance to get others to take up their side of the issue.” She also concluded that it was critical that women “Must be careful to stay in the mainstream of public policy and not to focus only on their issues.”

When she got a job at the State Chamber of Commerce she attended meetings at the Statehouse and watched many men challenge or ignore the women. She watched Speaker Vern Riffe control others with very visible directions. He was known as having a “strong iron fist.” on anything he thought was important. If a member didn’t follow Speaker Riffes’ “recommendations”, that member often lost some responsibilities or even his committee position. Ty and Tom here have much more experience and knowledge about Speaker Riffes’ dramatic uses of his power.

When JoAnn first attended the Ohio House, her few fellow Republican women began to meet with her. She encouraged them to mentally outline proposed activities in advance and encouraged debate among themselves but not to take the debate out to others. Within 5 years she was selected chair of the Republican Campaign Committee.

Throughout the next 10 years she tried to recruit women to be elected because she believed they gave extra good services to their constituents because of their previous activities in their non powerful but important family and community services.

In 1995 she was elected Speaker. The first women speaker in Ohio history. The headline in the Columbus Dispatch was “**Is she tough enough to govern?”** That article described her as a softspoken grandmotherly women and asked if she could manage her leadership power and responsibilities.

She proved she could.

She stated her years as Speaker were successful because of her previous experiences caused her to stay ethical and be fair to all members of the House. She worked with men legislators including asking Bill Bachelder to be Speaker pro temp. She made sure they did not attempt to limit or control her power and leadership. She was not like Speaker Riffe because she said “I was more discreet”. She did discipline members, but she did it in private not public. But the members realized she subtly used her powers so she would not lose control. She was subsequently described as a “Velvet Hammer Leader.”

She also made a difference in the way women legislators were respected. She encouraged the fact that women’s different experiences would give them different views on issues that needed to be considered. They were encouraged to recognize cooperative approaches and consensus building rather than merely focusing on goals and results. Many people still appreciate her leadership years.

Another dramatic impact of my research was a better comprehension of the changing realities of power between men and women in today’s environment. For example, in an interview with another woman lawyer she described the changes in leadership and power today versus ten years ago.

She said, ”One of the most significant factors is the increased numbers of women as full participants within activities and decisions.” She believes their equal involvement is working the processes of decision making and achieving shared cooperative power between both men and women.

She had four male leaders of her organization over the past decade, but only the last one who joined only 18 months ago accepted the women’s power roles. He encouraged equal participation, collaboration and sharing of power authority among all men and women. Unlike the three previous men leaders this last man did not assert his authority by simply telling the others what to do and how to do it. This was a fundamental change from her previous male directors and their authority attitudes.

Based on my new knowledge I now believe these trends of cooperative powers are not universal. For example, in current politics I see many women are adopting the existing male approach of leading with limited cooperative commitments.

I reviewed Deborah Tannen’s 1990 book; **You Just Don’t Understand** describing the different ways men and women use language to communicate. She stated that “men as a class are dominant in our society and that many individual men seek to dominate women in their lives…” She believes that more women are moving into positions of authority, but many are trying to talk like men. Trying to reframe their own communication styles to sound like men is rarely effective.

She then describes better women communication strategies:

Women are more comfortable navigating sensitive topics.

They are more expressive in their communication by using physical gestures, facial expressions and vocal variations. They also interpret others non-verbal actions like facial expressions, body language and tone of voice.

They fully concentrate on active listening to remember what was said by all. They try to seek consensus among all.

These describe how women participate, communicate and then implement their personal power.

I had an interview with a major male player in Ohio political processes for the past fifty years. We discussed his ideas of how women use their power better today. He believes there was a positive impact with the significant increase in the number of women successfully participating as senior leaders in working environments and politics.

He agreed that their expectations, attitudes and approaches have changed during the past decades. He believes today most women leaders are more willing to work with both men and women, than many men are.

However, he also believes that fewer men and women are willing to cooperate with anyone who doesn’t agree with their positions. He said both men and women leaders seem more willing to express their positions than to listen, let alone to embrace or include others in their approaches to final decisions.

He is working with several women who have successful political and organization strategies. They enjoy working with other women more than men. In fact, one woman leader told him he was respected by her because he was a woman thinker in a man’s body!!!

He would listen to all other thoughts and then participate, not to only present his opinion but to engage all thoughts in the process of a mutually supported conclusion.

He agreed that Jo Ann Davidson was more involved and cooperative with more individuals than his experiences with Speaker Riffe.

He agrees with Katty Kay that women have more impacting power activities because of their roles in their families and volunteer activities.

He believes those activities can often provide a positive base for the development of how to adopt power and to share it rather than direct it. Today both men and women have opportunities to have multiple responsibilities beyond work that give developments of power and leadership.

QUESTION: **Do we comprehend the values of non-work-related experiences to help us identify the best way to utilize power to achieve successes at work?**

An interview with a 37 year old male real estate executive proved to me that the changing impact of women’s ability to implement power is still not always having a positive Impact on some men. After ten years in multiple businesses including an association, managing several restaurants and now real estate seller he has concluded it is difficult for him to deal with women’s new power actions.

He believes that women supervisors who want everyone to participate in decision making is not a positive approach. He has concluded that he is most effective when he works alone and doesn’t try to equally participate with men or women.

I tried to get him to explain his difficulties dealing with women in power. He simply said he could not comprehend their approaches and expectations. He said, “I want to evaluate the issue, determine the best strategy and then do it!! He said he didn’t understand a women’s approach that they wanted all to participate. He feels that activity limits his abilities to achieve the best results as he defines them.

After 6 months of reading books and articles, researching with individuals’ experiences as they developed and utilized power and studying the last fifty years of history on women in power I conclude that I **REALLY** have very limited understanding of today’s differences in how men and women use communications to implement their personal powers.

Tannen’s books conclude that women use communications to build and maintain relationships while men use their communication to establish and maintain their perception of superior status.

Kay’s and Tannen’s books and my interviews of conversation differences and power utilization gave me a better understanding of the different ways most women and men use their personal power approaches to lead others and achieve success.

My question after my research and studying is:

**“What’s Really True Today about Women’s use of Power.”**

While I believe Kay’s analysis is **REAL**, I also believe it is not **REALLY** applicable with **all** men and women. Today many women use their real power over others just like men do. My perception of the men in Kit Kat is that we do not use our powers only to direct others. Rather we use our power in both ways depending on the situation.

Use of personal powers is changing because the world in which we work is changing dramatically. The impact of computer utilization and now the application of AI in more places every day is having a dramatic impact on the way men and women deal with their power in personal and professional issues.

I am concerned today that too many are using their power only to tell others what to do rather than getting others to participate in analysis, decision making and then collectively implementing the decision.

After all my research I don’t believe we can be sure how men and women will use their power styles in the future.

Worse I can’t “**REALLY”** suggest a single conclusion of the way men and women will use their personal powers to be more cooperative and effective.

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