

## **WinSETT / Becoming Leaders Workshop – Career Success: Skills and Strategies**

Carolyn J. Emerson  
Women in SETT / Femmes en SGMT Project Coordinator, CCWESTT  
709-754-7646 (ph/fax); carolyn.emerson@earthlink.net  
www.cwestt.org/sett.asp

F. Mary Williams  
Director General, NRC Institute for Ocean Technology  
FMary.Williams@nrc-cnrc.gc.ca

### Introduction

Progressive science and engineering organizations are committed to the fair representation and advancement of women in their workplaces. Despite many policies and practices, however, women are still typically underrepresented in senior positions and leave organizations at higher rates than men particularly at mid-career levels.<sup>1,2</sup> For example, a seven-year US study found that women in science and engineering occupations are twice as likely as men to leave these fields to pursue other careers.<sup>3</sup>

Companies and institutions invest significant resources in the recruitment, hiring, training and development of their employees. Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization found that *it cost roughly four times as much to continually hunt for and train replacement staff than it did to provide optimal conditions for job satisfaction and motivation of existing personnel.*<sup>4</sup>

Creating workplaces that support, offer development opportunities for, and retain women employees provides a return on the organization's investment in valuable human resources and saves on the high costs of this differential turnover. The employer who supports women in the workplace will also have a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining the 'best and the brightest' from an increased pool of talent and will become an 'employer of choice'.<sup>5</sup> [For more information on the economic benefits, see *Increasing Women in SETT: The Business Case.*<sup>6</sup>]

On the employee side of the equation, clearly there are rewards for women working in science and engineering fields with careers that are very likely interesting and financially rewarding. Such careers also have the potential to be much more: to put women in leadership roles, bring added recognition and satisfaction, and place them in a position to make a positive difference. For, as women succeed at each stage of their careers, they influence the people around them, their leadership grows and very importantly, they point the way for other women.

## Women in SETT / Becoming Leaders Partnership

The Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering, Science, Trades and Technology (CCWESTT) embarked on its Women in SETT (Science, Engineering, Trades and Technology) Initiative to effect change at the institutional level to increase the participation and advancement of women in SETT fields in Canada. In 2008, the WinSETT Initiative is delivering products and services to industry in four sectors, including oil and gas where the retention of women has been noted as an issue. One pilot service being offered by WinSETT is a workshop for early to mid-career women scientists and engineers in the oil and gas industry with the objective of increasing retention and strengthening leadership potential.

This WinSETT offered workshop is aligned with the successful *Becoming Leaders*<sup>™</sup> series of workshops based on the internationally lauded book *Becoming Leaders: A Practical Handbook for Women in Engineering, Science, and Technology*, a new version of which will be published in April 2008.<sup>7</sup> The handbook is a concise and highly accessible resource on a range of topics significant for women professionals and students in science and engineering, and those who support their progress. The handbook and workshops are successful because they were developed by women scientists, engineers, technologists and students from our own experiences and perspective, with strategies that work. The *Becoming Leaders Career Success Workshop* has been previously delivered effectively to a number of audiences including most recently on several occasions to mid-career women scientists and engineers in the Federal Public Service.<sup>8</sup>

### Becoming Leaders Career Success Workshop: Skills and Strategies

The underlying rationale for the workshop is that in career development, both the choice and the responsibility rest in large measure with the individual. She decides on the career path, the cost-benefit and work-life balances, and the personal style with which she is comfortable. Supporting her includes helping her to identify a range of options, raising awareness of both external and internal factors, and giving her the confidence and motivation to advance.

While at first glance the workshop seemingly undertakes to adjust the women to the workplace instead of to improve the work environment for the women, the aim is not to 'fit' the women, but to give them the tools to effect change, particularly in the interactions which involve them. There are also additional complementary resources available for managers and leaders to support the progress of women in their organization.

The workshop introduces the participants to the question of what and who controls individual career success, and addresses the reality that women often face special challenges in 'being heard' and gaining promotion. The session provides awareness of the subtle factors that impact our careers. These gender schemas are the sub-conscious beliefs about sex differences that all of us have – beliefs which “*affect our expectations of men and women and how we evaluate their work and performance as professionals*”.<sup>9</sup> These schemas result in women accruing a series of small disadvantages which see our career paths diverge from our male peers. With that key understanding, the workshop then provides the tools and builds confidence to advance women's career success, however we define it.

Information is presented interactively in a manner that encourages participants to relate it to their own experience. Reinforcement occurs when participants recognize common experiences which, since they are in a minority in the workplace, they often have not realized were common and characteristic for women. Participants learn about high value skills such as effective communication, organizational awareness, career planning, networking, and negotiating strategies, which will ensure recognition for their achievements and improve access to professional advancement.

The initial Women in SETT *Becoming Leaders Career Success Workshop* is being delivered in Calgary in late April 2008 to two dozen women engineers and scientists in the early to mid stages of their careers in the oil and gas sector. Dr. F. Mary Williams, leader of a major government research facility, senior author of *Becoming Leaders*, and the first NSERC/Petro-Canada Chair for Women in Science and Engineering for the Atlantic region, will facilitate the session. The session will also provide an opportunity for participants to hear workplace tips and personal strategies from more senior women with a variety of experiences in these fields. It is intended that participants will strengthen networks in their organizations/industry and will continue to benefit from supportive and mentoring relationships to progress in their careers.

Evaluation and outcomes from this workshop will be presented at the CCWESTT Conference and will enable CCWESTT to make any modifications for future expanded delivery of the workshop to industry stakeholders in several locations across Canada.

## References

1. Ranson, G. (1998). "Retention of Women in Engineering: Good News and Bad News from Alberta." 7th CCWEST National Conference, Vancouver, B.C., May 21-23, 1998.
2. Hewlett, S. A. & Luce, C.B. (2005). Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success. Harvard Business Review March 2005, 11 pp.
3. Holmgren, J. L. & Basch, L. (2005). Encouragement, Not Gender, Key to Success in Science. Carnegie Perspectives Feb. 2005, 3 pp. <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/perspectives/perspectives2005.Feb.htm>.
4. Council of Science and Technology Advisors (2002). EDGE - Employees Driving Government Excellence: Renewing S&T Human Resources in the Federal Public Service. November 2002. 22 pp. <http://www.csta-cest.ca>
5. Orser, B. (2000). Creating High - Performance Organizations: Leveraging Women's Leadership. The Conference Board of Canada. 31 pp. <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/>
6. CCWESTT (2006). Increasing Women in SETT: The Business Case. 14 pp. [www.ccwestt.org/sett.asp](http://www.ccwestt.org/sett.asp)
7. Williams, F. M. and Emerson, C. J. (2008). *Becoming Leaders: A Practical Handbook for Women in Engineering, Science, and Technology*. American Society of Civil Engineers Press, American Society of Mechanical Engineers Press, and the Society of Women Engineers, Reston, VA. 200 pp. ISBN 978-0-7844-0920-6.
8. Williams, F. M. and Emerson, C. J. (2004). *Becoming Leaders: Successes of a Handbook and Workshop Series for Women in Science and Engineering*. 9<sup>th</sup> CCWESTT National Conference, Brock University, St. Catharines ON, June 10-12, 2004.

9. Valian, V. (1999). "Why So Slow? – The Advancement of Women". The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 421 pp.

### Biographical Information

Carolyn J. Emerson, M.Sc., is Project Coordinator of the Women in SETT (Science, Engineering, Trades and Technology) project of CCWESTT. Carolyn, a former research biologist, has worked for over 20 years in initiatives to increase the participation and career success of women in SETT fields, is co-author of *Becoming Leaders*, and is president of Carolyn J. Emerson Consulting.

F. Mary Williams, Ph.D., D.D.S., is Director General of NRC's Institute for Ocean Technology, the recipient of several international awards, and principal author of *Becoming Leaders*. She was the inaugural NSERC/Petro-Canada Chair for Women in Science and Engineering for the Atlantic Region and is adjunct professor of Engineering at Memorial University.