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Editor's Notes

Betty Brown

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Editorial Notes

One of the most visible trends we've seen during the past decade is the increasing percentage of professional women in the workplace. In addition, a larger percentage of small businesses are being founded and run by women. Recently, a writer for a national business publication called to ask my opinion about whether or not new businesses started by women are more likely to fail than those headed by men. I didn't know the answer, but I had trouble getting the question out of my mind. Failure is looked upon as a disgrace that is to be feared and avoided at all costs. Perhaps we need to look at the consequences that the fear of failure can bring.

When I went through an undergraduate accounting curriculum in the sixties, there were few women in my business classes. They consistently received very high grades. Now, half the students in my classes are women, and many of them are struggling academically.

When I sat for the CPA Exam in the seventies, those



Suzie Superstar

candidates who passed all parts on the first sitting were called to the front of the room for a special award. Although the men taking the exam far outnumbered the women, six women and one man came forward to collect their awards. You could tell the lone male was uncomfortable by his cross buttoned suit jacket. On the most recent exam, half those sitting were women,

yet only slightly over half of the first time passers were women.

Why has the proportion of women who excel decreased? Do these changes represent a step back for women, or a giant step forward? I believe that we are seeing the results of significant advances for women in the workplace.

In the past, only Suzie Superstar would step forward to pick up the torch. She had to succeed because she represented her entire sex. Only those with exceptional abilities stood a chance of making their marks in this male dominated profession. Now, Amy Average is claiming her right to be a participant. Naturally, since Amy does not have Suzie's outstanding abilities, she is more likely to advance at a slower pace, or even stumble and fall. So, do we encourage Suzie into the profession and discourage Amy because she isn't considered a strong role model for

Amy Average



the young women coming after her?

The December 4, 1989 cover of Time magazine with the theme "Women Face the '90s" carried the statement, "In the '80s they tried to have it all. Now they've just plain had it." Suzie Superstar is the outstanding performer who



Debbie Desperate

makes it to the partnership level while raising a perfect family without showing signs of stress. From time to time, most of us envy Suzie because we can't be like her. Unfortunately Suzie Superstar is in danger of becoming Brenda Burnout. Often, Amy Average becomes Debbie Desperate if she can't accept the fact that she has different limitations than Suzie.

Do women starting small businesses fail more often than men? How can you avoid failure? Obviously, if an individual has a strong background in management, finance and marketing, an innovative idea or approach, and good business contacts he or she is more likely to succeed. But all of these factors will only increase the likelihood of not failing. I can tell you with certainty how not to fail.

First, never accept a challenge or test your limits. Stick with what you know and don't do anything that you haven't done before. Never go out on a limb unless you have someone waiting nearby to catch you when you fall. Make sure someone is there to bail you out in case you get in trouble. Don't try to be either Suzie Superstar or Amy Average, just be Melanie Mediocrity and you'll never suffer the humiliation of failing - or the exhilaration of winning.

If more women are failing, that tells me that more women are accepting challenges and exploring their limits. Certainly failure is not something to which we should aspire, but at least it signifies that women are out there developing entrepreneurial skills. We've come a long way if a woman can fail in her venture without feeling that she has failed all women.



Brenda Burnout

Betty Brown



Melanie Mediocrity