

Generations

Female bosses taught me a lot

Over the past 60 years, Gallup has conducted a poll with both sexes to determine if they preferred working for men or women.

Men preferred working for men, as expected, but I was surprised that women also preferred working for men. However, the latest Gallop survey showed that the tide was turning for younger women between the ages of 18 and 29 who had no preference.

Women must be starting to realize that working for a woman has plenty of advantages, the most important being that you can learn so much from her while climbing the corporate ladder.

The amazing female managers who took me under their wings as a fledgling struggling to fly in corporate America were women that I'll never forget.

My first job was stenographer for a town supervisor. He was a young, brilliant man who later became head of the legislature and then the county executive.

I was under the tutelage of Thelma, his confidential assistant. She had interviewed me and shot a barrage of probing questions at me. She was stern and didn't like chitchat, but she must have seen something in me because I got the job.

I later found out that Thelma was feared by everyone in the office because her job was primarily that of a watchdog and

she did it well.

She protected the



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charming, handsome supervisor from the outside world, including the young women in the secretarial pool who

swooned when they caught a glimpse of him as he entered or exited the building.

We learned in business school not to address our immediate supervisor on a first-name basis until we were instructed to do so. However, it turned out that I was the only one who used "Miss" plus her last name when addressing Thelma.

This went on for a couple of years until one day she looked over at me and said with a smile, "I think it's about time you called me Thelma."

She trained me to become junior watchdog, but she also bailed me out a few times, like when I sent the supervisor to the wrong airport and he missed an important flight. Thelma took the fall and I, in turn, paid her back with the only thing I was capable of giving her: loyalty.

Thelma made history, too, and taught me a lot about courage just by donning a pantsuit. During our legislature years of working together in the '70s, she pioneered the practice of women

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wearing pantsuits to work and persuaded one of the female legislators to join her by attending the next legislative session in one.

It made the front page of Long Island's Newsday. Pretty soon, most women showed up for work in pantsuits and a small victory had been won for women in local government. Times were changing.

When the county executive lost the election, I left Thelma and worked for another vibrant woman named Fran.

Turning 40 hit me pretty hard, but Fran was right there when I needed her most. For some premenopausal reason, I wanted my own space rather than sit in a busy office. She immediately understood, asked no questions, and turned the file room into an office for me.

I moved to Charlotte after retiring from government and went to work in private industry for two high-ranking female company officers.

These talented women taught me about style, how to dress to impress, interact with all sorts of personalities, and how to promote yourself so that

you make the right kind of impression. That stuff isn't stressed enough today, but it's so important to succeed.

Both were immaculately groomed in tailored suits with matching handbags and shoes. My budget was living from paycheck to paycheck with worn-out heels and mismatched separates.

One day, they invited me out to lunch, but to my surprise, those 60 minutes didn't include eating. We hit every thrift store and fashion outlet in Charlotte.

Smart shopping and good accessories were the keys to a polished, professional look, and not the number of bucks in a paycheck.

So, for those women at all stages of their careers reading this column, if you're lucky enough to have a woman for your supervisor, sit back and watch her. You may just learn a thing or two.

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