



post-gazette.com **Business News**

- Business
- Previous Articles
- Dateline
- Top 50
- Markets
- Personal Bus.
- Cars
- Consumer
- Technology
- Mortgage Rates
- Consumer Rates

Consultant finds biggest roadblock is what she does, not gender, age

Sunday, August 19, 2007

By Joyce Gannon, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Leslie Wilk Braksick co-founded Moon-based Continuous Learning Group in 1993 as a consulting group that uses behavioral psychology to improve business performance for clients such as Chevron Corp., Canadian National Railway, American Eagle Outfitters and H.J. Heinz Co.

She recently released the second edition of her book, "Unlock Behavior, Unleash Profits: Developing Leadership Behavior That Drives Profitability in Your Organization." The best-selling business book required updating from its original printing in 2000, she said, because "so much has changed in the marketplace Many important issues around employee engagement and leadership really had to be treated a little bit differently."

Q: What is so different about the business world since 2000 that prompted you to update your book?

A: I think the biggest change is the population of the people who are being hired and being led by companies today. The Y generation (broadly defined as people born between 1976 and 2000) profiles very, very differently than the generations that have preceded us. The generation I serve [includes] currently sitting CEOs -- 50-something people and above. People who grew up at a time when there was a very high degree of loyalty within a company. You went to work for a company, and your goal was to advance within that organization and to be promoted and dedicate your career there.

That is not at all the case now. Most people will work for an average of six companies in their career, which means you are doing a lot more hiring, more transitioning of new people in.



Bob Donaldson, Post-Gazette
Leslie Wilk Braksick sits at her desk with ready-to-sign copies of her book, "Unlock Behavior, Unleash Profits: Developing Leadership Behavior That Drives Profitability in Your Organization."

Click photo for larger image.

Leslie Wilk Braksick

Job: Chairman and co-founder, The Continuous Learning Group Inc.

Age: 42

Hometown: Ellenville, N.Y; resides in Sewickley

Education: Bachelor's, English and psychology, St. Bonaventure University, 1986; master's, industrial psychology, Western Michigan

FEATURED JOBS

- Therapist**
Pittsburgh, PA
- Management**
Pittsburgh, PA
- Customer Service**
Pittsburgh, PA
- Administrative/office**
Pittsburgh, PA
- Retail**
Pittsburgh, PA

[CLICK FOR MORE JOBS](#)



It's easy with the National Network.
 Click for details.
post-gazette.com

post-gazette.com
 Expanded Commercial Real Estate Listings

Place an Ad
 Click Here

CARFAX
 VEHICLE HISTORY REPORTS
 Protect yourself with a CARFAX Vehicle History Report.
 Click here.

post-gazette.com
Headlines by E-mail

It poses all kinds of challenges to how you retain knowledge and significant attributes of your brand inside an existing organization. All kinds of challenges get posed to leaders under that scenario. And the motivations are different. I think there's a much greater desire for reciprocity with the younger generation. They're looking for more of a partnership: I'll come in and do this for you expecting this in return. Those kind of conversations really didn't happen 10 and 20 years ago.

Q: How does your theory of behavioral psychology differ from other techniques used by business consultants?

A: Nothing changes until behavior changes. Most companies are trying to change some aspect of how they do things. So we become very concerned with what the current behavior patterns are and what the new behavior patterns need to be. Hopefully, we uncover why things are happening as they are. Why people do what they do is not at all mysterious. Say you're in a meeting and the [executive or company leader] says: "We really care what everyone thinks. Please speak up. Please be honest." Then the first time someone offers a new idea, the leader says: "We tried that before. It will never work." They've just communicated to that person that they shouldn't speak up in the meeting.

Q: Can you give an example of a company where you effectively changed the behavior?

A: Chevron Corp. In 1995, then-Chairman Ken Derr said he wanted to change the culture of the company and be a more effective leader himself. He started behavioral, executive coaching of the top 200 leaders within the organization. From there he took the refineries, the chemical plants ... and they applied their own customized [leadership] to their business.

One chemical plant was losing \$40 million net a year on plant shutdowns, which means the plant would unexpectedly need to be shut down due to some problem or error. We met with the hourly employees, with the supervisors. We asked a number of questions about the preventative maintenance. We found out there used to be people on shift to observe the equipment for warning signs and smells. But they had downsized. There wasn't a person assigned to general observation. Secondly, we learned they were very tied to making sure they never exceeded their maintenance budget because it was tied to receiving a bonus. They said they got in a lot of trouble if they went over their budget. Third, their standard operating procedures had not been updated, and there were not any checks or balances being done on the part of the supervisors.

University, 1988; doctorate, applied behavior analysis, Western Michigan University, 1990.

Career: 1987-90: consultant for professional and clerical staff development, Western Michigan University; 1989-90: consultant, University of Michigan; 1990-92: senior consultant, Center for Entrepreneurial Studies and Development, West Virginia University; 1993: co-founded Continuous Learning Group.

Listen in

Talking With Leslie Braksick



Comments on why [she stepped aside as chief executive](#) of the company she co-founded.



Talks about [whether she's felt discrimination in the business world](#) because she's a woman.

So we helped shore up the standard operating procedures, we got relief on the maintenance budget and helped them reassign who did what so there was time for some direct observation around the equipment. The first year they decreased their unplanned shutdown costs to \$8 million and now it's remained under \$2 million. It was just through behavioral and very minor process changes.

Q: Have you ever encountered resistance because you're a relatively young female recommending changes in leadership and behavior at organizations that are frequently very traditional and male-dominated at the top?

A: Yes and no. I feel the burden in every situation to earn respect, and to earn trust and demonstrate credibility. So I don't assume that I would immediately garner trust particularly because no one likes consultants. Most people have been screwed by a consultant. So they are very wary of consultants. We might as well just be called used car salesmen. We have a burden when we walk in the door to demonstrate we are different, and I love that. So in that regard, I don't think it's because I'm a woman or my age. It's because I'm a consultant and almost everyone and their brother has had a bad experience with a consultant.

I cannot name an instance in which I felt as though an opportunity was not made available to me or that I was somehow negatively treated because of my gender or my age. If there were people who were chosen over me, generally it was because they were better or they were more qualified.

Q: Last year you stepped aside as chief executive of CLG. Why?

A: I was the CEO up until 2006. And now it's Edward "Ned" Morse. I'm doing very little of the day-to-day operations ... by design. I ran the business for 10 years, and I was ready to do other things. I wanted to spend more time writing, speaking, working with my CEO clients and to travel less than I had for 14 years. I really thought the company would benefit from a new leader. It's a major milestone at a startup for a nonfounder to be running the firm, to be the CEO and to have that work successfully and really succeed the founders. I very much wanted to be part of that experiment here. I wanted to signal in every way to the company that I believed in its future and that did not mean I had to be running it every day.

Q: Besides your work chairing CLG, writing and speaking engagements, you sit on a host of nonprofit boards, including the Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh Foundation. How do you juggle all that with raising a family?

A: His name is Matthew. He's my husband, and he's the reason I'm able to do what I do well. He was a college English professor. He stopped teaching the year our son was born. He has focused his time on the kids, the house. He's a big gardener and sits on a number of boards locally that keep him closely tied to the community and the activities of the children. The proceeds of the book all go to Children's Hospital [where our late daughter was treated in 1996 for a rare heart disorder]. So the more books people buy, the more they're helping sick kids.

*Joyce Gannon can
be reached at
[jgannon@post-
gazette.com](mailto:jgannon@post-gazette.com)
412-263-1580.*

or

SPONSORED LINKS

[E-mail this story](#)  [Print this story](#) 

Get home delivery of the Post-Gazette - [click here for a special offer.](#)

[Search](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Advertise](#) | [About Us](#) | [What's New](#) | [Help](#) | [Corrections](#)

Copyright ©1997-2007 PG Publishing Co., Inc. All Rights Reserved.