

A graduate class on gender discrimination in the workplace sparks a grieving process among female professionals

BY LAURA SCHWEITZER
FOR THE BUSINESS REVIEW

When Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross published her work on the five stages of grief, she probably wasn't thinking it would apply to graduate students in a management course. Yet as I gear up to co-teach “Women and Management” in January, I am prepared to witness the grieving process.

In her 1969 book, *On Death and Dying*, Kübler-Ross defined five stages of grief experienced by patients diagnosed with a terminal illness: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and finally, acceptance. She went on to generalize her findings, relating them to any life-altering experience that results in personal loss.

It may sound dramatic, but the young women in our class progress through the same five stages during the course. They come to realize the playing field for women is far from even and that their own lives will likely be affected by gender-related impediments.

I co-teach “Women and Management” with Dr. Michele Paludi, a nationally recognized expert in gender discrimination. I bring to class only my personal experience as a woman rising through the ranks of academic medicine. Despite a long history of increasing numbers of women physicians and attaining 50 percent women enrollment in medical schools, it is a discipline where

Comment

less than 20 percent of full professors and 6 percent of department chairs are female.

On the first day of class, we ask students a variety of questions related to their own personal experiences. And while we avoid asking directly, it is clear to me from their comments that most of the women believe that gender discrimination no longer exists.

As an assistant and associate professor I shared their disbelief. I had been (and continue to be) given tremendous opportunities to advance my career. It was not until a 1995 salary equity study that I learned that I was making 12 percent less than male peers and received a \$14,000 a year equity adjustment. As dean of faculty, I catalogued objective evidence that women were held to higher standards in promotion and tenure committees. The discrimination I observed first-hand was a difficult reality to cope with—so I recognize that struggle when my current students discover the inequities.

In our course, we stick to the facts. Consider these figures for 2012:

- 3.6 percent: The current percentage of female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies
- 20 percent: The average disparity in income American women earn, compared to male colleagues in simi-

lar positions and seniority

- 3 percent: While the number of women on corporate boards has increased to almost 16 percent, less than 3 percent of board chairmanships are held by women

As students are given information, the Kübler-Ross process begins. Their denial gives way to anger. Anger gives way to bargaining and sometimes depression. Finally, they reach acceptance and these young women become focused on acquiring the knowledge and skills we offer in class that will help them best navigate their new reality.

Last time we taught the class, we had one male student who shared that he enrolled to better understand his (professional) wife's reality and the potential obstacles that lie ahead for his daughter. By the time his daughter is in graduate school, I hope we no longer need to teach a gender-based course in management. Capital Region business leaders—that is up to you.

LAURA SCHWEITZER is president of Union Graduate College in Schenectady.



Desperate times in Niagara Falls

Amsterdam, Elmira, Binghamton, Utica, Buffalo. Cities across upstate New York have had better days.

Population drain and factory closings have shrunk tax bases in city after city. Technological change and globalization have been particularly disruptive to these cities, wiping out entire industries.

It seems every development since Willis Carrier perfected air-conditioning has taken a piece out of upstate New York.

Perhaps no city has fared worse than once-iconic Niagara Falls.

State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli issued a report this week about the tragedy of Niagara Falls, once the honeymoon capital of the United States.

A few bleak factoids caught my eye:

- Niagara Falls's population peaked at 102,395 in 1960. The 2010 census shows a 51 percent population loss—the largest for any city in the state.
- 17.6 percent of those who do live in Niagara Falls live in poverty. Ouch!
- Unemployment is 11.4 percent, compared with the 8.2 percent average for New York state cities.

- Almost 14 percent of the properties in the city are vacant and nearly 45 percent are tax exempt.

- The median price for a home in Niagara Falls is \$65,400. The median home price in other New York state cities is \$96,000.

That is just brutal.

It was not always this way. Shredded Wheat and Triscuits were once produced in Nabisco plants in Niagara Falls. There was once a busy industrial complex of chemical factories. The local Air Force Base played a key role in the nation's air defense system. And, of course, the honeymoon industry was a big deal. It was the movie “Niagara” that made Marilyn Monroe a star.

I have been to Niagara Falls several times over the past 40 years. Several years ago on a bitter cold day I walked with a friend to see the so-called ice bridge. Another time a friend who lived there set out to show me the sights and we ended up driving through the infamous Love Canal neighborhood.

Now there is the Seneca Niagara Casino in downtown Niagara Falls, and that has been a bit of a mixed blessing. DiNapoli's report says a dispute with the Senecas has

exacerbated the crisis, depriving Niagara Falls some \$60 million that was due the city over the last three years. I am sure that is a messy situation, as those alphas seem to be.

Niagara Falls should be a warning to all of us here in the Capital Region. We have the strongest local economy in upstate New York. We cannot take any private sector employer for granted. The same forces that devastated the economy in Niagara Falls are always in play across upstate New York, whether we are in Albany, Ogdensburg or Niagara Falls. Let the momentum slip and it is a long road back.

MIKE HENDRICKS is the editor of *The Business Review* mhendricks@bizjournals.com 518.640.6809 @ALBBizNEWS



THE BUSINESS REVIEW

PublisherCarolyn M. Jones

NEWS

Editor.....Mike Hendricks
Managing Editor.....Neil Springer
Associate Managing Editor....Robin K. Cooper
Design Editor.....Jo Anne Howe
Associate Editor.....Philip Schwartz

Reporters

Pam Allen, Michael DeMasi, Richard A. D'Errico, Barbara Pinckney, Adam Sichko

Research Director/

Social Media Editor.....Melissa Gold
Biz Leads Editor.....Paul F. Marr
Photographer.....Donna Abbott Vlahos

ADVERTISING

Account Executives
Susan Brandow, Tiffany Giroux,
Cheryl Munzert, Rob Tallman

GRAPHICS

Art Director.....Melissa Mangini

AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Audience Development
Director.....Courtney Myers

ADMINISTRATION

Business Manager.....Sara Egan
Administrative
Assistant.....Tiffany Van Nostrand
Event Coordinator.....Kate Fruscione

News Fax: 640-6836
E-mail: albany@bizjournals.com
Web site: albanybusinessreview.com

©2012 American City Business Journals, Inc.
Reproduction or use, without permission, of editorial or graphic content in any manner is prohibited.

The Business Review is a publication of
American City Business Journals
120 West Morehead Street, Charlotte, N.C. 28202
Whitney Shaw, President & CEO
Ray Shaw, Chairman (1989 to 2009)

THE BUSINESS JOURNALS
The Audit Bureau

Information for obtaining commemorative plaques, reprints or Web permissions can be obtained from *The Business Review's* designated partner company, Scoop ReprintSource at 800.767.3263 or scoopreprintsources.com. No other companies offering similar services are affiliated in any way with *The Business Review*.

Letters to the editor

The Business Review welcomes your comments. Letters must be typewritten, signed and include your name, address and daytime telephone number.

All submissions become the property of *The Business Review* and will not be returned; submissions may be edited and may be published or otherwise re-used in any medium.

Letters should be sent to:

Editor

The Business Review
40 British American Blvd.
Albany, N.Y. 12110

FAX: 640-6836 | e-mail: albany@bizjournals.com