



Women's Growth Forum

SBI is dedicated to helping everyone who encounters the firm reach their full potential for unforgettable personal and professional growth. SBI's Women's Growth Forum is an invite-only event for female executives and women in leadership to participate with their peers in a small group roundtable discussion

March 2025 Meeting Summary

The March 2025 Women's Growth Forum used the Toughest Table exercise to discuss experiences, strategies, and tactics to build credibility, manage diverse personalities, and assert one's voice in critical negotiations. This note summarizes highlights from the discussion.

Turning Negotiation into an Opportunity for Influence

Negotiation emerged as a recurring theme, with leaders sharing how they position themselves effectively in high-pressure situations. The discussion highlighted the power of coalition-building, framing conversations to drive buy-in, and recognizing when walking away is the best course of action. Attendees reflected on the importance of preparation, from anticipating objections using the "5-questions exercise" to privately engaging with key decision-makers ahead of a larger discussion.

One takeaway for the group was to seek and receive feedback in a way that enhances credibility and influence. Leaders emphasized the value of articulating exactly what they need from a discussion, whether it be validation, alternative perspectives, or next steps to improve. By communicating clear expectations, a space is created for constructive feedback, ensuring the conversation is relevant and effective. Being open to input without becoming defensive fosters a culture of trust and collaboration.

Building Credibility in Tough Conversations

The leaders in the discussion emphasized the need for deliberate credibility-building tactics when facing tough conversations with clients, colleagues, boards, and investors. Techniques such as balancing analytical insights with narrative storytelling, identifying and addressing objections proactively, and fostering direct communication were highlighted. Leaders discussed the importance of shifting their own mindsets to recognize that their contributions hold weight, even if they take longer to formulate or are not delivered with the same volume as others in the room. They reflected on the fact that their presence in these discussions is not accidental. By embracing this perspective, the women in the discussion can focus on delivering thoughtful input without feeling pressure to match the style of more dominant voices.

Navigating Workplace Politics with Confidence

The forum explored the nuances of polarizing leadership discussions, and the skills needed to cut through corporate noise. Challenges arise when attempting to maintain authority in rooms where difficult news is being delivered, with the ability to manage perceptions and lead with authenticity emerging as a crucial factor to navigate these conversations with confidence. An insight from the group was the importance of understanding the various personalities present at these tables, identifying who influences outcomes, who resists change, and who acts as a bridge between viewpoints. Attendees discussed strategies for adapting their communication style to engage effectively with these personalities, anticipate reactions, and ensure their message resonates.

Understanding When and How to Speak Up

*"We tend to feel that we are boxed in or stuck in a situation, but **ultimately the choice is there.** It can be freeing to simply walk away from a difficult person or make the decision to stand up and say something."*

A common challenge leaders face is determining the right moment to contribute in conversations dominated by strong personalities. Attendees shared personal experiences encountering uncomfortable situations where they had to decide whether to assert their perspective or take a step back. In some cases, being vulnerable, expressing exactly what is needed and articulating when something is not working, can be a powerful tool. At other times, being able to recognize when additional support is needed is equally important. Those in the discussion reflected on the benefit of having an internal support system, trusted advisor, or peer who can advocate as well as stepping in to uplift other women navigating complex situations. By embracing self-advocacy, leaders can navigate high-stakes conversations with confidence.

Highlights and Most Valued Takeaways from the Forum

- Own your development and be intentional when seeking specific feedback. Ask another person at the table to help identify blind spots.
- Different personalities causing friction was a theme for many attendees' toughest table. Understanding and tailoring communication style to different personality types was discussed as an effective tool for coalition and credibility building.
- In challenging situations, consensus was that directly confronting the other individual is an essential step to overcome the situation. The group also acknowledged that sometimes people may not be swayed, so accepting the situation is a viable choice.
- Tell it like the weather. The group agreed that they were often passionate about the work they were doing, and emotions would override the message they attempted to convey. By taking a "tell it like the weather" approach, focuses the speaker on the message they want to convey and the outcome they are driving.

The Women's Growth Forum continues to serve as a space for open conversations about leadership, influence, and professional growth. Through shared experience and strategies, attendees left with a new perspective on how to navigate the most challenging aspects of executive leadership.

The next Women's Growth Forum is taking place in-person during SBI's Spring Regional Summit May 13 & 14th in Atlanta, GA.