

## What women bankers say about their leadership styles

Table discussions yield a list of strengths and areas for improvement

After hearing author Selena Rezvani discuss women's career issues across the business world, bankers attending ABA's Women's Leadership Forum went into table discussions to review questions posed by association organizers.

By Steve Cocheo, executive editor and digital content manager

"This is a good time for women in banking," said Oklahoma banker Jane Haskin. "The glass ceiling has been broken. They want people to step up. They want women on boards."

### More from the Forum

This article is a companion to coverage of keynote speaker Selena Rezvani's presentation at the 2012 ABA Women's Leadership Forum. [Click here to read about Rezvani's presentation.](#)

Some younger women in banking may not even know the term “glass ceiling.” It was long used to describe the invisible barrier between women in banking and the industry’s top echelons. Now, women don’t have a corner on the corner office, but one sees them in the top spot, or close to it, in more and more institutions.

Haskins, president, First Bethany Bank, \$172.8 million-assets, made her observations as women bankers attending ABA’s 2012 Women’s Leadership Forum launched into table discussions following a keynote presentation by author Selena Rezvani.

The 100-plus women registered (with one male trade magazine reporter, father of two daughters, attending) came from all facets of the industry. Some head community banks. Some run branches, departments, or divisions for larger institutions. Some do business banking, some handle lobbying. Some work for financial trade associations or consulting firms in Washington in communications, marketing, membership, government relations, compliance, or the law.

Massachusetts banker Dorothy Savarese told attendees that the whole point of the ABA forum is “to unleash talent.”

More than 100 women, more than 100 stories of how they got where they are today, and where they are going yet. Some are young, and some are banking veterans who came up the very hard way. Dorothy Savarese, president and CEO at \$2.1 billion-assets Cape Cod Five Cents Savings Bank, Orleans, Mass., served as forum moderator. After Rezvani’s speech, Savarese reflected that with one exception, it was all men who helped her reach the leadership position she has today.

“They advocated for me,” said the Massachusetts banker, “and pushed me along.”

More reading for women bankers

Community banker Jane Haskin, quoted in this article, recently reviewed Selena Rezvani’s book, *The Next Generation of Women Leaders: What You Need to Lead But Won’t Learn in Business School*

[Read the review now](#)

Part of the point of the table discussions and resulting reports to the whole group was to find ways for women bankers to advocate for women worthy of promotion. Other issues discussed included: creating development opportunities for women; improving women's negotiating skills; reviewing the women leaders that the bankers found as early inspirations; and developing leader style.

A sampling of what table leaders reported:

- "Many of us had negative role models, growing up. We learned from those role models what not to do."

- "When you are a woman banking leader, people are always watching you. People hear what we say, but they also see what we do, and for many, seeing is believing."

- The executive who shared the previous point added that she, and many women executives she has watched, tend to use more words to get a message across. She felt this had to be managed more carefully.

- Many women managers tend to "mother" employees--that is, they strive to prevent their staffs from making mistakes, to save them the trouble. But often it's the making of mistakes that teaches people the most.

- Yet sometimes the pendulum swings the other way, at least in one respect. "We feel that women are sometimes harder on women than they are on men who work for them," said one table leader.

• Something many women need a hand with early on is learning business protocol, how to get around a real-life office.

• "Tell young bankers that one of the most important points is that you need to listen to others."

• An aptitude to consider: "We often have better speaking ability than many men do."

• "When we have an 'improvement message' for someone on our staff, we need to deliver it in a positive manner."

• One executive said her organization has found that many positions previously filled mostly by younger women are being filled by young men. This needs to be looked into wherever it is seen, to consider the potential implications and ramifications.

Women of banking--and men too. What do you think? Share it in the comment section below

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