

## *Opinion: Women in the Trucking Industry*

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A friend once told me to “lead from a position of strength.” This helpful piece of advice is a reminder that people don’t want to follow negativity — especially in these turbulent times. They want leaders who can offer them something positive.

The late Edwin Friedman, who was both a rabbi and a leadership consultant, once defined leadership as “a capacity to define oneself to others in a way that clarifies and expands a vision of the future.”

At Women in Trucking, we are focusing our efforts on making the trucking industry a better environment both for women and for men. We know that even in 2010, there are lingering remnants of a historically male-dominated profession — including some “old-timers” who still resist change. Our goal is to help them envision a future that includes more women behind the wheel, under the hood and in the executive office. To do that, we must clarify that ideal and present a positive reason for change.

Although change will come slowly, and some will balk at it, as Friedman noted, “Resistance is part of the process of leadership and often elicits negative reactions at first.”

We realize that an entire industry the size of trucking cannot adapt to change as easily as one company or one vocation. As Friedman taught, “Tremendous energy is needed to tip a system out of equilibrium,” and change cannot occur without “disturbing the homeostasis.”

However, once people start sharing a vision, the momentum is advanced and a tipping point is reached. That’s when real change can occur.

Our vision includes a more driver-friendly environment with equal representation from both sexes. Respect for one another as professionals will be the basis for this new attitude. Our members have earned their place as trucking professionals but often are viewed as less competent than their male peers.

Even as we move further into the 21st century, we are still surprised when the person in coveralls who slides out from under the vehicle is a woman. Nor do we automatically assume that the woman greeting us at the dealership is qualified to sell a Class 8 tractor. When a woman is named CEO of a major fleet, it’s still newsworthy simply because she’s a woman.

Every woman who has chosen a career in the trucking industry has had to establish her credibility as a leader. She’s had to counter resistance because she’s “disturbed the equilibrium.” However, she is leading from a position of strength.

Often, the resistance women leaders encounter is from those who see themselves as victims — not just men, but other women as well. They feel “picked on” by co-workers, the boss or the entire company, and instead of viewing the situation as a challenge, they blame others and refuse to accept any

responsibility. Feeling powerless, they try to build themselves up by tearing down those whose positive vision they envy.

In such a situation, leaders must rely on their own emotional well-being and understand that their actions will not always bring praise and acceptance.

As Friedman put it, "Sure, leaders would like to be liked, but they don't need to be liked." A true leader stays focused on the vision and moves toward that end. Those who challenge that progress prefer to remain victims and never will contribute to positive change unless they can overcome their negativity.

I appreciate the sentiments of the late Paul Newman, who once said, "If you don't have enemies, you don't have character."

Friedman taught leaders not to become emotionally affected by those who disagree with or criticize their actions. When members of a group constantly try to coerce others into disagreeing with the leader, he said, the detractors' actions are defined as "reptilian functioning," i.e., drawing on the brain's most primitive impulses for survival.

The characteristics of a leader include the ability to remain emotionally unaffected by those who choose to resist. As women in the trucking industry, we can lead through a position of strength and avoid becoming victims by focusing on the future instead of the past.

Trucking currently has some notable woman leaders:

n Anne Ferro, former president of the Maryland Motor Truck Association, was nominated by President Obama and confirmed by the Senate to lead the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Before taking her post with MMTA, Ferro was Maryland motor vehicle administrator.

n Deborah A.P. Hersman was sworn in as chairwoman of the National Transportation Safety Board — the 12th person to hold that post.

n Barbara Windsor, president and CEO of Hahn Transportation, New Market, Md., will become chair of American Trucking Associations this year. When she takes office in the fall of 2010, she will be the first woman to lead the organization in its 77-year history.

More and more state association executives are women leading organizations whose board members are predominantly men. In 2009, 11 state trucking associations were led by women.

As we quietly move into more visible roles of authority, women will bring positive change into the trucking industry. Ferro, Windsor, Hersman and others are leading us into the future from a position of strength.

As a popular T-shirt proclaims, "Lead, follow or get out of the way."

*The Women in Trucking Association, Plover, Wis., is a nonprofit organization established to encourage the employment of women in the trucking industry.*

*By Transport Topics*