

# A Path to Wise Feminine Leadership

*By Karen Wilhelm Buckley and Fay Freed*



Karen Wilhelm Buckley is founder and principle of Communicore Consulting and co-director of the Wisdom Connection. She has partnered with leaders in corporate, government, and non-profit organizations as a leadership coach and consultant since 1979. Karen is a published author in the fields of organizational change and leadership.



Fay Freed is co-director of the Wisdom Connection. Fay has been coaching executives and entrepreneurs in Life Design for Success and Fulfillment for the past 18 years. Her clients have included women and men from various sectors, including health care, entertainment and non-governmental environmental groups.

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What kind of wise leadership is needed to lead us away from repeating the past into building a new future?

Our global economy runs on principles familiar to women: collaboration, cyclic change and respect for subjective realities as well as objective realities. It makes good business sense to build wise feminine leadership, within ourselves, in teams and in our organizations.

Feminine wisdom is a mature wisdom that is based in a high level of interest in others, and blends the cognitive, emotional, physical, intuitive, and pragmatic aspects of leadership with self-mastery. When women, and men, claim, honor, and develop the feminine principle in the workplace they develop women leaders who are competent and confident in their feminine approaches.

Women leaders who integrate their feminine wisdom lead with a natural authority. They expand their sphere of influence and increase their impact with far less effort. They gain confidence and step away from self-doubt. They develop a personal brand of leadership, rather than trying to be someone else. It's a proven leadership strategy!

Many women achieved success because of well-developed masculine qualities, but sensed that something was missing. They barely knew that they were only using half of themselves, the more visible masculine half. The dismissal of the feminine in relation to intensive business matters is painful. It is also a waste of talent. A recent study showed that 44 percent of women surveyed in Fortune 50 companies felt that their full capacities were not utilized in work.

Women leaders who embrace and use the wisdom and skills of their feminine report that they no longer abandon themselves when they walk into a difficult meeting. They feel more effective and are increasingly recognized for their different perspectives and the contribution of their web-based thinking and emotional intelligence. They speak of a fierce resolve on moral values as the core of their lasting personal and business success. They say the bottom line to their success is how well they cultivate trust-based relationships with customers, employees, investors, and the community.

What is the path to wise feminine leadership? Here are four steps to use in developing your own or mentoring another woman:

- 1. Amplify the strengths in your current approach.** Figure out what is working and build on it. Identify your feminine approaches, not as “weird” or unique to you, but as a source of power and capacity.
- 2. Identify self-imposed limits or acquired systems that no longer serve you.** What's standing in the way of fully expressing and utilizing feminine approaches in your leadership? Where do you give your power away? Find your courage. Look at the influence of socialization and media images: What are your imprinted assumptions about the efficacy of masculine approaches? What are your unconscious beliefs about the limits of the feminine?
- 3. Discover the basis for your own natural authority.** Get to know your feminine wisdom. Be curious. What really matters to you? What do you care about? What is your personal bottom line? Go to lunch with other women and share stories.

**4. Identify what conditions support you.** When are you your best? When do you contribute your knowledge, skill, and experience in a way that is worthy of respect? What setting, people, or agreements strengthen you? Develop two strategies to create more of those situations.

Make a commitment to yourself as a wise feminine leader and to mentoring the wise feminine in other women. Take the time to identify and leverage your unique talents and gifts of leadership. Give active help, encouragement, and support to other women. Point to the positive results of their wise feminine behaviors, approaches, and ways of thinking.

It is a business imperative as well as a personal imperative in today's fast changing world.

## **The Path to Integrated Wisdom**

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Accessing, expressing, and fully utilizing feminine wisdom in leadership is a leading edge of the new business paradigm and the path to the kind of leadership that can make a difference in what really matter—the success of our businesses as well as the health and safety of many generations of children and ecosystems around the world.

With some regional exceptions, social turmoil and personal distress are increasing while studies by the World Resources Institute show that every life support system on the planet is in decline. We need leadership that is exceptionally competent in formulating appropriate responses and feasible judgments in the face of uncertainty, ambiguity, and irreconcilable dilemmas. Potentially, feminine wisdom is an indispensable element in guiding the necessary changes.

## **In Conclusion**

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Whether driving innovative technology, organizing human affairs, developing business strategy or pioneering sustainable economics, we are faced with a timely opportunity to more effectively organize human society so that it is sustainable and truly prosperous. It is time to embrace the power and wisdom of our feminine selves and discover what that can mean for business, the world, and each of our lives.

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**Linkage**  
**Burlington, MA**  
781.402.5555  
info@linkageinc.com