

Not-So-Famous Women's History Month

By Myrna Marofsky

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This year I ask you to join me as we celebrate Not-So-Famous women as part of our Women's History Month celebrations. Using the vernacular of ProGroup, I challenge you to demonstrate APPRECIATION for the amazing women sitting right in your midst. It's not that I think it's unimportant to celebrate the contributions of those women who made the headlines, blazed new trails, or overcame discrimination but, let's face it, there are thousands of women who make history every day without loud fanfare or even quiet acknowledgement. In their own silent ways, they make a difference in our homes, workplaces, communities, and yes, in the world.

Have you ever scanned the daily news and seen an obituary of a woman who was an outstanding community leader, invented something unusual, or led a small company and realized that this may be the only media attention this woman has ever received? Are there women in your workplace that cause you to take notice because they are visionaries, problem solvers, leaders, mentors, or role models? Are there women who show great strength and ability without concern for what they receive in return?

I remember the story we've told in our workshops about the woman--let's call her Jan-- who worked on the factory assembly line making engines for automobiles. Jan took time off for maternity leave and returned three months later. When she got back to the line, she learned that her co-workers were having a problem getting lubricant into a very small space in the engine assembly. Jan thought about it and suggested they use a nipple from a baby bottle. She brought one in, showed her supervisor what she was thinking, and before you knew it, they had their problem solved. Jan was a quiet hero. There was no media attention, but she saved the day. Has a woman saved the day for your team lately?

Today, in Iraq, one in seven U.S. military personnel is a Not-So-Famous woman. This is the largest deployment of women to a combat theatre in history. While these women hope they don't make the headlines, they are making us proud. Many of them have family members in your workplaces that carry a worrisome burden, along with a great deal of pride.

In a recent article about women soldiers in Iraq, Sergeant Lucita Warglo stated, "We're just like the guys. We're all going to be dodging bullets." But, in the true tradition of a modest hero, Sergeant Kathryn Brady adds, "You don't have to be on the front line to be somewhere your life is in danger." Do you know any women in the military or mothers of these women?

We can meet women who are making history anywhere. On a recent trip to San Diego, while waiting in line for the rental car shuttle bus, I encountered a frazzled young mother traveling with her infant, a two-year-old, two car seats, two strollers, five suitcases, and a tube slung over her shoulder that likely contained charts or posters. Fortunately, the grandmother was there, too. The kids were scruffy and the two women were harried and covered in "kid dirt." Knowing that San Diego is a great family vacation spot, I asked them if they were on vacation. The young woman said, "No." She said she was there to speak about her research in cross-platform micro arrays (or something like that) at an international conference on plant and animal genomes. We boarded the bus and continued to chat. She said this was her first trip since her second child was born. Between cracker crumbs and nursing, she told me matter-of-factly that she has presented her research all over the world. The grandmother said, "Things were a lot easier when she was single and went off to Africa with a backpack." While she may be well-known in her professional life, few would rank her as I do, a Not-So-Famous hero in the "Amazing Mom" category. I'd include the grandmother in this category, too. Have you any nominees for these categories?

Well-behaved women seldom make history.
Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, author, women's historian

There are many types of Not-So-Famous women performing gutsy and admirable deeds without ever worrying about what they will get in return. These women are all around you. These acts are just as noteworthy as those of well-known celebrities are--if we take time to note them. Here are a few ways to take notice and when you do notice, to let the women know that you APPRECIATE them.

- ◆ Look around you. Identify Not-So-Famous women in your homes, workplaces, and communities whom you admire or who inspire you; women who make you think, "How did she do that?"
- ◆ Provide quiet applause. When you observe a Not-So-Famous woman who has done something that you consider noteworthy, acknowledge it. It may be with a quick comment, a simple smile, or a handwritten note--it can make their day.
- ◆ Talk to a "wise woman." Senior women aren't old; they are "wise." Spend time chatting with these Not-So-Famous wise women about their life experiences and you will soon learn something that will amaze you. Then, let them know that you are amazed.
- ◆ Support women-owned businesses. This is the fastest growing segment of new businesses today. Many of these businesses are small, but they are remarkable in how the woman owners found a way to address a need, a niche, and to be independent.
- ◆ Join the ranks. If you are a woman reading this, you have likely achieved much about which you can be proud. Include yourself as part of your Women's History Month celebration. Thank YOU!

Happy Women's History Month!

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