



Pivot points and male allies: How women create winning career plans



Julie Kratz

Key4Women recently spoke with highly acclaimed leadership trainer and executive coach Julie Kratz on promoting gender equality in the workplace and helping women work through their “what’s next?” moments. After nearly two decades of managing teams and producing results in corporate America, she experienced

her own career “pivot point.” She now concentrates on helping women leaders create successful career strategies and working with organizations to develop women leaders and foster inclusiveness.

Julie holds an MBA from the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University and is a Certified Master Coach. She is the author of *Pivot Point: How to Build a Winning Career Game Plan* and *ONE: How Male Allies Support Women for Gender Equality*. Recently, she led a successful Key4Women Leadership Coaching for Women program in Indianapolis.

What’s next?

It’s a question countless women ask every day. “Many women reach a pivot point in their lives and they’re thinking about something new,” Julie said. “Maybe they want to start a business, consider a new position or change career directions. But doubts are holding them back. They worry that they’ve never done a particular job before, they won’t make enough money, or the learning curve will be too steep. They need to find the confidence to take the next step.”

Key takeaways



Julie Kratz, highly acclaimed leadership trainer, author and executive coach, spoke about gender equality and career pivot points.



Her approach is designed to provide mid-career women with the tools needed to develop and implement actionable, winning career plans.



She explained that women are not going to solve the gender equality issue by only talking to other women.

Pivot points and mid-career challenges

For many women, family considerations have a huge impact on their careers. A pivot point may be reached when the children enter school or leave the nest, giving a mother more flexibility in her daily schedule. And women are often in mid-career when this occurs.

“The workplace can be relatively gender neutral in the early career stages,” Julie noted. “By mid-career, however, upward mobility for women starts to slow. Many have families then, and they’re in different places in life than the men with whom they started. In addition, since leadership roles are dominated by men, the environment is less inclusive. Women frequently become discouraged.”

Research points to differences between men and women in their approaches to risk taking, differences that have their roots in our culture. “Women have a greater tendency to be risk averse and less confident about taking a leap into a new role,” said Julie. Studies show that men tend to apply for jobs if they have some of the qualifications. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to feel they must meet all of the job specifications before they bid for a position. There’s an outsized fear of failure that has nothing to do with actual competencies or potential.”



Career planning begins with self-assessment

Julie’s executive coaching approach is designed to provide mid-career women with the tools needed to develop and implement actionable, winning career plans. “The planning centers around each person finding her authentic self,” she said. “We focus on identifying strengths and skills, validating these through 360-degree and DISC assessments. We catalogue likes and dislikes, and we explore each client’s life history as part of a self-examination process. More often than not, there’s an “a-ha” moment. The client discovers there’s something she’s always longed to do but had just not realized it. As we clarify aspirations, we define the steps that will be taken and benchmarks for measurement.”

Julie believes a career planning time horizon of three years is the perfect blend of strategic and tactical. “We can chunk out specific, tangible actions that lead to a one-year interim goal, then do the same for subsequent years,” she said. “There’s accountability and a well-defined roadmap for progress.”

The career planning program is flexible. “Clients may take a pause during the three- to six-month planning program and re-engage later,” said Julie. “We can also do the executive coaching remotely, which makes the logistics much easier.”

The role of an executive coach

Julie makes a sharp distinction between what she does as an executive coach and a mentor. “I ask clients questions and provide guided self-discovery to help develop ideas and solutions,” she said. “A mentor is someone who’s done what you’re doing—a been-there-done-that professional—who gives advice and troubleshoots. The bottom line: An executive coach asks, a mentor tells.”

Julie has been where her clients are. “My pivot point came after 12 years in business when I decided that I wanted to dedicate my career to executive coaching for women, gender equality and workplace inclusiveness,” she said.

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Fortunately, I had a client who gave me a stable revenue base early on. For others, there may be a big up-front investment in a new venture and negative cash flow at the outset. In those situations, I tell women to test the waters, perhaps making it a side effort for a while, and to manage the uncertainties. The message is not to avoid risks but to have your eyes wide open.

– Julie Kratz



Recruiting male allies

Throughout her research and work with successful women and men leaders over the years, Julie has seen the importance of men supporting women. “We rarely recognize the male allies behind successful women,” she said. “My new book, *ONE: How Male Allies Support Women for Gender Equality*, is intended to help men and women understand their importance.”

By playing roles as mentors, advocates, coaches, and sponsors, men and women provide invaluable support to future leaders in their careers. Despite women making up 51% of the U.S. population and 46% of the labor force in the U.S., 94% of CEOs of Fortune 500 companies are male (and the percentage increases to 95% if expanded to the Fortune 1000). “It’s essential that we get male leaders involved in the discussion,” said Julie. “Based on our interviews for *ONE*, we confirmed common traits associated with successful women. They engage men in their career development as mentors and sponsors, speak up for what they want, and draw clear boundaries between their personal and professional lives.”

However, according to *Harvard Business Review*, women are 54% less likely than men to have a sponsor. “That’s because men in leadership roles tend to promote those resembling themselves,” she remarked. “As humans, we naturally gravitate towards those who look, behave, and think like us. But it’s time that we look beyond our differences to discover how we can support one another as allies. Women are not going to solve the gender equality challenge by only talking to other women.”

Making it happen

Julie believes that most men really want to help, but she also understands that they may be struggling with how.



“Some male leaders may be reacting to #MeToo by avoiding one-on-one time with women out of fear of appearing to do the wrong thing,” she observed. “But women and their male allies can take steps to overcome obstacles and create opportunities for engagement.”

Significant progress can be made by men becoming more aware of behaviors that are not inclusive. “For example, it’s not uncommon for men to interrupt during conversations,” she remarked. “Other men combat this by returning the favor, but women may be more reluctant to be aggressive and retake the floor. Male allies and women peers can help by jumping in and saying, ‘Hey, let her finish’ or ‘She had that idea five minutes ago—she should explain.’”

Men can also help by learning not to make assumptions. “Male leaders frequently think that women don’t want to travel,” Julie said. “So an opportunity that requires travel may not get offered to a woman who might have leapt at the chance.” Women should also take the opportunity to speak up more and let leaders know that they welcome new challenges and travel.

Julie underscores the importance of women owning their own stories. “Male allies can help, but women have to know where they’re going,” she said. “We need to own our careers.”

To learn more about Julie or her books, visit nextpivotpoint.com/about-julie.

For more Key4Women resources to help you reach your goals, visit key.com/women.

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3 of 3

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