

Unlimited Validation Knowledge Awaits...

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Women in Validation: Challenges and Tactics to Empower



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Roberta Goode led a powerful female empowerment session at Validation Week.

The following article has been guided by Roberta Goode, of Goode Compliance International, who moderated the momentous panel session described below. We are grateful for Roberta's vision and commitment towards the life sciences, and especially for her passion towards female empowerment. This piece is dedicated to Roberta, and to the rest of the community that is working towards change.

According to The World Economic Forum, women earn "only 35 percent of the undergraduate degrees in STEM" (1). A number that has remained unchanged for the past decade, women account for almost 60 percent of college graduates. Entering STEM field has been a challenge for women due to factors such as stereotypes, gender bias, and the climate of the departments in which the women choose to work (2).

As women climb the corporate ladder, they traditionally serve dual roles as caregivers for children and parents, and the stress that accompanies this balancing act often leads to burn-out and health issues, with some statistics showing that 40% of female engineers alone leave the field (3). This exponential evolution means the ubiquitous challenges of work/life balance threaten to become a pinch-point for corporations as they depend on the productivity of their workforce.

Always at the forefront of life science industry trends, IVT Networks has a vision to create platforms for women to share practical techniques for optimizing performance both personally and professionally. The "Women in Validation Empowerment Summit" at the 23rd Annual Validation Week on October 17-19, 2017 featured an all-female panel of accomplished life science industry professionals. These STEM-centric panelists have successfully navigated competing pathways, culminating in business leadership and simultaneous high life-satisfaction metrics.

Moderated by Roberta Goode, our powerful panel comprised of:

- Tanya Fletcher-Scott, BS, Chemical Engineering, Director of Quality, Dendreon Pharmaceuticals
- Connie Hetzler, Global Validation Head, Alcon

- Lizzandra Rivera, Associate Director, IT Quality, Alexion Pharmaceuticals
- Delores Morrison, Director of Validation, Edwards Lifesciences
- Karyn Campbell, Director, Investigations Branch II, Division of Pharmaceutical Quality Operations I, FDA
- Carrie M. Kuehn, M.P.H., L.P.D., RAC, Senior Managing Scientist, Exponent, Inc.
- Valarie King-Bailey, CEO, OnShore Technology Group, Inc.

With over 60 life sciences industry professionals in attendance, participants spanned the spectrum of genders, seniorities, races and cultures. Metrics collected post-summit demonstrate accomplishment of our goals for this inaugural event, but this is only the beginning of the conversation.



Summit Panelists from left to right: Lizzandra Rivera, Tanya Fletcher-Scott, Karyn Campbell, Connie Hetzler, Carrie M. Kuehn, Valarie King-Bailey, and Delores Morrison.

Below are key take-aways from the Summit to help women navigate the workforce

1. A key discussion point regarding conflict resolution focused on the Thomas Killman Resolution Model. In this model, outcomes and relationships are plotted on an x-y axis to indicate gender specific preferences in negotiating workplace conflicts.
2. When only one woman is present in a meeting or a setting, it is not unheard of for her to get overlooked. When two women work closely together, they can be seen as colluding or complaining. When there are three women at the table, the studies show they are then heard. This idea kicked off the concept of "Three at the Table."
3. Women sometimes struggle with forming relationships with a boss or higher level manager of the opposite sex. A

woman may be perceived differently if she participates in bonding events that her male peers participate in (e.g., a drink at the bar after work, a golf game or sports event). As such, some women feel at a disadvantage and feel as though those male peers that had bonded outside of work have an advantage when it comes to promotions.

4. There are challenges with bias towards women cross-culturally. In the globally-spanning life sciences industry, many companies work with counterparts from different parts of the world, and this presents cultural differences in the work place. During the Summit, there was discussion on how there seems to be a bias towards men in the management ranks, specifically in regards to Japanese-owned companies. Participants discussed options for overcoming this bias, such as seeking out those leaders that have promoted women and forming alliances with them, asking for their mentorship, and also understanding what it takes to be promoted in that company culture.
5. During job interviews, a woman should pay attention to who her new boss will be, as well as other people in the interview process, to ensure a culture that is more amenable to women and encourages them moving into executive positions.
6. Practical means to balance work/life are needed for different folks in different positions, particularly those who can't work from home (e.g. lab managers).
7. "Imposter Syndrome" is real and we need to acknowledge and address it.
8. Managers have a responsibility to their employees to listen to what is going on with them and how they are feeling about their work, not just talking about projects and tasks.

Tactics for Empowerment

- **Build credibility but be authentic to yourself.** Find an advocate at work, someone who can be a mentor and advocate for you. Your mentor could be a man or woman, but be a person who is truly invested in seeing you succeed.
- **Schedule time for yourself and your family, and don't be afraid to talk about your family at work.** Balancing work and a busy personal life can be difficult but as Hetzler said during the talk: "You can think about a career as a rubber ball, if you drop it, you can pick it back up. Think about your family as a china plate, if you drop it, it shatters." Everyone has different priorities but if your family is your number one priority, your employer should understand, and be supportive of, your home life. In addition, women should empower other women to have a work-life balance.
- **Raise your voice.** Women use three times more words to articulate their ideas than men, and their ideas or concerns can become more pronounced in conflict. Even if this is the case, women should not be afraid to voice their opinions. Women should look at all facts of the situation they are in, be ready, and expect the unexpected. Be aware that there are many stereotypes of women in conflict (one brought up was that they have "female tendencies" in conflict resolution), but women should feel emboldened to question these stereotypes.
- **Be an ally to your female peers.** At the meeting, women shared experiences where they were minimized by male counterparts. One example shared by a panelist included a story of how she felt she was not being taken seriously during an audit. These kinds of situations can really test a person's perseverance, and it's up to other women to band together to help their female peers, along with men who are more cognizant of behaviors that demean.
- **Maintain professionalism.** It can be like walking on eggshells but as one panelist stated, maintain "grace under fire, be tough, and maintain professionalism." Some situations can test your perseverance but as we work towards equality in the workforce, it is important that women complete their jobs to the highest of their abilities.

The sciences have been a challenging environment for women to succeed in, many times due to biases and stereotypes about who should hold certain jobs. When IVT Network held their inaugural "Women in Validation Empowerment Summit" at Validation Week in 2017, they spotlighted gender-based issues that women face in the workplace. These include not being able to get their voice heard, not being taken seriously, and having a hard time balancing work with home life. IVT Network plans on continuing this discussion at future events, and promoting opportunities where women can share such experiences. Women should have the confidence to actively lead and shape their industries.

References

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