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By Cait Clarke

Barely a month into his presidency, Barak Obama signed an Executive Order creating the White House Council on Women and Girls. "I want to be clear that issues like equal pay ... are not just women's issues," affirmed the President in remarks. "Our progress in these areas is an important measure of whether we are truly fulfilling the promise of our democracy for all our people."

Creation of the Council that March morning was reasonably big news, noted in The New York Times ("The White House celebrated women on Wednesday," wrote Rachel Swarms). A spate of congratulatory columns and blogs followed. "Women issues getting traction," proclaimed the headline atop Nicholas Kristoff's op-ed column two days later.

Then, after the last ripples of launch publicity stilled, the Council effectively disappeared from public view. Its next mention in The Times would be 17 months later, this past October, and then only as a brief item in the week's calendar note ("The White House Council on Women and Girls will play host to a women's entrepreneurship conference in Washington featuring Valerie Jarrett, senior adviser to President Obama"). To my count, it hasn't shown up since.

I cite this story not to criticize the Council nor to minimize the praiseworthy work I'm sure it must be doing, but rather to underscore the notion that the mission of "empowering" women may constitute impeccable ideology but it elicits, at best, ephemeral popular support.

The 'inconvenient' truth is that, to fully prosper as both a class and—perhaps more importantly—as individuals, women must get better at asserting themselves. Policy and statute are certainly critical to stop

flagrant, documentable abuses. Context is important. But women themselves must, in a phrase, become considerably more comfortable about asking for what they want and be adept in getting it.

It was to that end—empowering individual women with skills that couldn't be marginalized— that I set out to write [Dare to Ask!](#) good negotiating texts available, but few (maybe none?) directly show women how to negotiate as women!

The reasons why women avoid negotiating are part cultural, part social, and part biological!

Cultures worldwide almost universally proclaim the gender value that women not be perceived as pushy or aggressive vis-à-vis men (even at the level of language, for example, there is no male counterpart to the female 'bitch').

Socially women have historically been fixed in subordinate roles, and thus, conditioned to 'operate below the radar' to get what they want. In the absence of socially sanctioned power, one doesn't have authority to make demands.

Biologically women appear to have evolved in ways that facilitate social bonding (whereas men evolved with a premium placed on climbing and dominating hierarchies). Via a greater preponderance than men of such hormones as oxytocin (sometimes referred to as 'the love hormone') and lesser amounts of testosterone, women behave in ways that favor 'getting along by going along'. Negotiation, on the other hand, is typically perceived as rewarding confrontation.

One more factor needs to be mentioned: women have typically not been mentored in negotiating. Most fathers don't teach daughters how to 'dare to ask' for what they want. At work, men will often be exposed early in their careers to situations that call for negotiating, women generally aren't (although this is starting to change as more women penetrate the glass ceiling).

Examples of women suffering from their well-documented reluctance

to negotiate are legion. We cite in Dare to Ask! a classic study of the starting salaries of graduates from prestige business schools: those of men were 6% higher than those of women (even more when bonuses are included, with initial differentials compounding over time) because, unlike their female counterparts, they didn't accept the first deal offered.

Even women lawyers get the blues! At the highest level of elite firms, female partners are paid on average \$66,000 less than their male counterparts ([this according to Professor Joan Williams of the University of California Hastings Law School](#)).

For women to be effective negotiators, though, it is not enough for them to overcome their various inhibitions (such as the need to be liked, a proclivity to avoid potential conflict, the assumption that the other side will naturally do 'what is fair and right'). Additionally, they must learn tools and tactics particular to them as women.

When women pattern themselves after men, when they model the aggressive style of the stereotypical male, research shows that they do badly in negotiations. Indeed, worse than they might have done otherwise. As Hannah Riley Bowles of Harvard (and others) have shown, such actions trigger gender biases unrelated to the substantive issues under discussion.

When they behave more according to gender expectation, however, women do much better. Rather than repudiate one's feminine identity when negotiating (which many think is required), just the opposite is called for.

Perhaps the most important argument in Dare to Ask! is that women, although they'll often defer from negotiating because they don't think they're good at it, actually possess significant natural negotiating advantages.

Those advantages are the social skills at which women (in general) excel: communicating, active listening, empathy, sensitivity to the other, willingness to share—even intuition.

The 'Big Idea' in the book is that if one can reframe the negotiating paradigm from "I win/you lose" (which is the standard 'male-centric' model) to something we call a "collaborative conversation" (in which the parties collectively problem solve to expand the pie), women are both experienced and adept at the process. They are comfortable with the give-and-take of conversation; they encourage inclusion so that everybody participates; they are good at forging consensus.

Thus, if a woman realizes that the social texture of her days is actually a succession of small negotiations, she'll see that negotiating actually comes naturally to her. We stress this idea in the book and, if I dare say so myself at risk of being immodest, there is great empowerment in this approach.

So, to come full circle back to the White House Women's Council, it is clear that it will not be enough to adjust institutional frameworks (no matter how necessary). If America is to fulfill our democratic promise as per the President's dictum, or on a more grandiose scale make real the Dalai Lama's vision that "western women will save the world," women must learn how to effectively negotiate.

#### SIDEBAR: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF NEGOTIATING FOR WOMEN (AND MEN, TOO!)

1. Be clear about the difference between what you need (overall objectives) and what you want (specific demands).
2. Know everything you can possible know about the other side.
3. Get to the table.
4. Have your opening offer prepared in advance.
5. Don't take "no" personally.
6. Silence is a weapon.

7. Never say "yes" to their first offer.
8. Be Patient: 80% of the issues will be resolved in the final phase of the process.
9. Whenever you give something, get something back in return.
10. The measure of a good negotiation is the willingness of both sides to transact another negotiation in the future.