

Seen, heard, believed: Women's summit encourages confidence

By Leigh Hornbeck



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Photo: Paul Buckowski, Albany Times Union

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Colonie

The third annual Women@Work summit took on the theme "seeing, hearing and believing in women."

Held at the Hearst Media Center and hosted by Women@Work magazine, a publication of the Times Union, it was attended by 150 women from a variety of professions, including health care, technology, education and finance.

"As we planned for 2019, we couldn't help but be influenced by what we saw transpiring in the world around us and in the pages of our own newspaper," said Patti Hart, Director of Cross-Media Business Development at the Times Union. "We saw examples of women who were not recognized and seen for their accomplishments; who raised their voices to call out injustices and were not heard; and women who presented evidence of wrongdoing and weren't trusted or believed. Against that backdrop it seemed clear what our summit should be about today."

"Everyone wants to be seen for who they are," said Shai Butler, the vice president for student success and engagement and chief diversity officer at The College of Saint Rose.

But women often struggle to achieve that in the face of wage disparity, gender harassment in the workplace and fewer opportunities than men when it comes to getting ahead in their careers.

Butler calls herself "CEO" - chief encouragement officer - and said the wherewithal to face challenges and succeed starts with learning and loving yourself, and then being apologetically yourself.

Panelists and speakers at the summit offered advice for both bosses and employees. Nathaalie Carey, the executive deputy commissioner of the state Department of Labor, said she realized she was spending too much time focused on what was going wrong on the job when one of her employees asked her, "did I do anything right?"

Carey said she started spending more time recognizing her team's individual contributions. In turn, women at the summit were encouraged to speak up and let their value be known.

Eve Walter, a senior research scientist at SUNY New Paltz and the Institute for Family, dispelled the assumption millennial and the generation coming behind them, "Gen Z," have moved past gender stereotypes. Data show a large share of the young people who responded to Walter's poll in 2017, "View on Women," still think women are less likely to be successful in science and technology and disapprove of working mothers.

The poll was a survey of New Yorkers, Hearst and Women@Work recently agreed to pay for a national View on Women survey that will be released in 2020. The poll Walter designed for New Yorkers was the first of its kind.

"A good marker of how our society is doing is how it views women," Walter said.

Another issue the group confronted was how supportive women are of other women. Many women spoke about peers whose help was immeasurable. But many others described female managers who undermined and held them back.

When asked to respond to an electronic poll that displayed results on a screen in the conference room, the majority of women chose "mostly negative" when asked to described experiences with female bosses.

Marissa Salzone, 29, the director of marketing for Grey Castle Security in Troy, said there is incredible value in women empowering other women.

Invoking the Time's Up movement against sexual harassment, Salzone said if women "empower together," our time won't run out.

While previous generations of women have fought and won battles against gender discrimination, women in today's workforce still face situations where the right answer isn't entirely clear. Jalila Smith, an information technology salesperson, shared a story with the crowd about the time her manager asked her, the only woman on an all-male sales team, to order the food for a meeting. Confused about how to handle it, Smith called on her mother.

"She said, 'do it once. After that, you shut it down,'" Smith said.