



Clockwise from top left: Jennifer Ward (left) and Erica Martin of emedia

Elizabeth Tee of Troncossi Public Relations

Sharon Beesley (left) and Audette Exel of ISIS Ltd

Ernst & Young's marketing team, left to right: Yvonne DeCoute, Sandi Wright, Johnette Smith, Rhonda Joy and Carolyn Myers



Women in Business

Women may be ideally suited to moving forward in today's business environment, with a work style governed by a focus on 'we over me,' according to a number of women working in the Island's business community.

Carolyn Myers, director of sales and marketing at Ernst & Young said: "Women tend to be natural team players and it seems they are less concerned about hierarchy and less prone to be purely success-driven in their jobs."

Ms Myers added that women are a good fit in today's business environment. "Gone is the command and control style of work environment. Now the focus is more on team management," she said.

Ms Myers added that it is not that women are not driven to do well in their jobs, but that there is a broader focus and that women, in her experience, have shown themselves to operate well as team members.

Ms Myers should know a thing or two about it, as she heads a five-woman strong department. And although she is the director of the department — which has been together for three years and includes Rhonda Joy, Johnette Smith, Sandi Wright and summer student Yvonne

DeCoute — Ms Myers said the emphasis really is on teamwork: "I am the leader, but we have a flat structure with each team member being the manager for her own projects."

Ms Myers said there were big differences in what men and women bring to the work environment: "There are distinct differences but I think generally these are good. Women have inherently positive attributes and skill sets which include being nurturing, empathetic and good communicators."

Ms Myers said that although her department is all female, it is not that way by design. And she added that the department's work is integrated with other teams — and made up of both males and females — throughout the firm.

Ms Myers said, however, that women may be well-suited to marketing as there is a natural aptitude for relationship management. Ms Wright added: "We work together and snowball ideas off each other."

Troncossi Public Relations managing director Elizabeth Tee said women are moving ahead in her field, and she believes there is a good reason for this. "The public relations industry worldwide tends to be dominated by women. I suspect this is because women have a natural

instinct to understand what makes people tick."

She added: "Having a female director on hand is extremely important when developing a public relations campaign — she has to read between the lines and understand the dynamics of the organisation and its members."

She said Troncossi Public Relations has an all-female staff. "When the team gets together to brainstorm we find that we generate a lot of ideas because we put ourselves in the position of our clients and their customers. We get in touch, and then we strategise — that is how we can influence opinion," she said.

Talent warriors

The Ernst & Young team noted that women seem to have a natural ability to recognise who the best person is for a specific task. "We are also 'talent warriors' in that we recognise each other's strengths, and single out specific people for different jobs," Ms Joy said.

Ms Myers added that the all-female department's approach to business issues is in contrast to the work style of the firm's accountants and tax experts. "We think differently, and that has

become recognised. We fit in the firm, but with a difference. There is a synergy," she said.

Ultimately Ms Myers said in spite of gender, companies are now focused on the value that staff members bring to an organisation: "Everyone — male or female — has to demonstrate value and contribute to the continued success of the business," she said.

A woman's ability to recognise who is good at what was also cited as leading to a good synergy in the workplace by Jennifer Ward, managing director of local multimedia firm emedia.

The company, which was started by partners Colin Murdoch and Ms Ward, has now grown to a staff of five, two men and three women. Ms Ward cited her close working relationship with account executive Erica Martin.

The two have an interesting history — both went to Warwick Academy at about the same time, and later worked together at Rosa's Cantina, a Hamilton restaurant.

Fast forward, and you see the two now work side-by-side at emedia. Ms Ward said each recognises the other's strengths, and that helps them define who is best at doing which jobs.

"There is a synergy in our work relationship. And there are no power struggles, as may sometimes exist between males and females," Ms Ward said.

The glass ceiling

Despite the gains that women are making in business — and the Bermuda workforce is recognised for its strong representation of women — the majority of top management positions here and elsewhere are still held by males.

Ernst & Young's Ms Myers said that there are few examples of women reaching the ranks of chief executive officer, but she did cite Carly Fiorina, chairman and CEO of the US firm Hewlett-Packard, as an example of one woman who has broken through the proverbial 'glass ceiling.'

She added, with a smile, that Ms Fiorina had come from a marketing background.

Audette Exel, managing director of corpo-

rate finance firm ISIS also recognised that women were not well-represented in top positions. She said: "Clearly women have not made it into senior management positions in any numbers anywhere in the world," she said.

Ms Exel is one of the exceptions to the rule, however, as she was formerly managing director of the Bermuda Commercial Bank. Now she runs her own firm, ISIS Ltd., with business partner and long-time friend Sharon Beesley, who was formerly head of banking of the law firm Mello, Hollis, Jones & Martin, now Mello, Jones & Martin.

The company, which was set up in 1997, is not your typical operation as ISIS Ltd. supports the ISIS Foundation, a charitable organisation. In essence the company's bottom line finances a growing network of charitable operations in both Nepal and Uganda.

Both Ms Exel and Ms Beesley questioned whether or not the low representation of women in senior management could, in part, be attributed to the choices a woman might make. Ms Beesley said: "Women make intelligent choices, and at least to some extent women may not be in those positions because they think: 'Who wants to work that hard and forsake value in their life?' It is about quality of life."

Facing decisions on quality of life is something Ms Exel and Ms Beesley know first hand, having made the decision to open their own business with the belief that contribution — and not just writing a check — should be part of one's working life.

ISIS is all-female, with seven staff in Bermuda and two full-time staff in Nepal and Uganda. Ms Exel said: "We joke that the only man who works for us has four legs (Ms Exel's dog Noah is a fixture in the office) but it is not a women-only office by design, it is how it has happened," she said. Both said they are not supporters of affirmative action in terms of gender "as it often demeans the group it is meant to help, as it means there is a different benchmark. There is no reason for it, as not only do women meet the same standards as men but have passed them time and time again," Ms Exel said.

Both recognised that there are, in general

terms, differences between the way men and women operate which may influence work styles: "Women are conditioned and genetically geared toward being more caring. That does not mean all women are like that, but there is a propensity that way," Ms Beesley said.

And both said men, in their experience, had demonstrated an ability to switch off from work.

Ms Exel said: "One of the downsides for women is they never really leave their jobs, lying awake at night worrying over a problem or a transaction they are working on, whereas men may say at the end of the day: 'I have worked hard, I have done my best today and now I am going home and will think about it when I get back in to work tomorrow'," she said.

But Ms Exel said it is important to note that there are positives to being a woman in the work force. "There are significant advantages to being a woman (in business). Now obviously — and there is no woman in the world that would tell you otherwise — there are significant disadvantages. There is no question that as a woman (in business) you are underestimated at the outset. But if I had to give two bits of advice to a woman (in business) I would say think of yourself not as a woman but as a business person, and number two, recognise that being underestimated is the single greatest advantage you can have in business because basically everybody's guard is down when they underestimate you." Ms Exel added: "For me, that has been an enormous advantage. And it still happens."

Despite the minimal number of women in the top ranks, both Ms Exel and Ms Beesley said women have made real in-roads in business. The duo, who are lawyers by profession, said the legal and accounting sectors have got to the point where people are judged on their ability and not their gender: "Those industries are incredibly well-integrated now, and no one bats an eyelid if you are a woman," Ms Beesley said.

Ms Exel said women should remember this one last piece of advice: "Never lose your sense of humour. You need to have an ability to laugh at yourself, and even to laugh at gender differences." B