How does a seemingly ordinary woman become a super-successful business leader? What qualities do you need to reach and then effectively fill a top leadership position? And what qualities or actions are likely to hold you back?

To find out, Kathy Hurley and Priscilla Shumway, who are themselves business leaders, interviewed 24 women holding leadership positions in a variety of industries to find out how they accounted for their own successes. The result is their new book *Real Women, Real Leaders: Surviving and Succeeding in the Business World*. It's a close look at the building blocks of success for today's executives and entrepreneurs -- both male and female.

Hurley, who has spent 40 years as a senior executive in education at Pearson, IBM, and the Learning Company shared some of the most
important advice she and Shumway gleaned from their interviews:

1. **Never trash anybody.**

"Never, ever say that you will not work for someone, because he or she may be your next boss," Hurley warns. Leadership begins with knowing how to work for someone you wouldn't normally choose, she adds. "Working for someone who is challenging or impolite takes its own set of leadership skills and qualities. If you can do so with success (and a little grace), your superiors will take note and likely reward you with opportunity."

Being able to deal with any kind of person will stand you in even better stead if you become an entrepreneur. Customers come in all shapes, sizes, and temperaments, and some of them will make the worst boss you ever had seem like Mother Teresa.

2. **Always network, even when you don't think you need to.**

"We have discovered more opportunities at non-networking events than you can imagine," Hurley says. "Talk to people. When you are sitting on a plane, in line at the DMV, or at that conference that you really didn't want to attend... all these places provide an opportunity to meet someone new who just may be your next connection into a new job or the business partnership for which you've been searching."

3. **Always give credit to others.**

"Recognizing achievement in others is one of the best qualities of a leader," Hurley says. "Not only does it build confidence in the person you've recognized, but it demonstrates that you place value on supporting the success of those who work with you and for you."
Over time, this is going to become an even more important thing to do, as the labor market for those with top skills becomes tighter. In-demand employees who can work where they choose are likelier to choose a boss who makes them feel valued and is quick to share the spotlight when things go well. Be that boss.

4. **When things go wrong, err on the side of generosity.**

"You will make mistakes, your colleagues will make mistakes, and life will just deal you a bad hand sometimes," Hurley says. When bad things happen, don't blame, don't rant, and don't panic. Instead, approach the problem with a sympathetic ear and an empathetic soul, she advises. "Those who work for you will appreciate your soft touch and those who may be observing you will appreciate your ability to limit drama in the workplace."

5. **Develop relationships that go beyond a specific job or company.**

"Jobs may change but people stay the same," Hurley says. Thus, she says, "Being a leader within your company is valuable, but being a leader within your industry is priceless."

With that in mind, she recommends building long-lasting relationships with people throughout your industry. "They may one day be your boss or co-worker, or they may even be your next reference," she notes.

6. **Surround yourself with smart people.**

It's easy to be intimidated, but the best leaders hire and promote people who are as smart as they are themselves, or smarter. "If you can manage to throw in a few who also possess humor and humility, you will be
limitless in what you can achieve," Hurley says.

7. Spend a lot of time listening.

"It is a powerful activity," Hurley says. "You do not have to be the idea person or the loudest person in the room." Instead, she says, reflect on what you are hearing. "When you are able to listen and reflect on the ideas in the room, you are usually in a better position to contribute to your team." You'll be a better leader as well.

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