

Anne Ladky: An Energy Approach to Leadership

Introduction

Anne Ladky does not have an easy job. She is the executive director of Women Employed (WE), a nonprofit organization based in Chicago that advocates for the economic advancement of women. WE analyzes issues, educates policymakers, and collaborates with other organizations to change policies that affect women in the workplace. Because they are taking on such pervasive and monumental problems, WE's line of work is often frustrating, disappointing, and downright exhausting. Consider the following statistics¹:

- The American labor force includes 68 million women – almost half of the total – but, on average, women earn only 77 cents for every dollar earned by men.
- Women are concentrated in low-paying occupations. Nearly half of the women who work full-time earn less than \$30,000. But 62% of working women earn half or more of their family's income.
- Most mothers are working mothers, including 77% of women with school-age children and 67% of women with children younger than six. Still, one in four working families cannot meet their basic needs.
- More than three quarters of the lowest-paid workers have no sick days or family leave.

The issues Anne and her employees address are not only daunting but also difficult to change. To tackle these challenges, WE must try to convince policymakers who are under tight budgetary constraints and political obligations, collaborate with other organizations that have their own agendas to worry about, and alter societal norms that are firmly established in the current employment system. Despite these difficulties, and despite employing only 17 staff members, Anne can reflect on many success stories:

As a 43-year old mother of two, Adella Robinson does not fit the conventional mold of a college student. Her firstborn daughter (age 24) is even older than most college students. But after more than two decades of single parenthood, addictions, unemployment, domestic abuse, and poverty, Adella feels incredibly fortunate to be attending community college in Illinois. Her exemplary study habits and honor roll grades reflect how motivated she is to turn her life around. Adella hopes to graduate with an associate's degree in psychology and then enroll at a local university to pursue her longtime career aspiration of becoming a social worker. Like many single mothers, Adella would not

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