

Women's Growth Forum

SBI is dedicated to helping everyone who encounters the firm to reach their full potential for unforgettable personal and professional growth. SBI's Women's Growth Forum is an invite-only event for female executives and women in leadership to participate with their peers in a small group roundtable discussion.

Meeting Insights – March 2023

*During SBI's women's growth forum, the group identified the impact and consequences of **Tall Poppy Syndrome** in the workplace. The study reviews where women are attacked, resented, disliked, criticized or cut down in association with their professional success.*

Workplace Boundaries & Expectations: Where to Relearn and Reset

Tall Poppy Syndrome is a familiar concept, yet the implications for female leaders are too frequently left unspoken. At the heart of the conversation were the areas where ambition is often met with a penalty and negative consequences in toxic workplace environments, leading to significant career challenges.

Shockingly and sadly, capable women continuously forego advancement or promotions due to unreasonable work expectations or cultural issues among leadership. They prefer choosing to leave organizations where these circumstances are tolerated. Beyond the productivity loss for companies, personal consequences to the individual outlast any resignation, including increased anxiety and self-doubt. These effects can sometimes take years to recover, impacting confidence and how women arrive in the workplace and at home.

*"Women often have to overcompensate, and it can be seen as 'ambitious,' but we're just trying to level the playing field. After all, **less than 2% of venture capital funding goes to women-founded companies.** Is that seen as ambition? We're just trying to get a fair shake."*

Setting boundaries of what is and is not acceptable has been critical for women to thrive professionally while maintaining emotional and personal stability.

A robust discussion evolved with real-life examples of women being on the receiving end of TPS. More importantly, the women shared a reflective and insightful discussion on how they, as leaders, have contributed to this phenom in the workplace.

Most commonly, the attendees confronted their own bias with their female colleagues, even going as far as to question the competencies, skillset, and experience of ambitious women versus men. The group revealed the shifting expectations of what types of ambition are acceptable to workplace counterparts, such as being a wife or mother, where the aspiration to become a CEO is often viewed as undesirable. All agreed they could adjust their perspectives and practice acceptance of varied ambitions from their own relative to their colleagues, regardless of gender.

Mentorship and Sponsorship: Empowering Peers and Colleagues

When discussing ways to actively combat a culture that enables Tall Poppy Syndrome, the women shared how they work to cultivate a more inclusive and equitable workplace. Despite having supported the professional development of their peers, only a select few had stepped up to proactively champion women in business. This admission indicates there remains much work to be done among female leaders to empower one another.

As leaders, women can play an invaluable role in advocating for marginalized groups within the workplace, driving others to listen and take action. However, for genuine sponsorship to be effective, there must be a balance of appreciation between the executive team and employees. Organizational leaders are responsible for achieving that balance, promoting commitment and responsibility for these opportunities.

One clear example of sponsorship was a weekly "Giving Sunday," wherein one female executive shared she dedicates one day of her weekend to mentoring and sponsoring employees and peers for advancement.