

Nevertheless, She Persisted

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In 1987, the U.S. Congress designated March as National Women's History Month. The stated goal is to create a special opportunity in schools, workplaces, and communities to recognize and celebrate the often-overlooked achievements of American women. This year, the theme designated by the National Women's History Project is "Nevertheless, She Persisted: Honoring Women Who Fight All Forms of Discrimination Against Women."

This phrase came from a moment in February 2017 when Senator Elizabeth Warren, was silenced during Jeff Sessions' confirmation hearing for Attorney General. At the time, Warren was reading an opposition letter penned by Coretta Scott King in 1986. Referring to the incident, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, later said "Senator Warren was giving a lengthy speech. She had appeared to violate the rule. She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless she persisted." Some have referred to this act as a "man-terruption." While certainly, not every man is guilty of this, the situation resonates with many women.

I do not go through my days focused on the fact that I am a woman and therefore, different from my male colleagues and male clients (most of whom I respect and like). I do not think about the difference until it is pointed out to me – by a comment, a look, an assumption, or when the difference seems to keep me from being heard or taken seriously. At this point in my career, it is much easier to have these moments of self-awareness, and then push on as if I'd removed a piece of kale stuck in my teeth. But, it was not always that way.

As a mom of a strong-headed 11-year old girl (who seems keenly aware of the differences between 5th grade girls and 5th grade boys), I only recently started to reflect on the fact that these gender gap moments were reduced to nuisance status for me only after many years of experience, direct support, guidance from mentors, and countless aha-moments. While everyone has different experiences, there are some principles that appear common to most of the strong women I know – regardless of their path:

- **You cannot do it on your own.** A strong support network away from work – and at work - are a must. Support from both men and women is key. Some days, you will not have the right perspective. Some days you forget your voice. We need supportive people to remind us of our two feet beneath us.
- **Accept that you *do* have to be better, smarter and work harder.** Hold yourself to a higher standard that you define. Resentment is unproductive and will bog you down.
- **Don't be apologetic about being a woman.** Being different and unexpected can be a great thing. Don't add qualifiers to what you think or what you say.
- **It is not a sex or gender thing. It is a power thing.** Everyone has a different way of trying to show it, protect it and garner it. Sure, men have been in the game longer than women, but the game is changing. Follow your own definition of power.

Certainly, this list is incomplete – but I’m still working on it. I’m a mom of two and wife to a husband of 15 years (who travels a lot). I work full-time at a demanding legal career. I don’t do enough for my parents, my brother, my friends, my community – or myself. I’m constantly torn between doing too much and not doing enough. In this imperfect existence, I do the best that I can (sometimes kicking ass, sometimes faltering), speak truths, and accept challenges and change. Hopefully, one day, my daughter will look back and proudly say, *nevertheless, she persisted*.

Beverly Alfon will be moderator of the Navigating a Non-Traditional Field and Emerging as a Leader Panel scheduled for the Illinois Chamber’s Women’s Conference: Second to No One: Strong Women. Stronger Illinois. Join us on March 27, 2018 at the Jack H Turner Conference Center, College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, IL 800 am – 1:00 pm. Register at ilchamber.org/womensconference2018