

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Is America Ready for a Woman President?: Ten What-It-Takes Tips for the Right Woman for the Job (Whoever She May Be)**

*Hillary's bid for the White House seems to be winding down. What went wrong for the woman who, once upon a time, seemed like a sure thing? Roxanne Rivera weighs in—and identifies the qualities she thinks the right woman for the job will possess.*

**Albuquerque, NM**—It's an exciting time in America's political history. Regardless of who is elected as our next president, he or she will be setting a precedent. John McCain: oldest when entering office. Barack Obama: first African-American. Hillary Clinton: first woman. Because of these factors, the "Is America ready?" question has been tossed about quite a bit. The "woman" angle seems to be getting the most attention, proving that gender/power issues are truly a national hot button. And Roxanne Rivera says she thinks the country *is* ready for a female president—but she has to be the right woman for the job.

"Sure it's possible to be a woman and do really well in politics," says Rivera, a former spokesperson for the New Mexico Republican Party and the creator of [www.nocryinginconstruction.com](http://www.nocryinginconstruction.com), a website aimed at women currently working or planning to work in a male-dominated industry. "A woman needs the same qualities to be elected president that she needs to be successful in any male-dominated industry—basically the right balance of strength and humanity."

And Rivera should know. She led her own multi-million-dollar business in the male-dominated construction industry for years, where she secured multi-million-dollar contracts in both the government and private sectors. Those experiences plus her years as spokesperson for the New Mexico Republican Party make her an expert in what it takes to succeed in a male-dominated industry—and politics is one of the most testosterone-laden of them all.

Women in politics (and business) run into many obstacles created by the standards society holds them to, says Rivera. If they are stern and serious, they are

portrayed as ice queens. If they show a sensitive side, they are seen as weak, or worse, manipulative. In the '08 race, Hillary has fought against all of these stereotypes with varying degrees of success and failure.

“It is looking less likely with each primary that Hillary is going to be able to secure the Democratic Party’s nomination,” admits Rivera. “I think she has fallen into a lot of the traps out there that are set for women who are trying to be successful in male-dominated industries. Still, I don’t think her lack of success indicates that America isn’t ready for a woman to run the country. It simply indicates that maybe Hillary isn’t the right woman for the job.”

So, what qualities should a woman running for president possess? Roxanne Rivera provides a few suggestions based on what it took for her to be a successful CEO and business owner in the male-dominated construction industry.

**There is NO crying in politics—if you are a woman.** If you are a man in politics, you can get away with the occasional tear—several of our past presidents have—and it will likely only endear you to the public. If you are a woman in politics, however, one tear causes voters, bloggers, and members of the media to raise a million questions about what it all means.

“When a woman in power cries, people start to wonder if she has what it takes to run a country, no matter how stereotypical or unfair such questions may be,” says Rivera. “After Hillary cried, it was *Can she handle the pressures she’ll encounter as president?* and *Was she being genuine or manipulative?* By crying she threw herself right into what I call the ‘Can She Take It?’ Test. As a woman in a male-dominated industry, you must never give anyone an opportunity to question your abilities. Next time around the female candidate must ensure that she keeps the crying card off the table. Women should be direct, honest, and meaningful when communicating, but they can’t get emotional.”

**Act like a lady.** Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher always presented herself with grace and poise even while she met the challenges of her office head on. And that doesn’t mean she ever backed down from a fight. (One Soviet newspaper of the time even called her “Iron Lady.”) Female political candidates should emulate Thatcher by believing in themselves and their inner strengths. They should know and keep their boundaries and show infinite grace under pressure. They should refrain from ridiculing or bashing other women or men. If they do these things, it will be easier for them to win people over.

“I think these are rules to live by for any woman and especially those running for president or any other political office,” says Rivera. “One place Hillary failed in this area was by not congratulating Obama on his wins in Virginia, DC, and Maryland. It made her

look like a sore loser, not someone who values grace and poise. Consider how Jacqueline Ingrassia, who was the first female to win the Triple Crown, described her experiences in the male-dominated world of horse racing. She said, ‘It has been a delicate balance of standing up for my rights while maintaining dignity and class.’ Those are two qualities that will never hurt a presidential campaign.”

**Let your emotional intelligence show.** Demonstrating a high level of emotional intelligence will set women apart in the political arena. Essentially, emotional intelligence is the ability to interpret your own feelings and emotions, gauge the feelings and emotions of others, and then use that information to guide yourself and others toward specific goals. In his book *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*, Daniel Goleman found that women tend to be more empathetic than men and are better at relating and interacting with others.

“Any woman who enters a race for the presidency is going to be held to a higher set of standards than her male counterparts,” says Rivera. “Look at Hillary: She is more critically evaluated and is under more intense scrutiny. Fortunately, women are better able to sense emotions, adapt to situations, and nurture relationships with potential voters. I think people want a president who cares about their well-being. The right female candidate will use her emotional intelligence to show people that she empathizes with them. She will be a caring woman who really understands what we Americans are feeling and going through. And she can use that information to become a great leader.”

**Always be open and honest.** Any female candidate is bound to encounter men who are chauvinistic, stubborn, and unthinking. It’s a given. But in order to appeal more to male voters, a female candidate need only share her thoughts openly and honestly. “If you talk to men honestly and with consideration, they will open up and become less rude, less stubborn, and less unthinking,” says Rivera. “Men, just like us women, like it when someone else is curious about their thoughts and opinions. Ask them what they think about an issue and watch them open up. Be straightforward when you share your feelings and thoughts. When men know that they are being dealt with in a straightforward manner, they will respect you.”

**Learn the intricacies of male/female dynamics.** To succeed in this or any male-dominated field, a woman needs a good understanding of gender dynamics. “Here’s what I have learned about men and women during my career: I think men benefit more from male/female relationships than women do,” says Rivera. “Men enjoy the nurturance of these relationships and enjoy ‘confiding’ in women. I’ve also noticed that women are less brutally honest and direct than men. I like the male directness I’ve encountered over the years because I always know where I stand with a man. And both men and women need to feel respected. If potential voters, regardless of gender, feel that a female candidate respects their ideas and their feelings, they will learn to like and trust her.”

**Reach out to other women.** Obviously, other women are key to getting a female candidate elected as president. The right woman will be one who has an incredible network of female supporters—both within and outside of the political realm—who have

helped her rise through the ranks and whom she has helped in the same way. Women are great sounding boards, and the more a female presidential candidate can interact with and learn from them the better.

“The same characteristics that men find appealing—a decisive nature and honesty, for example—women also find appealing,” says Rivera. “When a candidate has these natural qualities, or at least seeks earnestly to cultivate them, she’ll gain female supporters. I think there is a special excitement among women during this political time, because we are seeing one of our own up there taking on the men. And whether Hillary wins the candidacy or not, she should be commended for the work she has done during her campaign. I think women have been a huge support system for Hillary, and that is sure to hold true for other female candidates in future elections.”

**Be a consensus-builder.** Every great leader is a consensus-builder, but for women working in male-dominated industries, a special effort has to be made to bridge the gap between themselves and their male counterparts. This becomes especially true for a woman trying to win votes in a presidential election.

“I think this is an area in which Hillary failed,” says Rivera. “I think Barack has done a better job at being a consensus-builder and truly connecting with others. At times, for me at least, it seems as though Hillary has struggled to connect with others and has seemed tightly-wound and off-putting. It seems as though Barack has listened to what people in a variety of different groups want and need from the next president, and he has been able to communicate to each of them the way he can meet their needs both individually and as a larger population. The next time a woman runs for president, she will have to do the same thing. She will have to show both women and men that she understands their needs, and she’ll have to better communicate how she can meet them.”

**Show that you can make good, strong decisions under pressure.** Any time you are at the top of the totem pole—whether you are a CEO, a dean, or the President of the United States—nine times out of ten you are operating under intense pressure. Part of what it takes to win the presidential election, especially today when the war in Iraq is at the top of everyone’s list of concerns, is showing that you can handle the pressure that comes with leading a world superpower.

“I’m not sure Hillary has succeeded at showing she can make good decisions under pressure,” says Rivera. “Many women in male-dominated fields tend to get defensive when the pressure is on and then try to justify their defensiveness. I have noticed this tendency in Hillary. For instance in a recent debate, Hillary got the first question and came back to the moderator with a shrill reply asking why she always got the first question and seemed to begrudgingly say that she would answer it anyway. Whenever I was under pressure and had the urge to become defensive, I would consciously turn the situation around into one in which I could be proactive. Had Hillary done that, her reaction might have been, ‘Oh wonderful, I love getting the first question because it allows me to shine first!’ By simply tweaking the way she reacts to a pressure situation, she could have gone from looking irritated and nervous to looking cool and composed.”

**Show your strength in the right way.** Women in male-dominated industries face a tough uphill battle. They have to appear tough and capable of holding up under pressure without being designated with the b-word by employees and coworkers. Rivera says Hillary failed to find this balance.

“Hillary seems to have suffered from the curse many women in male-dominated industries have fallen victim to, which is that in order to be successful she feels she has to be really tough and hard-nosed,” says Rivera. “As a result I think she comes across as too harsh at times, yet another reason people have found it hard to connect with her. In order for a woman to be elected as president, she will have to be strong, yes, but also human. She has to prove to voters that she can stand up for them *and* that she cares about them.”

**Don't attack your opponents.** The fastest way for a female political candidate to be labeled with the b-word is to start attacking her opponents. In order to get elected, the next female presidential candidate should stick to the issues and take a pass on attacking her opponents. “Hillary has turned off a lot of voters and members of the media by calling Barack's campaign speeches ‘rhetoric’ and by constantly mentioning his lack of national political experience,” says Rivera. “Her attacks on Barack have made her seem more like a desperate candidate than someone who will make a great leader. Though both candidates have given in to attacking each other to some degree, I think it is best for a female candidate in a situation like this to take the high road and refuse to reduce herself to using these kinds of negative campaign tactics. Unfortunately this is not a perfect world, and the double standard still exists. Until it is eliminated, a woman needs to hold herself to a higher set of standards than her male counterparts and avoid giving anyone the chance of associating her with the b-word.”

“Even if Hillary doesn't win the candidacy, this has been an exciting time for all women, especially those who are working in male-dominated industries,” says Rivera. “Women have been fighting long and hard in order to get the respect we deserve, and I think the fact that Hillary has made it this far should be seen as a huge victory for womankind. Perhaps Hillary will be able to turn things around. But if she doesn't, I hope that whichever brave lady goes for the presidency next will learn from Hillary's mistakes. Aside from being a strong, intelligent, and caring woman, I think she will need to show a little more grace under pressure to get the job done.”

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### **About Roxanne Rivera:**

In 1981, using a personal savings of \$1,200, Rivera co-founded a sole proprietorship construction service business and grew it to a \$13 million company that incorporated in 1989. She oversaw all operations and up to 100 employees plus subcontractors in three offices throughout New Mexico. She wrote, marketed, and secured multi-million-dollar contracts in both the government and private sectors.

Rivera's key clients included the US Army Corps of Engineers, White Sands Missile Range, the US Air Force, the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, the Department of Defense, Los Alamos National Laboratory, Intel, General Electric, Ethicon, and Rockwell International.

Her construction firm received numerous small business awards, including two Small Business Administrator's Awards of Excellence and several nominations for Small Business Prime Contractor of the Year. She was named Female Executive of the Year by the National Association of Female Executives in 1995. Her firm was listed in the Top 500 Hispanic-Owned Businesses in the United States for five consecutive years.

Rivera has been appointed to several national advisory committees, most recently appointed by Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao to the National Advisory Committee on Ergonomics where she was the only businessperson on the committee.

She has served on both the Association of Builders and Contractors and the Associated General Contractors Boards of Directors. She also served on the Board of Directors for the University of New Mexico Construction Program Advisory Council, which she helped to found. Rivera has been an active community leader, currently serving on the board for the YWCA, and has worked extensively with ARCA, the Association for Retarded Citizens of Albuquerque.

Rivera has also spoken at and conducted seminars throughout the country with regard to Communication in the Construction Industry and Women in Construction.

Currently, she serves as CEO of Syntactics Communication Skills, LLC, a company that offers presentation and speaking skills training and coaching to executives at every level. In addition, she provides corporate consulting through KEYGroup<sup>®</sup>, an international consulting, training, and assessment firm based in Pittsburgh, PA.

**For more information, please visit [www.nocryinginconstruction.com](http://www.nocryinginconstruction.com).**