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Helping Hillary Hammer It Home: Nine Woman-to-Woman Tips to Help Clinton Win the Presidency

For the first time in American history, a woman could become the nation's next president. Roxanne Rivera says Hillary should stay strong under increased pressure and bring grace and poise back to her campaign strategies.

Albuquerque, NM (February 2008)—The 2008 presidential campaign has already been one to remember. Now that Barack Obama has won in eight states in a row, his neck-and-neck race with Hillary Clinton is reaching its boiling point. As Obama racks up victory after victory, many are waiting to see how she'll handle herself. From the beginning her every move has been picked apart by her fellow contenders and the press. And lately, the news hasn't been good. Her decision to fire her campaign manager was heavily scrutinized, as was her neglecting to congratulate Obama after his recent wins. But Roxanne Rivera believes it's not too late for Hillary to turn it around.

“As she and Obama prepare to face off in some very important states—Wisconsin, Ohio, and Texas—many are wondering how Hillary will deal with the pressure,” notes Rivera, a former spokesperson for the New Mexico Republican Party and the creator of www.nocryinginconstruction.com, a website aimed at women currently working or planning to work in a male-dominated industry. “I do believe she can retake the lead in the race to win the Democratic nomination, but she is going to have to start handling herself with more grace and poise than she's exhibited lately.”

Make no mistake says Rivera: Hillary has her work cut out for her just by virtue of the standards society holds strong women to. If she is stern and serious, she is portrayed as an ice queen. If she shows her sensitive side, she is seen as weak, or worse, manipulative. But all stereotypes aside, Hillary is a worthy candidate. She has made it this far by being exactly what she is: a strong, determined, intelligent *woman*—and she needs to act like one.

Rivera knows what it's like to fight for success in a male-dominated industry. For twenty-two years she worked with mostly men as the head of her own construction business. She has also spent a significant amount of time researching women's roles in male-dominated industries and interviewing well-known women who are serious players in their respective testosterone-laden arenas. Her website presents some of the fruits of that labor as it explores her own and other women's experiences surviving and thriving in industries ranging from construction to engineering to academia.

Here, Rivera offers some tried-and-true advice to Hillary from one woman in a male-dominated industry to another:

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. That's what has happened with Hillary now on two occasions. Rivera says the hoopla that resulted was all part of what she calls the “Can She Take It?” Test.

“The reality is if you are a woman in a male-dominated industry, you can't cry,” says Rivera. “It simply raises too many questions. With Hillary, 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 the ‘Can She Take It?’ Test. As a female in a male-dominated industry, you never want to give anyone an opportunity to start questioning your abilities. And when Hillary cried, she did just that. The first time Hillary teared up, she stayed on message and gave a meaningful, honest answer. I've found that men, in particular, respect this kind of directness and honesty. But in order to avoid being placed under more scrutiny, Hillary has to do it without showing too much of her sensitive side. If she can do that, she will pass the ‘Can She Take It?’ Test every time!”

Hold yourself to a set of higher standards. 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.”) Hillary should emulate Thatcher by believing in herself and in her inner strengths. She should know and keep her boundaries and show infinite grace under pressure. She should refrain from ridiculing or bashing other women or men. If she does these things, it will be easier for her to win people over.

“I think these are rules to live by for any woman and especially for the one running for president,” says Rivera. “But unfortunately, Hillary hasn't demonstrated these standards recently. By not congratulating Obama on his wins in Virginia, DC, and Maryland, she came off as a sore loser, not someone who values grace and poise. This kind of poor behavior isn't going to sit well with her winning the male vote, especially in Texas. I

always think about Jacqueline Ingrassia, who was the first female to win the Triple Crown. She said, ‘It has been a delicate balance of standing up for my rights while maintaining dignity and class.’ Those are two qualities that I think Hillary will need to show more of if she wants to win the candidacy and the presidency.”

Don’t be afraid to say no. At a time when Americans are looking for a presidential candidate who has all the answers, it can be dangerous to decline to answer a question. Hillary is and has already been faced with questions that are purely based on the assumption that she might have a hard time making tough decisions as a president simply because she is a woman. Should she answer all of them? Not necessarily, says Rivera.

“Women tend to answer every question asked of them because they do not want to be perceived as incompetent or uncooperative,” she explains. “I suspect this is a challenge that Hillary has faced. On more than one occasion men made assumptions about how good a job I could do in the construction industry because I am a woman. When Hillary is faced with questions that are being asked of her simply because she is a woman, I think she should think before she speaks and weigh the pros and cons of answering. She’ll have to set specific boundaries for herself in this area. Sometimes those types of questions will warrant an answer and sometimes silence will speak louder than words.”

Let your emotional intelligence show. Hillary and her opponents have each established that they can be politically smart and manipulative when they need to be. But Rivera says that demonstrating her emotional intelligence will set Hillary apart from the other candidates. 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.

“One of the realities Hillary faces in the male-dominated race for president is that she is held to a higher standard than her male counterparts,” says Rivera. “She is more critically evaluated and is under more intense scrutiny. Fortunately, as a woman she is better able to sense emotions, adapt to situations, and nurture her relationships with potential voters. I think people want a president who cares about their well-being. If Hillary starts using her emotional intelligence to show people that she understands and empathizes with them, she can be viewed as 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.”

Be flexible. Sure, people want a decisive leader, but as the current administration has shown us, decisiveness for its own sake can get us in a lot of trouble. Continuing to back a decision—the war in Iraq, for instance—without being willing to consider that other alternatives could work can result in scary consequences. Americans want a decisive president, but they want a reasonable one as well. And when people think of a “reasonable” person, they picture someone who thinks rationally, has perspective, and is

able to accept her fallibility. A reasonable person exercises sound judgment and has a healthy skepticism.

“I think more and more people are viewing President Bush’s unmovable stance on Iraq as being unreasonable,” says Rivera. “Hillary needs to demonstrate flexibility in her beliefs and show the ability to accept the unpredictability of life. She’s often criticized for voting for the war in Iraq back in 2002, and I think she’s right to explain her reasoning behind the decision she made then and the reason she no longer holds those positions. It’s a great opportunity for her to show her ability to be flexible and to make decisions based on what’s really going on rather than on a best-case-scenario situation.”

Always be open and honest. In her political career, it’s likely that Hillary has encountered her share of rude, chauvinistic, stubborn, and unthinking men. Hopefully, she realizes such behavior isn’t characteristic of all men. In order to appeal more to male voters, she 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.”

Don’t try to think like a man. Hillary has a tough battle ahead of her in that she has to appeal to voters—both men and women—who may not be sure what it will mean if a woman is elected president of the United States. It’s true that she has had more success winning over women voters than male voters—for instance, in a recent USA Today/Gallup Poll, 50 percent of men said they wouldn’t vote for her for president compared to 36 percent of women—but that doesn’t mean she is doing anything wrong. She shouldn’t try to start thinking like a man in order to figure out how to appeal to more male voters. If she does, they’ll know in a second what is going on and will immediately call her out for being insincere.

“Hillary can still ‘think’ like a woman and appeal to men at the same time,” insists Rivera. “I did it every day in my construction business. My advice for Hillary would be to remain open to the opinions of the men she encounters and to develop a good sense of humor around them. She also shouldn’t be afraid to laugh at herself when a time calls for it. Hillary can use her experiences as a woman to help her approach issues from different perspectives, and I think that is something that male candidates will have trouble doing. Hillary has the advantage of being a woman while also having the emotional intelligence to better understand why men react and act the way they do.”

Learn the intricacies of male/female dynamics. If Hillary is going to be successful in this male-dominated field, she will need a good understanding of how men and women interact. “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 Hillary respects their ideas and their feelings, they will learn to like and trust her.”

Reach out to other women. Her fellow women will be an important asset for Hillary. Many women are still trying to decide who they should vote for. Hillary should embrace those female supporters that she has already won over in order to garner more support from other women voters. Women are great sounding boards and the more Hillary can interact with and learn from them the better.

“Ever heard the idea that people vote for the candidate they would enjoy having a beer with?” asks Rivera. “Well, I think that idea holds true with female voters. I think they will find Hillary more appealing if they feel like she would make a good friend for them. The benefit is that the same characteristics that men find appealing—a decisive nature and honesty, for example—women also find appealing. 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 without batting an eyelash. In the end I think women are sure to be Hillary’s biggest support system, and she should embrace that!”

“This is 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 if America elects a woman as president, that will be a huge victory for womankind. I would love it if Hillary is able to turn things around. But in order to do so, I think she needs to show a little more grace under pressure. She is a strong, intelligent woman who doesn’t need to resort to unsavory tactics to win the nomination.”

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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[®], an international consulting, training, and assessment firm based in Pittsburgh, PA.

For more information, please visit www.nocryinginconstruction.com.