Science Societies

Finding your voice: The art of advocacy

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Marilyn Orr (top) leads a workshop at the ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting in San Antonio, titled "Finding Your Voice: The Art of Advocacy."

This article is part of a series written by members of the Women in Science Committee, for all Society members, and has been shortened for space in this magazine. For the full-length version along with related articles: **www.agronomy.org/membership/women-in-science**, **www.crops.org/membership/women-in-science**, and **www.soils.org/membership/women-in-science**.

At the 2019 ASA, CSSA, and SSSA Annual Meeting in San Antonio, members had the opportunity to attend a workshop titled, "Finding Your Voice: The Art of Advocacy," which was developed by the Women in Science Committee. The workshop was led by Marilyn Orr, a leadership and mentoring coach and workshop leader with the Center for Professional Education at the University of Texas–Austin. Throughout the workshop, attendees were prompted to participate as individuals and within groups to explore advocacy and our values around it, examine our self-limiting beliefs and behaviors, get comfortable with discomfort, and discuss how to find support and create new habits. It was a safe space to share personal experiences and openly ask questions about taboo topics.

"Personally, I came away feeling connected to the women around me and more confident in myself as a result," said Anna Schwyter, graduate student member of

SSSA.

Confidence is Key

Marilyn highlighted one of the most important areas in our careers—self-advocacy, or the action of representing yourself and your interests, especially at the beginning of our careers. As we grow and build our careers, confidence is a key trait we need to develop. Some may feel that the term “confidence” has a negative connotation to it, but Simon Sinek, author and motivational speaker, explains it this way: “Confidence is believing in yourself [while] arrogance is telling others you’re better than they are.”

It is essential to be confident in the work we do and our capabilities. Group discussions and exercises during the session helped to explore what healthy expressions of confidence look and feel like. As an example, too often women do not apply for promotions, fearing they are unqualified, or doubt their abilities and performance quality, according to Kay & Shipman, authors of *The Confidence Code*. Therefore, as anyone who desires to build confidence, we must get comfortable with our strengths, instead of self-deprecating or focusing on our weaknesses.

This could be considered a radical mindset compared with how many of us were raised, but confidence is key to advocating for ourselves in a healthy, humble, and effective way. It’s an art to self-advocate without feeling as if we are bragging, and one many of us tend to shy away from. One exercise we did was to list our three greatest accomplishments and lessons we have learned from them and then discuss around the table. This was valuable as we could see directly that we all have accomplishments and should be proud of them! This was a small step in practicing the art of self-advocacy.

Be Proactive about Emotions

Another step towards defanging our fears is acknowledging the emotions that we feel. Emotions impact every person, but often women are stereotyped as being “overly emotional.” Emotions are not a negative quality; in fact, they often come from a place of passion and caring, which is important! Marilyn suggests being proactive about big emotions: “You should not bottle them up! Instead, process through them by journaling or seeking a listening ear from friends, mentors, or therapists.” This will help to avoid a blow out and allow you continue to be productive in both your professional and personal life.

Not only is self-advocacy important, but advocating for others is as well, especially those whose voice may not be heard alone. One of the worksheets during the session framed it nicely by saying, “Cheer all the way up…and cheer others all the way up as well!”

The final exercise was to envision ourselves on the cover of a magazine 10 years from now and what great accomplishments we were being recognized for. If we can dream it, we can do it. Who, but ourselves, can really make us believe otherwise?

2019 Mentoring Award

The Women in Science Committee congratulates Dr. Sharon Clay as the recipient of the 2019 Mentoring Award! The award recognizes her efforts in encouraging women in science. Overall mentoring efforts assist students in presenting and publishing their work, finding financial aid, and providing career guidance; provide psychological support, encouragement, and strategies for maintaining work–life balance for early career professionals in the agronomic, crop, soil, and environmental sciences; and show continued interest in the individual professional advancement of women scientists.

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