

Women in STEM Leadership

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Do you want to have more influence at work?

This punchy opening line from speaker Penny Williams at a Women in STEM Leadership seminar last week left not one person in the room without their hand raised. Hosted by Arcadis, this event was the first seminar event organised by the WES London Cluster. It did not disappoint. The presentations were empowering, and the networking enlightening.



Figure 1 Margherita Latronico welcoming attendees

Penny Williams is an executive coach and public speaking mentor who spoke passionately about how to influence up in your career. This involved taking attendees through a step by step process towards having more influence over managers at work.

There was a definite buzz around the room as Penny paused to get attendees to discuss their preferred communication methods with their neighbour, one of the key steps in influencing. I personally would normally prefer to have an opportunity to read and digest information and then discuss it. An informative email followed by a face to face discussion would be a good way to communicate with me. In this crowd however, I found myself in the minority, with a majority of attendees, including my discussion partner, preferring face to face communication over emails. Perhaps this is unsurprising given the nature of the evening's discussion. Could there be a link between the type of people who attend leadership events such as this one and a

preference for face to face communication? At any rate, I think we were all somewhat surprised by the range of preferences around the room. Something I'm sure we will all now bear in mind at work.

The key message I took away from Penny's presentation, and the one discussed most during the evening's networking session, was about how to present your ideas. Penny advised that to increase your influence, it's best to focus on the benefits to three entities:

1. The organisation,
2. The person you are trying to influence,
3. Yourself.

It is often too easy to focus on just one of these, but walking into a meeting armed with all three is far more likely to lead to success.



Figure 2 Penny Williams' top tips for Influencing Up

The evening's second speaker was Jay Surti, an author, keynote speaker, and consultant in presentation skills, diversity and leadership. Listening to Jay's engaging and informative presentation, it was hard to imagine that this former lawyer used to have a crippling fear of public speaking.

Jay encouraged us to think of ourselves as our own brand. Writing this article, it really dawned on me that anyone who reads this has probably found it via a social media site, possibly with a link to my profile. Within two clicks you have access to a huge amount of information about me. I have grown up hearing of the evils of social media, but Jay helped me to understand that social media doesn't have to be kept entirely separate to work, in fact it can be used to shape your personal brand in a positive way. So here I am, taking the plunge and writing this first article (of many?).

The core of Jay's presentation focussed on tips for developing as a leader. She covered five key aspects:

- Emotional intelligence,
- Self-awareness,
- Giving and receiving feedback,
- Strong presentation skills,
- Having a comprehensive personal development plan.



Figure 3 Lively discussions during Jay's Presentation

Emotional intelligence, and understanding other people's motivations, was a strong theme throughout this event. It is all too easy to focus on goals and forget about motivations, but understanding the motivations of those you work with is key to achieving your shared goals.

There were so many important take-home messages from both speakers, far more than it would be sensible to write about here. I for one have a lot to digest, and I look forward to implementing some of their suggestions in my career going forward.

Thank you to Margherita Latronico, the WES London Cluster, and Arcadis for organising such a fantastic, empowering evening.



Figure 4 (L-R): Jay Surti, Margherita Latronico and Penny Williams

The Women's Engineering Society is a charity and a professional network of women engineers, scientists and technologists offering inspiration, support and professional development. Working in partnership, we support and inspire women to achieve as engineers, scientists and as leaders; we encourage the education of engineering; and we support companies with gender diversity and inclusion. <https://www.wes.org.uk/>

The WES London Cluster is a London-based group of WES members who meet regularly to plan events, discuss future WES projects, and support one another in our engineering endeavours. For more information, to suggest possible subjects for future events, or if you would like to present yourself, please contact weslondoncluster@gmail.com