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OPINION

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Erase the 'Little Lady' Frame of Mind

■ Successful women understand struggle and relish change, but aren't valued by our leaders.

If change occurs mainly through struggle in our culture, no group knows and understands this better than American women. Without an organized lobby or legitimate civil-rights-style movement to lead the way in breaking down the economic and social barriers to success, women have had to shoot their way into American leadership circles.

Women continue to be forced to compete under a different set of rules than men, and because of this, the unique perspectives, talents and abilities of American women are underutilized at a time when it is just their kind of ethic that is so badly needed in our society.

I have been active in fund-raising for charitable organizations in Orange County for quite some time, primarily in the arts and education. I'm also a successful businesswoman; I've built literally thousands of homes. Several years ago, when I was seeking construction financing from a local bank, the loan committee asked to meet me personally. "You don't look like a builder," they told me. I got the loan anyway, but the committee's demand that I appear in person had already set my loan and business apart from those of my male colleagues.

I'm also a "Team 100" member, one of a group of individuals who have contributed \$100,000 to the Republican National Committee in support of President Bush. I made such a contribution and was recently invited to a special reception with the chairman of the Republican National Committee, Clayton Yeutter. Only "Team 100" members were invited.

At that reception—a dozen or so of us attended—Chairman Yeutter walked up to me and inquired: "And who do you belong to, little lady?" Well, Mr. Yeutter, I've managed to get myself out of the kitchen long enough to climb to the top of the Orange County home-building business, and if you read the paper, you'll note that I'm quoted from time to time on economic and business matters.

And, one more thing. Unlike the chairman of the RNC, I wasn't appointed. I learned early that any success I would achieve had to be earned. So I and many other successful women have developed something our leaders in this nation don't have and desperately need: an ethic of success through struggle. We know that success requires some kind of change and understand that institutions not only inhibit the process of change but discourage the very idea.

Our American history is one of struggle

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for change, often against our own institutions and leaders, as Americans have fought toward a new order, a new way of thinking.

When a system brings prosperity, growth and global leadership, the prospect of change carries with it the danger of the unknown, of loss. But when our leaders protect against that loss at the expense of needed change, we as Americans must step in and force action. It is at this crossroads that we, as a society, find ourselves today. Our future is compromised not by a lack of ability, but by a loss of the competitive ethic that built this nation.

Our people feel this and know it to be wrong, even if our leaders do not. As a society, we have entered a time of profound introspection about America, our role in the world and our ability to compete and prosper in what truly is a new world order.

What we need, as a nation and as a people, to ensure our success into the next century, are new agents of change. If change occurs through struggle, who better to lead than those who have experienced the struggle—and overcome it.

The case for diversity in American leadership—political and economic—rests with this pressing national need. We don't need more women in offices and boardrooms just because there aren't enough there now. We need more women—successful women—because we must change our collective frame of reference to recognize more clearly the nature of global competition and the problems with our own economic theories. Because women struggle for each and every success, they can restore practical experience to institutions that have come to resemble laboratories more than proving grounds.

All over the world, the old ways are dying. America has led the way to greater freedom and prosperity since our founding. Now, as we enter the era we have so earnestly desired, we must cast off our own "old ways" and tap the intellect and abilities of all our people.

Our future and prosperity depend on the ability of our leaders to once again embrace the ethic of success through struggle.

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