



FIT TO LEAD

Fitness and leadership can and should go hand in hand.

By Ashley Tappan and Bonnie Wingate

Playing sports is about more than just fun. It fires the competitive spirit and can impart a sense of leadership, discipline and teamwork. We believe that athletics can also help female executives get into the C-suite.

Although women now have, on average, equal professional experience and educational credentials as their male executive counterparts, during the last 15 years they've made little progress in reaching the corporate upper echelons. Male executives have long bonded through athletics—and businesswomen can and should as well. Participation in sports can accelerate a woman's leadership skills and provide invaluable networking opportunities to advance her career.

That's why we founded Fit to Lead, a six-month fitness regimen that serves two functions: triathlon preparation and transformational leadership development to pave the way for promotions and job opportunities. (Insigniam encourages its employees to do pro bono work benefiting the community year-round, which has helped us launch and sustain this project.)

Offered through the Greater Philadelphia Chapter of the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association, Fit to Lead prepares businesswomen mentally, emotionally and physically for tough challenges, motivating them to emerge as stronger leaders. In 2013, the first year of the program, 13 women competed in the two-day TriRock Philadelphia Triathlon. In 2015, there were 27 competitors. Five of the participants have recently been promoted or landed new jobs.

Fit to Lead is a breakthrough for the participants because it takes them out of their comfort zone and empowers them to take actions, such as swimming in open water, that they never thought possible. Often, they must face failure over and over to achieve their goal.

The program offers unique opportunities to network—or as some call it, "sweatwork"—during group workouts and regular leadership development conference calls. There is a natural bond among participants as they get to know their fellow triathletes and recognize their ability to meet their commitments and inspire others.

If female athletes do make it to the C-suite, they're likely to find other women who've competed as athletes. In a 2014 survey of women executives on four continents by EY Women Athletes Business Network and espnW, 52 percent of C-suite women said they played sports at the college level.

We expect that number to grow as more women come to recognize sports as a critical tool for career advancement. Business and fitness go hand in hand because they are both ultimately about one thing: performance. **IQ**

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