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WOMEN IN THE WINGS **Aspiring female politicians learn the media ropes**

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Heidi Berenson took control when she took the stage, a general preparing troops for battle.

"Body language -- 55 percent of the message is you," said **Berenson**, whose forceful confidence was augmented by a white power suit (collar turned up, Fonzi-style) and royal-blue turtleneck with matching brooch.

"Voice -- 38 percent of your message is how you deliver it; if your voice isn't working for you it's working against you. Figure out what words you want to punch."

What about the speech itself?

"Sorry to break it to all the poets and wordsmiths out there, but word choice accounts for only 7 percent of message impact."

Berenson, a Washington-based political consultant, delivered her marching orders to 50 women who sat in rapt attention during intense training at San Diego State.

The former Emmy-winning TV producer ("Good Morning America," "Crossfire," "The CBS Evening News") was one of several high-powered media experts assembled by the university to teach women aspiring to be politicians how to "master the media."

The recent conference was a natural for SDSU, which happens to be one of the few American universities where aggressively grooming women for public service is a priority.

"Whenever people ask me why I'm so passionate about pushing

women for elective office, I say I'm a product of the Women's Studies Department at SDSU," said Deborah Carstens, Class of 1972.

Apparently, what the world needs now is not love, sweet love, but more female politicians.

Carstens, who was instrumental in arranging the recent two-day seminar, serves as a director of the national WISH List from her home in Arizona.

WISH stands for Women in the Senate and House and its mission, according to its Web site, is to raise "funds to identify, train, and elect pro-choice Republican women at all levels of government -- local, state, and national." Its motto: "Women deserve a seat at the table!"

After a successful career in real estate, Carstens said, she decided to begin stumping for more women on the stump. She cited numbers that she says paint a disturbing picture.

"There are about 200 countries that hold elections and the United States ranks 60th in the world in the percentage of women holding elective office," Carstens said.

"Many Third World countries have a higher percentage of women in office than we do; 40 countries have had a woman as president or prime minister, but not us.

"That's why I'm so excited about talk of a Hillary-Condi (presidential campaign) matchup in 2008!"

At the SDSU conference, it was all about learning how to play the political game. In attendance were several current office-holders, including District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis.

"Experienced trial lawyers know a lot of this stuff already. After all, a closing argument is nothing more than a lot of good sound bites strung together," the district attorney said during a break. "But there's always room to learn more."

Among the lessons dispensed: Manufacturing sound bites; knowing how to play to the camera; generating passion on demand; how to woo talk-show producers by having a take on the hot water-cooler topic of the day.

It's all about paying attention to the little things, **Berenson** lectured.

What do you do with your hands, for example, during a TV interview

or debate? Clapping them in front of your crotch -- the "fig leaf," or "reverse fig leaf" -- is a common mistake, she said.

Much better is counting off your fingers one by one, a subtle demonstration that you are constantly emphasizing the profound points you are there to make.

Speaking of points to make, **Berenson** says it's crucial for candidates to have three themes and hammer them over and over, regardless of what the interviewer asks.

And how do you deftly deflect questions and return to the point you want to make? By memorizing "bridges," of course:

"I'm glad you asked me that, but what's even more important is"
Or, "that's an interesting point, but it pales in significance compared with my plan for"

Politics is mostly serious business. But grim faces, **Berenson** noted, are unappealing, especially on camera.

"I was constantly reminding a former speaker of the House we worked with to smile," said **Berenson**. "I finally ended up putting smiley-face stickers all over the pages of his speeches. It's the little things."

Berenson said that other than "a few particulars about hair, clothes and jewelry," her advice to female candidates differs little from her advice to males.

Body language, posture, voice projection, clothing color schemes ("royal blue is always a flattering color") and personality, she said, are critical elements for any candidate, regardless of gender.

Francine Busby, a North County Democrat who came up short last fall in her first try for the U.S. House against eight-term Congressman Randy "Duke" Cunningham, R-Escondido, said she was amazed how much there was for her to learn despite having a campaign under her belt.

"One of the questions women candidates fear most is, what are your qualifications? Most women in Congress came up through city councils, school boards and community activism," said Busby, a former president of the Cardiff school board.

"They didn't become lawyers; a lot of women weren't on the career track to become politicians. I just jumped in with both feet. I made

hundreds of campaign appearances and honed my message, but this training would have been invaluable to me."

Dawn Lake has more than 20 years of service in the U.S. Army, most recently as a lieutenant colonel in Afghanistan after her Reserve unit was called up. Lake, who manages an "executive coaching" firm in Phoenix and is an experienced public speaker, also plans to run for Congress.

Despite extensive experience addressing all sorts of audiences (including legions of military men), Lake said she was picking up all sorts of useful tips at the seminar.

"We have to communicate in sound bites now because that's the way everyone has been groomed to listen," Lake said.

"Whenever I speak, I always videotape it, get a glass of wine and go over it line by line. Next time, I may go up with three things in mind to work on -- say, posture, smile, animation.

"Right now the problem I'm having is not punching my words well."

Francine Busby listened to this, smiled and shook her head.

"Over 300 campaign appearances and I never once taped myself," Busby mused.

But isn't there a Stepford Candidate quality to all of this? Aren't we pushing a bit hard to create a new crop of political spinners on the female side of the aisle?

"To me, it's not so much about spin as it is about being more effective in getting people to hear you," Lake said. "I lot of people come to politics with passion and commitment, but without the communication skills. This is about perfecting skills."

The campaign-seasoned Busby said there has to be steak behind the sizzle.

"There is a danger here -- there are politicians who are nothing but spinmeisters with no integrity, no core values behind the message," Busby said. "But when you're really passionate about something, I don't think you can fake that.

"People pick up on a phony."

SELLING IT

Passion Persuades: Speak with passion and you'll grab your audience's attention. Energy is contagious. If you exhibit a "passion deficit" then why should your audience care?

Preparation & Practice: Prepare on many levels: venue, audience, time frame, appearance, etc., and you'll better handle the unexpected. Before taking the stage take a few deep breaths to calm nerves.

Appearance: Dress like the TV pros; wear blue, particularly royal blue; it is the most flattering color to all skin tones. Hair and makeup matter. Make jewelry subtle and low sheen.

Paving Your Message Road: Facts, figures and jargon make people glaze over. Spice up key points with analogies, action words or anecdotes.

Be a Pro at Controversy: Anticipate your critics' arguments. Have phrases like "Let me put that into context" ready.

Three Key Points: Information is easily retained in threes. Position your first point as your "headline" to grab the audience and your last point as your bottom line; people tend to remember best what they hear last.

SOURCE: HEIDI BERENSON

U.S. WOMEN IN HIGH OFFICE

Though California has never had a female governor, San Diego has elected two female mayors in recent years, Maureen O'Connor and Susan Golding. Here is the breakdown of women currently serving in the U.S. House, Senate and governorships among the 50 states:

Women Serving in the 109th Congress 2005-07

U.S. Senate, 14 (nine Democrats, five Republicans)

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R)

Arkansas Sen. Blanche Lincoln (D)

California Sen. Barbara Boxer (D)

California Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D)

Louisiana Sen. Mary Landrieu (D)

Maine Sen. Susan M. Collins (R)

Maine Sen. Olympia J. Snowe (R)

Maryland Sen. Barbara Ann Mikulski (D)

Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D)

North Carolina Sen. Elizabeth H. Dole (R)

New York Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D)

Texas Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R)

Washington Sen. Patty Murray (D)

Washington Sen. Maria Cantwell (D)

U.S. House of Representatives 66 (43 Democrats, 23 Republicans)
plus 3 Democratic delegates:

California, 18 Democrats, 1 Republican

Female governors, eight:

Arizona Gov. Janet Napolitano (D)

Connecticut Gov. M. Jodi Rell (R)

Delaware Gov. Ruth Ann Minner (D)

Hawaii Gov. Linda Lingle (R)

Kansas Gov. Kathleen Sebelius (D)

Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco (D)

Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm (D)

Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire (D)

Lieutenant governors, 16:

Six Democrats and 10 Republicans

SOURCE: CENTER FOR AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS,
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