

**ILLUminate Blog Transcript: Dean Georgette Chapman Phillips on Women in Business**

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- ROB GERTH: 00:14 Welcome. I'm Rob Gerth, Director of Marketing and Communications for Lehigh University's College of Business. And today, we're talking with Georgette Chapman Phillips, the Kevin L. and Lisa A. Clayton Dean of the College of Business at Lehigh. Dean Phillips' research and teaching is focused on the intersection of law, economics and public policy. She is published in the areas of urban and regional planning, local government law, real estate and housing. She also has a law degree from Harvard Law School. Welcome back, Georgette.
- GEORGETTE CHAPMAN PHILLIPS: 00:43 Thank you.
- GERTH: 00:45 Now, today, we're talking about women in business. And two weeks and seven years ago, from the day that we recorded this, you actually became the first female Dean of the College of Business here at Lehigh. That must have been pretty exciting.
- PHILLIPS: 00:57 It was. It was one of my career highlights. I love this job. And I've really enjoyed these seven years and two weeks.
- GERTH: 01:08 Now, it's especially relevant to our topic. Because this year, Lehigh is marking 50 years of undergraduate coeducation. Is there any certain type of pressure that comes from being the first woman anything?
- PHILLIPS: 01:23 I would have to say yes. Because on the one hand, people are pinning their expectations on you whether you have agreed to accept that invitation. And on the other hand, there are people that are going to be quite skeptical of who you are because you're a woman. My answer to this is that excellence rules out. That doing your job and doing your job well is the answer to both sides of the equation. But yes, you are under a little bit more scrutiny as being the first anything, the first African-American, the first woman. But like I said, it's been really great being the Dean here at Lehigh Business.
- GERTH: 02:12 Yeah. It's funny you don't really hear-- except for the first man on the moon, you don't really hear about the first man doing this or the first man doing that. The other day as we tape this, there was a-- Virgin Galactic went into space. And they didn't say that he was the first man to do this kind of thing. He was just the first billionaire, actually, is what they said.
- PHILLIPS: 02:33 Right. So it's all about the default. Where does the default lie? If it has always been men, they don't say first man. There are some times where it is the first man in situations where it has always been a woman that has held the job. But those instances are much, much more rare than the first woman holding any kind of position after a series of men.
- GERTH: 03:03 And you probably have a lot of good stories. But one I know is-- I found an article from about six years ago that said that you, on more than one occasion, answered

your phone and the caller thought you were George Phillips' secretary. Hopefully, things have changed since then for you.

- PHILLIPS: 03:20 A bit. A bit. It's always-- because my name can be truncated into a male name. And sometimes, people just don't look at the last part, the feminization of the name. And they assume that I'm George Phillips' secretary, having never met me. And I just say, "No, no. Actually, George is my grandfather. So what do you need?" And I must say things, things have changed. It might be that I'm no longer new in the job.
- GERTH: 03:55 Right.
- PHILLIPS: 03:55 Okay. But yes, thankfully, things have changed.
- GERTH: 04:01 And before you became an academic, you worked at a couple of law firms. Were you at that time one of only a few women? And what was it like?
- PHILLIPS: 04:10 That was a very different and special place and time. Wall Street in the 1980s was a very go, go place. It was-- well, I don't really like this term, but I can't really think of another better term. It was a very macho environment.
- GERTH: 04:27 Yeah. Perfect.
- PHILLIPS: 04:28 It was who can work longer, harder, bill more hours. And sometimes, you just have to take a step back from that and say, "No, I'm not going to be in your macho race. I'm going to do what I need to do to do my job in the excellent manner that you expect." But I do not need to-- as I said in that [Saturday Night Live skit](#) from many years ago, "quien es mas macho" (who is more macho). I don't have to do that.
- GERTH: 05:05 Now, let's talk about education for a second then. Over the years, there's been an uptick in women in undergraduate and MBA programs. In fact, some programs are now 50-50. What do you attribute that to?
- PHILLIPS: 05:21 Well, two very important factors. One is simply the passage of time. And the second is a concerted effort. When you are in high school-- let's talk about the undergraduates for just a moment. When you were in high school and you're thinking about going to college, many people do not know that you can get an undergraduate business degree. Why? Because in high school, you don't study business. You studied Chemistry, or English, or History or Science. But you probably are not studying undergraduate business. And so you don't know that this is a possibility. So it's on us. It's our responsibility, those of us who have undergraduate business programs, to tell young women, "Yes, yes. This is a possibility." The concerted effort comes in that there are more women now that we can point to and say, "This is a woman who studied accounting. Or this is a woman who studied finance." And it brings it closer to that. This is especially true for MBAs. There are many groups that have it as their mission-- for example, the [Forté Foundation](#)-- to build the pipeline of women getting their MBAs. But you can't build that in a day. You have to-- as I was saying before, with the passage of time, cede the ground. Make it more fertile to allow women to see this as a career path for them. So it's, again, a combination of passage of time. There are just more women available. And secondly, the concerted effort that we're making on both the undergraduate and the graduate side.
- GERTH: 07:08 So I assume from what you just said, that you do feel that business colleges in general have a responsibility to support women.

- PHILLIPS: 07:16 Oh, absolutely. Because I think that we have a responsibility to support a whole host of different people, whether it be people that are coming from lesser served communities, whether it are people that are coming from rural communities. This is something that's near and dear to my heart. That there's a lot of things that you miss if you don't grow up in a city. But we also have the responsibility to say to women, "This is how you can make your mark. This is how you can blaze your career path using tools that you perhaps didn't consider before." Finance, accounting, marketing, management, data analysis, supply chain, all of the things that we teach you as an undergraduate. And then on the MBA side, "This is how you can lead." Because getting an MBA is all about leadership. How are you going to lead your enterprise, the world, the nonprofit or whatever it is. That's what an MBA is about.
- GERTH: 08:22 And for the employer, what do you think their responsibility is, particularly towards women to support them?
- PHILLIPS: 08:28 Well, first is to create an inclusive environment. That's number one. That a woman competes on her own steam without being held back. But the second thing is to open up opportunities, open up eyes. That if you see a woman who has a particular skill that the light is being shown upon them, to bring that out, to suggest women for career advancement, for MBA programs, for any kind of career progression that they might not know exists.
- GERTH: 09:13 So part of it, I guess, is the culture. So you're talking about the culture in the workplace, I guess--
- PHILLIPS: 09:18 Right. Right.
- GERTH: 09:18 --and changes. So what changes have you seen for women in particular in the culture, in the workplace over your career?
- PHILLIPS: 09:27 Oh, how do I start? How do I start? Sometimes, I feel very old. And then, I realize I'm not that old. Because it was a very different world. It was an extraordinarily different world. When I was in the place of young undergraduates or young MBAs that are coming out now, that they are assumed to be competent. They are assumed to have a place in the employment that they have chosen. And it's really the attitude of you're no longer an aberration. You're the norm. And we were talking about norming before when we were saying the first woman to do this. And I think that because so many women have now paved the path for these young women coming into the business world, they are not seen as an aberration. And they are able to compete on the basis of their skill and their ability. That's probably the biggest change that I've seen. And that men have recognized this. That perhaps it wasn't always that way and have worked very hard to make it that way now. The level of just overt sexism has diminished logarithmically. Again, sometimes, I feel very old. As you and I were talking earlier, there was a time when a female teacher-- when her pregnancy started to show, she had to quit. And when I was coming up, I thought, "How could that have possibly been?" Well, there are stories that I can tell that I'm sure some women that are coming into the workforce today will say, "Well, how could that possibly have been?" Yeah, it was very different when you have to explain that, "No, that kind of behavior will not be tolerated both in the office place and in social events." So yeah, there's been big changes. And it's a good thing.

- GERTH: 11:41      Yeah. I was talking to one of our professors who was-- it was around in the 70s and was saying that one of the things she ran up against was that the faculty wanted to change-- when the faculty meeting was, they wanted to move in early in the morning. This was in the 70s. And she was like, "Yeah, I was the only one that had child care problems." So I had to go to them and go, "You can't just do that if you want me to show up at the meeting."
- PHILLIPS: 12:05      We are actually changing the times of our faculty meetings. One thing that we learned through COVID was you get a lot more attendance at faculty meetings when people don't have conflicts. And so our faculty meetings historically have been very late in the afternoon. And anybody that's had to do child care pick up, you know the monetary difference between 05:55 and 06:05. And I realized and I should have realized this before, but COVID really brought to the forefront, we're moving these meetings earlier in the day so that nobody, men or women, have to make that mad dash to preschool pick up that we all have done.
- GERTH: 12:56      The Bureau of Labor Statistics says that in 2019, women made up the majority of the American financial services workforce, yet less than a quarter of them were senior leadership.
- PHILLIPS: 13:10      Yeah.
- GERTH: 13:12      Is there any way to reach any kind of gender parity? So there's more women in the workplace. There's more women taking MBAs. But they're still not getting that over the hump of that last leadership position.
- PHILLIPS: 13:25      It's a pipeline issue, right? And it's a leaky pipeline issue. I had a great conversation with one of our alums who in her time led one of the major accounting firms. And she worked very hard to change the workplace in such a way that women did not drop out off. The leaky pipeline issue she saw as one of her mandates to fix. And until you stop those leaks, stop women from dropping out of the workforce, just at the time that they start becoming middle managers which then leads to senior managers. If we can stop that leak, we're going to get a lot more women at the top. And I tell young women, much to their chagrin, that until men start having babies, it's never going to be equal. It's just not. And you cannot expect, you cannot expect that it is going to be equal. So what do you young women-- what do you have to do to make sure that you at least stay on track during the young childbearing years? Some women have chosen not to have children. I didn't make that choice. Having children was very, very important to me. But I saw that it was also important for me to raise those children, not just leave them with the nanny and run off to work. And so I change careers. I didn't drop out. I changed careers. And that's-- we really have to start thinking about what do we need to do to maintain the pipeline. Because then, when it's time to jump back up, I didn't have to retool. So it takes creative thinking. We can't just keep doing it the same old way and expect different results. We have to think creatively on how to stop the leaky pipeline and keep women in the pool.
- GERTH: 15:36      Well, I guess, that's sort of the same problem that goes with another statistic, another study that shows that true representation in the boardroom is still decades away.
- PHILLIPS: 15:46      Yeah. Board positions are not easy to get. A lot of it is word of mouth. A lot of it is who do you know that can recommend you. There are big pushes now especially in California, which just mandated a minimum number of women in public boards.

There are big pushes now to get women in the corporate boardroom. Because until the voice is there, it's not going to be heard. And that's so very important. I mean, do you ever see a decision that a company has made? And you ask yourself, "Who was in the boardroom when they made that decision?" Like really, who was there? Because I cannot imagine that that was an inclusive boardroom. Well, that's what we need to be striving toward.

- GERTH: 16:37      Some countries have laws that say there has to be a certain-- yeah, there has to be a certain percentage of women on a board.
- PHILLIPS: 16:44      Right. Because there is-- diverse voices are very, very important. It's not just a woman for women's sake. Or an African-American, or a Latinx, or an Asian-American or someone who LGBTQ, all of these are really important voices that need to be heard. And it's on the shoulders of the board recruitment committees to find those diverse, distinct voices.
- GERTH: 17:21      Where do you think women in business are being pioneers right now?
- PHILLIPS: 17:25      Everywhere, everywhere. And I think that's fantastic. That is wonderful. Because the one thing that I don't want to be is pigeonholed. My specialty is real estate. And that is not exactly the most "feminine." I love real estate. I love digging the dirt. I got to knock down-- we're building a new building. And I probably got on the big machinery. It was great. It was wonderful. And so I am happy that women are pioneers in finance, accounting, not for profit, everything that you can think of. There are women that are taking that step and leading in those areas. And that's what I think we have to do. It all goes back to, again, that discussion of how we start started. It's the norming. This is not an aberration. This is just how it is. And if we narrow women to pioneering in this or pioneering in that, then it's still kind of an aberration now across the board. And I think that's great.
- GERTH: 18:36      Do you see any trends that are in a positive way for women going forward right now?
- PHILLIPS: 18:41      I am constantly amazed at the young women that I meet that are coming through at Lehigh. What an incredibly talented group of women. I mean, the men are talented, too. But we're talking about specifically women. And the trend that I see and that I love is how assertive and forthright they are. They don't step back. They don't cower back. They don't wait to be asked. They just get out there. And you didn't see that 25 years ago. You would have a woman here, a woman there that would be out in the forefront. If it was somebody like me, I have been called mouthy. I've been called too forward, all of these things. And I'm like, "I don't care. That's just me." As I told a group of young women in one of our women in business seminars, there are no masculine traits. There are no feminine traits. There are your traits. And you be you. And if that means being bossy, assertive, forthright, whatever positive or negative connotation you want to put on it, then you be you. And don't fall into the gender based stereotypes of how you have to act. And so I love it that these women are there all that and more.
- GERTH: 20:07      And is there anything you'd like to see in the next 50 years? Some development that you're not seeing now or--
- PHILLIPS: 20:15      Well, I don't know about 50 years. That's a bit long to prognosticate. But I am somewhat concerned about a trend that I'm seeing a little bit. As I said, I'm not seeing it widespread. But I am somewhat troubled about how some young women have

forgotten the battles that were fought and won by people my age or even people a little bit older than I am. That they see the world as a gender neutral world. And it's not. I mean, again, until men start having babies, it's just not going to be a gender neutral world. It should be an equal opportunity world, but it's never going to be a gender neutral world. And I cringe, cringe when I hear a woman tell me that she's not a feminist. And I say, "But why?" That first of all, that's not a dirty word. That's a woman that I am-- word that I am absolutely proud to say, "I am a feminist." Because I believe in the value of equality of women. And to say that you're not a feminist is to erase the gains that women before you have made under the banner of feminism. So that does trouble me a bit. But then, it's counterbalanced by all of the wonderful women that I see that are shattering barriers and just really hitting it out of the park. So I love that.

GERTH: 21:59

Thanks, Georgette. That's a great place to end it. Thank you so much.

PHILLIPS: 22:03

My pleasure. This is fun. And go, Lehigh, 50 years of coeducation for the undergraduates.

GERTH: 22:09

I've been talking with Dean Georgette Chapman Phillips. She is a professor in both the Perella Department of Finance in the College of Business and in the Africana Studies Program in the College of Arts and Sciences here at Lehigh. This podcast is brought to you by iLLUminate, the Lehigh Business Blog. To hear more podcasts featuring Lehigh Business Thought Leaders, please visit us at [business.lehigh.edu/news](https://business.lehigh.edu/news). Follow us on Twitter [@LehighBusiness](https://twitter.com/LehighBusiness). I'm Rob Gerth. Thanks for listening.

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