

Interactive Workshops, Media Luminaries, and Joan Blades Rocked Recent Expo

—By Noelle Robbins

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Top: Pam Moore, KRON-4; Anna Marks of BABW News; Leslie Griffith of KTVU; and Lori Hope of BABW News pose for photo opp after media panel. Bottom: Leslie Griffith takes a moment to interview Joan Blades, co-founder of Moveon.org

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There is nothing quite as electrifying as a gathering of several hundred accomplished, energized women. The Oakland Marriott was the scene of just such an event.

Corporate representatives, nonprofit activists, business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs rubbed shoulders, shared tips and generated an upbeat inspirational buzz. Some men attended, as well, and eagerly jumped into the myriad of workshops, booth demonstrations and networking opportunities offered at this groundbreaking conference.

Exhibitors included a lively mix of banking services, office suppliers, insurance providers and marketing consultants. In addition, entertainment promoters and health practitioners; jewelry designers and fashion divas; authors and psychics all contributed to the swirl of color, sound and activity that engaged the attendees during the course of the day. There was never a dull moment. And yet there were ample moments for quiet conversation and the creation of memorable connections.

Tara Marchant enjoyed the Expo as both a participant and workshop leader, offering

"Embracing Your Unpopularity: When Being Likeable is a Liability." Marchant noted a real sense of community. "It wasn't a typical trade show full of strangers. People really got to talk to people and faces became familiar over the course of the day." She appreciated the fact that the event was organized to encourage "an environment of sharing."

Twenty workshops covered topics ranging from effective time management to efficient email marketing. Women also discussed issues and problem solving strategies related to personal marketing and negotiation; personal business style and communication; and maintaining balance between personal lives and work demands. Every participant had unique concerns and needs, fears and hopes; much to contribute, and much to learn. And Marchant observed that, "Attendees were able to immediately use what they were learning at the interactive workshops."

Several common themes flowed through the workshop sessions, and the broader conference, as well: communication, connection, courage and compassion, all traits and tactics that attendees agreed form a solid foundation for business success. In addition, the concepts of "women as healers" and of spiritual precepts as work practice guidelines, were comfortably explored by women seeking to enhance professional accomplishment. This no-holds-barred atmosphere stimulated deep and meaningful exchanges between women of different backgrounds, careers and aspirations.

Joan Blades and Media Panel Excite Crowd

Despite an environment clearly promoting mutual support and information exchange, there was no denying that featured speakers had serious concerns to raise about the corporate and media worlds at-large.

Joan Blades, co-founder of MoveOn.Org and author of *The Motherhood Manifesto*, a book scheduled to be released in conjunction with Mother's Day, expounded on current corporate policies and practices in California which she feels constrain mothers at work and at home. She noted, for example, that six weeks of paid maternity leave may strain the budgets of small business owners. Blades urged that maternity leave be a financial responsibility shared by government and business; a partnership which can lead to "more productive workers in parent friendly work environments."

Tackling the issue of women friendly work environments created an animated discussion for an impressive panel of prominent, award-winning media professionals as well.

Panel moderator Rose Aguilar, who covers social and political issues for KALW 91.7 FM, launched the exchange with a fiery assessment of the current state of broadcast media. Referring to her experience with male co-workers she made it clear that, "They just don't think about women's issues. Women see angles and sources for stories much differently than men."

Aguilar set the stage with statistics that illustrated the imbalance in the news industry. For starters, the fact that 92 percent of sources for network news stories are white; 85 percent are men; and 75 percent are Republican. She added that women represent just 37 percent of the news staff in media newsrooms and only 35 percent of management. Jory Des Jardins, co-founder and creative force behind BlogHer.com, related similar numbers in

the blogging universe where men represent 65 percent of bloggers. Des Jardins, who began blogging because, "I fell in love with writing the way I want to write," sees bloggers, who grow in number by about 16,000 daily, as the darlings of the media and pioneers in communication because they write with refreshing authenticity.

Panel members in more traditional media roles had their own stories to share. C. Diane Howell, founder and producer of Black Business Listings, a monthly newspaper designed to promote and empower African American economic development, regards the media as a tool. "Just like money, it's all about what you do with it."

Pam Moore and Leslie Griffith, newscasters on KRON Channel 4 and KTVU Channel 2 respectively, related the challenges facing women who find themselves "the only one in the room" full of male co-workers. They spoke passionately about the need for women in broadcast newsrooms and the important, unique perspective women "speaking from the heart" contribute to news reporting.

In terms of advice for professional women seeking to use the media as a conduit for promoting industry news, Judy Gallman, editor of Oakland and Alameda magazines, urged Expo attendees to "think like a reader." Rather than business profiles, she looks for East Bay oriented pitches and stories that illustrate "how business affects people." Vividly capturing the spirit of the Expo, Howell declared, "We need a bigger vision than just managing someone else's business. Women need to own and run the media."

Marchant enthusiastically agrees. For her this conference was all about "curiosity, partnerships and expanding horizons — going beyond the expected to learn all the possibilities." Intimate, engaging and empowering, the Bay Area BusinessWoman's Expo charged attendees' can-do spirit; opening doors, opening hearts, opening minds.

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