

Gender Equity and Inclusion at Guidehouse

Conversation with Michelle Fay, Guidehouse partner



think different” was Apple’s slogan about twenty years ago. These two catchy words signified that what was in the elegant white boxes containing Steve Jobs’ products resulted from imagining outside-the-box. It was different thinking that led the PUF team to create a better way to place the important themes of last November’s book, “Lewis Latimer, the First Hidden Figure,” and this month’s book, “Women Leading Utilities, the Pioneers and Path to Today and Tomorrow,” in front of our entire industry.

Rather than sell a copy one at a time, we’re able to provide it in multiple digital formats for free, only because of the gracious support of the books’ sponsors. Including in the case of “Women Leading Utilities,” the consultancy Guidehouse.

Michelle Fay, a Guidehouse partner, writes this in the book’s introductory pages: “As more women begin their careers or ascend to leadership roles, we must continue to work harder to close the gender gap, to give women a seat – and a voice – at the table, and to transform the old constructs of who belongs in this space. This book is a powerful reminder of why, and we’re glad to be a small part of sharing these women’s stories with the world.” She elaborates in the following conversation with us.

PUF’s Steve Mitnick: Your company, Guidehouse, and your team, decided to be a sponsor for Women Leading Utilities. Why did you all decide that and also write an inspiring statement in the book?

Michelle Fay: It’s something we’re passionate about. As an organization, we’ve published our CEO Blueprint. It’s not something we just talk about. It’s something that we live all day, every day, in everything we do – as we’re thinking about everything from recruiting individuals to making sure we have future leaders coming up through the pipeline.

We’ve noticed it’s not just us – it’s also our clients becoming more aware of diversity challenges. They’re taking action and we have to as well if we want to continue to keep pace. It’s clearly something we’re passionate about and take action on in our organization every day. As a proof point, we recently added a Chief Culture, Inclusion, and Diversity Officer to our executive leadership team at Guidehouse.

PUF: It’s a good thing, but it’s also seen as a valuable business decision and strategy. Why is that, at an organization like Guidehouse?

Michelle Fay: Having a diverse team brings a different perspective to the conversation. Like-minded, similar people tend to be one note. The more people you bring into the conversation from different backgrounds and experiences, the more varied perspectives you bring to the conversation. This often allows you to think about things in a way that maybe you wouldn’t have previously considered.

PUF: You’re a partner at Guidehouse, but there was a time when women were not as noticed. Maybe at first you were one of the few women in the room, so to speak.

Michelle Fay: Looking back, I was always one of the few women in the room. I started in this industry over twenty-five years ago, and I remember some of those first meetings I went to with clients where I was the only female on the team for both the client and from our consulting team.

When I go to a client meeting today, the females often outnumber the males. It’s changed drastically in the last 25 years. The women are in leadership positions.

and women do human resources. Did you find some of that?

Michelle Fay: I am beyond fortunate to have had some fabulous mentors in my career.

They never saw a female or male. They saw talent and potential. But to your point, I did see that with clients we worked with and in some organizations we interacted with.

I worked in situations where an individual would anticipate that the female in the room could not answer any technical questions, which was a ridiculous notion. There’s still some of that today, but it’s much less prevalent.

There are many females getting into careers in our field. Guidehouse is a good example. If you look at our ESG report, you’ll see there are equal numbers of women entering the workforce.

It might even be more women. The real challenge is getting females through the pipeline. They’re coming in at the entry levels, but what we are seeing is the struggle to get them up into those leadership positions.

This was particularly challenging for women who have

When I go to a client meeting today, the females often outnumber the males. It’s changed drastically in the last twenty-five years. The women in the meetings are in leadership positions, not just the ones taking notes. It’s exciting to see how far we’ve come and the changes in the industry.

PUF: Especially a couple of decades ago, it was rare for women to be at high levels. There was the idea that men do the technical work,

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children and take on leadership positions. Fortunately, many employers have changed their views and provide support to make this possible. I'm a great example of someone who is capable of being a mom and a leader in an organization.

I believe being a mom actually makes me a better leader.



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PUF: That's changing in all organizations, right?

Michelle Fay: Absolutely. We're seeing it now more than ever. Since COVID-19, companies have become more flexible with remote work schedules. I had a former mentor tell me he always found the women who had children had an uncanny ability to multitask and were extremely efficient. This flexibility will hopefully provide more options for women to move up through the leadership pipeline.

PUF: What do you say to the young people, if maybe they look to you and ask, I want to know how to advance in my career – particularly younger women.

Michelle Fay: Mentoring is a big part of our jobs. It's important to show younger women in the organization, as we bring them into the company, what's possible, how to be successful in their careers, and how to accomplish the things they may want to do personally and professionally. To do this, we need to help them lay out their path for success and provide coaching and guidance along the way.

PUF: When you talk to young people and they ask, should I come to your company? Is consulting a good field? What do you tell young people about consulting?

Michelle Fay: Yes. If you have passion for doing something challenging, solving complex problems, and working with great people, it's a great career. But it can be challenging from a work-life balance perspective. There are times when you need to be where your clients are.

I would tell someone considering this field to go in eyes wide open and make sure they have the support system they need if this is the career they want to pursue. Having a family, friends, and colleagues around to support you is important, perhaps more specifically for women.

PUF: What's most rewarding about what you do on a daily basis?

Michelle Fay: It's probably two things. One is helping clients do things they never thought they'd be able to do – solving complex problems. The other is seeing females be successful in reaching their career goals. I spend a lot of my time coaching and mentoring potential leaders within and outside of our organization and watching them grow and achieve success throughout their careers is extremely rewarding. **PUF**