

## The Power In A Gathering Of Women

by: Eileen McDargh, CSP, CPAE Forget "fight or flight" as the only duo of responses in the face of stress. For women, there's a third response: "befriend". A landmark UCLA study turned five decades of stress research on its head with the revelation that a cascade of brain chemicals gives women a larger behavioral repertoire when confronted with stress. The hormone oxytocin is released as part of the stress response in women. It controls the fight/flight response and, instead, encourages her to tend children and gather with other women. Accordingly to co-researcher Dr. Laura Cousino Klein, now assistant professor of bio-behavioral health at Penn State, the study suggests that this "tending and befriending" response to oxytocin produces a calming effect. Although it will take new studies to reveal all the ways in which oxytocin encourages women to care for children and band together, it might also explain why women consistently outlive men. I have addressed numerous women's conferences and corporate networks of women and I can attest to the observable behavior that participants leave these sessions feeling stronger, encouraged, and positive. I believe they also leave healthier. The famed Nurses Health Study from Harvard Medical School found that the more friends people have, the less likely they are to develop physical ailments and the more likely they are to cope better with challenges. Sadly, today's busy agendas often find women canceling the most positive and healthy thing they can do: gather with other women to engage in the kind of "rapport" and "report" talk that hallmark feminine conversations. The corporate women's networks that generate the most return for the time and money investment allow for the nuts-and-bolts training needed for the business while also creating plenty of opportunity for mentoring, problem-solving and the informal sharing of personal issues. Create a gathering of women and stand back. The energy reborn from conversation, caring, compassion and concern can move a community, a business, and a nation into a higher place. (c) 2004, McDargh Communications. All rights in all media reserved. Reprints must include byline, contact information and copyright.

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