

(Originally appeared in LIMRA Female Focus Newsletter – Winter 2005)

## Opportunities in the “Pink” Economy

By Ronna Lichtenberg, President, Clear Peak Communications

In my search to understand if there are truly relevant differences between men and women, I spent a lot of time looking at “brain sex” research. The research I considered convinced me that there are real differences in how the brains of men and women work, on average. But, I also discovered that it was more precise and more productive to talk about differences in style, rather than gender.

By style, I mean the way people choose to do business: what their priorities are and how they choose to communicate them. One of the biggest style differences is the relative importance individuals put on relationship and connection, as opposed to task.

Someone with a “pink” style, for example, is someone who wants to connect with you before doing business with you. A pink will first mention the weather, your handbag, your shoes — something, anything — before getting down to the business at hand.

If you’re pink, you probably know the names of your dry cleaner, your kid’s substitute teacher, the gynecologist’s billing clerk, and everyone in security and in the mailroom. Empathy over task, that’s the height of pink.

It’s easy to find pink-styled women on TV and in the movies: The enormously successful *Legally Blonde* films are great examples. Elle Woods, the lead character played by Reese Witherspoon, is an over-the-top-pink who does well at Harvard Law and as a lobbyist, not despite her style but because of it. Her desires to connect to other people and to be personal even in situations where being personal is traditionally not valued help her win.

There are men with pink styles, too, even though most of them don’t like it the first time they have to say so in one of my workshops (by the end they realize it’s cool to be pink). Former president Bill Clinton’s style tended toward pink, and whatever else you might say about him, he is abundantly a guy. But equally abundantly, he wants connection, not to mention affirmation. Newspaper coverage of Clinton’s first day out of office, for example, reported that he greeted a woman in the crowd by saying, “Love your shoes!” My rule is if they start a conversation by talking about your shoes, they are pink.

People with a “blue” style, on the other hand, are opposite of pinks. They place a high priority on what I call task — just getting the job done. Someone with a blue style either just isn’t naturally a “people person” or wants to keep his or her emotional connections outside the office.

Blues like to know where people stand, literally. Rank and order matter to blues. A blue wants to know right away how to fit into the grand scheme of things. Blues introduce themselves with titles and accomplishments.

Blues value business relationships and form close ones, but they’re able to see their success as independent of relationships. A blue who is well paid will feel that she has achieved success, regardless of how she feels about her workplace relationships.

It’s getting easier to find positive examples of blue women on television and in the movies, too, but traditionally, blue women have a bad rap; hard-boiled, cold-blooded, overtly ambitious women are a standard movie cliché and a way that our culture expresses ambivalence about women and power.

Positive images of blue men, on the other hand, are everywhere in popular culture. One of my favorite blue men in movies is U.S. Marshal Samuel Gerard, played by Tommy Lee Jones, in *The Fugitive*. The U.S. Marshal is on the hunt for a doctor, played by Harrison Ford, who is accused of murdering his wife. From the start, the marshal’s team refers to him as “Big Dog,” which is a definite clue that he is probably

not going to have a pink style. But any doubts you might have had about his style are erased when he takes over the case from some lame local authority and starts barking out directions about the kind of search he wants done.

Blue-styled women in real life are pretty easy to find, too, because women with a blue style were the first wave of big achievers in business. Margaret Thatcher, to reach back a bit, had a very blue style. Buttoned up. No nonsense. Martha Stewart has a blue style as well. She is interested in the task, not the person.

Fortune 500 company women CEOs also tend to be blue — or at least act as if they are — which is what I call having a “striped” style.

What does a striped woman look like? The big-time women broadcasters all seem striped, although the width and depth of those stripes vary. Katie Couric, for example, often leads with a pink style: friendly, approachable, clearly wanting to connect. But she gets to task quickly, and it is clear that she is about the business of getting the story.

Most people with stripes have one style that is dominant — a style that they lead with and that they default to when stressed. Others are pretty evenly balanced.

It is really important to know your own style before thinking about how you are going to persuade others. At the end of this article, there is a self-test to let you know whether you are pink, blue or striped. Please take it without peeking at the answers.

After you know your own style, you can move to figuring out others and knowing what will inspire them.

For example, when pitching to a blue, the following tips should help:

- Cover one topic at a time.
- Explain the advantage of your offering in competitive terms.
- Use visual illustrations, preferably charts and graphs.

When pitching to a pink:

- Make points by using personal stories.
- Don't dismiss emotion.
- Use facial cues and verbal affirmations to show you're listening.

After all, our business is built in really “knowing” our customers and knowing their style — how they like to do business — is the way we earn the right to serve them.

**ARE YOU PINK OR BLUE? Answer YES or NO to the following questions:**

1. When first meeting somebody, I like to know his or her credentials (i.e., where they work, their title, where they went to school.)
2. If I could, I would buy everything online.
3. At office meetings, I like to connect with people before we get to the agenda.
4. The most satisfying discussions I have at work are about how to accomplish a task.
5. The role a person has doesn't mean he or she is right.
6. It's important to know the person you are doing business with as a person.
7. It annoys me when people talk about their feelings at work.
8. Announcing accomplishments is self-promotion and mildly distasteful.
9. It doesn't matter if you don't like your boss; you have to respect him or her.
10. It bothers me when someone comments on my shoes or outfit.

Analyze your answers.

- 1) Yes = Blue No = Pink
- 2) Yes = Blue No = Pink
- 3) Yes = Pink No = Blue
- 4) Yes = Blue No = Pink
- 5) Yes = Pink No = Blue
- 6) Yes = Pink No = Blue
- 7) Yes = Blue No = Pink
- 8) Yes = Pink No = Blue
- 9) Yes = Blue No = Pink
- 10) Yes = Blue No = Pink

7 or more of one color: This is your dominant color.

5-6 of one color: You have stripes!

**Ronna Lichtenberg**, President ([www.askronna.com](http://www.askronna.com))

Ronna Lichtenberg is president of Clear Peak Communications, a management consulting firm founded in 1997. Clear Peak specializes in helping companies mine the value of relationships, both internal and external. The firm has a proven track record in strategy development, business development and relationship management training for field and sales leadership with particular expertise in the ultra-high net worth, women's and professional services industries. Clear Peak is certified as a Women's Business Enterprise National Business Council Member.

Ronna is a nationally recognized business author and lecturer who helps individuals develop business relationships that support their career goals. These days, Ronna is best known for her new book:

***Pitch Like a Girl: How a Woman Can Be Herself and Still Succeed.***

Other books have told you how to get what you want by being more like a guy. This one tells you why it's an advantage to be who you are – a woman, and a smart woman, at that – and how to do better by bringing more of yourself to work.

This powerful new approach “pitching like a girl” works—whether you want a raise, time off, capital for your business or just to be heard at the table. It's a uniquely woman's way to success in business and in life.

A01690-0606  
DOFU 6-2006