

■ Viewpoints

No place for pit bulls in workplace

In a Guest Commentary, S. Renee Smith writes how vice president candidate Sarah Palin's pit bull reference sends the wrong message for women in the workplace.

Page 4

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Guest Commentary

Pit bull not a good representation for women

By S. Renee Smith

Right now, in 2008, confident, courageous, outspoken women in corporate America, education, and yes, even politics, are fighting to overcome the stereotype of being "a bitch." So why, when even rap artists are beginning to see the impact of negative lyrics and images on women, particularly the word "bitch," would the Republicans bring out their supposed best — a self-proclaimed pit bull with lipstick?

Palin's comment perpetuates the message that women have to be a "bitch" to get the job done. As a former director of public relations and assistant manager for a major corporation, turned image consultant, motivational speaker, and author who works with companies and colleges and universities to help decrease workplace disturbances, I know this simply isn't true.

I admit that women have to deal with sexism, and it seems that we are challenged in ways that men aren't. But, from experience, I know that being a pit bull — basically a bully, male or female — only creates stress, intimidation and a decline in productivity in the workplace.

As this message becomes at home on greeting cards, T-shirts, mugs and bumper stickers, young ladies will constantly be reminded that they need to be "a bitch" to ascend to the high rankings of success. This message continues to perpetuate the lie and misconception of women. It damages the psyche of young women

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— S. Renee Smith

who are struggling to understand themselves and develop the confidence to be authentic. Sarah Palin should be called on the carpet, rather than applauded for her low, off-track pursuit of leveling the playing field, seemingly to measure up to being a man.

Many women and men have fought hard and shouted loud to cause the 18 million cracks that Hillary Clinton said shattered the glass ceiling. But what was it all for? Certainly not for one woman to come on the national stage to flex her muscles, growl, bark and grit her teeth in an attempt to make herself appear qualified for a position of international significance. Palin is beautiful, funny and entertaining, and can deliver a line, but she is certainly not a role model or a good representation of women.

The comparison of a pit bull gives us a clear picture of someone who is aggressive, controlling and insecure, one who refuses, once in a fight, to let go, focusing more on winning than working to find the best solution. She is using sensationalism to capitalize and appeal to our lowest nature. It's that very behavior that creates a

world of fear, ignorance and uncertainty.

This is an exciting, but serious, time in America. I don't think anyone could have predicted that an African-American man and a woman would run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2008. It is rejuvenating, energizing and offering hope and a new perspective for a nation. However, I don't think anyone would have imagined a pit bull that is differentiated by only a swipe of lipstick would be running for vice president.

As a nation, in the midst of significant challenges, we don't need self-centered bitchiness anywhere in our workplaces. We need strong, capable leaders who, at a minimum, possess and understand the power of these basic qualities:

Gentle, yet strong. Good leaders don't bulldoze their way in and scream at the top of their lungs that they have arrived. Strong leaders have a clear understanding of human behavior and appeal to the higher nature of others, trusting that they will respond.

Peaceful, yet effective. The per-

son who is listening possesses the power. Good leaders understand that listening gives you the opportunity to uncover and respond to truth and core issues. By being a good listener, you can more readily identify the problems and identify effective solutions.

Intelligent, yet open to new ideas. Everyone thinks his or her truth and ideas are best. A leader's job is to bring all those truths together and create one truth or vision that everyone can then follow. This requires a leader to unselfishly take off his or her lens and look at the situation through binoculars.

Imperfect, yet intentional. Great leaders understand the ramifications of everything they say and do. It is understood that no one is perfect. People are more forgiving when they understand your intention is not to bring harm to others. When we open our mouths, we declare to the world who we are, what we are and how we will handle situations. And depending on who's listening, we shape the behaviors of another generation.

Editor's note: S. Renee Smith resides in Dover. She is an image consultant, motivational speaker and author of "There Is More Inside." She can be reached at her Web site, www.srenee.com.