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y father turned 90 this year. During his Zoom birthday celebration, we celebrated his life and recounted the many ways in which he im-

acted our lives.

When it was my turn, I did not know where to begin. My dad has been an influence in so many ways. How do you summarize a lifetime in just 10 minutes?

But upon reflection, what struck me the most were his ceaseless efforts to encourage my strength as a woman and his passion for advocating for the advancement of all women — not just my mother and me.

I watched him be a champion for my mother, a preeminent scientist. He supported her career and cheered on her accomplishments.

While I was growing up, my mom was one of the only women in our neighborhood who worked outside the home. Even though she served as a strong role model, given the time in which I grew up, I was susceptible to the misconception that women could only hold certain jobs. You know, the ones people thought of as exclusively “female jobs.”

I remember when I was in third grade, I told my dad I wanted to be a stewardess (that’s what flight attendants were called at the time). I remember my father’s response as clear as if it were yesterday. He told me: “Be the pilot.”

I remember asking him if girls could be pilots. “Of course. Girls can be anything — pilots, doctors, lawyers, CEOs,” he said.

It simply seemed natural to him that years later, I would become a lawyer and take lessons to obtain my private pilot’s license.

My father’s support has continued throughout my life. He has always been there to help nudge me forward, a push which sometimes I needed. And while my mom has also been one of my biggest fans, sometimes having male backing had more of an effect.

My dad’s encouragement got me thinking about the importance of having men as allies — those people who provide help and support in your life. In the context of diversity and inclusion, an ally is someone who is part of the represented group — an “insider” so to speak. Even though allies are insiders, they adopt the perspective of



“BE THE PILOT”

Dad was my first male ally

By CAMILLE KHODADAD

and advocate for the unrepresented group.

A Boston Consulting Group study found a strong correlation between the involvement of men in gender diversity programs and an organization’s progress toward gender equality. In organizations where men were involved in championing gender diversity, 96% of the respondents agreed with the statement that “My company has made good progress toward gender diversity in the past one to three years.”

Only 30% of respondents agreed with the same statement in organizations where men were not involved in championing gender diversity.

Studies also show that when men speak up on behalf of women, such men come off as more credible because they “have nothing to win.” It’s ironic that men may be the most powerful advocates for change on this issue. By speaking up, men dispel the myth that gender equality is a just a women’s issue that women need to solve by changing their own behavior and the behavior of those around them. Male advocacy reinforces that gender equality is a human issue that we should all be concerned about.

In their book “Good Guys: How Men Can Be Better Allies for Women in the Workplace,” authors David G. Smith and W. Brad Johnson examine the critical role men play in establishing gender equality at work and discuss specific ways in which men can be allies for women. They encourage men to “actively promot[e] gender fairness and equity in the workplace through supportive and collaborative personal relationships and public acts of sponsorship and advocacy intended to drive systematic improvements to the workplace culture.” They emphasize allies are not saving women. They are partnering with women to create a more inclusive work environment.

I have been fortunate throughout my life to have male allies in both my personal and professional life. But, my dad, he was my first male ally.

This is for you, Dad. CL

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