

# Optimism, adaptation ring out during Central California Women's Conference

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Thousands of women flooded the Fresno Convention Center area on Tuesday for the 28th annual Central California Women's Conference, an all-day event in multiple downtown Fresno venues geared toward creating positive change in all aspects of a woman's daily life.

Keynote speaker Leeza Gibbons' husband, Steven Fenton, called it "the estrogen Olympics," as nearly 3,500 attendees moved across M Street to the various speeches, breakout sessions and vendor booths.

Gibbons, an Emmy-Award winning talk-show host and best-selling author, shared her message of optimism, healing and managing time as a career woman.

"We're always being told to find a balance for everything: work, family, friends, our husband," she said during the luncheon speech. "Balance doesn't exist. It's a conspiracy that I'm convinced was created by some sort of Cruella – someone who wanted us to hate ourselves."

Women should instead worry about investing their time, Gibbons said, and focus on getting a return on that investment – something positive from work, family or personal time.

Gibbons also spoke at great length about her mother, whose Alzheimer's disease diagnosis led Gibbons to create a charitable organization for families dealing with terminal illnesses. Leeza's Care Connection, which received more than \$700,000 during her winning run on "Celebrity Apprentice," helps families "deal with the new normal."

It's not over. Focus on what's left.

Keynote speaker Leeza Gibbons' message to those experiencing loss

Gibbons and many of the other speakers focused on asking women to alter their perspectives and approach new challenges with a positive attitude.

"Nice girls can finish first," Gibbons said.

The event kicked off at 8 a.m. with a talk by motivational speaker Jean Steel, followed by the first of three breakout sessions. Topics included relationships, social media, fashion, health, personal and business finance, family dynamics and landscaping.

Monica Piper, an Emmy-Award winning writer and comedian, concluded the event with a speech.

Valdez Hall was converted into a massive vendor area, where more than 175 businesses and organizations set up booths. Many were consumer-based, but some booths offered health and educational services.

Volunteers at the Marjaree Mason Center, a local nonprofit specializing in aiding victims of domestic violence, said that attendees approached the booth for a variety of reasons. Some wanted to volunteer, others wanted to donate – but a few came by asking about the center's services for women and their families in abusive situations.

The California Highway Patrol was on hand for another reason: recruitment. It, like many law enforcement agencies throughout the country, are in the middle of a hiring crunch that places particular value in adding more women

officers.

In addition to taking in a vast amount of knowledge at the various speeches and sessions, attendees also were asked to give. A portion of each \$110 ticket was donated to central San Joaquin Valley charities battling hunger, and each of the thousands of table settings came with an envelope for personal donations to the cause. The conference has raised more than \$665,000 for charities since its inception in 1988.

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