



**INNOVEST SME**  
Accelerating Small Business



# Women *in* Leadership

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*Don't just stand  
for the success of other  
women – insist on it.*

GAIL BLANKE

# PREFACE

Women make up almost half the workforce, yet they are promoted to leadership positions at a rate far lower than are their male colleagues. What accounts for this leadership gap? How can organizations foster and develop women leaders? Studies show that having women in leadership positions brings many benefits to an organization, including greater accountability and a culture of work-life balance. Yet it can be difficult to determine the barriers to women's advancement, and even more difficult to surmount them. Learning how to foster and develop women as leaders not only benefits individual employees, but can benefit your entire organization.

*Women are leaders  
everywhere you look, from  
a CEO to a housewife who  
holds together a home.*

DENISE CLARKE



# WOMEN AND THE WORKFORCE

Women have always been part of the paid workforce, since the earliest days of our history. Since the 1940s, increasing numbers of women have been entering the paid workforce, and today the number of American women who are employed outside the home is the greatest it's ever been. Women are a key part of our economy and our organizations, yet they lag behind men in assuming leadership positions.

## **50% OF THE POPULATION**

Women make up half – 50% -- of the population. In the US, as in many countries around the world, women are the primary homemakers and caregivers as well, even when they have outside employment. Women are powerful consumers and make a large share of the decisions about household expenditures, too. In spite of the fact that they make up half the population, however, women are underrepresented in many of the most vital areas of society, including government, finance, and business. While the number of women in these areas has been growing steadily over the last decades, women still do not occupy positions of power at a level that reflects their numbers.

## **60% OF COLLEGE DEGREE EARNERS**

Women earn college degrees at a higher rate than do men. As of 2013, 60% of all bachelor's degrees are earned by women. Women enter college at higher rates than do men, and are less likely to drop out than are men, too. Studies show that girls, and later women, tend to earn higher grades than do their male peers, and also seem to understand better the impact not earning a degree may have on their later earnings. Recent studies show, however, that women with college degrees earn less and are promoted less often than their male counterparts who do not hold degrees. Those same studies also indicate that women may take on more college debt than their male peers, yet earn less upon graduation and may struggle to pay those loans back. If women are earning degrees at a higher rate than any time in American history, it is imperative that we ask why this does not translate into more women in leadership positions in business, finance, and government.

## **47% OF THE WORKFORCE**

One explanation that has been put forth for why women are underrepresented in leadership positions is that there simply aren't enough women in the workforce to fill those positions. However, 47% of workers are women. And while women, especially women of color, do tend to be concentrated in low-wage or part-time labor, women outnumber men in the professional fields as well. With such representation in the workforce, it would seem to make sense that women should also occupy a similar proportion of leadership positions. However, this is not the case. Even in

fields where women make up the majority of the workforce, the majority of leadership positions tend to be held by men.

## **52% OF PROFESSIONAL JOBS**

Women have entered the professions at higher and higher rates over the last three decades. Women now hold more than half – 52% -- of all professional jobs. They earn professional degrees at about the same rate. While women are also overrepresented compared to men in low-wage, part-time, and service work, clearly women are represented in great numbers in the professional fields. Studies show, however, that women in the professional fields tend to be concentrated in lower level and administrative positions, rather than leadership or managerial positions. Even in professional fields where women far outnumber men, the leadership positions tend to be held by men.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Richard and Sarah were tasked with creating a program to increase women's leadership within their organization. *"I just don't think there are that many women in our industry,"* Richard said at their first meeting. *"I think I've met one administrator who was a woman. I just don't think women are that interested in what we do."* Sarah provided him with a report of all the employees in the organization. To his surprise, over half the employees were women. But when he took a closer look, he noticed something else. While there were many women in the organization, they almost all occupied secretarial and administrative positions, with many

of them in Human Resources. There were no female engineers and only a handful of managers. None of the Board was female. He and Sarah decided to look into this further, and found it to be a larger trend across many businesses.

*We must raise both the  
ceiling and the floor.*

SHERYL SANBERG



# THE LEADERSHIP GAP

In spite of their high numbers in the workplace, including the professional fields, women are still subject to what many studies call the “leadership gap.” This refers to the fact that even in fields where women make up the majority of workers, leadership positions are overwhelmingly occupied by men. Many theories have been put forth to explain the leadership gap, but none satisfactorily explain why that gap exists even as women earn degrees at higher rates than do men and enter the workforce at higher rates than ever.

## **WOMEN ARE UNDERREPRESENTED IN LEADERSHIP**

Broadly speaking, women are underrepresented in leadership positions. This is not just true of the paid workforce and the professions, but extends to politics, government, and almost every other arena of society. This is especially true at the uppermost levels of leadership, with women occupying just 14% of senior leadership positions in corporate world, and only around 20% of government leadership positions. The United States ranks 98<sup>th</sup> out of 100 countries in terms of women’s representation in governmental leadership, and ranks far behind Europe in terms of women in corporate leadership. And while women are entering the workforce at greater rates than ever before, their rates of representation appear to

be slipping. All this in spite of gains in terms of women earning college degrees and entering the professions.

## **WOMEN IN EXECUTIVE POSITIONS**

The leadership gap between men and women is most apparent at the highest levels of business. While women make up more than half the labor force in the professional fields, they hold just 14.6% of executive positions. If you look around the executive suite, it doesn't get much better for women. Just about 17% of Fortune 500 board seats are held by women, and less than 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women. While there are some high profile executive women blazing trails, such as Sheryl Sandberg of Facebook and Marissa Meyer of Yahoo, the most influential positions at the most influential firms are overwhelmingly in male hands. Women pay a financial price for this as well – less than 10% of the top earners in the United States are women! However, while these numbers are grim, it is worth noting that women's representation in executive positions has been steadily increasing since 1980, when there were no female Fortune 500 CEOs.

## **WOMEN IN FINANCE, HEALTH CARE, AND LAW**

The leadership gap is often most pronounced in fields where women have the greatest presence. This seems counterintuitive. It would seem that more women in a field would give rise to more women in leadership positions. However, studies show that even as women gain in fields such as finance and law, they still lag far behind men in gaining leadership

positions. For instance, in the financial sector, women make up about 54% of the labor force. They also earn about 44% of master's degrees in business, including 37% of MBAs. However, they hold only about 12% of executive officer positions, and about 18% of board seats. As of 2014, there are no female CEOs in the financial sector. The legal sector shows similar patterns. Women earn a little less than half of all law degrees conferred, and about 45% of law associates are female. However, at the level of no equity partner only 25% are women, and among equity partners only 15% are women. The healthcare field has the largest gap. Women make up nearly 80% of the labor force in healthcare, including earning just fewer than 50% of all medical degrees. Only about 15% of all executive officers in health care are women, and less than 13% of executive board seats are held by women. No health care or social assistance organization has a female CEO as of 2014. How is it possible that women are so underrepresented in leadership in fields where they have a commanding presence?

## **HISTORICAL TRENDS**

Looking at the statistics about the leadership gap, it can seem depressing or hopeless. There are some historical trends that are important to note, however. Women's representation in almost all fields of work, but particularly in law, medicine, finance, and the professions more broadly has been growing over the last 30 years. There are about 70 million American women in the workforce today, and that number is expected to grow to nearly 80 million by 2018. While women still lag behind men in executive positions, they occupy more today than they did in 1980,

where no Fortune 500 company had a female CEO. Today about a dozen do. Women have steadily earned more bachelors, advanced, and professional degrees, another trend that is expected to continue. If these trends hold, an even greater number of women will be poised to enter leadership positions in all sectors of society. Whether they will or not remains an open question, however.

### **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Trevor and Caitlin both work at an investment firm. Their organization sent them to a large national conference to learn more about current trends in the industry and to network. When they arrived, they were both surprised at how many women were there – Caitlin was one of only a dozen or so women at their small firm. Eager to network, Caitlin went to some presentations on women in the financial sector. She noticed quickly that nearly all the women speaking worked in administration, especially human resources. Only a handful of women held spaces on executive boards. When she and Trevor went to panels where executives were speaking, they were overwhelmingly men. *“I guess women just don’t get the higher education they need to be execs,”* Trevor said. *“I mean, all those men had MBAs.”* *“But a lot of the women I talked to – more than half – do, too,”* Caitlin countered. Trevor was surprised. Caitlin decided to do more research into women’s potential for advancement in her industry so that she could better plan her own personal development.

*I have yet to hear a man  
ask how to balance a  
family and career.*

GLORIA STEINEM



# BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Even with all the gains women have made in education and workforce participation, many barriers to women's leadership still exist. Some of these barriers are the result of deeply entrenched cultural messages about women. They may seem invisible, or simply the result of common sense, rather than any systematic effort to bar women from leadership. It is important to explore these barriers and create ways to surmount them if women are to assume more leadership positions.

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES ARE OVEREMPHASIZED**

No one would argue that men and women are exactly the same. However, the differences between men and women are often overemphasized, and used to justify the lack of women in leadership. For instance, the idea that men are "more rational" and women are "more emotional" is often used to explain why women do not assume executive functions more often. Similarly, physical differences in size or strength may be used to justify the lack of women in some fields. Ideas about women as natural caregivers are also commonly invoked to explain why women make good managers but poor executives. In truth, all humans are capable of a wide range of traits. And while men and women may approach the world differently,

based on how they are socialized, these differences seldom mean that one gender is automatically better at leadership, management, or any other aspect of life. This overemphasis on gender differences means that qualified female candidates are often dismissed out of hand for leadership positions.

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES ARE UNDERVALUED**

Men and women are socialized differently – they learn how to operate in the world differently, and this can impact their approach to leadership. Research shows that men and women often use very different communication styles, for instance, with women more focused on relationships and men more focused on communicating facts. Women tend to be more collaborative, and men more competitive, according to research. These gender differences are often undervalued, and used to justify the dominance of men in leadership. For instance, our “get it done” culture may undervalue female leaders’ focus on building relationships. Learning to see women’s leadership traits and styles as different from, but equally valuable as, men’s leadership styles is one key step in increasing women’s leadership.

## **WOMEN LACK PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS**

One of the most profound barriers to women’s leadership is the degree to which women lack professional networks. Numerous studies have shown that men’s professional networks are instrumental to their success. A strong network alerts you to opportunities, may give you a foot in the door

with a new organization, serves as a source of support and development, and generally encourages personal and professional growth. People who lack a strong professional network typically lag behind those with solid networks in terms of employment, promotion, and compensation. Women may face barriers to forming networks for many reasons. Men may be reluctant to network with women because of an overemphasis on gender differences or because of fear of appearing to engage in inappropriate relationships by socializing with female colleagues. (Our culture still lacks a good script for non-sexual or non-romantic friendships between men and women.) Women may be reluctant to network with men for the same reasons. Women are also the primary caregivers and homemakers, and so family responsibilities may mean that after-work socializing and other networking activities are not possible or not prioritized.

## **WORK AND FAMILY CONFLICT**

The conflict between work and family often underlies the lack of women in leadership. Even in two-partner families, women tend to take on the bulk of responsibility for childcare, housework, and other family needs. Many women also find themselves the primary caretaker for an aging parent. Cultural messages that a woman who puts her career before her family is a “bad mother” put a great deal of pressure on women to balance work and family, and to sacrifice career for family if it becomes necessary. While not all women who are in the paid labor force have children or otherwise engage in care work, a large proportion do and thus face this dilemma. Because many organizations do not promote work-life balance, women who must balance career and family often miss out on

opportunities that other colleagues can leverage. When it comes time for promotion, this may be used against a female candidate who is seen to not be sufficiently invested in her career due to family obligations. Family obligations may also mean women forgo important educational and development opportunities that would help them advance into leadership.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

When Meryn's organization started a peer networking group for people who wanted to move into management positions, she was excited. She had been in her current position for five years, and was ready for a new challenge. When she got the email about the first meeting, however, she was disappointed. The group would be meeting for dinner on Thursday night, when she was already committed to taking her son to skating practice. As a single mom of 2, Meryn usually had to leave right at 4:30 in order to pick her kids up from school. After work events were almost always impossible for her. As the months went on, the group kept meeting, but always in the evenings. While Meryn could occasionally get childcare, most of the time this was too difficult. She also wanted to be there for important events with her children. She asked her manager, Rick, what she should do. *"I really want to work with my colleagues and learn from them,"* she said, *"but I can't make evening meetings work."* Rick was sympathetic. *"I think you might be the only one who has family obligations that interfere,"* he said, *"so I think the guys in the group don't think about it when they schedule these events."* He suggested she email the group coordinator, Sven. She did, and Sven agreed to hold the next meeting at lunchtime so she could come.

*Define Success on your  
own terms, achieve it by  
your own rules, and build  
a life you are proud to live.*

ANNE SWEENEY



# TRAITS OF WOMEN'S MANAGEMENT

While it is important not to overemphasize gender differences, studies show that women often do lead differently than men do. By examining some common traits of women's leadership, it is possible to see how having women in leadership positions can benefit your organization. Not every woman will lead exactly the same way, any more than every man leads the same way. The traits that are common to women's leadership styles, however, can be highly valuable to your organization, both in terms of employee development and in terms of the bottom line in a rapidly globalizing business world.

## **WOMEN LEAD BY UNITING DIVERSE GROUPS**

One of the common themes in women's leadership is a focus on uniting diverse groups. Because women in general tend to be more collaborative, they focus on finding common ground and getting everyone to buy in to a common vision. This has clear advantages when working in a fast paced, team based environment. Getting diverse groups to work together rather than compete increases the chances of ultimate success and also helps to alleviate conflict. Women leaders have been shown to focus on people's commonalities rather than their differences. In this way, they are

able to get people who are on the surface very different, whether in terms of culture or function or background, to pull together toward a common goal. This builds workplaces that are more collegial and collaborative, in which interpersonal relationships are valued and maintained.

## **WOMEN VALUE WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Perhaps because they so often struggle to achieve it, women tend to value work-life balance more than do men. Women in leadership positions tend to create workplaces where work-life balance is easier to achieve (or at least work toward); including offering flexible work arrangements (work from home, flex time, shared positions), family-friendly benefits, and otherwise acknowledging that employees' non-work lives are important and should be respected. Women leaders may also be less likely to penalize employees who take time off for family obligations or who do not work overtime due to the need to care for children when it comes time for advancement. Broadly speaking, women leaders foster a work environment where excellence is important, but employees are not expected to sacrifice their families and personal lives for the sake of the bottom line. This tends to lead to higher employee morale, which in turn can foster greater job satisfaction and employee retention.

## **WOMEN VALUE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS**

Much research has shown that women tend to be more relationship-focused than are men, in all aspects of life. Women leaders tend to focus on interpersonal relationships in the workplace much more than do their

male peers. They do this by seeking to build rapport and relationships with colleagues and direct reports, and engaging in “rapport talk” – conversation in which they check in with others, talk about feelings, or otherwise connect. In contrast, men tend to engage in “report talk,” where they are interested in facts and getting a task done. Employees tend to respond better to a leader who seems to be personally invested in them, and for this reason may respond better to women’s leadership style of building interpersonal relationships. This focus on interpersonal relationships gives rise to workplaces where employees feel heard and valued, and where they are much more likely to build healthy collaborative professional relationships as well. While women’s leadership style has sometimes been critiqued as inefficient compared to men’s, studies show that workplaces where there is a focus on building and maintaining interpersonal relationships may in fact be more productive and may have better employee retention.

## **WOMEN VALUE ACCOUNTABILITY**

One of the most intriguing findings to come out of studies of women’s leadership is that women tend to value accountability more highly than their male peers appear to. Organizations with women in leadership positions tend to have cultures of personal and group accountability, and in general to foster honesty and transparency. Women’s focus on interpersonal relationships seems to foster this sense of accountability. When people are invested in each other, they are more likely to want to hold themselves and others to high standards. A culture of accountability is one in which people take responsibility for their mistakes, are acknowledged for their

efforts and successes, and do not seek to undermine others. The greater collaboration that is found when women are leaders further fosters this sense of accountability, as people who work together are invested in each other's success. A culture of accountability also fosters respect for others, which may lead to fewer interpersonal problems (up to and including harassment), as well as honesty, which can lead to fewer incidences of theft of other such issues.

### **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

No one was sure what to think when Linda took over the department. They'd never had a woman as a manager before. They were used to Roy's style, which was brusque but efficient. He worked his people hard – almost no one left at 5, and those that did knew that it would haunt them at review time. Roy had little tolerance for mistakes, so people spent a lot of time covering up their errors or finding someone else to blame. When Linda said she wanted to meet with each of her direct reports privately for 15 minutes, people were worried that it meant she was looking to fire some people. So they were surprised in the meeting when she told them that she knew that they had previously been working at a punishing pace, and she wanted them to slow down. *"Your job can't be everything,"* she told one of her direct reports, Sasha. Sasha didn't know what to say. She often missed her daughter's dance recitals due to deadlines, but had accepted that as part of the job. *"I want you to be able to trust that your team will back you up,"* Linda continued. *"You have a life outside this office, and if you are not living it, you'll be miserable here."* Sasha was impressed, but skeptical at first. Linda also had her people begin working

as a team on the large project they were responsible for, rather than each person working only one piece. The next week, when Sasha had to take a day off to take her daughter to the dentist, she was relieved to find that her colleague Raul was willing to take her place at an important meeting.

*I always did something  
I was not ready to do. I  
think that's how you grow.*

MARISSA MAYER



# **BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP**

Once you examine some of the common traits of women's leadership, it is clear that there are many benefits to having women in leadership positions. One excellent way to encourage your organization to focus on developing women as leaders is to articulate the many benefits of having women in such positions. While we can never assume that every woman leader will demonstrate all the common traits of women's leadership – nor can we assume that male leaders will not demonstrate any of these traits – putting women in leadership positions does increase the chances of your organization benefiting from these practices.

## **GREATER COLLABORATION**

One of the greatest benefits of having women in leadership positions is that they foster greater collaboration. Because women tend to be relationship focused, they are often able to draw in stakeholders from many different areas to work toward a common goal. Add in the tendency of women leaders to unite diverse groups around common goals and values, and it becomes clear that women leaders value and encourage collaboration. A culture of greater collaboration is beneficial for countless reasons. Collaboration helps to build relationships among employees and across

traditional divisions such as department or function. It helps to clarify common goal and values, which can further boost employee investment in the organization. When people collaborate, they invest in each other. And when people feel invested in, they have higher morale, are more productive, and are more likely to stay and grow within the organization. Finally, greater collaboration makes the best use of the organization's most valuable resource – its people.

## **CULTURE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Organizations with women in leadership positions tend to have cultures of work-life balance. They may offer flexible work arrangements – working from home, flextime, shared positions, or part-time options – that allow employees to maintain their career while also attending to life outside the office. Organizations with a culture of work-life balance also help to foster a sense that employees' lives and happiness outside the office are beneficial to the organization, too. A culture of work-life balance means that employees don't feel as if they have to choose work or family life, but can instead attend to both equally. Even more, a culture of work-life balance tends to promote employee satisfaction and happiness, stave off burnout, and promote retention. Employees may also end up taking fewer sick days or otherwise being absent, which is good for the bottom line. A culture of work-life balance helps employees feel like people, not just cogs in a machine. This in turn promotes happier, healthier workplaces.

## **CULTURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY**

Because they value personal accountability, for themselves and others, women leaders tend to promote a culture of accountability across the organization. A culture of accountability is one in which people take responsibility for their actions rather than seek to blame others, in which people are rewarded and recognized for their efforts and successes, and in which people act with honesty and integrity. The benefits of such a culture are clear and obvious. Accountability fosters a greater sense of trust, both between employee and peers and between employees and management. The knowledge that one will not be blamed for things they did not do, and that they will not be punished for owning up to a mistake, makes people feel safer and more valued at work. On a larger scale, accountability and transparency help to discourage stealing, dishonesty, policy violations, and more – including sexual harassment, financial misconduct, and even more egregious violations. A culture of accountability promotes workplace safety and workplace harmony, which results in better productivity, better retention, better morale, and a better bottom line.

## **ASSISTS IN RECRUITING MILLENNIALS**

One of the most surprising benefits of having women in leadership positions is that it helps in recruiting millennials – an incredibly important group of new workers. Millennials overwhelmingly want to work for organizations where they see women in leadership positions. This appears to hold true for both male and female millennials. Young women, especially, are likely

to be less attracted to work at organizations where they do not see women in the ranks of leadership. Seeing women in leadership demonstrates to these young women that they have the potential to advance within the organization. It also indicates a dedication to gender equality, something that millennials of both genders say in repeated studies is important to them. Millennials are also likely to value the traits common to women's leadership, such as accountability, diversity, and relationships. If your organization wishes to recruit millennials – and there is hardly an organization that does not – having women in visible leadership positions is one key component of your recruiting strategy.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Rolf and Samir were working a college recruitment fair for their organization. They were one of about 200 organizations present. Looking around, they noticed that they were one of the few booths that was staffed by men only – nearly every other organization had at least one woman recruiter. Over the course of the day, they also noted that several of the students who stopped by to talk about their organization asked how many women they had in leadership positions, as well as about issues such as family leave. The students' interest seemed to wane when they explained that the top administration was all men, at least for right now. On the other hand, the booth next to them seemed to be very popular with students. Rolf overheard a representative talking about the new female COO that had just taken over, and about the ways in which the company was seeking to create a training program for female managers.

*The question isn't who is  
going to let me in. It's who  
is going to stop me.*

AYN RAND



# NURTURE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

While there are formidable barriers to women's leadership, there are also simple but powerful steps your organization can take to nurture women's leadership. Developing women into leaders from within the organization is a key path to increasing women's representation in your organization. Investing in women who are already in the organization demonstrates a commitment to employee development generally and to women's development specifically. In addition, there are steps you can take to bring more women into your organization, whom you can then invest in developing.

## ACTIVELY RECRUIT WOMEN

One of most powerful things you can do to increase women's leadership in your organization is to actively recruit women at all levels. Don't just go looking for promising women leaders when there is a position to be filled. Also work to recruit women at entry level and on up the ladder. When you actively recruit women, you demonstrate that you care about having women represented in your organization. You might start by attending women's career fairs and expos in your community or at local universities and colleges, or having a presence at other events that are targeted at

women who might be interested in your industry. Including the simple line “Women are encouraged to apply” in your job announcements may also prove effective. Networking with women’s professional organizations is another way to actively recruit women into your organization.

## **CREATE AND ENCOURAGE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES**

Because one of the major barriers to women’s leadership is the lack of networks, creating and encouraging women’s networks is another powerful step your organization can take. Consider creating a women’s networking group within the organization – or several, divided by function or area. Encourage women employees to join professional organizations, even subsidizing fees if possible, so that they can network with colleagues and peers. If possible, encourage and support women in attending professional conferences and events geared towards women in your industry or professional women more generally. You can also encourage networks by introducing women in your organization to each other and encouraging them to work together or serve as resources for one another. Women should be encouraged to network with their male peers as well.

## **PAIR WOMEN WITH MENTORS IN LEADERSHIP**

Mentor relationships are a vital part of employee development, especially when developing leaders. Ideally, your organization has a mentoring program in place. To encourage and develop women into leadership positions, pair women with mentors. When possible, pair women with mentors who are themselves women in leadership. If this is not possible,

pair women with mentors who are strong leaders who will invest in them. You might also encourage women to seek out mentors beyond your organization as they seek to grow into leaders. When working with women who show leadership potential, encourage them to become mentors for other women.

## **CREATE AND ENCOURAGE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

Training opportunities are vital for developing employees of any gender into leaders. These opportunities are even more important, however, for women. Create training and other development opportunities geared towards women in your organization, and actively encourage women to engage in training and development activities that are geared toward employees who wish to move into leadership positions. Also encourage women to go through institutes or other training and development experiences that are geared toward women. Subsidize these opportunities when you can. Women can, of course, benefit from trainings and development opportunities that are targeted at members of both genders – be sure that you encourage women to complete these courses and other experiences. When possible, also facilitate one on one development and growth opportunities for women in your organization, such as serving on special committees or working on new initiatives and projects that will develop leadership skill.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Eva was eager to take on more leadership in her organization, but found that she was consistently passed over when promotion time came. Although she worked hard and was skilled at her job, she never seemed to be able to make the jump to the next level. In her annual review, she asked her supervisor, Jackson, what she could do to improve her chances next time. Jackson suggested that she go through the organization's Management Intensive. Eva had never heard of the program. Jackson was surprised, so he did some research and found that not one woman had ever completed the Intensive. One other woman had tried, but when Jackson asked she said that she had felt ignored and overlooked in favor of the men in the group. Jackson worked with the training coordinator to create a session of the Intensive that was all women, and encouraged Eva to go. She learned a great deal over the week of the course, and the next time she applied for a promotion to management, she received it.

*Whatever you want  
in life, someone else is  
going to want it too.  
Believe in yourself enough  
to accept that you have an  
equal right to it.*

DIANE SAWYER



# ACTIVELY RECRUIT WOMEN

Actively recruiting women should be part of any organization's recruitment plan. This is even more important if you are in an industry where women are underrepresented overall, or heavily represented in lower positions but underrepresented in leadership. Creating initiatives to recruit women at all levels of the organization helps to create a culture which is gender-diverse, and also creates opportunities to develop women leaders from within, starting at the earliest stages. There are several steps you can take to actively recruit women to your organization.

## DISCOVER YOUR BARRIERS TO HIRING

An important first step is to discover your barriers to hiring women. There are many reasons why an organization might have difficulty recruiting and hiring women candidates. It might be helpful to interview some current women employees, and also to examine research conducted on why women prefer some types of organizations over others.

Common barriers to recruiting and hiring women include:

- Lack of women in leadership
- Lack of recruiting efforts directed at women, especially in fields where they are underrepresented

- An organizational history or culture of sexism or sexual harassment, including lawsuits
- Lack of coverage of women's health – pregnancy, contraception, etc. – in benefits packages
- No organizational policy of maternity or parenting leave

It may be difficult to determine exactly what barriers are in place to hiring women, but it is vital to assess the organization to see if you can determine this. If systemic barriers to hiring women exist, even the best recruitment efforts may fail.

## **DISCOVER YOUR BARRIERS TO RETENTION**

Another key area to examine is your organization's barriers to retention of female employees. If your organization regularly hires women, but finds that there is significant turnover among them, this is a clue that there are barriers to retention. Examining employee exit interviews is one excellent source of data on why women do not stay with your organization. While not every woman who leaves your organization will do so for reasons grounded in gender, it is key to identify whether there are systemic barriers to retaining women employees. Common barriers to retention include:

- Lack of opportunity for advancement
- An organizational history or culture of sexism or sexual harassment, including lawsuits
- Lack of coverage of women's health – pregnancy, contraception, etc. – in benefits packages

- No organizational policy of maternity or parenting leave
- Culture that does not promote work-life balance
- Pay inequities between male and female employees in the same or similar positions

## **RECRUIT VIA WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS**

Women's professional organizations are a valuable resource when creating efforts to actively recruit women into your organization. Umbrella organizations for professional women, such as the American Association of University Women and the National Association of Women Executives, are one place to start. You should also look to large professional organizations in your field to see if they have women's caucuses or women's interest groups that can help in your recruitment efforts. Also look to organizations specifically for women in specific fields, such as the Financial Women's Organization or organizations for women in STEM. When creating efforts to recruit new college graduates, look to women's organizations on local university campuses, which are often organized around majors or industries (women in engineering, for example). These are all potential resources of talented women.

## **CREATE AND PROMOTE A WOMAN-FRIENDLY CULTURE**

One of the major barriers to hiring and retention is the existence of – or the perception of – an organizational culture that is not friendly to women. The most obvious examples of this are of course organizational history

and culture of sexism, discrimination, and harassment. These should have course be rooted out immediately. However, there are more subtle issues that may make an organizational culture less friendly to women. Seeking out these issues and helping to create an organizational culture that is woman-friendly is vital if you are to recruit and retain women.

Common features of a woman-friendly organizational culture include:

- Zero tolerance for sexism, gender-biased language, and sexual harassment
- Policies which consider women, such as maternity leave and coverage of women's health in benefits packages
- Flexible work options
- Women in visible leadership
- Women's networking and training opportunities
- Women at all levels of the organization

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

As a recruiter for his organization, Bjørn was tasked with recruiting more diverse candidates. An internal review had noted that while many women worked at the administrative and support level of the organization, there were almost no women in the engineering and product development sectors. Those that had been hired had left the organization with 2 years of coming on board. At the advice of his colleague, Helen, Bjørn sought out the listservs for two large professional organizations for women in

engineering. With the permission of the list admins, he read the list for two months. He was shocked to see several women who were searching for jobs say they would never want to work for his organization because it was a “boy’s club.” One woman even said she had worked for Bjorn’s organization, but had quit when the other engineers in her lab would not stop making sexist jokes in her presence. Bjorn took what he had learned back to the head of recruiting, Seamus. They agreed that they had to find and root out the cause of this behavior in the engineering labs if they wanted to recruit and retain qualified women as engineers.

*Women are not inherently  
passive or peaceful. We're  
not inherently anything  
but human.*

ROBIN MORGAN



# ENCOURAGE NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Research has repeatedly shown that a strong professional network is vital to career advancement and success. Other studies have shown that men tend to have larger, stronger professional networks than do their female peers. Women may miss out on networking due to entrenched ideas about the genders, unwillingness (either their own or male colleagues') to engage in mixed-gender networking, or due to work-family conflicts that prevent them from accessing networking opportunities. A key strategy in developing women leaders is creating and encouraging networking opportunities for women, both within the organization and outside of it.

## CREATE A WOMEN'S NETWORKING GROUP

One of the simplest and most powerful steps you can take to encourage women's networking within your organization is to create a women's networking group. Peer networking groups have been shown to be valuable sources of support, mentoring, and development. Work with Human Resources or another appropriate division to create a networking group for women employees – or several, if it makes more sense to have groups that are geared for women at different levels of the organization

(administration, management, etc.). Then be sure that employees are aware that the group or groups exist! You may fit this group into already existing peer networking groups, or it may be the beginning of a larger program that encourages peer networking in a number of ways.

## **ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO JOIN ORGANIZATIONS**

Encourage women within your organization to join women's professional organizations. You may need to make women aware of such organizations. You can provide literature, discuss them in employee reviews, or invite representatives to come talk to your employees. Women's professional organizations are valuable sources of development and training, networking, support, and information. When possible, subsidize membership fees. In addition to encouraging women to join such organizations, encourage and reward participation, such as presenting at conferences or holding leadership positions within the professional organization.

## **NETWORKING BUILDS CONFIDENCE**

No matter their gender, leaders need confidence. Studies show that a strong network helps to build confidence. Because networking gives people a chance to build and use skills, as well as build relationships, it builds self-confidence and self-esteem. Because women may sometimes lack the confidence needed for leadership – or be perceived to lack the confidence needed – due to ideas about gender and entrenched barriers to women's leadership, developing confidence is vital. Investing in women's networking is an investment in not only the individual confidence

of women employees, but in women's leadership more broadly in your organization.

## **NETWORKING AND RECRUITING**

Having strong networking opportunities for women in your organization can be a major asset when attempting to recruit women. Networks are a major way that people of all genders hear about job opportunities. When you are looking to recruit qualified women, it is likely that women in your organization may have the perfect candidate in their own networks. Encouraging women to network with women in their field or industry can be a major step forward in recruiting more women. Professional networking organizations are also a major way to recruit, through advertising jobs on their websites or in their newsletters, by attending their events to meet women in the industry or field, and by getting your organization known as a place that supports women's leadership and development. Encouraging women to network benefits individual employees, but also has the potential to benefit the organization as a whole.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Dorinda left her old job because after 5 years she had reached the highest position she could. While there were positions above hers, it seemed that men were always promoted or hired from outside. She decided it was time to move on. When she started at TechCorp, she was assigned a mentor, Suzette. During their first meeting, Suzette gave Dorinda some literature on a professional organization for women in the technology sector. Suzette

told her that if Dorinda joined, TechCorp would pay half her membership fee. Suzette also told her about the one a month networking lunch for women that TechCorp sponsored. *“It’s a great way to meet other women here, and learn about how to be better together,”* she said. Following Suzette’s suggestion, Dorinda joined the professional organization and started going to the networking lunches. She was amazed at the diversity of talented women she met – something that had never happened at her former job. A few months into the job, Dorinda recommended her friend Parvati apply for an open position at TechCorp, too.

*I think the key  
is for women not to  
set any limits.*

MARTINA NAVRATILOVA



# PAIR WOMEN WITH MENTORS

Mentoring is one of the best investments you can make in employees. Studies show that women especially benefit from being mentored by other successful women. Taking the time to pair women with mentors demonstrates that your organization invests in helping women grow and develop not just in their current roles, but toward their career goals.

## **BENEFITS OF MENTORING**

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of mentoring. Being paired with a mentor demonstrates organizational investment in each individual employee. Mentors also serve as models for what is possible within the organization, and within an industry or field. Mentors serve as valuable support persons and sounding boards, and can often provide their mentees with training and development experiences and one on one chances to grow. Mentors also benefit from the mentoring process, as they are able to share their knowledge and expertise and feel invested in the future of the organization. Other benefits of mentoring programs include:

- Increased employee investment in the organization

- Employee investment in their own growth and development
- Improved succession planning
- Fostering a culture of continual learning

## **THINK CREATIVELY**

When many people think of mentoring, they think of pairing an employee with someone who occupies the position he or she might aspire to. However, given that women are often underrepresented in management and leadership, it may not be possible to pair every female employee with a female mentor in her division or specialty. Think creatively when pairing women with mentors. You might pair a female employee with a female mentor who is in another division but has expertise that can benefit the employee. It is also appropriate to pair a female employee with a male mentor, if it is a good fit in terms of personality, expertise, and goals. While it is desirable to pair women with female mentors, the ultimate goal should be to foster a strong mentorship relationship, which can absolutely happen across gender lines. Also be willing to encourage female employees to find women mentors from outside the organization, drawing on their networks.

## **INCORPORATE MENTORING AT EVERY STAGE**

Mentoring should be incorporated at every stage of an employee's career. Do not wait to pair a woman with a mentor until she expresses leadership or management goals. Instead, pair women employees with

mentors almost as soon as they begin work at your organization. They may have different mentors at different stages, or may work with the same mentor long-term. Incorporating mentoring at every stage of an employee's career allows for the greatest potential for benefit from the mentorship experience. Incorporating mentoring at every stage of the career demonstrates long-term investment in employees and may help to promote retention as well.

## **ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO MENTOR**

Mentees are only one half of the mentorship equation. It is also important to have mentors who are willing to take mentees! Encourage women in your organization to mentor. This not only extends the benefits of mentorship to those being mentored, but allows women to share their expertise and experience with other women. While it is appropriate for women to mentor men as well, by encouraging women to mentor other women you demonstrate an investment in developing women and also in sharing the expertise of women leaders already in your organization. Being a mentor can be a valuable development experience, so in the process women may develop their own leadership skills and be able to advance their own careers as well as their mentees'.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

The longer Dorinda worked with her mentor, Suzette, the more she learned. She was especially interested in Suzette's perspective because, while they both came from technical backgrounds, Suzette's specialty was a

little different than her own. Dorinda asked Suzette how they came to be paired. *“TechCorp takes mentoring very seriously,”* Suzette said, *“and we know that women are still quite outnumbered in this industry. So we try to pair women with women mentors when we can.”* Suzette explained that right now there were no female manager with Dorinda’s specialty, so they had been paired together. *“I hope that when you become a manager, you’ll mentor another young woman,”* Suzette said with a smile.

*A good goal is like  
strenuous exercise – it  
makes you stretch.*

MARY KAY ASH



# CREATE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Growth, development, and learning must be continuous and incorporated at all stages of a person's career, regardless of gender. A key step in developing women into leaders is creating and encouraging educational opportunities. Much like creating networking and training opportunities, there are a number of things you can do to create and encourage educational opportunities that will benefit your female employees specifically and grow them into the next generation of women leaders.

## ENCOURAGE THE LEARNING OF LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Leadership is not a fixed quality of a person, but a set of skills that can be learned. Encourage women to learn leadership skills throughout their careers. This can be done through formal training and workshops, whether they are about leadership skills generally or geared toward women specifically. Women also learn leadership by leading. Give your women employees chances to practice leadership skills by letting them take on leadership roles – low stakes roles at first (such as leading meetings), with steady growth into more responsibility. If there are external workshops or courses on leadership skills that would be valuable, encourage women to take them. The organization should subsidize this if possible. When

working one on one with women employees, encourage them to read widely about leadership and to take on leadership roles in professional organizations and other settings where they can practice leadership skills.

## **INTERNAL PROGRAMS AND TRAININGS**

Develop and offer an array of internal programs and trainings on leadership skills and other valuable skills. These may be directed specifically at women, or may be directed at employees more generally regardless of gender. In developing these trainings and workshops, consider how to encourage employees (especially women) to attend them. You may make them mandatory, or make them highly suggested as part of development plans. The advantage to internal trainings is that they can be conducted within the organizations' training budget, and logistically they are more accessible than offsite trainings. Your women's networking groups are a valuable resource here, as they can tell you what women want and need to see offered and may offer up experts who can facilitate.

## **OUTSIDE TRAINING AND WORKSHOPS**

Do not negate outside training and workshops when creating plans for developing women leaders. Take advantage of external trainings geared specifically at women, or which teach important leadership skills which can benefit employees of all genders. Encourage women to seek these out, and make them aware of potentially valuable courses. These may be offered by for-profit companies, universities and colleges, or professional organizations. Annual conferences of professional organizations offer

another valuable venue for training and skills development. When creating development plans with female employees, include such trainings and workshops as options. When possible, the organization should subsidize such trainings.

## **ENCOURAGE TRAINING AT EVERY STAGE OF THE CAREER**

Like mentoring and other development, training and education should be part of every career stage. While the focus of leadership training is often on those who are currently in or moving into leadership roles, the development of a leader begins long before this. Encourage your women employees to seek out training at every stage. When creating development plans, work with employees to find training and workshops which will foster their goals and ambitions. This should include a mix of internal and external trainings, and trainings directed specifically at women as well as more general leadership trainings. Incorporating education and training at every stage of the career communicates that the organization invests in women and that there is potential for advancement.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Dorinda had been at TechCorp for a year already, and it was time for her annual review. She sat down with Suzette, her mentor, and her manager Clive. Clive asked about Dorinda's goals for the next year. *"I'd really like to move into a managerial position,"* she said, *"but I feel like I need to learn more about managing people."* Clive told Dorinda that there was an excellent two-week course she could take on the basics of managing

people, and that TechCorp would pay the registration fee if she wished to take it. She would take it through the local college's business school. He also recommended two books that had helped him in his early managerial career. Dorinda was excited to begin growing her skills so that she could work towards her goals.

*Successful people  
understand that  
you don't need to make  
things complicated.*

ANNE MCKEVITT

# CLOSING THOUGHTS

- **Lillian Vernon:** I became successful due to several reasons. I never gave up and I never let anyone or anything get in my way.
- **Barbara Walters:** Most of us have trouble juggling. The woman who says she doesn't is someone whom I admire but have never met.
- **Melinda Gates:** A woman with a voice is by definition a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult.
- **Madame CJ Walker:** There is no royal flower-strewn path to success. And if there is, I have not found it, for if I have accomplished anything in life, it is because I have been willing to work hard.



**Rick Chisholm** made history when he single-handedly changed the professional Audio Visual industry by breaking all the rules and capitalised over 50% market share in Australia with very little capital, no partners, mergers or lenders and set up the first franchise operation of its kind in the world in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

As a 7x founder of companies and 30x businesses such as Innovest, AI Machine, Lightsounds, LSW, Light Emotion with revenue in excess of \$300 million and having employed more than 1,000 staff over the last 35 years. Rick is known as the Start-Up and SME Guru and is Author of a number of books including Business Success for Life. Unlike many mentors, he actually walks the talk and has a number of businesses under management in such areas as Automation, Events management, Importing, Distribution, Retailing and E-commerce.

His BIG passion is Business Education empowering Businesses Owners through knowledge and skills. Whilst Rick has experienced great success, he has also endured many failures. Rick has faced and overcome the exact same challenges you are facing now.



**Tala Chisholm** is an SME specialist who has owned and managed several small to medium sized businesses in the last 20 years, several of which were eventually sold. She has extensive experience in the fields of retail, franchising, licensing, dealerships, education, importing, distribution and consulting.

Her expertise lies in building and implementing customised cross-platform database and software solutions for businesses, automation, IT, web marketing, advertising, graphic design, business administration, process refinement and implementation. Her business experience ranges from bricks-and-mortar Giftware retailing to highly technical fields such as Security, CCTV, Entertainment Lighting and Audio sales, hire and installations as well as e-commerce.

Throughout her career she also trained and mentored Franchise business owners as well as internal division managers. Some areas of training included retail operations, management practices, business strategy, accounting, cash-flow, marketing, customer service and IT. She has also headed up the drafting of Operating Compliance Manuals for Franchise operations and implementation of all the elements involved.

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