

Leading Women from the Ballroom to the Boardroom

Shaping the Gender roles in the Shrinking Workforce

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As we enter the 21st century the dynamics of the workplace are changing. Leading women from the ballroom to the boardroom and empowering them professionally, personally and socially is bringing about a paradigm shift. Encouraging women to strengthen, explore, express and embrace their self image and presence in the workplace gears up towards breaking the gender biases by offering women a setting to excel in the 3 main domains (personal, professional & social). Women are models for raising their kids (some do so singlehandedly) they face their fears, live alone in foreign countries, run their homes, drive classy cars, are there for their families and friends, are bona fide domestic goddesses, they host great parties; they are the givers of love and strength; these women should be celebrated both on the personal and professional platform.

These are women who are on-the-edge-of-their-seats ready to make things happen and initiate a culture of difference. These are women who are co-creating their own future and positively impacting others within their circle so why do these same women second guess themselves in the work place and shrink in the face of their success? This very same woman becomes a doormat in the workplace, overlooks her talents and tends to dish out praise easily! I do support women who allow their femininity to create collaboration in the work place but I do not endorse the belief of giving into the status quo out of fear of upsetting the apple cart. From a Human Resource perspective, no organization wants a trouble maker with hormones all over the place but by choosing your battles wisely, finding your voice appropriately and handling situations with finesse you will actually deliver desired results and will inevitably earn the respect of your superiors.

As an Interview Coach & Recruiter, I have interviewed over 100s of female candidates and have always been amazed at how different women interview when compared to men. Women tend to shy away from salary negotiations, whereas their male counterparts would not think twice about negotiation if they thought that the proposed remuneration was not reflecting their value. Women tend not to negotiate their salaries because they feel that they should be grateful for being offered the job or maybe they feel that negotiation would cut their chances of getting the job or they might be branded as bossy and less feminine. The shrinking workforce does not do much to deter women from this way of thinking and behaving.

Dating back to the traditionalists who believed that the office was no place for women, this bias, unfortunately has thrived for many decades and still subtly dominates the mind set. Today's modern organizational culture adopts policies for the purpose of affecting the work/life balance such as paid family leave, time off for child care, etc. however, women are overlooked for promotions or for senior roles because they assume these non-work type responsibilities. Unfortunately there is an unspoken

protocol that the alpha male leadership strategies still prevail and these biases towards women exist regardless of whether you are in the Western or the Arab world.

Aung San Suu Kyi is one of my role models and an example of a woman operating in her greatness. Aung San Suu Kyi demonstrates greatness for her work in Burma and the rest of the Burmese people. She is known world wide for spreading greatness to her people. This brave 5 foot 2 woman has led armies, endured military house arrest; she is a mother and was a wife. She experienced loss of her husband at the tender age of 42 but she still serves her people. She defies limitations to fight for the justice of her people. How can more women learn from her and project this strength in the workforce?

To the smart savvy women out there

- Statistics prove that men easily take the lead when it comes to rubbing shoulders, however women often feel uncomfortable about reaching out, playing politics and doing business networking. Reversing this perception will work wonders within the organizational culture. By working to effectively build enriching, rewarding and professional relationships on all levels, regardless of whether we are referring to stakeholders, colleagues or directors, this will improve levels of confidence and the way others see us. I suggest forming a female networking platform/ forum in the office. This will help women pull together to create a woman friendly culture in the workplace.
- Embrace office politics instead of running away from them by understanding the politics at play in your organization. Pay careful attention to how the most successful people within your company behave
- Adopt an attitude of addressing your fears by drawing close the very thing you fear. For example, you might be shy and you fear speaking up during company meetings or doing presentations, face your fear by becoming more vocal. Take baby steps by overcoming small fears in your daily working life. Try attending a public speaking seminar or become a member of a public speaking group such as “Toast Masters”.
- Attend networking/ team building events, work socials: This will boost your confidence, give you an opportunity to bond with team mates and to interact with like minded professionals during networking.
- Learn a new skill which is related to your job and company and put you ahead of the competition.
- Speak up: If you are striving towards a promotion and have been working towards it, let your goals be subtly known to your directors/senior management while taking action daily to achieve your goal.
- Find creative ways of sharing your perspectives and presenting your own ideas that would help improve processes at work, introduce refined methodologies. By striving to work towards the betterment of productivity and performance, you will become a part of the solution. You will gain recognition for this from your superiors.
- Find mechanisms to cope with juggling being a mother, a wife, a home executive and an employee. Some days might be more stressful than other days. Get a support structure outside work to help you cope with the pressures of life.

- Don't expect favors because you are a woman; be willing to go the extra mile. This might require staying behind for an additional 30 minutes to complete a piece of task, do so whole heartedly.
- Dress the part; if you want respect then you've got to command it. Your dressing speaks volumes about you.
- No need to emulate your male counterparts but do act and speak with confidence. Flirt only in the ball room and not in the board room.

Over the next decade, more women will be embracing upper level management roles and holding directorate positions despite the odds being against them. Women will be instrumental in reshaping the 2020 workforce and bringing about revolutionary changes. Women are indeed the accelerated gender in the workforce; this just needs to be realized and these gender bias perceptions will soon begin to evaporate. This change needs to first start with women. Ladies, the red carpet is being rolled out, be the first to own your achievement and success and let the F factor shine.