



Men: The Gender Gap Is Your Issue, Too

Women aren't going to advance into the uppermost business ranks unless there's a concerted effort —among women and men—to alter their perceptions and actions at work and at home

By Judy D. Olian, Ph.D.

A decade ago, the *Fortune* 500 included just six female CEOs. Since then, that number has increased to 23, including iconic companies such as GM, IBM, Pepsi and HP. The relative increase may seem impressive, but it's actually a stark reminder of the persistent gender differences that continue to permeate the American workplace.

While women lead just 4.6 percent of the *Fortune* 500, they make up 46.9 percent of the U.S. labor force. At the same time, women dominate the freshmen class at our nation's colleges—and their majority is increasing. It certainly doesn't follow that women should hold just 14.6 percent of C-level executive positions and a scant 16.9 percent of *Fortune* 500 board seats.

Change of Attitude

What needs to change? Of course, some actions are called for among girls and women, but it is as much a men's issue: They must change their behavior—both at home and at work.

The data shows that by high school, young girls are less self-confident in math and science skills. This drives them into different fields in college, whereas men overwhelmingly dominate the STEM fields. Parents and teachers—women *and* men—need to nurture the full set of talents in young women, and reinforce their self-confidence.

The norms of society and expectations women impose on *themselves* are also factors: Women feel they have to "do it all." We need to help women relax that requirement.

Perhaps they do end up doing it all, just not all at the same stage in life. The essential challenge is to decide which priorities are a must for each stage and which can be deferred. Better alignment of expectations with what's

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possible will save women guilt, broken relationships or feelings of inadequacy, and, at some life stages, it will give them license to go full throttle in their careers.

It also requires a full partnership at home. Choosing a life partner is also choosing a career partner. Amazingly talented women often turn down much-sought-after job offers and promotions in deference to the demands of their partner's career and choice of job location. These decisions should be made together, on a level playing field, hearing each partner's career and life dreams.

Men—Big Part of the Equation

Men are a big part of the equation for women's success. Sheryl Sandberg (Facebook's CEO and well-known author) talks of the housework divide, noting that fully employed women still do twice the housework and spend triple the time on childcare than do their husbands.

Men also bring their cultural biases into the workplace. There are innumerable studies that show that—despite equal qualifications—men (and often, women, too) are harsher in their assessment of female company founders and CEOs or of IPOs led by females. Men with stay-at-home wives give less favorable performance evaluations to women than do men whose wives work. And in America, the challenge of finding affordable childcare disproportionately affects the career options of women.

So, what has to change? Female

advancement into the uppermost ranks will happen through a dual strategy of women's actions and choices, as well as through changes that men and the broader society commit to make. Since men still comprise a majority in the workforce, especially at the higher ranks and on boards that make the leadership decisions, women aren't going to advance unless there's a concerted effort—among men—to alter their perceptions and actions at work and at home in order to enable women's success.



About the Author

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