

Powerplay— Who's Winning The Leadership Game?

BY CANDY TYMSON CSP

Leadership genre connects to gender. According to a recent article in the Ivey Business Journal by Melbourne-based consultant Dianne Jacobs, women are contributing new approaches to leadership and power, bringing a style that provides a more 'power to' approach, rather than the perceived traditional male style of 'power over'.

Masculine traits of leadership are linked to individualism, being assertive, giving direction and a power-over approach of influence: getting people to do what they don't want to do by use of status, expertise, reward or punishment.

In contrast the feminine traits of leadership have been linked to collaboration, emotional intelligence, adaptive approaches and a power-to mentality of influence: ability or potential to bring about change, recognising that power is relational and reciprocal.

A study undertaken by Chesterman, Ross-Smith and Peters concluded, "Organisations are inherently gendered and that everything that is taken for granted as 'normal' at work, is, in fact, based on male/masculine standards. Until these gendering processes are revealed and critiqued, until organisational policies and practices are put under a 'gender lens', change cannot take place".

The War for Talent

But why should change take place? The traditional male style of doing business has worked for centuries. Why challenge it now?

Leading Business consultant, Tom Peters expressed it well in his book, *Re-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age*. "My beat is business performance, not social justice. So I look at the issue of women and talent through a business performance lens. And what I see, quite simply, is a strategic opportunity of the first order. That opportunity is knocking ... and it won't wait long for you to open the door."

As the war for talent increases at a rapid rate due to the large number of baby boomers retiring, the high turnover of younger employees who operate from a different work ethic, and skill shortages generally, it makes sense to look for a new pool of talent to draw from. PriceWaterhouseCoopers, in their *2007 Retail & Consumer Outlook* report, identified four market segments with low employment participation rates who could be retained or recruited. They are baby boomers, women, school leavers and immigrants.

Women are currently 41% of the workforce and 55% of university graduates and yet we have all seen the figures on how few senior positions are held by women.

Could it be that how we perceive 'leadership' and 'power' is clouding opportunities for a new style of leadership to emerge?

"Creating a business culture that supports innovation, growth and prosperity requires people with diverse talents, and organisations need to ensure that they value all styles of leadership and work".

Harvard Business Review

A recent article in Harvard Business Review by Alice Eagly and Linda Carli stated that when you put all the pieces together, a new picture emerges as to why women don't make it into the C-suite. It's not the glass ceiling, but the sum of many obstacles along the way.

Obstacles to Leadership

Obstacles include resistance to women's leadership where people (both men and women) view successful female managers as more deceitful, pushy, selfish and abrasive than successful male managers. Therefore many female leaders struggle to reconcile qualities people prefer in women (compassion for others) with qualities people think leaders need to succeed (assertion and control).

Family demands also continue to be a major challenge.

The IT industry in Australia is a good example of where a perceived culture of male domination has seen women leave the industry in droves—resulting in a 13.4% decline in seven years. A survey undertaken under the auspices of the Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) in 2006 showed that women cited lack of work/life balance, a culture of male domination and job inflexibility as the major issues of concern. (It's interesting to note that the younger generations, both male and female, are likely to cite work/life balance and job inflexibility as issues too).

However if we continue to move the bar to favour females with special privileges such as maternity leave, flexi-hours and job sharing, surely we are at risk of demonstrating discrimination against those workers, both male and female, who do not have family responsibilities.

It was once said: "if you meet the expectations of women, you exceed the expectations of men". Women, and the younger generations generally, both male and female, are demanding a new way of doing work. Those companies that embrace the opportunities that this brings will attract a more diverse workforce and in the process may change their style of leadership to the more feminine traits of collaboration, emotional intelligence, adaptive approaches and a power-to mentality of influence; surely that can only be good for business!



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