



TALENT MANAGEMENT

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Why Develop High Potential Women Differently Than Men?

| LYNNE MORTON

Every few years a prestigious organization publishes a study that points out what a strong impact women have on organizations and business results. We continue to hear variations on this theme, yet continue to behave in the same way. Which is to say, we don't do much about it. Since we know that women in business make a difference, wouldn't we want more women in our organizations? What about the following are we not taking to heart? I believe that it's time to look at the facts and decide what actions it's really time to take. The facts are compelling:

- FACT: 34% of private sector organizations have had their companies' profits increased as a result of women's engagement; another 36% expect that will happen; 58% expect those increases to come from creation of new markets or expansion of existing ones – McKinsey study, The Business of Empowering Women 2010
- FACT: Fortune 500 companies with a higher percentage of women officers experienced, on average, 35.1% higher return on equity and 34% higher return to shareholders; Fortune 500 companies with more women board directors outperformed others by 53% – Catalyst, The Bottom Line, 2002 and 2007
- FACT: Companies with women leaders, esp. more women on boards, perform better: 53% get higher return on equity; 42% get higher return on sales; 56% get higher return on invested capital – Deloitte Women's Initiative, 2009
- FACT: Women occupy 40% of all managerial positions in the U.S; but only 6% of the Fortune 500s top execs are female; and just 2% of those firms have women CEOs. Women's leadership style—characterized by innovating, building trust and empowering followers—is ideally suited to today's business challenges. – Harvard Business Review, Women & the Labyrinth of Leadership, 2007
- FACT: 56% of S&P 500 companies have no women and/or minorities in the highest paid executive positions – Calvert, Examining the Cracks in the Ceiling study, 2010

We are now crawling out of a global recession. We are moving from operating principles of survival to those of growth. Common sense would tell us that in order to make up for the lost time of the recession,

we should seek better and faster ways to grow and achieve great results. One such way is to have more women in leadership roles. That's why the time is NOW.

Women are being hired by organizations. But they aren't being understood, developed, or groomed. They are leaving before they hit the leadership ranks, and with them go knowledge, energy, and innovation. I view this as more than a brain drain; it's an economic drain. It shows up in lost dollars of revenue, in lost dollars spent yet again on recruiting.

It shows up globally too. At the 2011 Davos meeting, the position of women in business was discussed with energy and passion. In the WEF's 2010 Global Gender Gap Report a strong statement was made about gender parity being on the agendas of business and government globally, with special initiatives in place at the UN, among many companies and in the U.S. government. They state that closing gender gaps is closely correlated with increased competitiveness. The WEF's 2010 Global Corporate Gender Gap Report, the first of its kind, shows a huge variance in the global representation of women in corporations. Even given that, there are significantly fewer women at senior levels... on average, less than 5% of CEO positions are filled by women. There is more data available than ever before... and more organizations indicating a desire to take action for change.

Clearly, the "same old" leadership development approaches are not working. It is time to develop women in a focused, special way that takes into account the perspectives of their male colleagues and of their organizations, but that also recognizes that women are different. To release the energy of High Potential women, we should think in terms of releasing energy from the inside out: from the inside of the individuals and from the inside of the organizations. Women should be developed for leadership differently than men and the time to do that is now.

I find that developing women in a vacuum, though, does not fully enhance their effectiveness in their organizations. Therefore, the perspectives of men must be included. Theirs can be voices shared via a survey or pre-training interviews. They can be present in online discussions or video segments. It is likely, though, that having men actually in the room for group developmental sessions will inhibit conversations. If women are going to open up about their own assessment feedback, their own aspirations and sense of limitations (either coming from themselves or "felt" as imposed by the organizations) then they need a safe context in which to do so. Women talking to other women, facilitated by other women who have shared similar experiences, is just such a context.

Women also need opportunities to explore stereotypes and personal behavioral barriers. Stereotypes may be what society in general says about women, or what their organizations show as beliefs, based on their behavior. Organizational policies promote equality, but the behavior of individuals within the organizations may not support or mirror those. Women are not likely to discuss these issues openly, but they will discuss them if appropriately facilitated.

The bottom line is that if we care about the bottom line, we must care about developing and retaining our women High Potentials... and I know we can do that now... and do it in the special way that it deserves. 🌍

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