

Woman Up The Ladder



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For long there has been bias in our society. Bias in data is defined as “**an error that occurs when certain elements of a dataset are overweighted or overrepresented.**” Quite similarly, bias fits into the brains of us humans. Due to the overweighted and overrepresentation of men in certain roles, we have all developed what I would like to put as *an unconscious gender bias*, especially when it comes to roles of leadership.

For decades, history has shown men to be in roles of power and leadership whether it as ruler of kingdoms, head of the army, leaders in science, research, innovation, politics or simply a family setting. Initially, eons ago, these started as mere logical reasoning given the anatomical differences in men and women. However, over the years these themes shifted from simple logic to an acquired bias towards men, paving path for elements of patriarchy, misogyny and male chauvinism in the society.

Although, in the current world, both men and women, are trying to break these long established baseless stereotypes and establish a more inclusive world for women, to wash this bias enforced over decades together is not easy. This bias has ingrained itself in our DNAs and comes forth in our behaviours, decisions and judgements quite sneakily.

Over the years, this stubborn and hard to detect gender bias has subdued the confidence of women in themselves, sowed doubts in their minds on their own capabilities and harboured a sense of discomfort and self-insufficiency for not fitting into the society’s definition of a woman.

Diversity and Inclusion programs had to be started to break groundless gender stereotypes and empower women. These were primarily aimed to re-instil in women the confidence that the long running gender bias had striped them off. These programs have not only empowered the woman to be financially independent but also to embrace their individuality and apply their talents to betterment of the world. Additionally, these programs have helped increase the footprint of women in every field, especially STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

Over years, with the support of each other and allies, women have broken glass ceilings, climbed higher up in the career ladder and reached great heights; which was perhaps a far-fetched dream for women even a generation or two ago. It is these courageous women leaders who have become torch-bearers for other women leading the way forward to their growth. Diversity and inclusion automatically become high priorities for such women leaders as a generic response of the brain to give back to what helped them and continue the cycle. Further, diverse teams pave path to fresh perspective and thereby encourage better problem-solving and innovation, directly impacting the quality of work done in STEM.

However, no one has ever had it easy, especially women!

Even after proving their worth time and again, after winning battle after battle, women leaders are often challenged and perceived with different judgements. One such resistive judgement comes from the natural threat faced by the male population.

Women leaders often understand and relate to the plethora of challenges both, external and internal, faced by other women. As a natural instinct, they tend to go up and beyond to cater to these specific gender challenges and help other women thrive in their careers. Further, multiple studies have shown, that exposure to female role models improves women’s performance and self-evaluations while eliminating the gender performance gap.

However, the above approach may often lead to an insecurity in the male counterparts. Whereupon come questions like, **Do Women At The Top Elevate Everyone— including men? Or just...?**

It is a natural human instinct to revolt against anything that seemingly threatens one's survival or challenges one's definition of 'normal'. Women leaders, more often than not, understand this. Women for generations have been home managers— managing conflict between individuals, drawing out time for everyone and recognizing the necessity for balance has been a natural core embedded skill in them. Most unconsciously apply this to the situations at work dexterously. They usually tackle this issue by involving men in the empowerment of women, by encouraging them to become allies. This is a key effort that nudges teams to become more diverse, robust, effective and productive.

A landmark 1992 meta-analysis of 61 studies led by Eagly, showed that female leaders demonstrate more transformational leadership styles. They demonstrated more contingent reward behaviour than the two-dimensional actions (active and passive management) presented by male leadership. Also, female leaders tend to prioritize work-life balance, which benefits everyone, including men.

Another study led by social psychologist Mansi P. Joshi, PhD, in 2022, found that, the mere presence of a female leader relative to a male leader led perceivers to anticipate fairer treatment in that organization and greater projected salary and status.

Thus, it is evident from the above points that women leaders, foster a better work culture that has a fair work-life balance which is known to directly impact an individual's productivity and mental health, thus contributing to success of an organization. They encourage men to become allies for empowering women and overall encourage and support a diverse and dynamic team.

Unfortunately, the corporate world was late to realize the power of women in an organization. Promoting women in leadership roles is not an overnight process. Nonetheless, thanks to ongoing efforts to promote gender equality in the workplace, female leaders are slowly making inroads in science, sports, technology, business, politics, higher education, and various other fields. Despite these bright spots, the proportion of male and female leaders is still far from equal, especially in developing countries.

Getting a seat on the plane is not enough, it's time for women to be the pilot, if we're going to have a future moving forward together and achieving greater heights!

Finally, going back to the question—

Do Women At The Top Elevate Everyone, including men?

Absolutely! To move the vehicle forward smoothly and gain speed we need both set of wheels—the left and the right— to work in sync.

- Geetika Moolchandani