

Four Advantages for Women Managers, and How to Harness Them for Success

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There's a new advantage available in the business world that some companies and their leaders are finally starting to realize it. It's been forty years in the making and is still in process, but progress is made every day.

That advantage is a renewed focus on the importance of women in leadership.

Corporate leaders are beginning to understand the value of creating balanced teams with higher numbers of women in these critical roles. Research has shown that businesses are more successful and more competitive overall when they have women in primary positions. They are also more profitable and more deeply reflective of the market. And the women who aspire to higher positions of management and leadership gain as they get better prospects for career advancement and more opportunities to make an impact.

Unfortunately, many businesses do not have this advantage — a consequence of outdated policies and cultures that unwittingly work against women's efforts to advance as managers and leaders.

However, women themselves can play an integral role in shifting this dynamic. In order to be effective as supervisors, managers and leaders, women must realize the significance of their roles. Not only will they become better in their positions they will contribute to the success of their teams and the organization itself.



Four Advantages for Women in Leadership

The following are strategies women can employ to leverage the advantages available to them, for their companies and themselves.

1. The Networking Advantage

Networking is about building strong, valuable relationships with people who help you be more effective in managing your team.

Research in networking reveals a number of trends that fall along gender lines. The founder and chairperson of the networking organization BNI, Ivan Misner summarizes the research this way:

- Women put relationships first, business second
- Men put business first, relationships second

We're generalizing, of course. But understanding this simple contrast goes a long way toward understanding how men and women can expand their networks. When it works best, networking takes the best of both worlds — the relationship-building and a business orientation.

Challenging oneself to become more strategic and involved in networking can enhance one's ability to get results, create outcomes, take advantage of synergies and realize opportunities — an important advantage needed to succeed in their roles.

2. The Balance Advantage

In their annual Gates Letter in 2016, Bill Gates and Melinda Gates explained their priorities for The Gates Foundation. This year, Melinda Gates tackled the one issue she sees as critical to the advancement of women in any arena: time. “To empower women to reach their full potential,” she says, “we need to give them back time.”

Women have been shown to put in an additional four extra hours a day, on average, of unpaid work, usually related to taking care of their homes and families. For busy women, the extra obligation can cut into important time and mental energy needed for effective management. Many women feel they never get a rest, as they rush headlong from their professional work into their work at home. In that sense, their jobs are never done.

Women who realize this are at a distinct advantage. Knowing the concrete impact of “over-busyness,” they can learn to avoid it.

That may mean focusing on effective delegation, at work and at home. It can mean streamlining systems and eliminating the unnecessary. Managers who do so make time for the work that matters for a more fulfilling and effective experience throughout their lives.

3. The Mentoring and Sponsorship Advantage

Leaders who have the benefit of strong mentoring and sponsorship have a powerful advantage. In their efforts to manage their teams, succeed in their goals and lead others toward a vision, they are not alone.

In order to be effective, managers need to know the right people, increase their visibility and make a case for their own success and advancement. They need to be connected in order to get things done, and in many cases, they need firepower beyond what they may have developed by this stage in their career. They need advocates for their advancement and champions for their ideas. Mentors and sponsors provide this advantage.

Mentoring is taking an interest in you. Sponsorship is taking action for you. Both are important, but for women, sponsorship takes on added importance. The trouble is it's less accessible to women. Only 13 percent of full-time female employees at large companies have sponsors or colleagues senior enough to make a career-changing impact with their support compared to 46 percent of men.

Women can find themselves isolated — aware they need powerful relationships but missing the connections to secure them. As a result, they can be at risk — lacking support and advocacy at a critical point in their career.

On the other hand, when women have a sponsor, the likelihood that they will seek other ways of advancing their career goes up 8 percent — a small but significant impact.

4. The Executive Presence Advantage

An advantage women can develop to build stature and credibility is their executive presence.

In a survey of executives, Forbes magazine found “executive presence” counts for 26 percent of what it takes to get promoted. When leaders have executive presence, their intent matches their impact. As a result, they develop a reputation as a leader, which leads to more opportunities from a career standpoint as well as better outcomes for their companies and their teams.

Kristi Hedges, the author of *The Power of Presence: Unlock Your Potential to Influence and Engage Others*, describes presence this way:

[Presence is] equal parts communication aptitude, mental attitude, and authentic style. It combines a supportive inner mindset with the outer skills needed to create the natural, confident, consistent leadership presence we all seek.

A review of the research revealed an expansive list of attributes needed to exhibit executive presence:

- Status and Reputation
- Physical Characteristics
- Demeanor
- Communication Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Interpersonal Behavior Patterns
- Values-in-Action
- Intellect and Expertise

- Work Outcomes
- Power Use

Along with your intelligence, experience, and performance, presence is another dimension that communicates the authority and influence characteristic of strong leadership.

Kim Hanna, Global Environmental Officer at AIG, puts it this way. “Presence is more than just looking the part of an executive. It is looking it, feeling it, acting it, and believing it.”

Conclusion

As women take on more and more roles in supervision, management and leadership, they have a unique advantage to develop their own careers and take ownership for their own successes. Doing so can give them the perspective they need to avoid feeling like a victim and instead to focus their efforts where they can make the biggest impact for their team, and, ultimately, their organization.

about the authors

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