



Getting More Women Into the C-Suite

With women taking on C-Suite roles at companies like PepsiCo, Inc., Hewlett-Packard and General Motors, we've certainly come a long way from the days of women staying home to care for the household while the men went off to work long hours at the office.

But is it enough? Although the work environment is more female-friendly, with women comprising roughly half of the total U.S. labor force, it's often an uphill battle for many to transition into corporate leadership positions. In fact, women only account for approximately 14.6 percent of executive officer positions at major corporations in the U.S., according to research from not-for-profit organization **Catalyst**.

The reasons for this vary – factors like women taking time off to care for loved ones, unconscious gender bias and lack of support from upper management have contributed to this anemic growth. As with any big change, it won't happen overnight – organizations can begin to take actionable steps in ending the bias against female leaders.

Embrace and Effectively Utilize Gender Differences

Sure, women and men are different – some may say they're from different planets altogether – but what if, instead of pointing out the differences as challenges, upper management embraces and effectively utilizes them? Behavioral science is unlocking ways to blend the unique talents of both sexes in the workplace as it relates to problem solving, management and social skills, with the ultimate goal being to more effectively utilize and merge them to improve organizational performance.

In fact, according to the **Gender Intelligence Group**, the economic benefits to adopting this way of thinking are numerous, from helping companies grow in their global competitiveness to securing and retaining the best talent, leading to better strategic decisions and achieving superior financial results. All of this is possible by simply choosing to employ the talents unique to both genders.

Develop a Formalized Women Leadership Program

Many companies talk about building women leaders and helping them to the C-Suite, but how many are actually walking the walk? To make it happen, companies are developing formalized women leadership programs, which often consist of mentorship programs for one-on-one support, matching women with experienced partners who advocate for the career advancement of the program participant.

What about those employed in more traditionally male-dominant industries, like professional services, law or tech? Accounting and advisory firm Baker Tilly is an example of how the development of a well-rounded, comprehensive and progressive gender diversity initiative (the firm's GROW - Growth and Retention of Women - program) is helping women to successfully navigate to leadership positions in the male-heavy professional services industry.

Companies have come a long way in helping women feel at home in the workforce, but must do more to truly elevate women to the leadership level. Embracing gender differences and developing women leadership growth programs are steps in the right direction.

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