

IS YOUR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP STRATEGY SITTING ON A ONE-LEGGED STOOL?

It's 2018, and there is still a lot of work to be done to achieve women's equity in the workplace. In fact, progress—real progress—in advancing women in most organizations has stalled at middle management. Today, in most organizations, less than 15 percent of leadership roles are occupied by women and in the C-Suite, the number is less than 5 percent. These numbers are largely unchanged in the past 10 years.

Why Women's Leadership Initiatives at Most Companies Fail to Drive Real Change



I've been advocating that it's time to stop trying to "fix" women by providing them with one more mentoring or training program, and instead take a closer look at the strategy, culture and the role of men that are hindering gender equity within your organization. To achieve gender equity—frankly, to achieve equity for *all* employees—organizations must address all three legs of the proverbial stool:

- 1. Women's Leadership Initiatives**
- 2. Integrated Strategy and Corporate Culture**
- 3. Creating Male and Organizational Champions**

Let's take a closer look at these three vital parts of your women's leadership strategy.

Women's Leadership Initiatives

Most companies have programs in place for women (and some men) to support women. Typically, these forums are 90 percent led by women and attended by women. These initiatives include frequent lunch-and-learn activities to hone skills, mentoring programs and annual events with speakers and workshops during Women's History Month (March) or other times during the year. A majority of Fortune 500 companies have these programs down to a science. Progressive companies are asking this question: Are these initiatives having the desired impact to fill the pipeline with qualified female candidates for senior management positions and to address workplace inequities?

My short answer is *no*. Even with a best-practices women's leadership program, companies are balancing on one leg, hoping to address one of the most crucial issues facing corporate America today—equity in the workplace. Companies are failing to close the gap in advancing women in the workplace by falling short on integrating their women's leadership initiative into the broader spectrum of corporate culture and programs and by failing to engage men at all levels (especially middle and senior management) in the planning and implementation. Many companies allow women's topics to be framed as women-only issues instead of important, organization-wide topics that require a larger lens to address.

Integrated Strategy and Corporate Culture

Companies must treat their women's leadership initiative as a change initiative rather than a program or policy change. This means total enterprise engagement. Women's leadership advancement must be owned by operations, sales and marketing, with HR and senior leadership playing critical support roles with the necessary progressive policies and programs. Then, senior leadership must be out in front, leading the initiative. Not only should they be talking about it, but more importantly, they should be holding people accountable for success.

Male Engagement

Mercer's *2016 Global When Women Thrive Report* found that only 39 percent of middle management and 38 percent of male employees are engaged in company diversity and inclusion initiatives. While we can say nearly 40 percent is pretty good, there are men who are disenfranchised or who will interpret someone else's gain as their personal loss and will see your D&I initiatives as a zero-sum proposition. If a majority of your workforce is men, it is imperative that your company programming and solutions integrate and involve them in your diversity and inclusion initiatives in a deep and meaningful manner.

Leaders and organizations must ask themselves, “Are we really committed to driving long-term change to advance women?”

10 Tools to Drive Real Change for Women in the Workplace

Here are 10 tools YWomen offers to help you assess where you are and what your next steps could be to create a level playing field for women in your organization:

Strengthen Your Women’s Leadership Initiatives

1. Sign-up for my *Gender Conversation QuickStarters* monthly newsletter in which I share three timely topics that can serve to start conversations between men and women in the workplace. Use these for your weekly staff meetings, one-on-one conversations or lunch-and-learn topics for your women’s employee resource group.

2. Rethink your 2018/2019 programming to reflect a sense of urgency and the national conversation about workplace equity. Deepen your Unconscious Bias trainings focus on gender. Most Unconscious Bias training isn’t effective because it doesn’t go deep enough. Consider a standalone Unconscious Gender Bias training workshop.

Enhance Corporate Culture and Programs

3. Use the 80/80/80 Business Case to assess how your company is addressing the business case that shows that women represent 80+ percent of all business to consumer purchases and women and minorities represent 80+ percent of all new entries into the workforce. High performing companies seek 80+ percent engagement levels. What’s yours?

4. Conduct Executive Briefings to create a private forum for senior leadership to explore and address women’s leadership advancement.*

5. Do an organizational assessment. The 30-Point Readiness Assessment reveals your organization’s readiness to implement, from top to bottom, an integrated women’s leadership strategy.

Creating Male Advocates and Organizational Champions

6. Train male allies and advocates. Becoming an advocate is a process. Conduct a workshop on Men and Women Working together for Team Success or conduct a daylong program to train men how to become advocates. To learn more, take the Male Advocacy Profile assessment, a tool 20-question quiz I developed with Rachana Bhide to focus on the workplace and dynamics of gender equity.

7. Make a commitment to LISTEN, LEARN, LEAD and have the WILL to advocate for the recruitment, advancement, retention and equitable treatment of women in the workplace with these simple tools.

8. Watch and discuss my Women to Lean-in and Ask Men to Stand-up (video).

9. Encourage men to take the Father of Daughter Initiative pledge and post to the Father of Daughter Facebook page.

10. Create an inclusionary element by encouraging women to be supportive enablers of each other through the Women Championing Women and Advocating For Women commitments.

**Contact me at jthalter@ywomen.biz to discuss your objectives or visit my website for ideas about how to take your women’s leadership initiative to the next level.*

Jeffery Tobias Halter is the President of **YWomen**, a strategic consulting company focused on engaging men in women’s leadership advancement. Founder of the *Father of Daughter Initiative*, creator of the *Gender Conversation QuickStarters* Newsletter and the *Male Advocacy Profile*, Jeffery is the country’s leading male expert on advancing women and engaging men. Speaker, consultant and thought leader, he has authored two books, *WHY WOMEN, The Leadership Imperative to Advancing Women and Engaging Men* and *Selling to Men, Selling to Women*.