

THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE



4 Key Actions Male Leaders Must Take To Advance Women

CEOs, senior leaders and middle managers are grappling with how to advance women in their organizations. The burning question is, **“How do we begin to drive active male advocacy in the recruitment, development and advancement of women?”** Leaders in best-in-class companies realize that active male engagement is one of the most critical elements in driving systemic change for their organization.

It is my belief that organizations must approach advancing women as a business strategy. The Women's Leadership Imperative is designed to move the organization to a deeply internalized approach regarding gender differences, executed with a sense of urgency, to create competitive advantage. To win with women in the marketplace and workplace, leaders must take four simple, yet challenging actions. To advance women, leaders must:

Listen, Learn, Lead and Have the Will to Change

The first three actions come from the [Male Champions of Change](#), 15 male CEOs in Australia who have outlined exactly what men need to do to drive advancement for women in their organizations. The fourth action is my own epiphany and comes from dialogues with senior leaders from across industries. The will to change is the single most daunting task for organizations, and the one most organizations are unprepared to do. These four actions are best executed in a sequential manner to drive truly meaningful change.



Listen

This is an **often overlooked** step. Leaders want to lead and take action. However, listening is a step that is critical to connecting to root issues and inequities in your organization. It is incumbent on senior leaders to personally listen first before taking action. In doing so, they will recognize that:

Men and women are having significantly different experiences in the workplace.

Both genders are working hard, but women are working significantly harder as they constantly deal with being “one of a few” in the room. What men don't know is that women (and under represented groups) are always counting. This happens when you are the only one or two in the room, something rarely experienced by men, who as members of the majority, make the rules and set the norms. This is one of the reasons I invite men to attend and participate in women's leadership conferences.

For many men, attending a women's conference is the first time they have not been in the majority, and it's eye-opening. Nothing convinces male senior leader faster than an immersion activity. When I ask if they are a little uncomfortable, and they answer yes, I always add, “That's how women and minorities feel every day.” They get it immediately.

I also encourage leaders to invite a trusted female colleague to have an honest conversation regarding their experiences in the workplace and their company specifically. If you don't believe men and women are having different experiences in the workplace, take a woman you know and trust to lunch and ask one simple question:

Do you believe men and women are having different experiences at the company?

Then be quiet and genuinely listen. Don't interrupt, don't be defensive or justify company policies. Just listen. Also, don't be surprised if she doesn't tell you anything. Most women do not want to be singled out to "represent all women." But just listen. After 10 minutes, ask a second time:

What else don't I know?

Listen intently for another 10 minutes and ask a third, and final, time:

And what else?

In that last 10 minutes, you will hear root-cause issues that you have never heard or imagined existed in your company. These are differences that women and other minorities are experiencing every day, and they have a direct correlation to work, performance, retention and advancement. This same activity should be done with millennials, people of color, LGBTQ and even older, white men.



There are systemic issues in your company that are prohibiting growth, retention and development of all employees, impeding engagement and affecting your company's reputation in the marketplace, and listening is the first step to uncovering them.

Why do I ask men to do this? Because men are still in charge. Men hold 85 percent of senior leadership roles in companies, and it is incumbent upon them to lead this change. Once you have genuinely listened, the next key action is to learn.



Learn

The first thing to learn is how to articulate the business case to your team. This must be done at all functional levels of the organization. It's not enough for senior leaders to have a conceptual understanding. What is needed is a *Locally Relevant Business Case* that answers the questions posed by middle management, "How does this connect to me and my work?" "What do I need to do on a daily/weekly basis?" "How am I being held accountable" and more importantly, "What's in this for me?"

Leaders today are answering these questions with facts and data. While the revenue piece will vary widely by industry, the war for talent cuts across the entire organization. Five compelling facts leaders are talking about:

- 85 percent of new entries into the workforce are women, people of color or millennials. The representation of our workforce is changing rapidly.
- Millennials are approaching 40, and they represent your budding pipeline. By 2020, they will be the largest employee pool in the country.
- Women are getting more than 60 percent of advanced degrees in this country. If you are a knowledge-based company, you need to attract and retain women.
- 10,000 Boomers are retiring per day, every day, and this trend will continue for the next 7 years until they are all gone! In 7 years given Boomer retirement, job growth and fewer new workers entering the workforce there will be 23MM job openings in this country.

These macro-trends are creating a massive war for talent. Organizations are feeling the pain, and smart leaders are addressing it. The *Locally Relevant Business Case* combines your company's revenue opportunity and the war for talent into a measurable action plan that can hold people accountable.

The second learning point is to *Generally Value the Individual*. Managing people today requires an evolved leadership sophistication to meet and value each and every person individually. And again, this is true not just for women but also incoming millennials and other under-represented groups. This is how you maximize employee engagement and retention.

The final learning element is *Leading from the Front*. To win with women and the organization, men (senior and middle managers) must take visible, vocal actions and hold people and their organizations responsible for change.



Lead

Leadership starts at the top of organizations. In studying the best practices of companies who are making headway advancing women, visible, vocal leadership is always a critical characteristic.

People in your organization look to you and your senior leadership team to set priorities. What vision and norms do people see in your behavior? What is the gender balance of the top team? Is each member of your team fully committed and engaged in attracting, retaining and advancing women as a strategic imperative? Is that

commitment visible in the next level of management? While senior leadership plays a critical role, middle managers own the day-to-day experience and operations of your organization. Have they internalized the priorities, behaviors and goals? How are their actions supporting the targets being measured?

It is imperative to sharpen our focus and harness our full management capabilities and systems. This means you must consistently report progress on gender representation and advancing women into leadership positions in your organization. The goal is to create a transparent view of the pipeline and progress.

For most middle managers, the real challenge is to demonstrate leadership in advancing women in their everyday actions. There are many ways to demonstrate this commitment. This is not an all-encompassing list, but it notes some simple things you can do to incorporate elements into your department's operating routine.

- Develop and talk about your department's business case. Your middle managers need to know why the company is doing this and how it affects them and their department.
- Maniacally manage talent. The war for talent is real, and you cannot afford to lose a single woman, minority, millennial or white male in today's competitive environment.
- Ask the tough questions. Hold people accountable. This is what leaders do. If advancing women is a business priority in your company, you need to track success (or failure) and hold people accountable.
- Develop your cultural competency. Men and women are having very different experiences in the workplace. Commit to learning more about the topic.
- Make symbolic gestures and systemic changes. Learn what it takes to be a champion, and then have the WILL to do it!



Have the Will to Change

Willingness to change means you must examine your company's results, acknowledge they are not acceptable and choose to do something about it.

This is when you need to Listen, Learn, Lead ... and Have the Will to drive change!

Openly, publicly committing to change: This is what Having the Will to Change looks like. Organizations and leaders are NEVER satisfied with status quo. Leaders need to look at their numbers and take action.

Here's One Simple Test For Your Company

If women are truly a business priority of your organization, how many full-time resources and millions of dollars do you have committed to this work? Chances are, your women's strategy is owned by your women's resource group, a committed group of volunteers with a budget well south of \$100,000.

If women were truly a business priority, companies would be sourced, staffed and budgeted appropriately. I cannot recall the last successful brand launch or M&A that was conducted by volunteers and a few thousand dollars. Organizations must be willing to staff and fund their women's leadership initiative like any other corporate priority.

Having the Will to Change Takes a Personal Connection

This is not to say all men who are supporting change for women have this connection, but I have found the most committed ones do. The men who are really choosing to do this work have a personal connection. This is where advocacy comes from. It may be a spouse, sister, mother or chances are they are [fathers of daughters](#). The conversations I have with CEOs regarding advancing women focuses on 80 percent head and 20 percent heart. The business case is the head piece. That's why you need a conversational knowledge of why women's leadership advancement is important. The heart piece, however, is the 20 percent that moves men to advocacy, and that's the personal connection.

Men don't consciously conspire to hold women back. We just rarely make the connection. Men, tend to lead compartmentalized lives. I did. Yes, I'm a young boomer. I wanted to raise a strong daughter. I made sure she went to a great school, got a good degree. And when my daughter graduates and makes \$.78 cents to my son, I choose to do nothing. Men should be outraged that society and organizations value our daughters at \$.78 to our sons, but instead, we choose to do nothing.

Men must understand that if they are not advocating for gender equity, if they are not advocating for women, if they are not talking about bias and holding their leadership team accountable, they are not only letting down their own daughters, but all women.



Jeffery Tobias Halter is a gender strategist and the President of [YWomen](#), a strategic consulting company focused on engaging men in women's leadership advancement. Jeffery is the former Director of Diversity Strategy for The Coca-Cola Company. He is the author of two books, [WHY WOMEN, The Leadership Imperative to Advancing Women and Engaging Men](#) and [Selling to Men, Selling to Women](#) and is a two-time TEDx speaker. His clients include Walmart, Barclays, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Bacardi and dozens of other Fortune 500 companies. [@YWomen](#)