



THE THREE KEY ELEMENTS TO DRIVE MALE ENGAGEMENT: AWARENESS, ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADVOCACY

It's 2020, and it is time to finally take assertive action into engaging men in advancing women. Let's be candid. Women's equality in the workplace is stalled. In the past 20 years, the number of women moving into Senior Leadership and the Executive Team is marginal. Why? Because men do not see themselves as part of an actionable solution. Too many men conceptualize that advancing women is a good idea yet they are lacking the three key elements that will drive long-term systemic change.

I believe there are three As to address the question of "what's next" to bring about equality in the workplace:

- **Awareness**
- **Accountability**
- **Advocacy**

In my work, I spend the bulk of my time focusing on helping men become better advocates for women. Our discussions focus on workplace culture, accountability and the need for visible and vocal advocacy. While my work focuses primarily on gender, it is impossible to talk about gender without also recognizing the intersectionality of all additional dimensions of diversity such as race, sexual orientation and ethnicity to name a few. I use gender as a "gateway" to talk about these other dimensions and intersections.



Why Is Gender Equality Stalled at Work, and What Can We Do About It?

Men still occupy roughly 80 percent of the senior leadership roles at U.S. companies, and their engagement in the work of advancing women is necessary and vital. There is a leadership imperative to move organizations to a deeply internalized approach regarding leveraging differences, executed with a sense of urgency to create both a high functioning work environment for EVERYONE and to create a competitive advantage in the workplace.

As a gender strategist, I use gender as a gateway. Realistically, most people find it challenging to have a simple conversation about gender. If we can't talk about gender, how can we talk about race, ethnicity, age and the other dimensions of diversity?

Many men will ask, why can't we just acknowledge diversity of thought and get back to business as usual? The challenge is that diversity of thought is just the starting point. Leaders need to get comfortable listening, understanding and going deeper. Well-meaning leaders often say, "I don't see gender or race." This "gender/color blind" approach ignores the fact that personal, social and historical events have happened to shape people's experiences. Individuals actually want to be valued for their gender and race. If you [flip it to test it](#), it would be like a woman or person of color replying, "That's okay, I don't see you as a man." Not exactly a compliment for most men!

Awareness, Accountability and Advocacy

I've found that there are three factors that impact driving change in organizations, especially when it comes to advancing women and engaging men as advocates. I call them the three As:

BARRIERS

SOLUTIONS

Awareness	Listen to Understand Workplace Inequities and Microaggressions
Accountability	Operationalize the Business Case with Metrics and Hold Leaders Accountable
Advocacy	Demonstrate Visible and Vocal Advocacy and Have the Will

Awareness

Men and women are having vastly different experiences in the workplace. Women and people of color face a host of systemic, cultural and hidden biases at work. I encourage men in management positions to take a trusted female colleague to coffee and ask about her experiences in their company (and industry), then to actively [listen](#) to her response. Genuinely listening to employee issues and concerns is the requisite first step to gaining understanding before diving into "leading." To understand what is happening (or not happening) in your organization, it is imperative that senior leaders (namely older white men since they comprise more than 80 percent of senior business leaders) explore this paradigm.



When you listen, there is a strong chance you'll hear about one or more of these common microaggressions that women face on a daily (if not hourly) basis:

- Voice talked over/interrupted
- Expertise is questioned
- Assumption of all office housework
- Being called a "Working Mom" when male peers aren't labeled "Working Dads"

While these may seem minor to most men, when women encounter this issue multiple times on the same day, it becomes a significant issue. I suggest all men observe this behavior and then talk to women. You will see this is a very real issue women face every day. Ask yourself, how are microaggressions impacting engagement, productivity and retention?

Accountability

According to the McKinsey 2018 Women in the Workplace [study](#), 76 percent of companies have articulated the business case for gender diversity but only 13 percent hold people accountable for tangible results. Business leaders track EVERYTHING in business. However, very few [track](#) anything when it comes to advancing women.

The study also notes that more than 90 percent of companies say they prioritize gender and racial diversity, but only 42 percent of employees think this is the case for gender diversity and only 22 percent think it's the case for racial diversity.

Why? Because leaders are not held accountable for tangible results. Today, I am still challenged by companies asking, "Can we really measure and track gender balance and hold our people accountable?"

The answer is yes.

Hard metrics aren't quotas. In order to be fiscally responsible, businesses track and measure everything from inventory to pending orders and turnaround times. As business leaders, we track. We measure. We ask questions. We hold people accountable. We make adjustments to the strategy based on the numbers. It's legal. It reinforces the bottom line. [Click here](#) for my thoughts on the [10 metrics](#) every business leader should be tracking and holding people accountable for when it comes to advancing women.

Advocacy

Talent is your bottom line. For senior business leaders, talent management is job one. Most senior business leaders rank attracting and retaining talent, developing the talent they have, managing performance and creating effective leadership teams among their top priorities.

Given the current war for talent, the effects of retiring baby boomers and the costs associated with recruiting and retaining employees, it is in companies' self-interests to address the business case for diversity and gender equity in the workplace. Successful leaders must have the will to address systemic inequities, biases and cultural norms that hold back or drive out women and minorities.

I have attended scores of women's leadership events during the past few years and witnessed many amazing women (and a number of men) talking collectively about how to advance women. I've had the pleasure of working with C-Level male leaders who are true champions and advocates and are demonstrating the will to drive change in their organizations. The companies that are making real progress have male advocates within the organization who do four things: They [Listen](#), [Learn](#), [Lead](#) and are visible and vocal in their advocacy to create a new dynamic within the organization. Quite frankly, do they have the [Will to Lead](#) change and be agents of change.

What do advocates do?

- Listen and Seek to Understand
- Create a Business Case – Hold People Accountable
- Set An Example to Correct Bias
- Sponsor or Mentor Women
- Engage Other Men
- Demonstrate Advocacy – Visible, Vocal Leadership



Ask yourself and your leadership team what are you personally doing to foster equality for all in your organization. The war for talent is real. Attracting and retaining talent is job one for managers - at every level in the company. Are you ready to challenge the status quo and work to create a future that values diversity and is truly inclusive? If so, then join me in becoming an advocate today.

To assess where your company is, take the [30-point Readiness Assessment](#). To assess where you are as an ally and advocate take the [Advocacy Quiz](#). For tips and meeting-in-a-box ideas to start conversations about gender, women's advancement and engaging men, [sign up](#) for the YWomen e-newsletter Gender Conversation QuickStarters.



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](#)