

# THE 4 KEY ACTIONS TO ADVANCE WOMEN



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Leaders in best-in-class companies realize that active male engagement is one of the most critical elements needed to drive a women’s leadership initiative. Why men? Because in most organizations, men are still **80 percent of Sr. Leadership**, which means they represent 80 percent of the solution. Simply put, we will never drive long-term systemic change for women without active male advocacy. Additionally, women also act as a gateway to create more dialogue and movement for all under-represented groups. To engage Sr. Leaders, men and women, you must link the advancement of women to the overall success of the entire organization.

The challenge in most organizations is that significant barriers can exist to active male engagement. Four major barriers have been identified that are necessary to overcome. The following chart represents the barrier, a description of what it sounds like and the solution to overcoming the barrier.

BARRIER	WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE	SOLUTION
Empathy (Lack of)	I don’t believe men and women are having different experiences in the workplace	<b>LISTEN</b> 1
Apathy	I don’t understand what the big deal is	<b>LEARN</b> 2
Accountability (Lack of)	It’s not important to my boss or my work, so why should I care	<b>LEAD</b> 3
Fear	Though I won’t acknowledge it, I am afraid I may say the wrong thing	<b>HAVE THE WILL</b> 4

### Empathy/Listen

Men and women are having significantly different experiences in the workplace. It is probably not visible to most men, but it is very real for women. To find this out, do a simple exercise.

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. Don’t interrupt her or

## Empathy/**Listen** continued ...

try to problem solve, just listen. Then ask a third time. In that last 10 minutes, you will likely hear root-cause issues that you have never heard or imagined existed in your company. These are differences that women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) are experiencing every day, and they have a direct correlation to work, performance, retention and advancement.

Another activity you can do is focus groups. These can be large or small, formal or informal (such as with a quick Survey Monkey). By collecting this data, you will be gathering qualitative data to support your business plan. This is measurable over time and can link directly to business results.



## **Apathy/Learn**

To overcome apathy, 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?"

Your *Locally Relevant Business Case* should focus on five key areas; Consumers, Customers, Talent, Engagement and Innovation.

AREA	DESCRIPTION	MEASUREMENT
Consumers	What % of our end purchases are made by women?	Revenue
Customers	What % of our buyers/clients are women?	Number of customers with women as purchasing agents
Talent	What % of our talent is female by role and function? Where are the biggest gaps?	Employee population by role and function
Engagement	What is the engagement level of women in our organization?	Formal engagement scores
Innovation	What is the % of diversity on our teams?	Representation of teams responsible for innovation

By gathering as much possible data as you can, you will begin to obtain quantitative measures and be able to set appropriate goals to track and measure. Tracking and measurement are critical to driving accountability.



## Accountability / Lead

Having developed qualitative and quantitative goals, you can begin to hold people accountable for results. While initially this may seem daunting, remember one of *Our Guiding Principles: You Can Only Control What You Can Control*. This means demonstrating leadership within your area of influence in the company.

Armed with metrics, it is now necessary to demonstrate visible, vocal leadership. What vision and norms do people see in your behavior? What is the gender balance of your team? Is each member of your team fully committed to 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 you and your actions supporting the targets being measured?

Answering these questions will help you to demonstrate *leadership* by holding people accountable.



## Fear / Have the Will to Change

Though we do not talk about it, many men are simply afraid to do this work. The tenets of male cultural norms have been instilled in men since a young age. Some of these norms include: Doing this work will show weakness or loss of power; doing this work is somehow women's work and by choosing to be an advocate, their very manhood is being called into question; a belief that this is a lose/loss, (i.e. if I am advocating for women, won't men be left behind?).

Finally, many men are simply afraid they will say or do the wrong thing. Is it okay to hug a female colleague? Hold the door open? Compliment her on what she is wearing? In a #MeToo age, many men find it easier to just opt-out and choose to do nothing. This is why men must choose to be advocates and doing so requires *Having the Will*.

**Having the Will comes from one of two areas: believing in the business case or having a personal connection.** Progressive leaders realize that women are an integral part of the future. We can't solve our business issues with only 50 percent of the talent pool working toward solutions. They put in place qualitative and quantitative measures, and they hold people accountable.

Other leaders are engaged in advocating for women because they have a personal connection through a working mother, spouse or daughter. They are aware of the issues and the need for men to be engaged allies and advocates to make change happen. They make a simple connection: "*If I'm not doing this work to support women today, what will be the impact on the women in my life in the future?*"

Identifying these four barriers and applying the four solutions will be the focus of this program.

### Questions

1. Which of the barriers do you see as most present in your work situation?
2. Which of these barriers provides you the greatest challenge?
3. What is one barrier you can start to address within your span of control?



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