



Women, Work and Gender-Equity in today's corporate world

Leaders need to uncover and capitalize on the inherent strengths of women rather than encouraging them to imbibe qualities associated with male counterparts.

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The narrative of a woman being the reason behind a man's success has been hardwired in our minds, it's time now that women take pride in their own success rather than being in the shadow. It is high time we acknowledge that a woman can very much be the reason behind her own success rather than being only a backstage performer.

Breaking the Glass Ceiling

The representation of women in top leadership positions globally has risen to 29%, however the proportion differs on roles; 43% of HR Directors are women, whereas only 17% - 18% hold senior positions in Sales and IT. Taking cues from success stories of women leaders across sectors, organizations should be committed to providing an enabling environment for hiring and nurturing women for diverse positions.

Our organization has seen success in women sales team members, who have climbed up the ladder from the frontline to leadership roles. We have created platforms like "Women Achiever's in Sales", which appreciates women who excel and motivate other women, who aspire to take up sales careers.

As CXOs, we need to create an environment, where women employees do not feel left out and equally footed with their male counterparts. It is essential for women, who are inclined towards coveted careers branded as male bastion, to seek out fresher avenues than the ones that society and patriarchy have imposed on them for so long.

Women leaders across the globe have proven that gender does not inhibit one's growth and that giving equal opportunity is not only an ethical obligation, but have achieved verified business results.

Managing Conflicting Priorities

For working women managing conflicting priorities is the key, be it women working in the farms or in a corporate set up. One of the myths and perception is that ambitious and career-oriented women compromise on their family lives. On the contrary, in my opinion, our outside-in experience helps us relate better with our family and bring an informed perspective to the table. We are respected for our success and are considered important decisions partners, which has a very positive impact on the family.

Hence, it is important for us to take pride in our achievements, and being in an influential position, we need to speak openly about the practical trials and tribulations that have got us

here. Often the younger women feel inspired by the way I balance my work and family life, to which I tell them that we unnecessarily go through a lot of guilt, for not being there at times for our families and the important part is to manage this guilt. My daughters once told me that they are able to share a lot with me as compared to some of their friends do with their Moms; I could comprehend their perspective much better. Maybe because I interact with a lot of people across age groups because of my work. That was such an elating experience. We have created an informal forum of women in our organization, where such experiences are shared and as friends and colleagues, we learn and motivate each other.

Creating Ecosystem

We must turn our attention to issues that make a real difference to women. A break in the career, for instance, can be a major concern for working women. It is high time that we create an ecosystem that supports our women employees through their critical life stages, like marriage or motherhood.

Steps like 6 months maternity leave is very enabling, but if we can move to sabbaticals linked to maternity. Providing creche facility at workplace, flexi timings, comeback scheme etc. will all go a long way in enabling young mothers and women in general, in avoiding a break in their careers. While these are steps to enable women; a conducive ecosystem for women will only be created, when men will also be encouraged by organizations to take up their paternal responsibilities and consider reforming their Paternity Leave policies.

Need for Financial Independence

Indian women are oriented towards delegating their financial planning decisions to the male members of the family. What is surprising is that even in working women only 23 % take financial planning decisions themselves.

Today's woman is independent and should be capable of taking her own decisions, financial or otherwise, primarily because their needs differ from men. Financial stability would also ensure greater proactive acceptance within the family. It is time that we instill confidence in them to take their own investment decisions for their own retirement, health and future planning and not leave it to chance.

As a women CXO in financial services, my priority initiative is to do financial planning workshops for women to enable them to take informed decisions impacting their careers and personal lives.

Leaders need to uncover and capitalize on the inherent strengths of women rather than encouraging them to imbibe qualities associated with male counterparts. Research has proven that a diverse workforce is a secret to an organization's success.

As CXO's if we are able to harness the diversity and create an unbiased eco-system, women will find their success path and flourish in their career aspirations.

The author is Chief Distribution Officer of Canara HSBC Oriental Bank of Commerce Life Insurance. Views are personal.