

Can A Woman Run An Enterprise As Successfully As A Man?

Business leaders all over the globe would widely agree that we operate in a VUCA world where volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity are commonplace. The challenge for leaders, therefore, is to make quick decisions and respond swiftly to change and demands in an arena that is increasingly challenging and competitive. However, amidst all that uncertainty and ambiguity, another critical leadership issue has risen to the surface: the majority of leaders within senior positions continues to be men, while women, however, are still struggling to achieve representation at just about every other level within business, let alone the senior level. This, of course, raises a fundamental question: can women run enterprise firms as successfully as men?

The direct and simple answer is: yes. Women have made progress in leadership. In fact, 2016 not only “almost” saw the first woman elected president of the United States of America, arguably the most powerful public office on Earth, but importantly - too, and here at home - it also saw Theresa May become the second woman Prime Minister in the United Kingdom, 21 years after Margaret Thatcher bore the same title. But, Clinton, Thatcher or May are not the only members of this exclusive, and elusive for many, club of women leaders. The chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, the Head of the IMF, Christine Lagarde and the chair of the US Federal Reserve, Janet Yellen, are all women. As are the CEOs of General Motors (Mary T. Barra), IBM (Ginni Rometty), and Lockheed Martin (Marilyn Hewson), among others. And yet, strangely, the question still remains: why does the glass ceiling still exist?

Be Bold For Change

Unfortunately, the jury is still out on that one. Despite the myriad of studies showing that companies perform better when there is at least one female executive on the board (they deal more effectively with risk, do better at addressing concerns of internal

and external stakeholders and have stronger focus on long-term priorities; according to the experts), the truth of the matter is, “promotion rates for women lag behind those of men, and the disparity is the largest at the first step up to manager. As a result, far fewer women end up on the path to leadership (McKinsey&Co. & Lean In, 2016)”.

So, can a woman run an enterprise as successfully as a man? Of course. However, the question really should be “can a woman run an enterprise as successfully, without having to act like a man to get things done?” With that subtle change to the question, what would that look like?

This year's theme for International Woman's day 2017 was #Beboldforchange. The day typically celebrates the many achievements by women around the globe: cultural, social, economic or political. And sure, there's no doubt that women need to be bold if they want change in their professional life, but they

need that boldness to state what they want, what they need and what they deserve. But, it does bring forth the question, how is this boldness actually manifested? Are women trying to assert themselves as leaders by mirroring male behaviours; or are they, on the other hand, comfortable enough to embody the feminine aspects of themselves?

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Embracing Femininity

Whilst this International Woman's day most certainly highlights and celebrates the progress women have made, there is still some way to go for women to be equally represented in the boardroom. This is where access to training and leadership development for women within enterprise becomes crucial in changing attitudes and standards in organisations. One powerful method to achieve this change is through mythodramatic training, which is a technique that has gained popularity over the past few years. This is because it encourages participants to evaluate traditional stories, from Greek Mythology to Shakespeare, and “act in” the desired behaviours and attributes and learn about themselves and their organisations so that they can grow and improve.

Demeter And Persephone

One such powerful story that is used to train women to take control of their feminine selves is that of the Greek Myth of Demeter and Persephone. The myth goes like this: Persephone is abducted by Hades (with her father's, Zeus, consent) and taken to the underworld. Her mother, Demeter, goddess of Agriculture, must use her skills, wit and resources to rescue her, which she does. Although, Persephone will still have to go back to the underworld for a period of time every year. The outcome of this story represents the creation of the seasons and the reason they change; from Spring (Demeter gets Persephone back) to Winter (when Persephone must return to Hades).

By way of illustration, through Demeter and Persephone, women are encouraged to explore the different cycles they go through in their lives, from Maiden to Mother to Crone and the inner transformations through those stages.

The myth also addresses one of the biggest challenges, if not the biggest, for women: how can they maximise their potential and be effective in a patriarchal world that is not always open to incorporating women? More importantly, how can women not only survive but thrive in a masculine world without losing or compromising their essence?

The True Self

Today there is a tendency to confuse strength and power with learned behaviours that women have historically had to inhabit and often overplay. In doing so, women have created a gap between their “true self”, who they really are; and their “adapted self”, who they need to be to fit in.

Therefore, empowering women to reclaim their powerful feminine aspects has nothing to do with being weak, ineffective or “fluffy”. There’s a lot of value for the business world in feminine energy, the “the right brain” approach: humanistic, emotionally intelligent, intuitive. And even more in finding a balance with the masculine: scientific, rational, fact based “left brain” approach.

Conclusion

Although there are many successful female leaders out there, women do still have a long

way to go before breaking the glass ceiling; however, with the right training, support and encouragement we can not only help women

break their own personal glass ceilings and embrace their feminine power, but also those restricting their professional growth.



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