



NURTURING FEMALE TALENT

Do females need nurturing any more than their male counterparts? Are in fact, young men more in need of special attention?

Studies have shown that young males feel insecure about their roles in society and their future in the workplace. Many are putting their careers on hold to stay at home and in the past five years the number of so called 'house husbands' has risen from 44,000 to 99,000 (Source: The Office of National Statistics) and is in fact a subliminal role reversal actually happening with women having centre field with umpire laws to protect and develop them.

Women in the current UK workplace

The truth is however, that females are still not getting a fair deal in the workplace.

Whilst they are securing executive and managerial positions they are often not being paid at the same level as a male counterpart, for example, female managers still earn on average £30,000 less than men in the same jobs.

Though the gender wage gap is negligible in other European countries, if you are female you're better off in France, Germany or even Portugal.

In Britain a female working full-time earns just 82% of her male colleague's salary. (For a part-time female worker this sinks to 60%). The pay gap costs a woman with average qualifications about £250,000 during her lifetime.

What is perhaps more worrying is that women are also still not advancing to top board level positions as they should.

A recent report, undertaken jointly by the Industrial Society and the Fawcett Society and initiated by Harriet Harman, found that women account for:-

- 5% of all directors of the UK's FTSE-100 companies
- 45% FTSE-100 companies still have exclusively male boards.
- Only 10 female executive directors were found in all.

The question is why are women not coming forward for the top board positions? Possibly due to exceptionally long hours and their commitment and dedication has to be visible and total. Many do not get the chance to look around for advancement.

The job market is highly competitive and studies have shown that young male managers are

more proactive in promoting themselves, often networking at a higher level than female managers do.

The adage of who you know rather than what you know rings true, particularly at board level, where old boy networks are still prevalent. Head-hunting firms report difficulties in finding suitable women directors, this lower level of networking by women may be an important factor.

A key criterion for board appointments is corporate experience at board level but how can women provide this if they cannot get that first appointment?

Those who do get appointed often have other credentials, such as a title (Baroness, Dame, Lady and Dr.) and a few women appear in the FTSE Female Index with remarkable frequency. Dame Stella Rimington holds non-executive positions on a number of boards, including Marks & Spencer and BG Group (part of British Gas), while Baronesses' Hogg and Dunn appear more than once.

Change needs to be encouraged

More women will become board directors; it is just taking longer for it to happen than many had hoped.

These women will act as symbols of the organizational culture for women lower down the ladder. Women managers will be encouraged to stay if they see that ladder extending to the top for those with the right ability, regardless of gender.

In this way the US is a model to us in the UK – of the fortune 500 companies 84% now have women on their boards but this trend has now slowed and women are still not given the power that they deserve

As in the UK, women in the US have pointed to the fact that they lacked corporate and general management experience.

It is interesting to note that 72% of companies in the top half of the FTSE-100 have female directors, compared with only 44% of companies in the lower half. Does the presence of women on the board foster growth and profitability, or is it that when companies reach a certain size they can afford to take risks and make diverse appointments?

More women are attending university but are they studying the right subject? There are very few females working in the IT and engineering industries and it is often from these areas that the top earners and managers evolve.

So what can be done if you are an Employer?

Have a mentor programme -

- Take an ongoing interest in your female staff advancement.
- Provide them with the right development opportunities at the right time.
- Acceptance of gender as a business issue
- Build a flexible workplace
- Help women understand the importance of networks
- Examine the role of structured leadership training and executive coaching.
- Note the importance of building cultural awareness

- Challenge traditional perceptions and go beyond the *status quo* in the job of the employer.
- Cultivate an entire corporate culture Surrounding women in the workplace which features a flexible working environment.
- Increase focus on feedback and aligning business strategies with employees' personal values.
- Create a supportive environment in which women share experiences and practice skills either through group or individual mentoring, coaching or networking.