

The High-heeled Leader's

TOP TEN TIPS FOR

Sustainable Gender Diversity in Business

Number One – Know Your Values

For any culture change or policies to be sustainable, they need to be lead from the top of an organization. That person should be fully aware of their values in business, the values by which they run the company and able to step completely into those values, ensuring they live them everyday. It only once values are openly shared can any culture change begin and have a chance of success. The organization will take their lead from the person at the top.

Number Two – Open Communication

One of the biggest mistakes organizations make is deciding on culture and policy change behind closed doors and forgetting to communicate that message to everyone else! This can create gossip around the coffee machine as people don't know what is going on, and what they don't know you can guarantee will be made up. Be clear on what you want to achieve and by when and ensure open and clear communication. Even when things go wrong, don't wait for employees to fill in the gaps of what they don't know, make sure you take people on the journey with you and share successes *and* challenges.

Number Three – Shared Ownership

When people feel fully part of any journey of change, they are more committed to that journey's success and smooth path. What can create conflict and resentment more quickly than anything is when people feel 'done to' by the organization for which they work. By that I mean they are 'told' of new policies and changes without being part of that change process. People can feel they haven't been trusted enough to be asked for their input and opinion, and that they don't really matter. If employees are included at every step of the journey, they will own that journey and work together to ensure it's successful completion.

Number Four – Respectful Collaboration

By that I mean an organization should resist the temptation to collaborate with only the women within that organization. That leads to a disrespect of the men who work there and will only lead to alienation and resentment rather than collaborative team work. So, an organization starting any kind of culture and policy change must ensure they include a cross section of employees in the planning and implementation stages: both genders; different business streams; fee earning and non fee earning; senior to junior management levels; non-management levels. It is only once every representation of an organization is involved can culture change to truly respectful and collaborative. An organization needs to view change from the angle of everyone they employ, not a small sample.

Number Five – Robust Policies

Once full collaboration, shared ownership and open communication have been firmly established, the next phase is to ensure any new policies, procedures and guidelines are robust and able to stand up to scrutiny. This is not the time to be shy of strength and commitment to change. The new policies are the foundation of sustainable change, and need careful thought to include active and ongoing measurement (see next Tip), the ability to withstand external examination, and are as 'evergreen' as they can be, but not so entrenched that the ability for flexibility and movement are removed.

Number Six – Clear Measurement

So, you have all other tips covered, and your robust policies have been established and communicated. How are you going to know the level of success and impact of change? This is where clear measurement comes in. It is crucial that measurement is included in the planning stage to ensure this is as strong as the policies themselves. Ensure you have short, medium and long term goal posts clearly identified and the measurement indicators for each stage captured and communicated. If you can establish this strategy at the beginning you will be aware of any potential challenges or glitches and be able to deal with them swiftly and immediately, thus securing the positive impact of change for the future of the organization.

Number Seven – Solid Accountability

The responsibility of gender diversity does not sit solely within HR/Learning and Development. It is the responsibility of everyone employed and everyone must be kept accountable for the implementation of policies and the success of culture change. Without accountability firmly established, and followed through, any change remains simply a 'nice to do' not a robust shift in the business. The implementation of policy and culture change should be included in all Appraisal Systems, with clear penalties for lack of absorption of these changes. If this does not happen and there is no consequence if changes are not embraced, respect will be lost internally and any future change will be virtually impossible to consider.

Number Eight – High Profile Role Models

For people within your organisation to be inspired, they need good, solid and high profile role models. If people have nothing and no-one to aspire to, the drive to grow is diminished. The role models you choose to promote your culture change should show all the excellent traits of powerful leaders. They don't necessarily have to be in senior management positions within the organization, but they do need to be well thought of and respected by everyone, both internally and externally. They will be people who are trusted and have the confidence of the organization and everyone they interact with. And, as we are talking about gender diversity, be women! The role models you work with must be willing to be vocal and active with their commitment to making change and supporting those women coming up behind them, as well as able to promote the organization to an external audience. Find them, work with them and promote them, these women will do more for your gender diversity agenda than anyone else.

Number Nine – An Influential Champion

So, a champion is the same as a role model? No. These are very different sets of people. Role models are women who have already achieved the senior status within the organization and as such are the inspiration for other women. A Champion is one person, very senior, who will be the motivating force behind any culture change. This person needs to be a man. This may sound counterintuitive, but the person championing any culture change within an organization should be the opposite to the change. For example: Disability needs to an able bodied champion, sexual orientation needs a heterosexual champion, etc. The culture change will have far more power and impact if this is the case. People within the organization need to see that the change is for positive impact for everyone and that any such shifts in culture are not only because it is the right thing to do on a human level, but that it is also the right thing to do on a business level.

Number Ten – A Global Vision

This brings the gender diversity sustainable culture change full circle and back to knowing your values. The organizations that look at the short term, 'good thing to do' agenda are the organizations that will have a surface only and vulnerable culture change. It the organizations that take a bigger, global view of where they want to be and to ensure that gender diversity culture change is so embedded in the DNA of the organization, that nothing will derail or threaten it, is the organization that creates the sustainable and robust change. Thereby ensuring its long term health and reputation. So, look at the bigger picture. Ask yourself: Where do you see the organization in 3 years time; 5 years time; 10 years time; 20 years time. What legacy are you leaving that will live on a long time after you have left? This takes you to the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – Self Actualization and Fulfilment.