



COMPASS GROUP Manager CHAT

Seeing Women and Men through a New Lens

Management Reinforcement Article

"...an employee community consisting of talented men and women representing many backgrounds, cultures and social perspectives clearly is best equipped to anticipate and meet the needs and expectations of an increasingly diverse customer base."

Cigna CEO Edward Hanway

Women are taking on important roles in business and are slowly making advances into the management ranks, even in traditionally male industries. Managers working with women as direct reports, peers, staff members, and bosses need to better understand gender communication differences so they can lead most effectively. In particular it is valuable for managers to learn about their own communication styles as well as differences among the men and women employees they manage impact success.

This article will highlight:

- Some of the advantages of women in business
- What holds women back from using their skills and strengths
- Why coaching and mentoring is important
- What managers can do to better lead, follow, support, and guide all associates most effectively.

The purpose of this Manager CHAT is to increase awareness of the important role of women in business, to encourage men and women to view each other through a new lens, and ultimately to develop and retain women in the workforce.

Advantage of Women in Business

Compass is committed to retaining good talent and developing both women and men as leaders and managers. Research reports show that the best run companies *by far* have a diverse mix of employees, *many* of whom are women. Without supportive corporate environments, however, more and more women leave corporations to start their own businesses and/or find work that is more meaningful.

Today more than ever before companies are seeing the payoff of maximizing the unique strengths of women as employees, managers, and leaders. Some of women's essential skills in business include the ability to:



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- Include and work effectively with diverse employees
- Multi-task
- Build teams
- Engage others in decision making
- Empower, teach and develop others
- Communicate, ask questions and listen to various points of view
- Support, nurture and encourage others
- Navigate change and ambiguity effectively
- Demonstrate compassion and caring

It is important for progressive companies recognize the unique skills women provide and look for ways to retain and develop them as emerging leaders.

What Holds Women Back?

Since women offer unique talents and skills, one might ask, “What holds women back?” or “What gets in the way of realizing women’s potential?” Two of the factors that top businesswomen say impact their success are:

Stereotypes and Bias

Men and women both hold unconscious biases about each other and women’s value is routinely underestimated and underutilized in organizations. Research reports suggest strong evidence that men hold false perceptions about women’s contributions, their willingness to travel, the impact of children, etc. For example in business, marriage is often seen as an asset for men and liability for women. These perceptions may result in women being overlooked for promotions or management roles even if she has exceptionally strong credentials.

Stereotypes are also formed about the way woman communicate. Interestingly, when women use communication patterns traditionally used by men they are often criticized as being too aggressive, directive or tough. Yet, when women act in ways that are consistent with women stereotypes —focusing “on work relationships” and expressing “concern for other people’s perspectives” — they may be considered less competent. What’s a woman to do? It is confusing for women to receive mixed messages about how to communicate and act.

Few Role Models

While role models for women are limited, the role models that matter most come earlier in life for women—at school or in the family. In fact, many successful businesswomen state that a supportive father was the greatest factor to their business advancement. The most



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“women-friendly” organizations look for ways to showcase woman as role models and offering women’s initiatives to help women, especially emerging women, learn from other women.

Why Coaching and Mentoring is Desirable

Managers and supervisors make the most difference in retaining women employees. Effective coaching is linked to women’s professional success and personal fulfillment at work. Women who are fulfilled stay with companies longer, offer more ideas, and improve bottom line corporate performance. However, many companies fail to give adequate training to managers in how to manage and coach a diverse workforce including women.

Managers and supervisors, who are effective mentors and coaches, serve as a resource to women and can help them navigate in a male dominated environment. In fact, the women who stay with their companies are more likely to have managers and supervisors who:

- Provide regular and specific feedback about work performance and communication practices.
- Help them learn how to prepare for and behave in various work settings.
- Explain and interpret organizational politics (52% vs. 24% who intend to leave)
- Tell women how they are perceived by others.
- Map out clear developmental goals for their direct reports (46% vs. 17% who intend to leave).

Communication Differences

As you read the following principles, keep in mind that there are “exceptions to every rule.” These ideas highlighted here are communication practices between men and women that are well documented. Identifying these differences should help you understand the challenges that both men and women face when they communicate with each other. Each can be looked at as advantage or an opportunity.

First it is important to understand that women and men have different communication goals. Men often talk to create or maintain power and status; while women talk to build and nurture relational connections. When our goals are different, we may seem that we are communicating with at cross purposes. By looking through the LENS highlighted in the associate CHAT, you will better understand reasons for our differences.

In conversations, woman often:

- Ask more questions than men
- Use more direct eye contact to build a relationship
- Communicate more cooperatively - Nod there heads and smile more frequently than men; avoid direct confrontation and disagreement



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- Use verbal qualifiers, hedges and tag questions such as: “I may be wrong, but...” “That’s a good idea, don’t you think?” “I’m not sure of how I feel, but...”

When women communicate to build relationships, their patterns may communicate an unintended or a different message to men than expected. Without understanding the goal, men may think that women:

- Lack initiative and leadership potential
- Are overly concerned with being liked and accepted
- Avoid confrontations or speaking up
- Who do speak up are aggressive rather than assertive
- Too sensitive to criticism and slights

In conversations, men often:

- Offer solutions before showing empathy
- Use less eye contact
- Communicate more competitively
- Listen to the content of the verbal message

Women often misinterpret men’s intent. For example, women get frustrated when men offer solutions before asking questions or gaining understanding. Women may not understand that offering solutions is a man’s way of helping and/or fixing the problem. Women want more feedback and encouragement and may interpret men who provide little or no feedback as being bored, uninterested or dense. When a man’s lack of responsiveness is interpreted as not understanding, women repeat themselves or give more detail. Many men get frustrated with the detail and may experience the women as talking too much or “down” to them.

What Can Managers and Supervisors Do?

Men and women can both have trouble understanding other people’s points of view. Before beginning to working to change how you communicate, consider your own communication habits and practices. Then, try putting yourself in your employee’s shoes, think about communication differences between men and women, consider how to.

- Leverage the best of both male and female communication styles to benefit everyone.
- Embrace differences between gender communication styles to help foster/support the acceptance of more creative, innovative ideas.
- Take the gender-difference in communication styles less personally and remind themselves of the differing LENS.

In **coaching women** to communicate with men, consider offering these tips:



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- Understand that men communicate to share information, not to establish relationships. This means a conversation with a man might not always be as satisfying as a conversation with another woman.
- Don't be frustrated when a man's not as interested in chatting as you are. Men tend to speak about the task at hand with fewer words than women.
- Think of interruptions and disagreements as some men's way of asking questions. Remember for most men a sporting fight is how they bring out the best in each other. Men are usually good friends after "the game."
- Try to talk less. Most men are bottom-line oriented and will be better listeners if you get to the point quicker.
- Be more direct in your communication. Men lose interest when you take a circuitous route to the point of your story.
- If you want support rather than answers, say so up front. Tell him if you want solutions or just a sympathetic ear.
- Put your communications in a linear format (very organized), male communicators may better appreciate/understand.
- Focus on only one or two factors that would be most relevant to the situation.
- Embrace the devil's advocacy kind of male communication. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are shutting down your idea. It may be their way of supporting you to make the idea bullet proof. Ask for collaboration or "angel's advocate" if you want to build on the idea.

In **coaching men** to communicate with women, consider these tips:

- Realize that women communicate to establish relationships, so they might be chattier and more personal in their conversation.
- Understand that not every question from a woman is a problem begging for a solution. Listen first and be certain she's asked for your help before you jump in with help because sometimes, she just wants to blow off steam.
- Listen, listen, listen.
- Move beyond two-word answers, especially on the phone.
- Since these women are more relationship based, they really value a sincere, direct communication particularly when they are the victims of a difficult management decision (For example, in the case of schedule change, express apology.)
- Find ways at times to be more an 'angel's advocate' rather than 'devil's advocate' to affirm what is valuable and build on the idea and then let them know you want to play 'devil's advocate' to bullet-proof the idea.
- Allow women to communicate problems to consider prior to taking action. This allows them to act on preventing other fires as well as fighting fires

What can organizations and leaders do?



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Research reports show that successful companies are the ones who actively seek to identify the gender barriers. By nurturing the best talent, the investment of hiring and developing them will be realized.

1. **Understand the business imperative/advantage to recruit and retain talented women and men.** Companies need to be able to look two to five years down the line and understand the implications of not developing women as managers and leaders. Make sure that your brightest and best women are not discouraged.
2. **Understand that men and women communicate and listen differently.** *Women are listened to less carefully than men.* Numerous studies suggest that listeners remember more information when they listen to men. It is frustrating when women attend meetings and are not heard. For example:

Eliza wanted to be the first woman to become a supervisor in her department. She had the credentials, experience, and motivation to succeed. However, Eliza was frustrated. Meeting after meeting she came fully prepared and offered suggestions. However, in almost every meeting a few minutes after Eliza gave an idea, a male colleague, would propose it again and the group would give him credit. It was as if Eliza hadn't spoken – no one acknowledged her input.

You may ask, "Why?" Some of the differences can be attributed to women using softer and/or higher pitched voices and less direct communication (e.g., "Don't you think . . . ; You may not agree, but . . . ; or I know this may sound crazy . . .). Fortunately, with awareness and effort these obstacles can be overcome.

3. **Encourage women to speak up and express themselves in the moment.** Based on experience, women often experience leaders as not listening and when they do speak may not feel "heard." Women have much to offer and need to be encouraged to offer their ideas and points of view more regularly. Women need training on how to recognize issues of disagreement, take positions on controversial issues, back up claims with evidence, and refute positions opposing their own viewpoints.

Summary

Just because men and women generally communicate differently, doesn't mean that they can't make and maintain powerful connections with one another. In fact, many times male and/or female colleagues can help you think about situations and events in a different way. Rather than getting frustrated with each other's differences, try to embrace each other's different opinions,



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conversation styles and approaches. Through education, understanding, and practice you will improve your communication skills, which will allow relationships to evolve to a higher level.

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