



SOPHIA ASSOCIATES

Awakening Leadership Within

Equality, Not Sameness: Measuring Women's Leadership

"As a concept equality suffers from a mathematical fallacy that is, the view that only things that are the same can ever be equal."

~ Christine Littleton, Professor of Law at UCLA

Catalyst, the women's research organization published their report on Women CEO's of Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 companies and found twelve female CEO's in Fortune 500 and fourteen in Fortune 1000. That is dismal to say the least.

I believe that we as women are attached to a standard of measurement that is culturally ingrained and based on traditional and male values. We can't succeed against this standard because, well, we are women not men.

Inherent in this standard is the concept of equality as sameness. Without being the same there is no being equal. That is a fundamental and hidden principle that keeps women from bringing their whole, authentic selves to engage fully in life and work. It is the cause of much struggle for women.

We are not the same. We are also no worse nor better. We are different and bring a wealth of qualities and traits to leverage on behalf of our organizations and communities. This is not a polarized view. Our approach to leadership and power, both for men and women, needs to be inclusive and accepting of the differences we bring to bear on leadership.

In the book "Standing at the Crossroads: Next Steps for High-Achieving Women" the authors Ruderman and Ohlott from the Center for Creative Leadership, studied women's leadership and name five key themes that are essential to the leadership development of women.

Authenticity: The authors define authenticity as the desire to have a healthy alignment between inner values and outer behaviors. Women thrive when they are able to produce work that demonstrates and taps their values. It is notable that women comprise 43 percent of non-profit board members according to a Board Source survey¹. Women serve most often on the boards of smaller arts and cultural, health, human services, environmental, and educational organizations. The nonprofit sector has proven to be an effective vehicle for women to leverage power and influence political and social issues.

Connections: The authors define connections as a fundamental need to be close to others. Most women I know value the relationships they have, personally and professionally, and are constantly seeking ways of broadening their alliances and network and helping one another. Women tend to have enhanced relational skills and higher levels of emotional intelligence. These are critical assets to women in positions of

¹ BoardSource 2007, *Nonprofit Governance Index 2007*

leadership where relational skills supersede the technical skills as a determining factor for success.

Living Agentically: This represents the drive to have control over one's life. More women leave organizations because they are not being promoted, not being given positions in key strategic areas and because they are not able to get the support they need to combine a successful career with family life. Life experience is a developmental aspect of leadership and women will look for companies that value the whole person. In particular the new generation of women are moving to companies that challenge and reward them and understand their value around an integrated life.

Wholeness: This represents the desire to unite different roles into an integrated whole. So much is written on life/work balance, which I personally feel is unattainable. Women are looking to contribute without giving up the rest of their lives. To feel successful, women seek to integrate the many aspects of their lives as harmoniously as possible. In particular women who have families may struggle in organizations that do not support the role of women as caretakers as they move through their career.

Self-Clarity: Understanding one's own motives, behaviors and values in the context of today's world is important to women. I hear many women talk about how they can fit better into today's business environment and explore how they can leverage their skills and education and life experience. Women will be reflective about their values and how to bring them into their work experience.

We are now familiar with the Dalai Lama's statement, "The world will be saved by the western woman," delivered during the [Vancouver Peace Summit 2009](#). He later added, "Some people may call me a feminist...But we need more effort to promote basic human values -- human compassion, human affection. And in that respect, females have more sensitivity for others' pain and suffering." There is recognition of increasing political power of western women to influence global issues through the leveraging of what has before been seen as our liabilities.

For a long time women have been striving to make an impact on the world, often by conforming or imitating aspects of the male-dominated business culture that do not align with the best of what we have to offer. We can be more effective by tapping into our creativity and natural skills, not measured against what are traditionally accepted male skills but by valuing our authentic leadership style. Women, and men, would be better leaders by balancing the reflective and the active traits that define great leadership. These traits are not the same. But in an increasingly complex world, they are equal and necessary.

Equality as acceptance would affirm the equal validity of both women's and men's life experience, protecting and rewarding nurturance and community as well as self-reliance and autonomy in ways that enrich all of us. Our gender narrative has to be rewritten for the sake of both men and women, for the benefit of our collective communities.

There will come a day when women will no longer be measured against the male norm without the shadow of gender and its cultural implications. What internal process must occur within each of us that will allow for a shift in mindset for women and for the world at large? What can we now offer our daughters, and our sons, in the way of paving the road? Both men and women need to stop polarizing our attributes and invalidating our unique experiences and differences and bring the best of who we are to the game. We must engage life and work, relationships and results, similarities and differences holistically

and inclusively in order to thrive in this diverse and fluid world in which we find ourselves. We need a holistic approach to caring for our collective community and advancing women and diverse populations into parity of power, influence and resources that allow self-actualization. Shifts in organizations, societal values and the elimination of stereotypes and assumptions will finally bring us to equality by acceptance and better results than equality as sameness.

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