

Women vs. Men: The Difference Is in the Numbers

Why is the distinction between men and women in the workplace made? Why not a distinction between tall and short people? Or big-footed versus small-footed people? Most simply put, the differences between men and women are hard wired—the manifestations of which are visible any day of the week at every workplace.

What are the some of the key differences (generalities, of course)?

- Women are highly community-oriented--teamwork is second nature.
- The female view of situations tends to be more holistic that of their male counterparts.
- Relationships and rapport are of paramount importance to women; perhaps even more than other critical attributes.

(It is essential to note that the aforementioned, as well as the following statements, are written with no judgment attached to them. They are merely behavior patterns that have been observed repeatedly over time and are now considered, for the purposes of discussion, factual.)

What can we learn from these composite traits?

One commonality, found at the crux of many women's conduct, is an avoidance of measurement. The struggle is that people place the highest value on those things that can be counted. Consider this list of workplace actions:

- The analysis of growth of sales dollars brought in by your company during Q3.
- The determination of monthly increase in output by your shop floor.
- The estimation of a decrease in annual operating costs.

Translation: Head of Sales, VP of Operations and CFO.

Other activities conducted in organizations include:

- The calculation of frontline employee morale each quarter.
- The establishment of an ROI on the new TV and radio ads that are being run monthly.
- The analysis of communication effectiveness between departments each day.

Translation: Director of HR, Head of Marketing, and some undetermined, cross-functional area.

Associations can be easily drawn. The first list of activities and positions is most often associated with males. The second list, with its correlating positions, is generally aligned with females. Looking deeper, it is worth remarking that the first set of tasks is all easily quantifiable. Everyone knows how many dollars are being brought in or the current level of output. Yet, how easy is it to calculate morale or conduct an accurate ROI on a marketing campaign?

The truth is undeniable—women gravitate to those roles that are not straightforwardly quantified. Consequently, these same women are easily dismissed because their worth cannot easily be determined.

The answer for women: strive for chronic accountability, for incessant quantification. Stand up and be counted. You will never be valued at your full worth until you do.

Susan Lesser, a Partner at nPlusOne Consulting (formerly the Susan Lesser Group) spends her days (and sometimes her nights) surrounded by numbers. She improves her clients' financial results by increasing their employees' performance through a process that quantifies leadership, measures communication and analyzes teamwork.