

Ready for Hillary or not – let's fill the next leadership opening with the most qualified male or female, ok?

After being part of Corp America for over 26 years, I'd like to offer some words of wisdom to my younger self and retired past bosses regarding what could be seen as gender bias in leadership roles. As I look back, there were examples of gender bias that I considered part of the job but now wish I would have managed both my boss and myself differently.

Why the need to share? I recently read an article on CNNMoney, <http://money.cnn.com/2015/03/24/investing/female-ceo-pipeline-leadership/> about the gender gap in corporate leadership roles today and it alarmed me. According to the article, there are only 14% of females in the C-Suite and only 5% in CEO roles of all the S&P 500 companies.

Furthermore, there are only 17% of females having seats on Fortune 500 boards. I propose that if more companies had more females in the boardroom and on the executive team, the company would improve their bottom-line and overall business performance.

Why do I have this point of view? In my opinion, women tend to possess certain leadership traits that would greatly enhance executive teams and boards. I believe the valued leadership traits that are traditionally stronger in women include: Collaboration and Teambuilding; Developing, Inspiring and Motivating others; Championing Change; and Building Relationships.

Before I go any further, I am not suggesting quotas nor am I suggesting that we give a less qualified woman the job over a more qualified male. Quite the opposite as I'm suggesting that we fill the next leadership opening with the candidate who has the better track record and character, the candidate who is most qualified. In addition, the candidate selection process is void of as much media, societal and / or traditional biases as possible.

The following are *6 Pieces of Advice* to my younger self or past boss when it comes to navigating gender bias and cracking that ever present glass ceiling:

1. Past Boss: When we entertain clients, can it not be at Hooters? Yes, that might be where we have taken them for the past decade, but perhaps they want to go somewhere else. Have we ever asked them? It's hard to talk about the superior technical aspects of our products over our competitors when our server is wearing double D's.
2. Younger Self: When entertaining clients at Hooters, don't respond by hiding your femininity. You are the last person who needs to cover up anything.
3. Past Boss: When a crass joke is told at staff meetings, give your team permission not to laugh. If you feel there's discomfort in the room, perhaps it's not appropriate anymore.
4. Younger Self: When a crass joke is told at the staff meetings, you don't have to go out of your way to show you are a team player and that you were not offended.
5. Past Boss: When there's a "people project" and people need to know that they are valued by the company, I may not always be the obvious choice. What a growth opportunity for my male colleagues to work on empathizing and managing change.
6. Younger Self: Don't always take the "people project" because you think you are the only one who can appropriately nurture the people. Your male colleagues may surprise you.

If you find yourself as the hiring manager for the next leadership opening in your company, review the company values and if collaboration, teamwork, employee development are anywhere in the mix, consider interviewing a qualified female employee who may or may not have applied for the position. As a minimum, what can you lose? On the flip side, look at all the tangibles and intangibles that can be gained for you, your new team member, your team and your company.....winning.

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