

## Women in work – glass ceiling?

Dr Tony Miller



In the cutthroat business of selling one of the best phone sales agents I know is in the UK. In America one of the highest performing and highest earners in a very specialist industry is under 25 years of age. The best HR person I know in the GCC countries is in the Oil sector.

Who was the first Briton in space?

What have they all in common – they are all women.

In my own company (England) 50 per cent of the employees are women. In the UK the head of the country and the head of the Royal family are very successful women. Hard working, committed, loyal and with a great work ethic.

The largest Empire the world has ever seen was created by – a woman; Queen Victoria

It's so sad when you hear women being restricted by the "Glass ceiling" but is it really there? Regretfully it is; and companies who allow this practice to happen are the losers. Every body has potential and it should be the employer's duty to get the most out of their work force and support people who have the potential and commitment to work.

Best practice starts with correct recruitment procedures that are bias free; selection should always be made on criteria and the best person for the job not on whether some one is male or female. The exact procedure should be in place for assessment at Performance Appraisal, bias free evaluation. Its not about quotas – you don't have to have 50 present women and 50 per cent men, it about fairness and getting the right person for the job.

Most senior selections should be made using assessment centres, professionally run this is a very bias free way of selecting the best. It's also very transparent in that all the assessments are scored and are publically available to see. Promotions are made on ability and not on a bias opinion.

Cultural issues have in the past held women back and in some case made them feel inferior to men in the work place. As times have changed we can see new thinking changing some of the old beliefs and practices. This takes time but that's exactly how everything changes. The new skills for now are very much about the uses, application and development of technology –an area which is completely gender free – just look in Google ;one in four leaders are women.

### **Based on fact**

#### **Women experience a workplace skewed in favour of men.**

On average, women are promoted at a lower rate than men. The biggest gender gap is at the first step up to manager: entry-level women are 18 per cent less likely to be promoted than their male peers. This gender disparity has a dramatic effect on the pipeline as a whole. If entry-level women were promoted at the same rate as their male peers, the number of women at the senior vice president and C-suite levels would more than double. And the disparity in promotions is not for lack of desire to advance. Women are just as interested in being promoted as men, and they ask for promotions at comparable rates.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, women are less optimistic about their prospects. They are less likely than men to aspire to be a top executive. And even the women who aspire to be a top executive are significantly less likely to think they'll become one than men with the same aspiration.

## **The Middle East**

Women in the Middle East now outnumber men in universities but this isn't translating into jobs - curbing the benefits of the "demographic dividend" that fuels economic growth.

Almost all girls in the Middle East and North Africa now attend school, and more women than men go to university, according to the World Bank, but women's participation in the workforce stubbornly remains among the lowest in the world.

The demographic dividend refers to an acceleration of economic growth as the working-age population expands relative to the non-working-age. But without enough women, its impact will be muted in the Middle East, experts say.

"The demographic dividend is not going to be as good as in Asia," said Tiziana Leone, assistant professor in demography at the London School of Economics. "If they want the benefit of it then you need more gender parity."

Barely a quarter of women in the region are in employment, but with sharp variations. Rates of women's employment are lower in conflict-hit places such as Yemen, Gaza and Iraq compared to the GCC Countries and Iran.

### **What are the financial consequences of qualified women not being in work?**

The legal and social barriers hampering women's access to jobs and careers in the Middle East and North Africa is costing the region an estimated \$575 billion a year.

Although this is changing examples are needing a guardian to travel as in Saudi Arabia or laws requiring permission from husbands or fathers to work, common in Egypt, Jordan and Libya.

A recent survey of attitudes in the region, by the UN Women agency and Promundo found more than two thirds of respondents believed a woman's primary role should be caring for the household, while at least half the women surveyed also saw this as their most important duty.

### **So if you want a career what do you need to do?**

In simple terms you need to take action and be responsible you your career. There is a super quote from Helen Sharman Britons first astronaut "There are no boundaries"

The key to success is getting the right attitude and be very careful you get the right training, women don't specifically need separate training from men, but they do need training to build confidence and training that will give them competitive edge when it comes to the possibility of first management job.

The future is bright – but make the right choices

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