



Building inclusion globally

Leadership that Supports the Progression of Women

A Practical Guide

Introduction

Who is this guide for?

Welcome! This guide has been designed for Leaders and Managers in organisations that want to progress more women through their pipeline into senior roles. It outlines four key areas in which you can challenge your own perceptions and adapt your personal management style to be more inclusive in how you recognise and develop talent.

Our approach

We start with the assumption that nobody sets out to discriminate against women, or anyone else. We seek to raise awareness and invite you to be curious about how you could adapt your leadership approach. This applies whether you are male or female yourself.

In compiling this guide we have held up some male and female stereotypes, which you may or may not agree with. Notice your reaction to them. Ask yourself, which of the traits do you identify with personally? Which do you not? If it is unhelpful for you to think about this exclusively in terms of gender, you may want to think about it in terms of 'privileged' and 'non-privileged' groups, where the 'privileged' group includes those currently in leadership roles.

How to use the guide

As you work through the guide, keep an open mind. It is human nature to read through and notice the things **we are already doing well**. We may even silently congratulate ourselves for this. It takes more intention and deliberation to pick up on the things **we're not doing**, even if there's just one. That could be the one that makes the difference.

FOUR PRACTICAL TIPS

1. Challenge your thinking about what a leader looks like
2. Stop talking about 'lack of confidence'
3. Encourage and support self-promotion
4. Promote risk analysis and calculated risk-taking



1: Challenge your thinking about what a leader looks like

In your view, what are the traits of a great leader?

Chances are, the conscious mind will produce a politically-correct definition of which you are justly proud. Yet studies show that we unconsciously associate leadership with dominance, ambition, self-confidence and assertiveness, and these happen to be traits that are also often associated with men.

Consider these two styles...

Traditionally it is the agentic style that is more associated with effective leadership. This is possibly because a long history of men in leadership roles means that we find it hard to separate 'leader' associations from 'male' ones.

As a result, women find themselves in a **double bind**. If they are compassionate, kind and gentle they may be criticised for not fitting the leadership mould; if they are highly agentic, they are more likely than men to be judged for lacking communion. Either way women may give the impression they don't have the 'right stuff' for the powerful jobs. In short, there has traditionally been a natural resistance to women's leadership styles that has held them back.

And yet, there is a shift in thinking about leadership, with humility gaining ground as a leadership imperative. David Burnham's model for 21st Century leadership places interaction & collaboration ahead of 'command and tell' institutional styles; work by Susan Cain on the 'power of introversion' provides a compelling alternative to traditional views of effective leadership.

AGENTIC

(associated with assertion / control)

Dominant
Ambitious
Self-confident
Forceful
Self-reliant
Aggressive
Individualistic
Extroverted

COMMUNAL

(associated with compassionate treatment of others)

Helpful
Friendly
Kind
Sympathetic
Sensitive
Gentle
Introverted



1: Challenge your thinking about what a leader looks like

Practical Tips for Leadership Reflection and Action

- Take a fresh look at those considered to be ‘high-potential’ in your department or region. Do they fit any particular mould?
- If you perceive a woman as ‘aggressive’ or ‘pushy’ consider, would you have the same reaction to similar behaviour in a man?
- Notice your reaction to assertive women. How do you respond? What assumptions do you make?
- Watch Susan Cain’s TED Talk online ‘The Power of Introverts’



2: Stop talking about 'lack of confidence'

Perceptions of 'lack of confidence' can do significant damage to women, and also those in non-privileged groups, in the workplace. Beliefs about confidence (or not) are largely driven by observable behaviour:

'CONFIDENT'

- Expansive body language
- Lower vocal tone
- Tendency to speak early and often in a calm, relaxed manner
- No hesitation in the voice
- Succinct sentences

'LACKING CONFIDENCE'

- Hunched body language
- High pitched voice
- Apparent reluctance to speak up
- Flappable
- Hesitant
- Build out sentences with 'fluff'
- Apologetic vocabulary

A woman expresses being at a crossroads in her career and confides she is unsure what to do next. Her manager describes her as 'having a confidence crisis'. When we drill down on what the manager is picking up on, it turns out the woman hesitated as she spoke and did not make eye contact. The manager extrapolated out those momentary behaviours and diagnosed a confidence crisis!

When the behaviours above are expressed to a woman as a 'lack of confidence' it can be perceived as being part of a deeper personality flaw, rather than simply a behavioural trait.

Studies on over-confidence have shown that success correlates just as closely with confidence as with competence. People who are more confident in a group rise to the top – regardless of competence. They are more universally revered, valued and liked. This is not fake confidence – this is truly believing they are better. The problem is, they may not be better. Women who appear to lack confidence may feel just as secure in their competence as the next person – it's just that they may show it in different ways.



2: Stop talking about 'lack of confidence'

Practical Tips for Leadership Reflection and Action

- Don't talk about 'lack of confidence' – it is a subjective thing. Notice instead what is pointing you to that conclusion.
- Where appropriate, give feedback on behaviours – *“When you didn't speak up in the client meeting, it gave the impression you had nothing to contribute. How would you like to come across?”*. Be sensitive though to cultural styles and preferences.
- Coach women on how to turn their ideas into action. In relation to the scenario in the previous page, *“What options do you have with regards to your career? How could you find out more information?”*



3: Encourage and support self-promotion

Self-promotion is a strong driver for achieving progression & success, yet it is well documented that women are more reluctant to talk about themselves and their workplace successes than men. This is a blatant stereotype, so does it really affect women more than men?

- Studies using fMRI scans into amygdala activity in the brain show that women may form stronger emotional memories of negative events than men, meaning that women may be more likely than men to dwell on things that go wrong rather than things that go right.
- Those who have been raised in a culture where it is bad form to boast, or impolite to talk about oneself or one's achievements, may find it difficult to do that in the workplace.
- Finally, there is evidence that women find it harder to make the transition from a school environment where results are very measurable, to the workplace where merit and success are more subjective.

Pause for a moment and consider what is true for you. It doesn't matter if you are male or female. If you find it easy to articulate and share your achievements, or consider it to be an integral part of your job, you may not even be aware of how you do it. It's possible you may find it hard to understand why others don't do it. As a Manager you may assume that, if somebody's not doing it, they have nothing of note to share.

On the other hand, if you find it difficult or uncomfortable to do, how does that position you to help someone else do it? Perhaps your own success has planted a belief for you that the quality of your work, and your results, speak for themselves; in short, there should be no need to shout about it.

Your own views about this will inevitably influence the way you manage others.

Kate was delighted with the new client contract worth a significant sum. She had spent many months working on the deal. She knew she needed to let others know about it – it could influence their views about the new role she was being considered for. It took Kate over an hour to compose a simple two-line email... and her finger hovered for some time over the send button, such was her discomfort at blowing her own trumpet. She was a little surprised and delighted when her boss's boss replied straight back, congratulating her and copying in several others.



3: Encourage and support self-promotion

Practical Tips for Leadership Reflection and Action

- Notice in what ways self-promotion contributes towards personal success where you work.
- For women in your team, and others who may be reluctant to self-promote, talk to them about the importance of self-promotion. Let them know that if they don't tell you and others what a great job they're doing, it may remain a secret. Encourage them to express how what they are doing is benefiting the business. Do all of this even if you feel uncomfortable doing it yourself.
- Act as sponsors for women. Help others discover how valuable they are. Don't wait to be asked, do it proactively.
- Encourage women to find authentic ways they can raise their profile. For example, are they good at writing? Perhaps they could write a piece for an internal newsletter or trade journal that will be of value, whilst showcasing their expertise.



4: Promote risk analysis and calculated risk-taking

The effects of hormones in men and women suggest that men may generally be greater risk takers than women. Testosterone is correlated with risk taking, and men's bodies typically have 10 times the level in women's bodies. A series of studies at Cambridge University which measured saliva samples of male traders at a London hedge fund associated higher levels of testosterone with riskier trades. Testosterone levels also soared when trades paid off (the 'winner effect').

There are at least two possible consequences of this:

- Women may be better than men at mitigating and managing risk
- Women may need extra encouragement to take risks

It's time for another stereotype alert! Once again, what's most important here is your own observations and assumptions about risk. Any beliefs you hold will drive a particular behaviour. For example, if you have noticed somebody seems to be risk averse, or you think they might be, you are less likely to give them a project that takes them out of their comfort zone. You may even make that decision believing it is in their best interests (benevolent bias).

However, one of the best ways to grow and develop is to get involved in new things and step out of our comfort zone. Denying this opportunity to one whilst giving it to someone else essentially favours the career of the one over that of the other. More intentional and deliberate thought in the allocation of opportunities and projects can lead to more inclusive talent development



4: Promote risk analysis and calculated risk-taking

Practical Tips for Leadership Reflection and Action

- When assessing and analysing risk, include both men and women in the process and discussions.
- Encourage women to take calculated risks.
- ‘Take a chance’ on a woman you wouldn’t normally put forward for an opportunity... and provide the support to help them succeed.
- Be intentional about giving women opportunities that will stretch them. them and help them



Conclusion

At PDT we don't set out to 'fix women'. Women already have the skills and experience to be successful in their careers and deliver exceptional business results.

And we're also not here to 'single out men'. If businesses are to address the issue of too few women progressing through the pipeline into senior roles, we need to work together; generate true understanding about difference; and challenge some of the default ways of working that have created the current construct.

The heart of our business is to help you create a more inclusive culture so that everyone, no matter who they are, has the potential to reach their potential and be the best they can be.

Our modular gender programme, ACCELERATE, is highly interactive and provides practical tools and advice to help participants understand who they are on the **inside**, and recognise how that's perceived on the **outside**. We help women dial up the richness and the volume for themselves, enabling them to stand in their own authentic space and *choose* how to adapt their leadership behaviour to achieve their career goals.





The People Development Team
Leading the Way in Global inclusion

Please visit us at:
www.pdtglobal.com

Email:
info@pdtglobal.com

Twitter:
[@PDT_Global.com](https://twitter.com/PDT_Global.com)

Please feel free to
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