



Women in Leadership

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Abstract: "The ability to learn is the most important quality a leader can have."

-Padmasree Warrior (CEO & Founder, Fable)

Women are often dynamic leaders of change, galvanizing women and men to get involved, claim their rights, strengthen their communities and protect their planet. Their participation is fundamental to democratic governance. Yet women still have far to go towards equal representation in positions of power and leadership, whether in corporate boardrooms or presidential cabinets. Women have a right to equal participation. Once in leadership roles, they can make a difference that benefits whole societies.

This study aimed to identify status of women, as well point out factors hindering women from the participating in public and forward some possible recommendations for solving the problems identified through study. Some researcher has forwarded some possible ways in which women could appear in public decision making and leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, Decision making process, Characteristics, Glass Ceiling.

1.0 Introduction:

"Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence, and making sure that impact lasts in your absence." - Sheryl Sandberg (COO, Facebook)

Women are gradually making their leadership presence felt in entrepreneurship, administration, education, engineering, health, etc. at regional, national, and global levels. Women are now resolved to break the traditional glass ceiling that barred them from entering leadership positions even if they possessed requisite skills and talent to occupy them.

Women are constantly evolving and reaching new milestones across a wide spectrum of human activities in modern times. The world has witnessed the advent of women leaders such as Hillary Rodham Clinton, Indra Nooyi, Oprah Winfrey, Theresa May, Christine Lagarde, to name a few.

1.1 Glass Ceiling:

The proverbial "glass ceiling" refers to the existence of intangible and unacknowledged impediments that obstruct the advancement of women and the weaker section of the society in professional or public life.

Glass ceilings as barrier are not based upon a person's inability or lack of expertise and knowledge to carry out assigned tasks. Rather, it relates to women as a community who are knowingly or unknowingly kept from advancing higher because 'they are women'.

1.2 Characteristics of Women Leadership:

Some of the common characteristic features of women leaders –

1. Transformational Leadership Style:

Women leaders are more transformational than men leaders. They function as a role model for their subordinates. They inspire their team and spend a lot of time coaching their team. They care a lot about their personal development. Women leaders emphasize teamwork and authentic communication as a key to success.

2. Task-Focused:

Women leaders are invariably focused on completion of tasks assigned within deadlines. From an operational point, completing day-to-day tasks are necessary to ensure smooth functioning of the company.

3. Promote Cooperation and Collaboration:

To work in collaboration with others is a typical feminine characteristic. Women leaders always promote cooperation and collaboration amongst the team members. In this case, all the members of the team need to be clear of their roles and responsibilities, otherwise, it results in redundant work.

4. Self-Branding:

Unlike their male counterparts, women leaders often appear to be modest or silent about their own accomplishments. They are seldom good at branding themselves. However, it is necessary that women leaders learn how to brand themselves by sharing their achievements and skills with others. Unless people know or notice what they are capable of, they cannot recognize the leadership qualities of a women leader.

2.0 Women in Leadership – Importance:

Any institution, whether it is society or organization, in the present century cannot function effectively without women's equal participation in leadership activities. Women create a perspective that brings to competition and collaboration to organizations and teams.

In today's world, organizations that are led by inclusive leadership teams make effective decisions that deliver better result. In the twenty-first century, the essential qualities required to lead include the ability to collaborate, connect, empathize and communicate. All these qualities are feminine in nature and can help build a more sustainable future. Many statistics show that companies led by women have better financial results. Leadership by women is vital to increase the pace of societal transformation at home and in the workplace. Women leaders are likely to provide an integrated view of work and family, resulting in an engaged and promising personal and professional future. Gender parity in leadership is important because true progress cannot happen without a diversity of perspective in leadership roles.

3.0 Good Education:

Education is a great liberator. It liberates women from the shackles of age-old superstitions, traditions, and beliefs that exist in a society. It is rightly said, "If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family".

1. Education helps women acquire knowledge, understand gender relations, develop a sense of self-worth, a belief in their ability, etc. It enables them to bring out the best in them and make them accepted as a mass leader.
2. Education enables women to free themselves from the bondage of ignorance and orthodox beliefs, social evils, gender discrimination, and domestic as well as social violence.
3. It creates in them fortitude and self-confidence to fight against every odd on their way to achieve success in life.
4. It enlightens them about the larger world and world views. It also acquaints them with women leaders of different countries and their leadership styles. It exposes them to the world and helps them know the conditions of women in different countries and different societies.

Good education brings out the inherent leadership qualities in women and enables them to establish themselves as great leaders.

4.0 Women and Academic:

“When girls are educated, their countries become stronger and more prosperous.” – Michelle Obama.

Women have made great gains in higher education and are now earning more degrees than men. In the 2016-17 academic year, 57 percent of bachelor’s degrees were conferred to women, and according to the Pew Research Foundation, women now compose half of the college-educated workforce.

While acknowledging gains made in numbers of women, it is equally significant to address the challenges women continue to confront: women hold the least senior administrative positions and are the lowest paid among higher ed administrators. The picture is starker for women of color: in 2016, only 14 percent of higher ed administrators -- men and women -- were racial or ethnic minorities. Women, and this is especially the case for those of color, are also underrepresented in tenured and full professorships, which in turn limits opportunities to advance into formal leadership positions at colleges and universities.

5.0 Women and Corporate:

Having more women in leadership positions has been talked about for several years; and, there’s no doubt that there are more female CEOs leading Fortune 500 companies today than ever before. Yet, as of May 2018 there are only 24 female CEOs. This is under 5% of the total list of Fortune 500 CEOs.

The time has come for more organizations to tackle the under-representation of women in leadership and to strengthen the female leadership pipeline. While women need to start taking charge of their careers, men, too, must embrace female leadership and empower the women around them.

6.0 Some trend setting and successful leading women leaders of current times:

1. Arundhati Bhattacharya:

Arundhati Bhattacharya is the living replica of women leadership in India today. She is the first woman Chairperson of State Bank of India, the largest commercial bank in the country, and is one of few powerful women who have made it to the top of Indian banks. For her exceptional leadership qualities, she was listed as the 25th most powerful woman in the world by Forbes Asian Women Power List in 2016.

According to the Times of India, Bhattacharya is the first woman to ever lead a Fortune 500 company in India, and the only woman banker on that list of giants anywhere in the world. She was also ranked among the FTP Top 100 Global Thinkers by Foreign Policy magazine. India Today ranked her as the 19th in India’s 50 Most Powerful People List of 2017.

2. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw:

Kiran Mazumdar Shaw is globally recognized for her pioneering role in raising a world-class biotechnology industry in India. She is the founder of India's leading biotechnology enterprise, Biocon. She is termed as an iconic Indian business woman and 'Czarina of Indian biotech' for her enviable leadership, which has transformed Biocon from a humble start-up into a billion-dollar business.

She founded Biocon in India with an initial capital of Rupees 10,000 in 1978. She was only 25 then. Having been driven by unparalleled spirit to create a business that would leverage science for the benefit of society through affordable innovation, she concentrated on introducing affordable biopharmaceuticals for patients who needed them the most. Apart from being a highly successful entrepreneur of global repute, she is a philanthropist to the core of her heart. The Mazumdar Shaw Cancer Center in Bangalore provides affordable world-class cancer care services to patients from all sections of society. Her philanthropic efforts have led her to be featured in the Forbes' List of 'Heroes of Philanthropy'.

3. Chanda Kochhar:

Chanda Kochhar is the current boss of the country's largest private-sector lender, the ICICI (Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India) Ltd. She has often been featured in Fortune magazine's annual lists of the most powerful business women across the world. She was also ranked in the list of Forbes' 100 most powerful women in the world in 2014.

Kochhar has been instrumental in setting up and scaling up the retail business for ICICI Bank. She oversees about USD 125 billion in assets as Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of ICICI (Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India) Bank. Kochhar is also associated with national and international financial and business forums. She is the President of the International Monetary Conference, an organization that annually brings together the chief executives of approximately 70 of the world's largest financial institutions from 30 countries, along with officials from government institutions. For her constructive contributions in the banking sector, she was conferred with Padma Bhushan, one of India's highest civilian awards, in 2011.

7.0 Challenges and Opportunities:

Gender gap in the workplace remains a big business problem. And unless we move beyond tokenism and truly strive to make our workforces diverse and inclusive, we will be unable to breed creativity, promote innovation and push the envelope when it comes to growing our companies.

The fact is men and women work side by side, walk the same hallways and tackle the same business challenges. Yet, they inevitably experience the workplace differently in some ways. For instance, though employers have begun to offer generous maternity leave, women deal with the fear of being judged and analyzed for taking a career break. In fact, working moms are just as likely to aspire to senior leadership as women without children.

Though organizations have begun to take steps to support and treat women equally, women too, need to own their place in the organization. They need to proactively step up, turn every experience into an opportunity, maximize their access to leadership positions, and never, ever doubt their abilities. Calling for more women in the workplace should not be a race to meet a quota; it should be about maximizing an organization's potential, better decision-making, higher employee retention, and increased innovation. An organization where women can be found at every rung will be a better workplace for everybody.

7.1 Policy Changes to Promote Women Leadership:

1. High quality and affordable childcare and elder care

2. Paid maternity and paternity leave
3. A right to request part-time work
4. Comprehensive job protection for pregnant workers
5. Higher wages and training for paid caregivers
6. Reforms at elementary and secondary school schedules to meet the needs of digital workplaces.

7.2 Ways to Promote Women Business Leaders:

1. Corporate houses and companies should make high-level decisions to promote women's advancement in the career pipeline and the progress of the situation
2. There should be meaningful equality plans
3. Recruitment processes should promote both genders to seek all kinds of jobs
4. Talent potential among the employees should be recognized and it should be ensured that women are fully considered in the talent management process
5. Men and women should be offered equal training
6. Women should be allowed to experience business operations leadership and line management
7. Provision of proper mentoring for women in their career path.

8.0 Conclusion:

Women are gradually making their leadership presence felt in entrepreneurship, administration, education, engineering, health, etc. at regional, national, and global levels. Women are now resolved to break the traditional glass ceiling that barred them from entering leadership positions even if they possessed requisite skills and talent to occupy them.

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