

Hand that rocks the cradle breaks glass walls now

FOR MANY years now, the concept of glass ceiling and glass walls have become part of the management vocabulary. These two represent challenges in the context of gender diversity in organisations and how women were discriminated against when it came to distributive justice as they set out to climb the corporate ladder. Glass ceiling represented an invisible barrier for women employees from reaching higher positions of responsibility despite merit and capability. Glass walls again meant an invisible barrier for horizontal movement into certain hot jobs that were often considered as a male bastion in management! And in an organisation perceived to perpetuate glass walls and ceilings, there will very likely also exist 'glass escalators' which mean an undeserving fast track for male employees.

I was invited to speak at two conferences in Bangalore recently on the occasion of International Women's Day.

Understandably, the challenges women continue to face in the form of glass ceilings and glass walls came to occupy significant part of the discussions. I took a different point of view stating the following:

■ Glass ceilings and walls may exist, only in very few industries and organisations and that such unhealthy and unprofessional practices are a thing of the past in the new economy where what matters is only knowledge and intellectual horse power.

- Women should be afraid only of their shadows! It is not uncommon to come across women employees who may be shying away from reaching their potential for fear of the unknown.
- Women have arrived in all walks of life and have demonstrated their merit. Accomplished and successful women did so by virtue of sheer merit, hard and smart work and not due to luck or tokenism.
- The knowledge industry celebrates talent and recognised and reinforced meritocracy across various organisational levels. Women rise to top jobs by virtue of merit and without any glass ceiling or wall.
- Women are naturally endowed with a higher emotional quotient and their "gut feel" often proved right and so most of them became good at teamwork, interpersonal relations and leading teams.
- Women are better listeners and so benefited from points of view



WOMEN'S LEAGUE

Judy B Roemer in 'America's Competitive Secret: Women Managers' mentions the following as qualities in support of what makes women as great managers:

- They are comfortable with sharing information.
- They sustain fruitful collaboration.
- They empower rather than practice top-down decision.
- They value technical and interpersonal skills.
- They readily accept ambiguity.
- See redistribution of power as victory, not surrender.
- They honour intuition as well as pure rationality.
- They are inherently flexible.

TALENT TRACK

- Women are naturally endowed with a higher emotional quotient and their "gut feel" often proved right and so most of them became good at teamwork, interpersonal relations and leading teams.
- Women are better listeners and so benefited from points of view from others even when these were opposed to their own view points.

Power of Women:

And there is enough and more research to substantiate that women make better managers, women negotiate more effectively and women-managed businesses are more successful and have created more employment opportunities! This list of achievement goes on.

Womenomics everywhere!

Faith Popcorn in her book 'EVEolution' (2000) lists out the following, making a powerful case that the customer is no longer the king, but the queen!

- Women influence the purchasing of 80% of all consumer goods, 51% of all consumer electronics goods and 80% of all health care decisions, 50% of all car purchases and 50% of all PC purchases.

- Female owned, female-run business generate \$3.6 trillion annually.

- Wives out-earn husbands in 22.7% of cases.

- The Economist had this to say: Forget China, India. Internet- economic growth is driven by women.

Business owners:

Margaret Heffernan in 'How She Does It' provides interesting data. US firms owned & controlled by women constitute 48% of all firms, their growth rate is three times higher and their job creation has been two times higher than those owned by others.

Women make better negotiators: In a cover story of 2006 World Business titled 'Saying it like a Woman', Horacio Falcao mentions the following. Women make better negotiators because of their ability to put themselves in their counterparts' shoes, they are comprehensive & attentive, they demonstrate empathy that facilitates trust-building, they are less competitive, have a strong sense of fairness and are good at collaborative decision-making.

Women as managers:

It has been reported that women executives as rated by their male colleagues and bosses score higher than male counterparts on various measures such as producing high quality work, goal-setting and mentoring. Rosabeth Mass Kanter of Harvard Business Review has this to say: "Women get high ratings on exactly those skills needed to succeed in global information age, viz. teamwork and partnering". Well known consulting firm, Personnel Decisions International (PDI) looked at a sample of 58,000 managers and found that women outranked men in 20 of 23 areas!

So much for women making great managers! Having demystified why women employees in corporates should no longer worry about glass ceiling or glass wall, I also cautioned that if they did worry about it, it could lead to a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Most importantly, there are new challenges for women — beware of the new big one: 'The Glass Cliff'.

(The next part 'Beware of New challenge: The Glass Cliff' will appear on April 21)

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QUIZ TIME

Take this quiz! Answer the following questions:

Who puts more efforts into their appearance?

Who manages more things at once?

Who enjoys the recap to the day's events?

Who usually takes care of the details?

Who asks more questions in a conversation?

Who is a better listener?

Who encourages harmony & agreement?

Who has better intuition?

Who works with a longer 'to do' list?

Answer: WOMEN!