

Women in Power

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It's no secret that men have the upper hand when it comes to becoming CEO's, administrators, executives and countless other positions of power. But just how challenging is it for women to reach these goals, and what can women do to overcome these obstacles, obstacles that sometimes restrict them from reaching the top? Today women face challenges of unequal pay, being seen and respected as a leader, and several other challenges that time has helped, but still has not diminished.

Countless powerful women have shaped the course of history with their strength, passion, leadership skills and intelligence. Challenging the biases and status quo that are put on women, Margaret Thatcher is a prime example of this. Thatcher stopped politics for a while to study law. After finalizing her training in 1953, she qualified as a barrister, which is a type of lawyer. But she didn't stay away from the political arena for too long. Thatcher acquired a place in the House of Commons in 1959, representing Finchley. Thatcher was no doubt a woman on the rise, and was assigned parliamentary under secretary for pensions and national insurance in 1961. When the Labor Party assumed control of the government, she became a member of what is called the Shadow Cabinet, a group of political leaders who would hold Cabinet-level posts if their party was in power. Margaret was made secretary of state for education and science in 1970 when conservatives turned to office. She found her position frustrating and faced challenges and even said that she didn't believe there would be a female prime minister during her lifetime, but she was unaware of her own power. In 1974 she became the first woman to serve as the opposition leader in the House of Commons while England was in a time of economic turmoil, this instability helped return conservatives to power and that is when Thatcher was appointed Britain's first female prime minister. During her rule as Prime

Minister, Thatcher was best known for her destruction of Britain's traditional industries through her attacks on labor organizations, and although she faced her share of challenges throughout her multiple terms as Prime Minister, she was still seen as a prominent woman in power and continued to share about her experiences as a world leader and a pioneering woman in the field of politics (Margaret Thatcher Biography, 2018.)

Throughout history, the status of women in American society has improved immensely over the past three decades, Title IX was implemented in the 70's to give women gender equality in education and athletics, still, women's sports are not seen as equal to men's sports. Women have been fighting for their rights since the late 1800's, but most of the advancement for women's rights didn't start making progress until the late 1960's, and even then it took some time to begin to be seen as equal regardless of what the law indicated. While we still have a long way to go, women have come a long way, before the 70's women could not be employed if she was pregnant, could not report sexual harassment in the workplace, could not own a home or get a credit card, could not refuse to have sex with her husband or get a divorce with ease, amongst other things that, thankfully, women have the right to do now (Ms. Magazine Blog, 2013.)

Being treated equally is the main challenge that females currently face in the workplace, although it is not that simple, women's equality has countless subsections. Sometimes women do not have access to the same rewards, resources and opportunities that men have, and unequal pay is a huge factor in what drives women to want to make a change. It is not outlandish to assume maybe men typically get the leadership positions because they are better educated, although many years ago this statement would have been true, today women have truly surpassed men in educational achievement. Since the

70's women have steadily outnumbered their male counterparts in regards to higher education, the U.S. average for males in higher education according to the *National Center for Education Statistics* for public college enrollment in 2008 was 43.62% compared to women at 56.38% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008.) If college education gives you better opportunities in the workplace and women outnumber men in college then why are women still facing these challenges?

Lets talk about biology, females have more emotions and this can sometimes put a damper on how effectively a female can lead. Sure men have emotions too, but women have typically been defined as being more emotional beings and have been blamed for being 'unreasonably moody during that time of the month' and due to this gender stereotype there is not a large percentage of women in top positions. Women sometimes overreact to certain things because they take things personally, whereas men tend not to take things to heart, especially when it comes to the work place. And women tend to get emotional and cry four times as often as men, because we are just wired differently (*Today's workplace 2013.*) Women are also child bearing, meaning that if a woman decides to have a child there may be a point in time that she may be physically unable to do her job. But the real problem arises because women typically carry most of the caregiving responsibilities, women usually put in more hours into household activities than men, which disadvantages women in the workplace because women cannot realistically be available at all times, especially when it comes to taking care of her children.

Although nearly equal numbers of men and women go into medicine and law, more women graduate from college and graduate school than men, and the gap between

pay has shrunk in recent decades, its still prevalent that men make it in the highest positions over women. Women only make up 4% of Fortune 500 CEO's, meaning that men make up a whopping 96% of all CEO's, and only represent 19% of congress. Women are rarely leaders in high paying, progressive financial services and technology companies, and still make 23 cents less than men on average. It is still a mans world when it comes to running things at the highest level, even in schools, women make up three quarters of teachers in grade school but only one quarter of school superintendents. Not only are women's salaries only 77% of men's salaries, but there is also a loss in terms of human potential when women are not able to make it to the top of their fields. Due to gender biases, women search for jobs and promotions only to a certain extent, the numbers have discouraged women from even trying to reach the top because of the small percentage of women they have to look up to, or have as a role model for their goals.

(Clea Simon, 2016)

Men might advocate for gender equality in the workplace, but the reality is that men want to remain on top and feel threatened by females who have a higher authority than their own. In a study conducted by Bocconi University, men were asked to decide how to split a \$10,000 bonus between colleagues in the environment, and the results showed that men split the bonus equally between male and female coworkers and gave more than half to male managers. But when it came to female managers, the men gave \$500 more to themselves. The study showed that men search for fairness in the workplace until it came to having female leaders; the researchers interpreted the findings again to show that men feel threatened by female bosses. When the same study was conducted with women as the participants, there was no difference in splitting the money

whether the boss was male or female. The problem arises because although men may feel apprehensive toward female managers, they will not admit it to themselves. When women speak on behalf of their experience or strengths they experience backlash, and are questioned on how wholesome their statements are, whereas men are generally believed without question (Shana Lebowitz, 2016.)

Inequality for women is not only prevalent in the workplace but even in sports, only 23% of all head coaches are female, Teresa Phillips is the only female ever to coach a Division 1 NCAA men's basketball team, so why are female coaches so underrepresented, specifically when it comes to coaching a male sport? 40% of all NCAA coaches are women, but when looking specifically at Division 1 sports only 38% are female, so the same thing goes for women in the workplace, as the seriousness of the job position increases, the number of women in these powerful positions decreases. The data-driven research shows that, even within the women's sports arena, intercollegiate female coaches face unambiguous biases that male coaches simply do not. To be clear, the biases were associated with the gender of the coach and not the overall team's bias. Some of the report's findings are fairly obvious, which makes it even more surprising that research of this caliber hasn't been conducted until now. For instance, while female coaches are largely aware of gender discrimination, their male colleagues are just as often clueless about the widespread problem. Women states that it's easier for men to get top level coaching positions, and even when women get the top coaching jobs, they are being paid less for doing the same jobs as male coaches. This might be because sports as a whole is seen as more masculine than feminine, and when supervisors are monitoring female coaches they tend to be more discriminating than when monitoring male coaches, but

female coaches often refrain from speaking out on behalf of Title IX infractions for fear of losing their jobs or putting an unnecessary target on their backs (Kate Ryan, and Stacy Leasca, 2016.)

One of the case studies I focused on was a case in 2015 where three female coaches filed a discrimination suit against the University of Minnesota, alleging discrimination under Title VII and Title IX and saying they were fired because they are female and gay. Shannon Miller, Jen Banford and Annette Wiles all left the school after suffering what they describe as a pattern of hostility and making complaints that went unanswered. Miller was the head coach of women's hockey and was informed that her contract would not be renewed, and was told that the decision was "strictly financial" even though she was making 30% less than the men's hockey coach, despite having many incredible achievements as a coach. Banford was the head women's softball coach and was notified that her contract would not be renewed as well, which she believed was linked to her support for Miller who was let go just days before. And Wiles was the head basketball coach and says she was forced to resign because of the hostile discriminatory environment created by the university. All three of these women had great achievements as coaches, all while being paid less than their male counterparts. But were ultimately all let go because they were female (Dave Stewart and Melissa Gray, 2015.)

Overcoming these all the challenges women face is not an easy thing to do, but with hard work and a fierce mindset it can unquestionably be done. The first way women can overcome challenges is to work on strengthening their leadership skills, and attain those crucial attributes of leadership. Leadership can be so many different things, but it is the action of leading a group of people or an organization. Leaders must be skilled in

diversity, being able to lead both men and women, leading people with different ethnic backgrounds, leading people with all types of religious beliefs and whose beliefs are different from your own. To be a good leader the first thing you must do is establish your beliefs and have faith in them and have a clear understanding of self, you must be a good communicator, being direct with your expectations and being able to speak to those you lead whether it's about a good or bad situation. Good leaders set good examples for others and are passionate about what they do, every day might not be ideal in your workplace, but leaders will always overcome adversity and remain fixed on their ultimate goals. Leaders must be confident, this point is especially true about women leaders because many women have problems with being confident at all times. Leaders must have good relationships with everyone they lead and work with, this doesn't mean you have to be best friends with everyone you meet, but having that level of respect and being able to have a good work relationship with everyone is important to leadership. Leaders must set themselves up for success and be able to make hard choices, understanding that people rely on you and the decisions you make affect more than just you. The team you build as a leader is a direct representation of you, good leaders create a team of leaders, and they earn the respect of their team through hard honest work rather than simply demanding respect. Women in power can ensure their success as a leader by following these attributes of good leadership, also using this as a guideline to lead them on a positive path to good leadership qualities.

Recognizing that discrimination is taking place is the first step in being able to correct the behavior, just as an addict can't overcome addiction without recognizing it as an issue first, we must address that there is a problem, then seek out solutions to the

problem. Unfortunately this subject is not spoken on frequently, making it somewhat uncomfortable, and most people would rather stay quiet and just say that this is the way things have been and always will be. But the truth of the matter is that a person is a person regardless of gender and should not be discriminated based off sex, rather the quality of their work. Ensure that all employees are aware of what gender discrimination is and what it looks like in certain situations, and making sure that there is a level of respect between genders. While discrimination can happen to males as well, with regards to the workplace, females are more frequently victims to gender inequality. Women have to work harder than men to overcome the stigma that women cannot be in positions of power, so women should showcase their success and demonstrate how they achieved their level of success for other women (Career Profiles, 2018.)

When it comes to the hardwiring of the female brain, emotions do not have to be a bad thing, women can turn emotion into emotional intelligence in order to be successful. Because of women's keen sensitivity to emotions, they can detect their others emotions better than men and be able to fix the problem quickly. Compassion and empathy have helped women deal with people, which is crucial in the workplace, women tend to win the people over because they are more caring and more sensitive, while men are more logical and tend to leave emotion on the backburner. With that being said we can discard the notion that emotion is detrimental to the workplace and should be completely separated from work, because at the end of the day, emotions have a lot to do with passion and drive, making women prime candidates for positions of power (Lydia Dishman, 2015.)

“I may sometimes be willing to teach for nothing, but if paid at all, I shall never do a man’s work for less than a man’s pay.” – Clara Barton

This is a powerful quote because it shows that women who are capable of doing the same work as a man deserve the same pay as a man. Sometimes it’s very difficult to be strong, especially when you’re a woman. Perhaps, you’ve always heard from your relatives or friends a very common phrase “Be strong!” But what does it mean to be a strong woman? Being a strong woman is not about physical strength, it is about knowing that your gender does not hinder your capabilities. Women are constantly progressing and making big moves for gender equality, and although things may not be 50-50, we are succeeding every day and should continue to do so.

In today’s society, according to the data, men definitely have the upper hand when it comes to becoming CEO’s, administrators, executives and countless other positions of power. Women face countless numbers of challenges in their journey to the top that men do not. Women must work harder to reach these goals, but despite what research has shown, women can overcome these obstacles, and have been steadily doing so. Today women still face challenges of unequal pay, being seen and respected as a leader, and several other challenges that time has helped, but still has not diminished completely, with time women will reach the top with men.

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