

Gender

How Men Can Be More Inclusive Leaders

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Summary. Despite the Covid-19 “Shecession,” which has driven millions of women out of the workforce, women are the majority of the college-educated talent pool. Because of this, male leaders — and men more... [more](#)

Note to men: Your father’s approach to leadership won’t work for you. In fact, it’s a recipe for failure. With the global pandemic, searing evidence of social injustice, the [rise of employee activism](#), and the changing role of the corporation (success is no longer just about [shareholder value](#)), we are witnessing a fundamental shift in the workplace.

For decades, effective leadership has been defined by top-down, hierarchical approaches to driving business outcomes. Twentieth-century leaders often embraced [authoritarian leadership](#) approaches. But the workplace is changing — from the nature of work and how we accomplish it to the people doing the work itself. Profit-driven organizations focused on “what” and productivity are evolving into purpose-driven cultures focused on “why” and their people.

This is partly due to the talent pool itself. Twentieth-century employees were homogenous, predominantly male, and primarily consisted of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, but today the [talent pool](#) is increasingly diverse, dominated by Millennials and rising Gen Zers. As of 2017, millennials were [more likely to be employed and work full-time](#) than any other generation. Their [preference](#) for collaboration, transparency, healthy work-life integration, celebration of diversity and inclusion, and purpose-driven employment demands a new kind of leadership.

What’s more, the new world of work also requires leaders to comprehend the tremendous [economic opportunity](#) inherent in achieving genuine gender equity. Since 1981, women have secured more college degrees than their male counterparts. Today, despite the Covid-19 “[Shecession](#),” which has driven millions of women

out of the workforce due to the burdens of caring for family, women are the majority of the college-educated talent pool. Women constitute a rich trove of skills, abilities, and competence. Failing to attract and leverage female talent is a huge missed opportunity.

Because of this, male leaders — and men more broadly — are increasingly expected to pursue gender inclusion and equity through deliberate allyship with women. Allyship includes collaborative personal relationships, public acts of sponsorship, and advocacy intended to drive systemic improvements in workplace culture. While in the past, inclusion and advancement of women was viewed as a “nice-to-have,” today’s male leaders understand that full inclusion of women and the pursuit of measurable gender equity is a core element of their leadership brand. What’s more, [recent research](#) reveals those leaders who truly believe in the value proposition of diversity, inclusion, and the core tenets of allyship are 62% more likely to occupy the C-suite.

Fortunately, there are ways you can set yourself up to be an inclusive leader and ally. Based on our work with male leaders who prioritize allyship with women to achieve equity, here are four inclusive leadership strategies to follow:

Get Comfortable Being Uncomfortable

Have the humility to know that there’s much you don’t know about others’ experiences. Getting comfortable with discomfort and embracing risk are key to successful inclusive leadership. Having the courage to ask difficult questions about your own leadership style is an important place to start on your journey to being an ally with women. How are you truly supporting women at work and in your life overall? Ask about the experiences of women in your workplace; ask if they feel fully included, valued, and respected; and be willing to hear answers you might not like. If you’re comfortable as a leader, you’re probably not challenging yourself, your people, and your organization in ways that will ensure future success.

Make It Personal and Visible

Inclusive leadership has to come from the heart. Messages about equity must be personal and authentic. If managers don’t see you owning and fully engaging in programs and initiatives to drive equity in the workplace, chances are they’ll turn to other priorities.

Begin with an authentic narrative about why this is important to you personally, and then connect this personal story to how gender diversity and inclusion are important to your business. Blake Irving, former CEO of GoDaddy, [made it his personal mission](#) to change the company’s notoriously sexist brand and was clear [he was motivated by the untimely death of his sister](#) to commit to creating a truly inclusive workplace. The result? GoDaddy is now one of the [best places to work for women in tech](#).

Being visible also requires you to show up at events, conferences, and other initiatives promoting gender inclusion and equality. This encourages other men to follow your example. When leaders fully participate, they demonstrate support, develop empathy, diversify their networks, and identify high-potential talent. Be

that leader who not only attends but stays the entire time, engages fully, takes notes, and asks great questions.

For example, when Brian Olsavsky, CFO at Amazon, sponsored a LeanIn event, Rachel Thomas, cofounder and CEO of [LeanIn.org](#), told us, “I heard from several of the senior men who attended that they had received very direct emails from Brian making it crystal clear he expected them to be there. As a result, when I looked out in the audience, it was one of the very few times I can recall seeing at least half the audience was male. Brian was sitting up front, he sponsored the event, and he communicated his expectations for the other men in the company to show up and engage fully.” This sense of ownership from leaders like Olsavsky demonstrates their commitment to men being involved in the solution to an equitable workplace.

Design Transparency into Your Workplace

Transparency about what you’re doing, why you’re doing it, and how you’re progressing is a game changer. “One of the biggest obstacles to accelerating workplace equity is the lack of transparency from many companies regarding initiatives such as efforts to close the gender pay gap, to provide paid parental leave to both parents, or to recruit without discrimination,” [said](#) Diana van Maasdijk, CEO of Equileap.

Poor transparency sows distrust in the organization. This is even more critical as we consider how much importance [Millennials and Gen Z workers](#) place on contributing to the company’s mission.

Transparency can also be influential with external stakeholders. Leaders who harness the power of public disclosure as a tool to promote trust with investors and future employees have a strategic advantage. For example, [99 investors](#) representing more than \$1.61 trillion in assets recently requested that companies increase public access to workplace equity policies and practices across demographic diversity. The investors believe that these disclosures can have a significant impact on investing decisions and enable a comparative analysis of company culture and risk. “Leaders willing to publicly disclose their policies and practices on gender, race, and sexual orientation inclusion will be the companies that succeed by attracting and retaining the best and the brightest employees, and reducing risk to shareholders,” [said](#) Andrew Behar, CEO of As You Sow.

Design Accountability into Your Workplace

Today’s leaders understand they can impact change by ensuring that their governance policies align with their inclusion goals. Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff’s passion and commitment for advancing pay equity resulted in a [complete overhaul of their compensation system](#) leading the company to close the gender pay gap. Starbucks recently announced it is tying executive compensation to diversity metrics and a growing multitude of companies are committing to ensuring they have at least one woman on their boards (partially driven by [requirements](#) from Nasdaq, Blackrock, Goldman Sachs, and others who are mandating diversity).

Don’t stop with internal stakeholders; extend diversity and representation requirements to your suppliers and customers.

Romy Newman, CEO of Fairygodboss, told us that you can influence suppliers to change the way they do business. In 2017, former Hewlett Packard CMO, Antonio Lucio fundamentally [changed the advertising industry](#) when he demanded more gender diversity amongst his ad agencies. Today, companies like Facebook, SurveyMonkey, and Amazon are [insisting on diversity](#) from their suppliers. “Companies like Microsoft are not working with suppliers who don’t provide paid leave to their female employees,” Newman told us. “Other companies refuse to work with suppliers who don’t show up with diverse teams. Nothing speaks louder than money.”

Although some men continue to practice legacy leadership, [those they lead](#) want to see authenticity, empathy, cultural humility, transparency, expressions of care and compassion, and an appreciation for the value of diversity in their relationships and on their teams. Public ownership, commitment to creating change, and transparent investment of your own social capital are hallmarks of allies in leadership. If your leaders are operating like we’re still in the 20th century, you need to act fast. Otherwise, your employees, your customers, and the world at large will act for you.



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