

Let Brilliant Women Shine!

By Simon T. Bailey

Today, I want to break once and for all the glass ceiling that still hovers over the heads of many working women and forces them to settle for lower salaries, condescending attitudes, insincere promotion promises that pay lip service to equality, and no formal training to make it to the executive suite.

Companies only hurt themselves when they don't allow women to reach their full potential. A recent study released by the research company Catalyst, which surveyed 353 of the Fortune 500 companies, reported:

- The group of companies with the highest representation of women in top management teams experienced better financial performance.
- In five industries where women were equally represented in top management positions there was a higher return on equity.
- In four out of five industries where women were equally represented in top management positions, the companies experienced a higher total return to shareholders.

Through my close contacts with many companies in many different industries, and through observing the experiences of several friends I have seen how widespread and insidious (and unconscious) sexism can be. Women managers may be expected to "baby sit" their less enlightened male counterparts or play other unofficial caretaking roles. Some men are threatened or intimidated by an intelligent, powerful woman and may mask it with condescension and stubborn disapproval, forcing a perfectly competent woman to not only prove her job skills, but also to cut through assumptions that are based on sexist prejudice.

I also think it is not uncommon that once a woman's brilliance is recognized, she finds herself handling an overwhelming volume of work. Consciously or subconsciously, higher ups recognize that she will work harder than her male counterparts because she feels she must continually prove herself. I once knew an amazing CFO, the only female director in her company, and a woman whose judgment and business acumen rivaled that of any great leader I have ever known. The organization's CEO had a habit of piling complex extra assignments on her rather than evenly distributing them among the other executives, and I couldn't help but notice that he expected more from her than from her male counterparts. She in turn always took on the extra work, and I couldn't help but observe that perhaps as a woman she felt an "extra" obligation to prove herself over and over again.

Every corporation should take a long hard look at its spoken and unspoken policies and overall culture relative to women. Every workplace should be a place where women can thrive professionally. Every corporation should have some type of mentoring/advancement program for women. If not, then why

not? Accenture does, Deloitte does and so does Eli Lilly and Company. What's the story with your place of business?

If your corporation is dominated by male executives, then find out what the organization is doing to diversify your employee population. If the answer is "nothing," the corporation needs to hold a women's focus group to find out what is missing for women in the organization, and what changes need to be made in order for them to succeed. You can take the bull by the horns and help create a better environment for all employees.

Every organization that desires to kick-it-up-a-notch and attract the female consumer should ensure that women are equally represented in their executive ranks. Implementing formal mentoring programs or hosting a Women's Leadership Summit that engages and educates younger women who are just entering the workforce can result not only in improved internal satisfaction, but also external customer approval.

Ladies, it's time for you to leverage your brilliance in a workplace where you are celebrated rather than tolerated. You are too bright to be stressed out wondering how you are going to cut through the glass ceiling of sexism in your organization in order to succeed. It's time for the American workplace to become a place where women are celebrated, rather than having just a few companies set an enlightened example. Brilliant women are ready and willing to use their intellectual potential to take their organizations to the next level. These women are priceless and rare diamonds who are waiting to be placed in a platinum setting of unlimited opportunity.

To every woman who is reading this message, I want you to know that it is your time to stand and be recognized for your resolve and brilliance. I see you. You are all the shades of the earth. Your spirit shines like the sun in the middle of the day. Come from behind the shadows and take your place on the center stage. Simon says...brilliant women, it's your time to shine.