

Why Men Should Support Gender Equality

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4 Steps for Male Leaders

By Jeffery Tobias Halter. Male engagement is critical to driving long-term advancement for women. I actually believe that upwards of 30% of leaders want to support women's advancement. The challenge is giving them tangible actions they can take to demonstrate advocacy.

[Male Champions of Change](#) outlined three simple things men can do to advance women: listen, learn, and lead. In my work I have found these to be great foundational principles, but I believe there needs to be a fourth element: have the will.



These actions are best executed in a sequential manner to drive meaningful cultural transformation. Too often, senior managers want to start with lead. The problem is many do not have an understanding of the context that is critical to success. As hard as this is, it is critical to start by listening and learning in order to create change and encourage others to participate.

Listen

Men and women are having significantly different experiences in the workplace. Both genders are working hard, but women are working significantly harder as they constantly have to deal with being “one of a few” in the room.

In my consulting practice, I encourage men to invite a trusted female colleague to have an honest conversation about her experiences. In this exercise they ask their female colleague three simple questions:

Do you believe men and women are having different experiences at the company? Listen. Don't interrupt, don't be defensive or justify company policies. Just listen.

After ten minutes, ask a second time, *What else don't I know?*

Genuinely listen intently for another ten minutes and ask a third (and final) time, *And what else?*

In that last 10 minutes you will hear root cause issues that you have never heard or imagined existed in your company—differences that women (and perhaps other minorities) experience every day in the workplace. These experiences have a direct correlation to work, performance, retention, and advancement.

Once you listen and have heard, you can begin to take action.

Learn

Men still hold well over 85% of senior leadership roles in companies. That is why it is incumbent on men to be active participants in the initiative to advance women by influencing cultural and organizational change. And if listening is critical to the workplace element, then learning is critical to creating cultural change in all corners of the organization.

Based on your listening exercise, what tools, knowledge, and training do you and others need in your organization to address the challenges of bias, micro-bias, and other obstacles for women and minorities in your organization?

Sign up for any applicable training sessions or ask HR about how you can gain those skills—and make them available to others.

Lead

We need to ask our male champions to lead every day. Senior male leaders can take initiative by doing these four things on a daily basis:

- **Develop and talk about your department's business case.** Your middle managers need to know why the company is doing this and how it affects them and their department, and also understand the need to be able to talk the talk with their team.
- **Manage your talent.** The war for talent is real, and you cannot afford to lose a single woman, minority, millennial, or white male in today's competitive environment.
- **Develop your cultural competency.** Men and women are having very different experiences in the workplace. Commit to learning more on the topic.
- **Symbolic gestures & systemic changes.** Learn what it takes to be a champion, and then have the will to do it!

Men at all levels of the organization can do the following:

- **Mentor female coworkers.** If applicable, become a sponsor.
- **Set an example to correct bias.** Act to correct micro-bias as you see it happen.
- **Offer encouragement.** Encourage female coworkers to take more risks, volunteer for stretch projects, and apply for open positions.
- **Support gender pay equity.** Deepen your understanding of your company's HR practices and encourage correcting inequalities

Have the Will

Women's leadership advancement is stuck. Driving change requires having the will to question and challenge the status quo. Having the will to do so means asking tough questions and holding people accountable, including yourself.

Think about how ridding the workplace of bias and micro-bias, and bringing diverse points of view to bear on problem solving, will benefit your organization. Ask yourself "How does this connect to me and my work?" and more importantly, "What's in this for me to improve conditions for my coworkers?" Knowing the answers to these questions will sustain your motivation.

Leaders also need to ask their direct reports three questions:

- What were the turnover and advancement numbers for your department last year by gender? (My guess is the answer will surprise you).
- What is your plan to advance women for the coming year?
- How will you drive this plan deep into your functional area, and how are you planning on holding middle management and men accountable?

Leadership takes having the will to change and to challenge the status quo. It's what great leaders and great companies do to drive long-term systemic change for women in their organizations. Advancing women in the

workplace will take the engagement and active involvement of men at all levels of the organization.

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