

the Business Ledger

The Business Newspaper for Suburban Chicago

June 13, 2005

www.thebusinessledger.com

630-571-8911

Bridging the leadership gender gap through team-building

Today's workplace presents a new set of challenges in the area of team-building. To embrace the requirements for improved productivity, leaders need to understand how the challenges evolved.

The unprecedented fast pace of the 20th century introduced a school of thought regarding a required management style needed to deliver consistent business results. The "command and control" style of management was often viewed as necessary to ensure productivity goals were met. This type of leadership approach helped to create the hierarchal style of management that is well known in the corporate environment.



Not For Women Only

Deborah Chambers Chima

As the U.S. economy began to grow by leaps and bounds during this time period, many companies began to see the entry of women in the workplace, but their talents and skills were not necessarily viewed as the needed solution to continued business success. In fact, there was an often spoken opinion that working women were a temporary means to an end.

As we fast-forward to today's 21st century economy, we see just the opposite paradigm occurring. In many industries women are becoming the majority gender in the workplace. This transformation has created new internal problems for management to solve.

The need for leaders to incorporate strategies designed to address the diverse needs of employees is taking on additional prominence and importance. More and more women are making their mark in the business world by demonstrating a different style of leadership. This trend is important for the following three reasons:

- The "command and control" style of management has been proven to no longer be the most effective method to motivate employees
- Organizations continue to seek the magic bullet that will deliver the desired profitability results to overcome the past few years of sluggish sales and growth

- Women leaders offer the world of business a unique perspective regarding how to effectively lead and develop people

According to a recent study conducted by the American Management Association, firms that include women on their senior management teams show greater improvement in corporate performance. The AMA study found that 62 percent of those firms surveyed saw their market share grow, compared with only 39 percent of companies with no women on the team.

The study further states that leadership traits previously considered to be "feminine" appear to grow in levels of importance in the 21st century, according to more than 160 international companies and 75 senior executives surveyed. Most of the predominantly male respondents predicted a trend toward a more "team oriented" managerial approach.

an environment should create improved business results. To accomplish this task, team sponsors will need to conduct due diligence to ensure leadership roles within the teams are equally shared between the men and women.

- Identify women within the organization who can be promoted at least two positions within the next five years. Ensure the success of the succession plan by creating and implementing development plans with the participants that focus on the required competencies of the future positions. The purpose of the succession plan is to ensure the organization can take advantage of the viewpoint of women leaders as the participants move up the management ranks. Men in leadership within the organization should spend a minimum amount of time each week interacting with these women on their ideas of how to create organizational success.

According to a recent study conducted by the American Management Association, firms that include women on their senior management teams show greater improvement in corporate performance.

This study identifies a need for organizations to determine how to encourage and support more women within their organization to become leaders. The viable solution to this need is to create work environments where the leadership styles women offer can be nurtured and developed.

I offer the following two examples to assist in implementing the type of transitional thinking that must take place within organizations. The focus of management needs to be placed on helping more men and women understand how to work more effectively as a team.

- Choose the most promising people in your organization to serve on teams that are purposely diverse in gender. Challenge the teams to focus on solving the top two challenges of the organization. The main purpose of implementing these designated teams is to create work teams where every one's opinion is valued. The creation of such

Additionally, to ensure more men are comfortable with the transition of women into leadership positions, organizations may need to consider the benefits of investing in team-building workshops and exercises designed to create respectful high performing teams.

We all win when everyone is provided the opportunity to offer their talents and skills for the good of the organization.

Deborah Chambers Chima, CEO of Chambers Consultant Group, is an author, speaker, leadership coach and consultant who collaborates with organizations and individuals to accelerate their productivity. Contact her at deborah@chambersconsult.com.