

Helping women scale the heights of leadership

- What makes women great leaders & why there are so few
- Why role & remuneration may not be enough to retain your female talent
- The costs of running your business without women at the top

by Jen Dalitz
www.sphinxxx.org



About the Author: Jen Dalitz



Jen Dalitz is a thought leader and expert in the issues women face in advancing to leadership roles. She specializes in developing solutions that enable organizations and individuals to manage these challenges effectively.

Jen has worked in the corporate environment as an executive, consultant and business manager over the past 15 years with leading corporations in Australian and around the world.

In 2007, Jen founded sphinxx – a company that specializes in advancing women in leadership. sphinxx supports the advancement of women in leadership by helping them to manage the tensions between the lady and the lioness in them.

Jen can be contacted via business@sphinxx.org or phone 02 9968 1599.

Share this

You may distribute this paper freely to anybody you like, as long as you distribute it in its entirety, don't change it in any way and don't charge money for it.

Copyright © 2007 Jen Dalitz

Disclaimer

The material contained in this report is general and is not intended as advice on any particular matter. The author expressly disclaims all and any liability to any persons whatsoever in respect of anything done by any such person in reliance, whether in whole or in part, on this report. Please take appropriate legal advice before acting on any information in this report.

The lions share of leadership roles

This paper outlines:

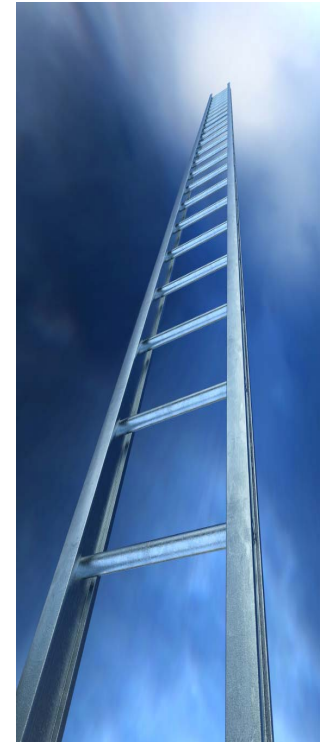
- How to understand and appreciate the differences between men and women leaders;
- Why, to remain competitive, organisations must grow the ranks of female leaders; and
- Discussion points to help organisations open up the debate and move forward in expanding gender diversity in their leadership ranks.

Throughout the world, stark gender imbalance continues in the senior ranks across leading companies and diverse industries. Advancements in educational standards, political systems and employment practices have resulted in women in the developed world entering the workforce and professional roles in equal proportions to men. Even first level management roles are well balanced between genders. Yet beyond that, men continue, by far, to hold the lions share of leadership roles.

The disproportion in leadership ranks can be seen in Australia's top 200 publicly listed companies, where woman hold only:

- 12% of executive management positions
- 8% of Board positions
- 3% of CEO roles and
- 2% of Chairs

The fact that women make up only 2% of Fortune 500 CEOs indicates that this is a global issue, and one that can't be ignored.



The case for gender diversity in leadership

What are the costs of running your business without women at the top?
And why is it a business imperative to attract and retain women to your leadership roles?

1. The war for talent

In today's war for talent, no organisation can afford to under-utilise any segment of the talent pool. Companies that develop and advance women will benefit financially from accessing a larger part of the available talent pool.

2. Attracting talent

Research shows that role models matter when it comes to attracting female talent. Seeing is believing, and women are attracted to companies with high female representation across senior roles in whose footsteps they can follow.

3. Women as consumers

When women, as consumers, control or influence at least 80 percent of all household spending, can you afford to make strategic decisions that don't involve women at the highest levels?

4. Financial performance

Research has shown that companies with the highest representation of women on their top management team experience better financial performance.



The bottom line: the world is changing in ways that can profit from women's leadership skills as well as those of men. How is your organisation responding to this challenge?

When the role and rem isn't enough

It's a fact: women are attracted to leadership and motivated to stay by different drivers than men.

Underlying sphinxx leadership is the premise that a woman's propensity to pursue leadership roles is linked not only to the role and remuneration, but to her ability to celebrate her uniquely female attributes in her work while maintaining a richness of life.

The sphinxx leader is a lady *and* a lioness.

When she is constantly challenged to conform to male-oriented leadership stereotypes, or when life becomes very one-dimensional around a work bias, opportunities to off-ramp or shift employment become more attractive.

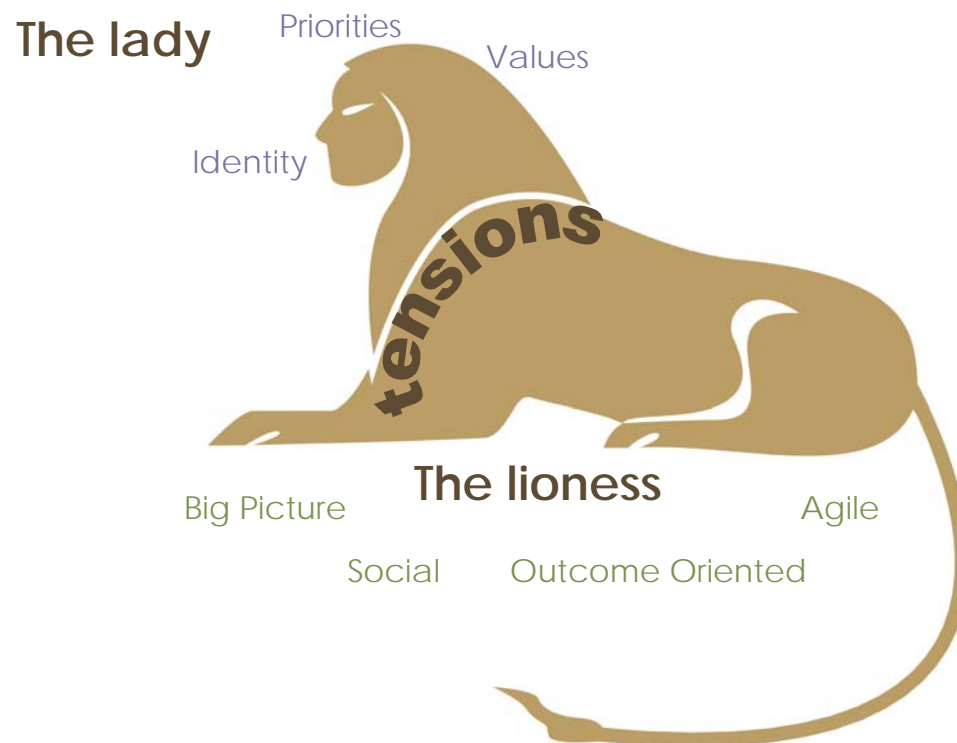
Have you ever had a partner who, despite telling you they love you, constantly asks you to change your clothes, hairstyle, body weight or past times? In a way this is what women leaders experience every day: they suffer extreme perceptions of being too soft, too tough, too emotional – never *just right*. Yet chances are they are already doing what is required to deliver, just differently. This ongoing correction has a cumulative impact on self esteem and self efficacy.

The erosion of professional confidence can have a spiraling impact on the "head space" of the sphinxx leader. As pressure builds in her professional life, it is common for tensions to flow on to her personal life. Long work hours challenge her personal pride and distort her perceptions of success. This is often in spite of maintaining excellent standards of delivery in her leadership role.



The tensions between the lady & the lioness

sphinxx leaders know how to play to their strengths. Yet even the most successful women in leadership feel the tensions of the pull between their professional and personal pride.



The key to retaining your female talent lies in understanding these tensions and creating an environment in which women can be proud of her lady and her lioness.

Do you know what the tension points are for your female talent?

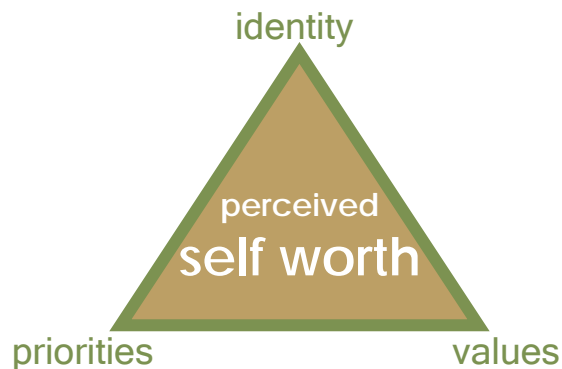
Inside the headspace of the female leader

Being in a leadership role is exciting and challenging, and brings with it both responsibility and rewards. But is it a level playing field for men and women alike in their quest for leadership?

Given the statistics, it would appear that something is amiss. But what is it that's so different for women as leaders?

It could be the estimates that up to 75% of male executive managers have the support of a stay at home partner, while only a fraction of female leaders share the same luxury. Compared to their male peers, female leaders are likely to be juggling more personal responsibilities and obligations on top of the demands of their leadership role. Or it could be the challenge that comes with being a minority voice in a largely homogeneous community of the corporate leadership stereotype – the middle-aged, Anglo-Saxon male.

No matter the cause, the effect is that women wage internal battles with their self perception of identity, priorities and values:



The fine line working women walk

While sphinxx leaders are ambitious and motivated, the quest to reach their fullest potential brings with it tradeoffs. Beneath a veneer of accomplishment and achievement, inner turmoil may wage between:

1. Identity

Women leaders struggle with a desire to bring their whole selves to work; while being constantly encouraged to compartmentalise their work life in the manner that is characterised by the male way of thinking. She feels a pressure to defeminise herself in the work environment, and to conform to a male-oriented norm, notwithstanding the difference that difference can make to a leadership team.

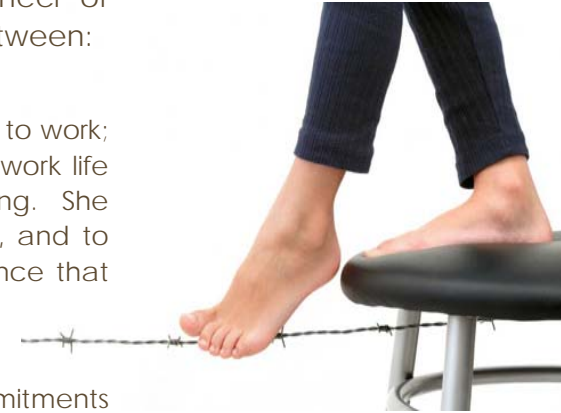
2. Priorities

The desire to have a career in addition to managing commitments outside of the workplace does not sit easily with women aspiring to leadership. How can she reinforce her need for flexibility without appearing to demand special treatment? And how does she ensure appropriate time and energy is devoted to her interests outside of work including her family, friends and self? Working women constantly look for ways to balance overtime, family time and "me time".

3. Values and beliefs

The demands of being a leader brings pressure to bear on a woman's sense of values and value. She often questions the need to change to be more like her male peers, to demonstrate similar behaviours, cognitive processes and responses to situations. Yet she is unique and different, yet often challenges this belief. And her values and belief systems, formed and framed through her executive social skills, may also be challenged, and so it takes courage to hold strong to them.

sphinxx encourages the substantial contribution women make in all aspects of their lives, without fear, guilt or a sense of compromise.



The lioness as a natural leader

There are a number of natural traits or attributes that make women excellent leaders. That is not to say that men don't make great leaders – of course they do – but women leaders bring a diversity in skill set and thinking to the table, which can be the source of competitive advantage.

Some of the attributes and instincts that make women great leaders include:

1. Big picture

Psychologists report that women gather details faster and arrange these bits of data into more complex patterns than men. Women tend to weigh more variables, consider more options, and see a wider array of potential solutions to a problem; whereas men are more likely to focus their attention on one thing at a time. Linked to this is the ability of women to assess multiple, complex scenarios and plot a long term course; while men are more likely to focus on the here and now. In a world of increasing complexity, this contextual view is a distinct advantage.

2. Social

Women have a bias towards communities and teams stemming from what scientists call "executive social skills". They have evolved a keener ability to pick up the nuances of posture and gesture, read complex emotions in faces, and hear slight changes in tone of voice. Women also have remarkable facilities for collaboration, empathy, inclusion and sharing power. In the new global economy, the capacity to collaborate, empathise and "read people" are essential leadership traits.

3. Outcome Oriented

Women have many different responsibilities and time is usually a woman's most precious commodity. This results in women making focused, outcome oriented choices regarding the allocation of their time. This is particularly evident in working mothers. Women tend to put more emphasis on outcomes than hours, and are less inclined to pursue political agendas than their male counterparts.

4. Agile

Women have an exceptional ability to find the right word rapidly. This talent for basic articulation emerges in early childhood, and is associated with gender differences in the brain. Coupled with mental flexibility, women leaders are ready and able to pounce on new opportunities as they arise. They can deal with and respond well to ambiguity, and even to generate new and imaginative ideas more naturally than men. This agility gives them an edge.



So what are women looking for?

How well does your organisation know the needs of its women employees?

Research indicates that women in Australia find it difficult to progress in a male dominated environment due to factors such as:

1. A lack of easy access to informal "boys" networks;
2. A shortage of appropriate mentors;
3. A lack of workplace flexibility;
4. Poor job design; and
5. An inability to navigate the political maze.

To sustain and support women in the workplace, employers should:

1. **Provide strong formal support** and encouragement from organisational leaders;
2. **Introduce flexible and family friendly work practices** and provide education throughout the workplace about flexible work arrangements;
3. **Build accountability in management ranks** by implementing ratings on how well they foster an inclusive, flexible work environment and report on the number of women serving key accounts, in key leadership jobs and in the leadership pipeline.
4. **Increase access to and use of formal and informal networks**, including mentoring and coaching programs, to build the skills, confidence, leadership opportunities and networks necessary for women to be successful;
5. **Adopt International Labour Office (ILO) maternity leave standards** (ie 14 weeks paid maternity leave); and
6. **Embrace organisational values** that accurately reflect employees' lives.



sphinxx – building a community

The philosophy of sphinxx is to create a community of support for women in leadership. Quite different from their professional landscape, sphinxx is a forum where women form the majority and are free to celebrate their uniqueness as both women *and* leaders.

At sphinxx we believe that representation and retention of female leaders will increase as women and their managers alike learn to identify with the lady and the lioness.

While fueling the lioness with professional development, learning and forums, sphinxx also supports the lady within, bringing all the personal services she needs right into her reach. Strong alliances are formed on the basis of trust, friendship and referrals, giving sphinxx leaders a new network of likeminded women with common interests and challenges with whom to share the load when the going gets tough.

sphinxx facilitates this through products and programs for women, their employers and workplaces in general.



sphinxx community offerings

women's national networking calendar	<i>Leading Women</i> peer support groups for women leaders	executive boardroom lunches
in-house women's forums	Australia's first portal for women in leadership	sphinxx leadership book series
<i>Take the Lead</i> audio leadership development program	womentoring women leaders and leaders of women	women's leadership conferences

Want more?

contact: Jen Dalitz, sheEO sphinxx
 email: business@sphinxx.org
 mail: PO Box 190, Mosman NSW 2088
 phone: 02 9968 1599 / 0414 647 382
 website: www.sphinxx.org

Testimonials

"Finally an intelligent women's website that looks at the whole person. I also value the sphinxx news alerts to stay on the pulse of business leadership trends."
Karen Miles www.karenmiles.com.au

"Jennifer as CEO of sphinxx, provides enormous insight for women in business. It is Jen's unique approach and energetic involvement in caring for each individual, that impressed me the most. Jen has the ability to work with others selflessly, in order to help them find their voice. When you realise it's time you found your voice; Use it to call Jen and ask for her help. You will be proud of yourself when you do."

David Lee, Coach, Trainer, Speaker, Mentor, Leeway Consulting

"If you're interested in ways to support women in leadership, from access to networks and services, or personal coaching and mentoring, make contact with Jennifer. She is a thinker and a doer and she makes good things happen."

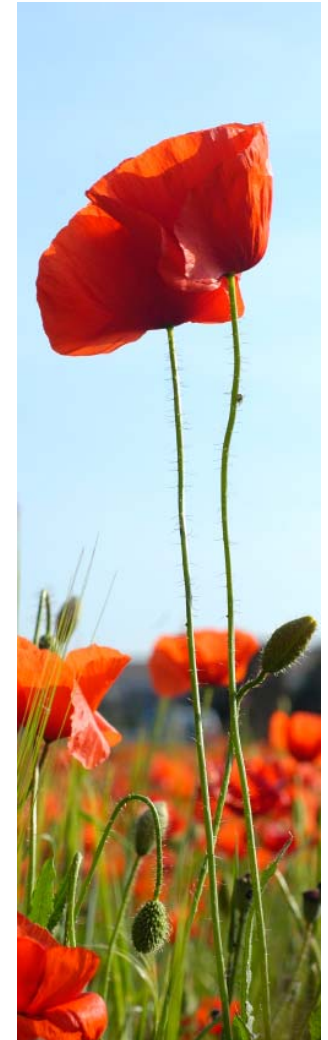
David McCubbin, Principal, coup

"Let me say how IMPRESSED I am with www.sphinxx.org. In particular the section on networking events is something that I think many people will find extremely useful. I have already forwarded it on to several women."

Valerie Khoo, Sydney Writers' Centre

"I wholeheartedly recommend Jennifer Dalitz if you are seeking advice or leadership in advancing women at work. Jen is passionate about the role of women in the corporate world - everyone in your organisation should hear her speak about the important role we each play in advancing women in business."

Michelle Bowden, Michelle Bowden Enterprises



Sources & Further Reading

Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency, 2006 Census of Women in Leadership: www.eowa.gov.au

The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity, Catalyst 2004 www.catalystwomen.org

The Natural Leadership Talents of Women, Helen E Fisher – as published in the collaborative work: Enlightened Power - How Women are Transforming the Practice of Leadership, Jossey Bass San Francisco 2005

Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success, Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Carolyn Buck Luce, Harvard Business Review March 2005

The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women In Leadership: Damned if you Do, Doomed if You Don't, Catalyst 2007 www.catalyst.org

The Difference "Difference" Makes: Women and Leadership, edited by Deborah L Rhode, Stanford University Press, California 2003

Breaking the Cultural Mould: The Key to Women's Career Success, The Hudson 20:20 Series, www.hudson.com

www.sphinxx.org

