

Are men and women really the same at work?

By Inge Woudstra

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree it will lead its whole life believing that it is stupid" – Albert Einstein

Did you ever consider that the way 'we run this place' doesn't necessarily work for women? Women say they often feel excluded, undervalued and see little chance of promotion. The numbers confirm that they do leave organisations more often than men, which obviously brings extra cost for your business.

Gender Smart Leadership is the answer. You need to flex your leadership style and change the business culture to get the best out of both men and women.

Here are a few simple things you can do to make sure both men and women feel engaged and included, and perform better.

Check In Regularly

Women usually enjoy it when you regularly check-in with them and see how they are getting on. It helps them feel valued and included. It shows them that you care about their work, and you care about them.

Be careful though that you sound genuinely interested. She will feel completely undervalued if you stutter a vague, 'Euhm...how are you getting on?' It's much better to make it sound personal and ask questions relevant to what she is working on like, 'How is that project you are doing for Janet coming along?' She will love sharing her work and hearing your thoughts.

Don't judge too quickly. It doesn't mean she cannot work independently or she needs you to solve her problems. You just need to listen and show you are interested, so she knows you care.

Give Autonomy

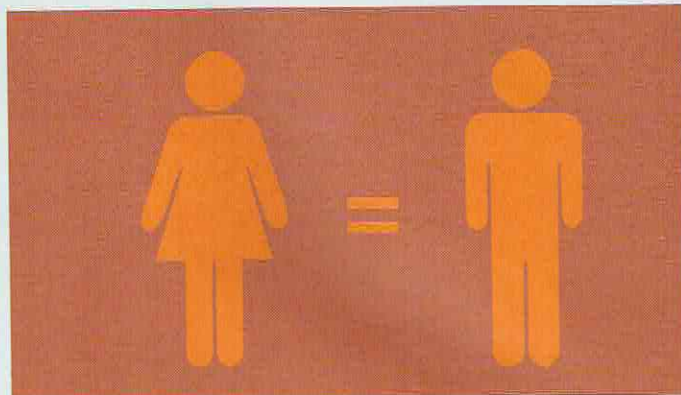
Be careful though not to do the same with your male colleagues. When you check-in regularly with men they may well feel like you have no confidence in them and don't trust them with the job. Men usually prefer to work more autonomously. They enjoy the achievement of grappling with an issue, than solving it and proudly being able to present their results.

So just give them the space and leave them to it. If that makes you feel like you lack control, just cut the assignment up in smaller chunks and ask he reports back once he has some results.

Give the 'Why'

Women have more connections between the different parts of the brain than men. As a result they often connect different topics, connect to the future and the past and enjoy knowing the big picture. When giving something to do, they will look for that big picture, as it helps them do the job. To complete the picture they may well ask you many questions such as why you are giving them the task and how it fits in with other areas of work.

Men often feel slightly offended by this, 'Surely she is not questioning my authority or judgment?'. So if you are one of those men, rest assured, she is not. She just likes to know, so she can have



a complete picture and have more degrees of freedom to deliver exactly what works for you.

Give her the background she is looking for and she will most likely be more motivated to do the job and deliver results that suit better with your needs.

One topic at a time

Men have fewer connections between the different parts of the brain than women. As a result they often prefer to work on one thing at a time, working towards one solution.

When women bring up related issues and topics or ask questions, these often seem off-topic to them or irrelevant and it can confuse them.

It's much better to be aware of what he is working on, and connect your topic to his or schedule a different time to talk about your topic. So, if he is working on the budget, and you would like to mention a potential delay in one of the client projects, just link it to the budget and take it from there.

If you have a number of issues to raise, just cut them up and schedule a separate meeting for each one of them.

Simple and effective as it helps most men feel in-control and on the ball. Instead of dismissing your point or being irritated they will be able to hear you.

Men/Women or Individuals?

'Yes', managers tell me, 'but in my business I just have individuals, and I flex my style for each one of them'. Of course you do, and that's what works best. But, once you add the female perspective, you end up having a wider range of leadership tools that you can rely on to work for a wider set of people, be they male or female. So to up performance in your team try out some of these gender smart strategies and learn what works for you and your team!

Do you want to learn more about why men and women behave like this? Do you want to know what the science behind it and what else you can do to help men and women work better together? Then be sure to check out the book by Inge Woudstra, 'Be Gender Smart – The Key to Career Success for Women' or find details of her training programmes at: www.w2oconsulting.co.uk