

## What Women Do and Men Ought To Do

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We'd like to request that you list on a piece of paper the attributes that best describe the behavior of the ideal leader to whom you would happily report. Please do this now. When your list is completed, please read the article first before referring again to your list.

At *The Leader Edge/Leaders By Design*, we have decades of collective experience researching leadership. Recent findings in neuroscience, along with decades of observations running a firm dedicated to coaching executive men and women leaders, have led us to the insights we share below.

We have interviewed hundreds of men and women about gender differences in the workplace. Often, if you ask a man to describe the ideal leader to whom he would happily report, he describes attributes typically associated with men such as control and forthrightness. If you ask a woman to describe her ideal leader, she describes attributes typically associated with women such as listening with empathy.

We believe companies need *both* genders at the helm. This ought to be our new reality although it collides with the old establishment. Studies from Catalyst have shown that companies with women included at the helm are more profitable and run more efficiently. Let's look more carefully at some of the attributes of leadership that can improve a company, many of which women commonly possess.

### **COLLABORATION:**

Women tend to be intrinsically more collaborative and willing to seek out, empathize and attend to other people's opinions and desires.

Men can observe how women do this naturally and think about the more positive outcomes that occur when all the people involved feel like they were part of a solution or decision.

### **INTUITION:**

Women tend to be more intuitive when it comes to hiring the right people or managing talent effectively. They often have a gut feeling about a person's ego, experience and leadership skills that if listened to can yield a better hire or avoid a mismatch that results in failure.

Men might listen to the first instinct that a woman has and think carefully as to whether it has merit and should be explored.

**FUTURE IMPACT:** Women tend to have a greater awareness of the future impact of decisions on clients, customers and business. They can see how a decision might affect anything from profit to morale that may not be apparent or obvious at first.

Men would be wise to listen carefully to women's questions and concerns when making important decisions or setting strategy instead of getting frustrated with the longer discussion that may be required to explore those questions and concerns.

### **LOYAL WORK ETHIC:**

Women tend to have a work ethic that allows them to stay committed to getting things done even if their schedule is interrupted by demands outside the workplace. They don't have to be at their desk from 9-5 to follow through on assignments.



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Men should understand that women are accustomed to navigating through very complicated lives balancing home and work. They will work into the wee hours but they will get it done and clocking them at work is not productive.

**EXPRESSIVE COMMUNICATION:**

Women use three times as many words as men to describe the context of a situation. Sometimes that's a good thing and sometimes it's overkill. Women need to be aware that men use fewer words and appreciate brevity and economy.

Men need to be aware that with a little more patience they can gain women's insights through important clues in the context of a situation that may lead to a better decision and the likelihood of fewer inaccuracies.

Unfortunately, there is a deeper bias present beyond each gender's choice of attributes in their leader. Because men were in the workplace first, they established and corralled the power. Men created *management* to house and entrench that power. As a result, many men have come to believe the workplace is their *place* where only they can rise into leadership. That mindset doesn't include women.

Also, many male executive leaders tend to transfer power to and share the tips of being effective executive leaders to other men, and withhold giving or transferring power to women, refusing to advise them with the necessary knowledge that will help them become exemplary executive leaders. Men will often mentor women to be executive *followers*, not actual leaders. This results in unfair decisions to include unequal compensation for women and less opportunities for women to be promoted.

This deeper bias may begin to be ameliorated by the following suggestions for men.

- Don't ignore the talent you see in women; collaborate with her and others.
- Don't interrupt a woman when she is speaking or rebuke her questions; the attribute of intuition sometimes takes a longer time to emerge in conversation.
- Don't dismiss women's profit-making know-how; they know how policy impacts people.
- Don't intrude on a woman's personal space; she is a committed professional and works hard to be as productive as possible if not intruded upon.
- Don't ignore the fact that women have finely honed language skills; learn from it.
- Don't laugh at or encourage sexist jokes; refraining will gain you a woman's trust and besides 'only men can end sexism.'
- Don't assume a woman needs your protection; recognize her strength and endurance.
- Don't get defensive when feedback comes your way that is not flattering; feedback makes us better.

Now, check your list of preferred attributes. Did you describe attributes that characterize a woman, a man or both? Whatever your responses tell you about your own preferences, they do represent what you consider to be the attributes of an ideal leader. Think about those attributes and consider whether the recommendations above, if not already on your list, ought to be added to your list.