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# HOW TO GET AHEAD AS A FEMALE IN THE WORKPLACE: LINDA MCGREGOR

MARKETING

OPINION



Home : Marketing : How To Get Ahead As A Female In The Workplace: Linda McGregor

WITH **WOMEN IN MEDIA** JUST AROUND THE CORNER, THERE'S PLENTY OF TALK ABOUT FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE. IN THIS GUEST POST, FOUNDER AND BUSINESS PRINCIPAL OF ALL ABOUT EVE, **LINDA MCGREGOR**, TELLS WOMEN HOW TO GET AHEAD IN THEIR INDUSTRY.



Posted by

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There's lots of discussion about workplace gender equality; how to better promote women through the ranks, ratios of men to women on boards, even basic recruitment and retention.

Companies are embracing all this more and more but there's still a lot of emotion due to a sense of advantaging one "group" over another.

Equally, most women would like to feel they have been promoted based on their skill set, performance and merit, rather than just helping a company meet gender mix KPI's.

Working for an enlightened company helps, a lot, but, at the end of the day, it's in your hands too. So how do you help yourself? Let's start with three basic scientific insights to help you understand the human factor in all this:

**1. 101 Decision Making:** understanding how human brains form opinions, hold values and make decisions.

In a nutshell, less than 10 per cent of the process takes place consciously, meaning a whopping 90 per cent+ of the process is done without us realising it – or as the psych boffins would say – in our subconscious.

**2. 101 Subconscious Bias:** research proves that men AND women overall believe that men are more capable at most tasks.

In male dominated areas or roles the gap is strongest e.g. STEM (science, tech, engineering and maths), traditional leadership or areas where action orientation and assertion is judged as strength. Result? Men are assumed to be more capable so given more lenient scrutiny on suitability or performance.

But understand too, bias can work in your favour as a female. For example, women assumed as being more caring, likeable, nurturing – this could lead to you being highly regarded as a potential coach, trainer etc. This is where context of your role, company culture, context comes into play.

**3. 101 Denial of Personal Disadvantage (DoPD):** is a phenomena social psychologists have found widespread in minority or “not in power” groups e.g. women, gay men, non caucasians etc.

Psychologically, as it's important to our happiness to believe that we work and live in a fair world we often subconsciously distance ourselves from perceived weaker segments, choosing to identify ourselves with the stronger cohorts in an organisation.

So called Queen Bee syndrome refers to senior women not promoting or associating with other women – the social scientists would cite this as classic DoPD, unconscious fear of being labelled with a disadvantaged “minority” group once you've moved into a power position.

There may be a sisterhood in our personal lives but, until recently, we been taught (subconsciously) that in business that association can break us away from those in power. With women, it can play out as the phrase, “no, it's not happening to me as I'm a strong, capable woman”.

So how do these three 101's help you? Simply, they give you the key contexts in play in your career and its progression; in the organisation with the managers making hire/fire/promote calls and with yourself on how you view & position yourself.

So here's a few points to work with, based off numerous psych and sociology studies:

With others and the organisation:

- Be conscious of bias and stereotyping, and remember people are often unaware of acting on it. Don't take it personally, rather work with or around it as required
- Know upfront criteria being used for judging the right candidate – find out/ask what it is, measure yourself honestly against this. Build and sell yourself on facts and examples that demo against those criteria
- Realise Subconscious Gender Bias is as likely to come from women as men – we all do it, relying implicitly on what we THINK we know about groups of people. Push for bias training in your company to make

people conscious of the phenomena and their behaviours

- Most women would rather work for a male boss than a female boss. Overall most of us struggle with the idea of a strong boss who is likeable AND female. The stereotype is still there that female bosses are alpha females and aggressive!

And for yourself? Way before you're looking for that promotion, start building the case and behaviour:

- Become conscious of what you do and how you come across to others. Consider enlisting help from others to monitor your progress on controlling perceptions of you
- Know women are less likely to self-promote, expecting that others will recognise her skills and achievements and promote on her behalf. Don't, you should own it
- Know women can sound unsure of their opinions whereas in reality they just use a more collaborative, less challenging form of communication. Concentrate on sounding confident, rather than just being confident, to get your opinion heard
- Realise what others might expect of you and use that to your benefit. Remember going harder isn't the way, owning your strengths and skills is!
- Change your behaviour to other women. Most women researched say they would rather work for a male boss than a female boss – doesn't that reinforce females make poor leaders? Check if you're evaluating her fairly and gender neutral. Also vouch for other smart woman you work with, pointing out her competency

Good news? Women can and do succeed on merit and skills and most companies and employees want this too.

Being aware of these three scientific insights – and applying the lessons – to impact conscious behaviour, by others and yourself, can level the playing field and even tip it in your favour!

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