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## Creating a workplace where everyone is valued

In today's competitive workplace, it is critical for decision-makers to display a sincere concern and commitment to ensure everyone within the organization feels valued.

Execution of this business imperative is dependent upon creating an environment in which stakeholders feel they have an opportunity to become an integral part of the leadership structure of an organization.



### Not For Women Only

Deborah Chambers Chima

Women are not always afforded the same opportunities as men, despite their numerous contributions to the success of an organization.

Universally, professional women want to receive more respect given the following facts:

- Women outnumber men in managerial and professional occupations. As of Nov. 30, 2003, women represented 50.6 percent of the 48 million employees in management, professional and related occupations, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
- Consumer spending by women is \$3.7 trillion a year and business spending is \$1.5 trillion.

Despite these current leadership trends and vast spending power, women don't always feel they are a part of the organizational decision-making process. To create an environment where everyone feels valued, decision-makers must seek more feedback from this viable segment of the work force. Leaders who desire to create a high-performance environment must recognize the needs of women who still face challenges in the workplace.

Make no mistake on this topic; the current effort of women seeking more equity and opportunity in the workplace is not a fleeting trend. Organizations that seek to continue to be successful must find ways for women to be heard in a manner that is conducive to all.

To some, it may initially seem as if a mixed message is being communicated. If women are visibly taking on more leadership roles, what is the problem? Although women have made much progress in the workplace, men still dominate

most industries. Therefore, an educational process must be implemented to ensure both genders understand the importance of valuing the contributions of all.

A good place to start is seeking to gain an understanding of the challenges women face as they continue to take on leadership roles within organizations. One of these immediate challenges is in the area of power.

Regarding the use of power, Naomi Wolf, author of *Beauty Myth*, states, "Historically many women have been uncomfortable with traditionally male definitions of power... Behaviors such as climbing over and stepping on other people are not appealing to most women."

Organizations need to become comfortable with creating an environment where women can be themselves and succeed despite not playing by the perceived rules of the game. This very topic is the subject of a new television show called "Commander in Chief" in which a woman becomes president of the United States and wants to handle power her own way.

To ensure women are able to embrace power within an organization in a comfortable manner, one recommendation is to encourage them to behave in ways that allow their styles of leadership to surface without pressure to conform.

For example, some women are more comfortable handling conflict in an indirect vs. direct manner. Allow them to learn any lessons associated with their style of management through trial and error. Women who want to be effective leaders will soon learn the pros and cons of their behaviors and adjust as necessary.

The key to ensuring the organization benefits from this transformation is to provide an environment in which men can become comfortable blending in with different leadership styles. Some current thinking suggests that women have unique leadership abilities that work brilliantly in corporate America today.

One of these areas is team building. Women tend to introduce the aspect of relationship building within teams in a manner that allows the team to bond faster and thus work more effectively together. Women leaders appear to more openly share the power in an effort to ensure the results are achieved with everyone's input. This style of leadership is not the norm, yet it deserves an evaluation to determine its merits.

Men who have traditionally managed from a hierarchical perspective would do well to observe this different type of leadership style that is being required more frequently in today's work environment.

A word of caution must also be given. The art of creating a balance in which everyone's perspective is heard must be done in a strategic manner to ensure the organization's focus is not disturbed. Sales and profit goals must still be met as important internal changes are identified and adjusted.

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As a leader of an organization needing to conduct business within new parameters, one can easily become overwhelmed while exploring the steps required for essential organizational change. Such organizations would do well to partner with external subject-matter experts who can help minimize the unavoidable learning curves that will take place. These experts can help monitor the acceptance of everyone on the team to ensure that the desired environment is created in which everyone can contribute to the success of the organization.

Imagine the enhanced business results that can be attained in such a workplace.

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