

## What Senior Leaders Need to Know About Reaching Gender Parity

Each time a woman leaves or fails to reach her full potential because of a lack of institutional support, firms waste precious resources. These failures lead to frustration on the part of the organization and for both male and female employees.

Research shows that this failure is often due to *second generation gender issues*<sup>1</sup>—the powerful yet often unexamined barriers women face arising from either cultural beliefs about gender (stereotypes) or embedded workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favor men.

Carol Frohlinger, President of Negotiating Women, Inc., has created an approach that educates senior leaders about how these issues impact women and how solutions to them can be identified and implemented saving their firms significant amounts of time and money.

Described below is a two-step process that should be implemented only if firm leadership is fully committed to support it. If your firm is not at that stage, Carol recommends doing only #1: Facilitated Learning Session.

### #1: Facilitated Learning Session

Preceded by a pre-reading packet, this 2 hour session reviews the research on *second generation gender issues* and creates an opportunity for senior leaders to discuss the implications of the research and the associated risks to the firm of the status quo.

Unlike many sessions of this sort which focus on unconscious bias, this session is grounded in the work of Daniel Kahneman. Kahneman, the only psychologist to win the Nobel Prize for economics<sup>2</sup> and author of "[Thinking Fast and Slow](#)", has done extensive research on the ways people think. He describes these as "System 1" thinking — intuitive and automatic —and "System 2" thinking — deliberate and analytical.

This lays the groundwork to understand why we (male and female) are so vulnerable to making systematic errors in judgments including judgments influenced by gender stereotypes. Kahneman concludes that we cannot avoid our automatic thoughts no matter how much we would like to do so. However, we can mitigate or even eliminate their impact by training ourselves to use System 2 thinking to review and potentially revise the decisions we make as individuals and as organizations.

This approach is philosophically compatible with the bigger picture method required to identify and remedy *second generation gender issues* as described above. It has the added benefit of preventing the feelings of blame and shame that senior leaders often experience when trying to problem-solve issues related to gender parity in the workplace.

*Second generation gender issues* discussed include the following four, commonly found in the workplace:

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<sup>1</sup> See Deborah M. Kolb, Judith Williams and Carol Frohlinger, *Her Place at the Table: A Woman's Guide to Negotiating Five Key Challenges to Leadership Success* (Jossey-Bass/John Wiley, 2010). See also Susan Sturm, *Second Generation Employment Discrimination: A Structural Approach*, 101 Colum. L. Rev. 458 (2001).

<sup>2</sup> Kahneman was awarded the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2002.

- **Gender Correlated Differences in Communication Styles**  
Socialized gender communication norms and expectations can often lead to dilution of women's messages and impact/contribution.
- **"Invisible" Work, sometimes referred to as "Office Housework"**  
Certain work, often expected of women, does not get noticed or recognized, and therefore rewarded. Examples include mentoring & counseling staff, planning events and representing diverse perspective on committees.
- **Lack of Implicit Trust/Hyper Scrutiny**  
Because people tend to like and have greater confidence in people "like them", in-group favoritism leads to greater trust and leniency; members of the in-group receive the benefit of the doubt. This is one reason why men can be overrated and women underrated.
- **Perceived Lack of Vision**  
Women are often perceived as tactical rather than strategic; as a result may not be considered for top leadership roles.

## #2: Problem Solving Session

A follow-on to the **Facilitated Learning Session**, this 2 hour session offers senior leaders an opportunity to showcase the "best ideas" (solutions) they've generated to solve the four *second generation gender issues* described above as well as to make decisions about which ideas to implement.

Preceded by a guided process to generate "best ideas" during the time between the **Facilitated Learning Session** and this Problem-Solving session, leaders:

1. Identify "best ideas" (solutions) that address the four *second generation gender issues* described above, recommending enhancements or modifications to firm wide processes and practices that would allow the firm to realize the highest benefits from its women
2. Using a World Café process, leaders agree on which "best ideas" to adopt using the following evaluation criteria:
  - ✓ Likelihood of success - how well will it work to mitigate or eliminate SGGI?
  - ✓ Business impact - what's the benefit to the firm overall? to a particular business area? Is there a way to measure the impact?
  - ✓ Feasibility - skills/tools needed?
  - ✓ Amount of pushback anticipated?
  - ✓ Time to results - when can it start and how long will it take?
  - ✓ Cost?

Please contact Carol Frohlinger, President of Negotiating Women, Inc., to learn more about how these sessions can be customized to meet the needs of your organization. Reach her by phone at (866) 616-9804 or by email: [carol@negotiatingwomen.com](mailto:carol@negotiatingwomen.com).