

MARS VERSUS VENUS - OR IS IT?

When she's not breathing fire at would-be entrepreneurs, Dragons' Den star Hilary Devey heads up her own logistics empire. In Hilary Devey's *Women at the Top*, a two-part BBC documentary, she investigated why so few female graduates end up in top management jobs and discovered that mixed gender teams perform better.

A matter of proportion

It may surprise you to discover that in the UK there are more female than male graduates. However, the programme made known that in the UK's 'top companies', 70% of middle managers are male and only 30% female. Ceri Goddard, Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society, commented on the figures: 'There are a number of factors. Women still do the vast majority of childcare in this country, and often also look after older relatives and others. We have a culture of long working hours and even though we've had this big move of women into the workforce, it hasn't really changed to reflect that fact.'

If you are a woman the picture at the top of the management chain is even bleaker, with men accounting for 83% of senior managers and board members. Goddard felt this may be due in part to the old boys' network 'You have a very small pool of mostly men, who then appoint what they know, which is other men,' she commented.

Mixed teams produce best results

If you think only women need to be concerned think again: the documentary showed evidence that gender-mixed management teams perform better in business. Hilary spoke to Geraldine Huse, Vice President of P&G, whose research had found that mixed teams within the business performed 5% better than single-gender teams. There was also research from US-based organisation Catalyst demonstrating that US companies with the most women on their boards had

42% higher return on sales, 53% higher return on equity and 66% higher return on invested capital, compared with those companies with the fewest.

So what's different about gender balanced teams?

The programme showed an experiment carried out by Dr Judith Baxter at Aston University which revealed that mixed gender teams bring out the best in both men and women. A different atmosphere emerges with mixed teams and there is a lack of negative competition. All male teams tend to compete over who has the best ideas rather than debate the alternative options, whilst all female teams invite members to share ideas and use cautious language. They all want an equal say and to be included.

How can you balance the mix?

The programme explored various solutions, however one of the most interesting angles was average differences in how male and female job hunters respond to job adverts.

Occupational psychologist Professor Binna Kandola commented that female candidates are more likely than males to question whether they measure up to a given job description, for example asking themselves whether they are the 'exceptional' individual that a job advert demands. He also argues that words that are typically more likely to be associated with men than women (eg 'gravitas') can both discourage women from applying and bias recruiters towards male applicants.



Mixed teams performed 5% better than single-gender teams

GPS is ahead of the game

Hilary Devey may not be on hand to help you or GPS, for that matter, grow our businesses. A lot of what the programme had to say rings true at GPS. Yes, we believe that our success to date is directly attributable to our ongoing investment programme and a desire to achieve optimum quality and efficiency through the use of innovative technology, but we also believe our mixed gender teams give us the edge. Our gender balance, particularly in leadership roles, gives us greater customer understanding, allows us to represent our clients more fully and deliver better customer service, ultimately boosting sales. Now you know one of our secrets it's not just about machines, it's about people and diversity.