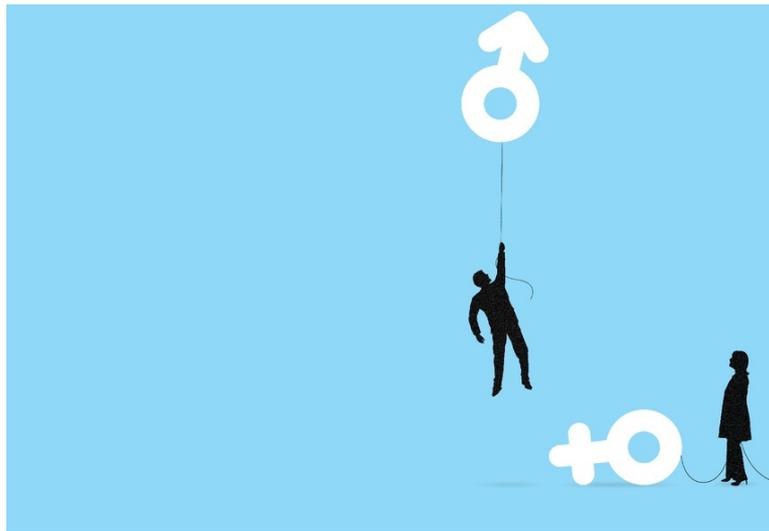


## What Really Hinders Women in Their Careers?



As an entrepreneur, I have been in a fortunate position of not having to compete with my male counterparts and have never felt threatened, although I'm sure I would have done business very differently if I were a man. As a career consultant, I have, however, been told stories by frustrated women who have applied for management positions and negotiated salaries with prospective employers and the stories were always the same – either the male applicant got the job, or if they did get the job, they found out later that they could have been earning a lot more.

According to the International Labour Organisation, if the current rate of progress holds, we won't see pay equality between men and women until *2086 at the earliest!*

Why? I asked myself, and started doing research and found some interesting facts that I would like to share with you.

**Globally women are astonishingly scarce in the higher levels of corporate management.**

What's holding us back?

I found 3 major reasons – and it wasn't necessarily men, but women themselves stopping themselves from breaking through the glass ceiling:

1. Identity conflict between their professional roles and their gender
2. Gender discrimination
3. Lack of confidence

Let's take a look at these in more detail:

### **Identity conflict between their professional roles and their gender**

Research shows that men, since by culture are seen as linear thinkers, obviously take a very linear path. Traditionally, they take three to five years of job experience before getting an MBA around the age of thirty, are offered a major leadership position at thirty-five, acquire international experience before being made Senior Vice President at forty to forty-five, and move into the executive level around the age of forty-five to fifty.

Women, since they are culturally perceived as natural multitaskers, tend to take a more “horizontal” career path with interruptions, usually because of motherhood, a husband's career and family commitments to children and/or aging parents.

Although these reasons have nothing to do with skills, women are characterized as less reliable and have insufficient experience for their age because of these interruptions. Some women get into

personal conflict because, even though they'd like the promotion, the job at the next level may require relocation.

So, women tend to take roles with more flexibility, fewer hours and fewer travel requirements. These positions are typically functions such as human resources management and communication; positions that very rarely lead to the most senior levels of management. It means they have less power and status, and are often paid much less.

Also, although role models, coaching, and mentors to help advance through the management level is a must for women wanting to break through the glass ceiling, sponsoring is significantly inferior to that enjoyed by men.

## Gender discrimination

A second hurdle I came across is gender stereotypes.

This social dilemma continues to affect how women are perceived and evaluated by colleagues and superiors.

The stereotype male is assertive, confident, and visionary. Even children see this at a very early age; at home, school, films, and then in the workplace. If you close your eyes and think of a manager you will invariably picture a man.

Women have more people skills; are sensitive and caring. Success in leadership is often perceived as requiring assertiveness and competitiveness; attributes that clash with a view of women. If women copy male traits it comes across as unnatural, and somehow wrong. It makes the woman less attractive, whereas the same traits in a man makes him more attractive.

We are affected by our environment; home, school, media, and workplace, concerning the role of women. This gender bias is slowing women down. They are being told; "Go for it!" When they do, they always get the feedback that their style is somehow "not quite right."

Fifty years ago, many countries legally ended discrimination on the basis of sex. Nevertheless, most women are still being held back in their careers by stereotypical prejudices about the qualities needed for leadership.

Studies on the career paths of men and women looked at alumni of top MBA programs and found that the projects the men were getting assigned to had bigger budgets, more staff, more visibility, and more international scope.

## Lack of confidence

In their book, *Womenomics*, Claire Shipman & Katty Kay look at the many positive changes unfolding for women as they interviewed many accomplished women. However, the authors kept bumping against a dark force that was clearly holding them back.

"Success, it turns out, correlates just as closely with confidence as it does with competence!"

Is it no wonder then, that women, despite all our progress, are still under-represented at the highest levels!

In studies of business school students, it showed that men initiate salary negotiations four times as often as women do, and that when women do negotiate, they ask for 30% less money than men do.

In other studies, although the performance didn't differ in quality, men consistently overestimated their abilities and performance, whereas women underestimated both.

Women apply for a position only when they meet 100% of the qualifications. Men apply when they meet 50%.

Having talent isn't only about being competent; confidence is part of that talent.

In a study at Yale's School of Management, MBA students showed that although all students were top-of-the-chart intelligent, female students lacked the belief in themselves.

Do men doubt themselves sometimes? Of course they do, but they don't let their doubts stop them as often as women do. The fact is that overconfidence can get you far in life. Men use expansive body language, speak in a lower vocal tone, have a tendency to speak early and often in a calm, relaxed

manner. Men do a lot of things to make them look confident in the eyes of others; and the most confident people are considered the most liked.

If women are competent and hardworking enough to outpace men in school, why is it so difficult to keep up later on?

School is where many girls are first rewarded for being good, but it doesn't prepare us very well for the real world. Girls get praised for being perfect; they learn to avoid taking risks and making mistakes. This is to their disadvantage.

Boys are taught to speak up, be strong and fight; be heroes.

On a brighter note; companies are recognizing that women can be valuable in decision-making, diversity, sensitivity, and the ability to take a holistic approach. These, although feminine traits, are necessary qualities to becoming a successful global leader.

But there is still a wide-spread assumption that a woman with family obligations will not have the time to meet senior leadership obligations. Organizations should assess what leadership characteristics they are looking for; such as collaboration, care, inspiration, and sensitivity.

47% of women in OECD counties are now set to graduate, against only 32% of men. In the United States, women now earn more college and graduate degrees than men do and make up half the workforce, and closing the gap in middle management. Businesses with a higher proportion of women on their Boards have consistently outperformed their competitors. And yet, in 2015, less than 3% of the CEOs hired by the world's largest companies were women, the lowest since 2011.

Women shouldn't have to work 51 years to earn what a man earns in 40 years!

### Exhibit B: Losing Ground Share of incoming women CEOs in the U.S./Canada



**Note:** Includes turnover events resulting from M&A and interims.  
**Source:** Strategy& 2015 CEO Success study

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About the writer:



Executive Link

Global Career Consultants

Mary Petersen, Executive Link, is a global education and career consultant, an international resume writer, and coach for job seekers and university/business school applicants alike, assisting them in their search, formulation of documents and the interview process. She is a regular speaker at career and education events. Mary's second passion is executive coaching and leadership development, especially for women; she is a Marshall Goldsmith executive coach.