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2023

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WOMEN BUSINESS LEADERS:

The Game
Has Changed

Is Your
Company
Moving
in the Right
Direction?

THE
GENDER PARITY
E D I T I O N



In recognition of **American Business Women's Day**, celebrated in the United States every September 22, and out of deep respect for the growing body of remarkable female professionals in pivotal business roles today, I'm dedicating this issue to women business leaders.

I believe a brighter light needs to shine on the different and successful ways women lead, and why women have become lynchpins not only for their organizations' success and growth, but also within our society and world.

Before digging in, I'd like to acknowledge some caveats on this topic, and a few of my own observations and experiences as a business strategist and consultant for the past 25 years.

Gender identity | While not all individuals identify within the traditional confines of male and female genders, out of necessity, the trends and studies shared in this article are based on observations and research surrounding the traditional female gender. However, I hope this spotlight resonates with all women-identifying individuals.

No universal truths | Leadership traits and styles dramatically differ among professionals, no matter our gender, with influential factors that shape how we navigate business, relationships, decision making, crisis management, opportunity and defeat. These deep-seated factors include

personal experiences, culture, upbringing, education, training and much more. I think we can all agree that drive, ability and resilience are gender-agnostic!

My professional truths | Through the years, my firm, The Cooper Group, has advised and guided hundreds of business owners and executives to shift into newer, better ways of operating. Most of these business leaders have been men – until recently. From my vantage point, there is a marked change in the air. Although studies indicate laggard but steady growth in the number of women business leaders worldwide, small incremental change in this trend has not been my experience of late.

In fact, every individual who has sought guidance from my firm over the past year has been a woman between the ages of 30 and 40. Every single one, and the trend is growing. These adept and energetic professionals are business owners, members of executive teams and C-suites, budding entrepreneurs, and leaders of various task forces within their organizations. All are on spirited missions, not to break the glass ceiling, because they've already done that, but to crush barriers to transformation and energize their organizations and teams with refreshing finesse, including with their male counterparts.

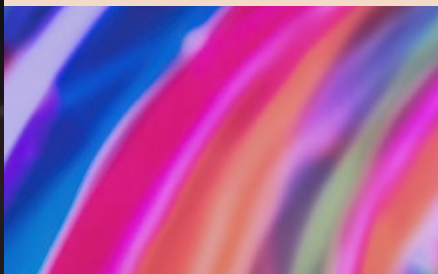
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WOMEN BUSINESS LEADERS:

THE GAME HAS CHANGED

by David Cooper

What is happening?

Many studies and observations over the years have highlighted distinct traits, characteristics and behaviors that tend to be aligned with women versus men and how these traits play out in their leadership styles.

In my opinion, and granted, I'm an optimist, what's happening in the United States and globally is that women business leaders are inching closer to reaching critical mass in gender equality. I hope I'm right because I've seen first-hand the incomparable value and effectiveness of appointing women to positions of leadership. And I'm not alone in my observations.





Generations of game changers

Emboldened by the major strides of their more senior peers over the past 80 years, today's female business leaders are a clear and present representation of what an inclusive and balanced gender ecosystem can accomplish within today's organizations – fostering cultures in which gender biases and other stereotypes are fading away, and where companies are able to flourish by embracing and empowering the best traits and characteristics of every leader and leadership candidate, regardless of gender, race, color or creed.

Following are four widely recognized traits that have been suggested as prominent among women business leaders and key reasons why women succeed in rising to the top and making meaningful differences in their organizations, teams and professions.

With their unique perspectives, innovative ideas and exceptional leadership skills, women are changing how firms make key strategic decisions.



1 More open to change

"Women are redefining the C-suite and entrepreneurial leadership in today's business world," says Sabine Holl, vice president of Technical Sales and CTO MEA for IBM. "Companies with women in leadership roles tend to perform better financially, and diverse leadership teams are more effective. With their unique perspectives, innovative ideas and exceptional leadership skills, women are changing how firms make key strategic decisions and

shaping the top management team's culture to be more open to change."

A recent study shared in Harvard Business Review reports that companies with a higher proportion of women in top leadership positions "are more profitable, more socially responsible and provide safer, higher-quality customer experiences." The study looked at 163 multinational companies over 13 years to determine how these firms' long-term strategies shifted after women joined their top management

teams. They discovered that firms became more open to change and less open to risk and shifted focus from M&A to R&D.

Studies into the behaviors of men and women leaders show that women are much more likely to be role models for the change that they seek, and willing to share inspirational stories to motivate others to embrace that change.



2 More collaborative

“Collaboration has become an essential ingredient for organizational success (perhaps even survival),” wrote Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D., president of Kinsey Consulting Service. “As

organizations move toward more collaborative cultures, a new leadership model is emerging – one that replaces command and control with trust and inclusion. The leader’s role is to encourage team members to see themselves as valued contributors, to help them build their knowledge base, expand their personal networks, and to motivate them to offer their ideas and perspectives in service of a common goal.”

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), team collaboration is greatly improved by the presence of women in the group. In studies with approximately 700 people, an organizational psychologist and her colleagues examined working

groups of two to five and found the proportion of women in a group was strongly related to the group’s collective intelligence, meaning their ability to work together and solve problems. Further, groups with more women exhibited greater equality in conversational turn-taking, enabling members to be responsive to one another and make the best use of members’ knowledge and skills. The APA cites that decades of studies show women leaders not only help enhance collaboration, but also increase productivity, inspire dedication and improve fairness.

Mabel Abraham, associate professor at Columbia Business School, said, “It used to be the case that we thought people in leadership roles were most successful if they were independent, decisive and assertive, and those are traits that we attribute to men, specifically white men. But now more and more people are saying that collaboration, selflessness and flexibility are the key things that matter. These are traits that tend to be associated with women.”

Women are better communicators than men, which can lead to an enhanced ability to connect with others, motivate and strengthen teams and perhaps most importantly, become better leaders.



3 Better at communication

Scientific research has indicated that “Women are better communicators than men, which can lead to an enhanced ability to connect with others, motivate and strengthen teams and perhaps most importantly, become better leaders. This can be essential not only when dealing with colleagues, employees and investors, but also in responding to customer needs and protecting a brand’s reputation.”

Female strengths like this are nothing new. Last fall, S&P Global released a research report contributing to a better understanding of the leadership style of women leaders during times of economic uncertainty and workplace transformation. The report, "Women CEOs: Leadership for a Diverse Future," found that women CEOs more frequently use terms associated with positive communication and more often articulate concepts of diversity, empathy, adaptability and transformation.

An interesting and related observation: Women use anywhere from 10,000 to 20,000 words per day on average, versus a man's 5,000 to 10,000. In the midst of an ever-evolving crisis, and with the knowledge that communication is one of the most important skills to have for mitigating a crisis in the first place, it's easy to see why leaders who communicate more may have an advantage.



4 Understanding the importance of relationships

One of many qualities in which women scored higher than men, according to a Harvard Business Review study, was described as "inspires others" and "builds relationships" in the workplace.

Shedding more detailed light on this tendency is Cindy Adams, president and chief learning officer at Leadership Circle. "Women build and cultivate stronger connections....Female leaders show up in a noticeably different way than male leaders in terms of building caring connections,

mentoring and developing others and exhibiting concern for the community. In today's business environment, this acts as a superpower. In a nutshell, female leaders demonstrate higher levels of leadership effectiveness and higher levels of creative competency (in all dimensions), and they demonstrate lower reactive impact compared to their male counterparts."

Based on Leadership Circle's growing database of more than 240,000 complete leadership profiles, Adams highlighted other key advantages of effective female leaders:

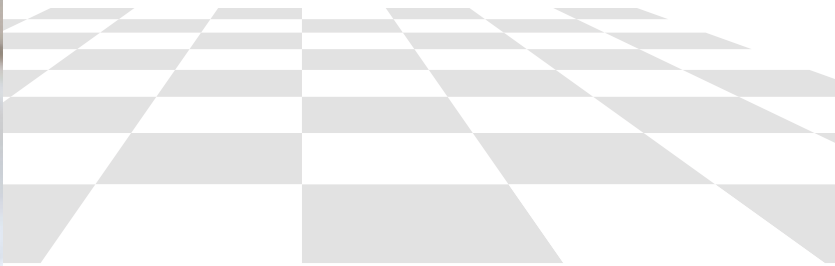


Women leaders score significantly higher in their capability to connect and relate to others, as well as in the Authenticity and Systems Awareness competencies. This suggests that women leaders are not only better at building relationships but also that the relationships they build are

... women leaders are not only better at building relationships but also that the relationships they build are characterized by authenticity and an awareness of how they contribute to the greater good...

characterized by authenticity and an awareness of how they contribute to the greater good beyond the leader's immediate sphere of influence.

Women are more likely to lead from a creative mindset, Adams wrote. "Female leaders more



SEPT 22
**Happy
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Women's Day**

often lead from a 'playing to win' orientation – focusing on their natural curiosities about what matters most to the future they are creating and partnering with others to move toward that vision. Male leaders can and do also lead from this orientation, but they are just as likely to lead from a 'play not to lose' orientation and may spend as much time moving away from what they don't want as moving toward what they do."

Financial performance improves

All these traits and more improve a company's financial performance, according to a more in-depth analysis published by What They Think in August 2023, in which they note the growing body of research suggesting that companies with a higher percentage of women on their leadership teams tend to perform better financially. They also note that this phenomenon is not simply a matter of fairness or equity, but that it appears to be directly linked to improved business outcomes.

It's safe to say that effective and transformational leadership is a blend of traits and behaviors among both men and women who work in harmony to address the operational needs and financial goals of an organization.

The game is changing. Take steps in a promising direction!

Johns Hopkins University recently cited five ways that some notable organizations are leading the charge in improving the representation of women in leadership positions. From establishing objectives to hire and promote more women to forming women-focused employee resource groups (ERG), these organizations have identified strategies to ensure the growth of women in the workplace. I highly recommend

exploring the noted methods and others to take your organization's leadership to the next level.

IBM also offers great steps and sound advice for today's organizations wanting to get serious about achieving gender equality. Their 2023 Women in Leadership study is available for download to gain insights and a detailed action guide.

In closing – to all of my talented female peers, colleagues and clients making a meaningful difference for your companies and teams, I join the rest of the country in saluting you on American Business Women's Day on September 22 – and every day!



VIEW FROM THE TOP:

Where Women Leaders Stand Today

Women worldwide have moved with verve and vitality into diverse professional and political realms over the past 80 years. In the United States from 1940 to 1945, during World War II, the percentage of the female labor force grew from 27% to nearly 37% and steadily increased, rising to 38% in 1960, 43% in 1970, 52% in 1980, 58% in 1990, and 60% by 2000. By 2022, the rate was about 57%, with the slight drop attributed to retirements, impacts of the pandemic on the workforce and other factors. By late 2022, the number had ticked back up to 58.4%, and in mid-2023, the rate was at 57.4%

by **David
Cooper**



Despite representing more than half of the U.S. labor force for more than four decades, in 2022, women held only 35% of senior leadership positions. The presence of women in leadership roles has been a much slower although steady progression compared to women's historical, overall participation in the workforce.

Some compelling facts and statistics:

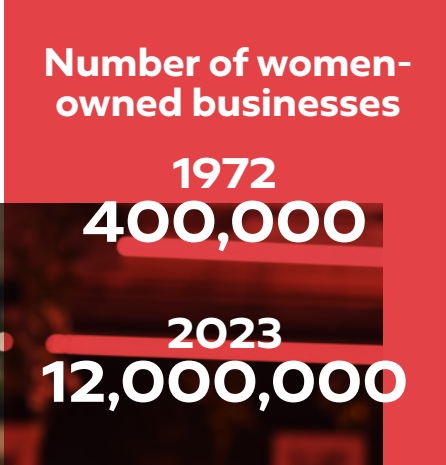
- Women's global share of senior and leadership roles saw a

32%. In the first two months of 2023 alone, women gained 34 seats on S&P 500 boards, the strongest start since at least 2019 after hovering at 16% for several years prior.

- In 2021, across industries, women held 31.7% of top executive positions in the United

million in 2023 and the number grows daily.

- In 1965, just 2.3% of U.S. representatives were women. As of 2023, 28% of U.S. representatives are women.
- In 1975, 2% of state governors were women. In 2023, 18% of state governors are women.
- Women comprise more than 28% of members of the 118th U.S. Congress, the highest percentage in U.S. history. Counting the House of Representatives and Senate, women account for 153 of 540 voting and nonvoting members, representing a 59% increase from the 96 women who served in the 112th Congress a decade ago.



Earlier this year, after crunching data from the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. News & World Report published an article on the share of women holding top executive positions, focusing on states with the highest percentage of female top executives. These are the leaders:

1. New Mexico (46.1%)
2. Vermont (44.3%)
3. Delaware (42.4%)
4. Montana (42.1%)
5. Tennessee (38.7%)
6. Maryland (37.9%)
7. Maine (37.8%)
8. South Dakota (37.5%)
9. Oklahoma (37.0%)
10. Mississippi (36.9%)

steady increase from 2017 to 2022. In 2022, global gender parity for these roles hit 42.7%, the highest parity score yet.

- In 1995, 0% of Fortune 500 CEOs were women. Today, 10.4% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women.
- In 2020, 30% of S&P board directors were women, a record high, followed in 2022 by

States, representing a nearly five-point increase since 2015 at 27.1%.

- More than 50 years ago, the U.S. Census Bureau began including data on women-owned businesses. In 1972, there were roughly 400,000 businesses owned by women throughout the country. The number has skyrocketed to 12

If Washington, D.C., were a state, it would be at the top of the list with women comprising more than half (50.7%) of top executives in the district.

If you're interested in more statistics, check out the third annual [Women CEOs in America](#) report, which provides a comprehensive breakdown of women running Fortune 500, Fortune 1000, Russell 3000, S&P 500, Private Companies over \$1 billion, and women entrepreneurs with over \$500 million in revenue. Here's one of the biggest takeaways from the report:

Change is afoot. While the numbers show slow progress at the highest levels of the country's leading corporations, there are indicators of gender equity moving in a positive direction:

- There are more boards recognizing the number of talented CEO-ready women.
- There are more women board directors advocating for the advancement of talented women to CEO posts.
- Corporate cultures appear to be changing.
- There is a greater awareness of unconscious bias, a more widespread acceptance that diversity is as much about good business as it is about good citizenship, and an increased realization that managers at all levels need to be held accountable for supporting and promoting women on their teams.

Underrepresentation continues unabated

In 2022, McKinsey & Company, in partnership with LeanIn.Org, released their eighth Women in the Workplace report, the largest study of women in corporate America. Their research revealed that we're amid a "Great Breakup,"

in which women are demanding more from work, leaving companies in unprecedented numbers to get it, and that women leaders are switching jobs at the highest rates ever seen, higher than their male counterparts.

"Women are already significantly underrepresented in leadership," the report says. "For years, fewer women have risen through the ranks because of the 'broken rung' at the first step up to management. Now, companies are struggling to hold onto the relatively few women leaders they have. If companies don't take action, they risk losing not only their current women leaders but also the next generation of women leaders. Young women are even more ambitious and place a higher premium on working in an equitable, supportive and inclusive workplace. They're watching senior women leave for better opportunities, and they're prepared to do the same."

Big challenges keep women from leadership roles

Women face many obstacles in the workforce, particularly in the business world. Some of the most unrelenting challenges include gender bias, that women are held to higher standards, and that many businesses don't feel ready to hire women for top executive posts.

"Even in 2023, women still face challenges to their authority and success that are greater than those faced by their male counterparts," said Alice Eagly, PhD, a professor of psychology emerita at Northwestern University and pioneer in researching women's leadership. "However, despite these difficulties, women are slowly rising in political leadership and in corporate and educational leadership."

All the right stuff: Women not only possess the qualities and skills necessary to be successful in positions of leadership, but

McKinsey shared these comparisons of female representation in corporate roles in America, showing the sluggish rise in positions of leadership over a five-year period:

	senior manager/ director	vice president	senior vice president	C-suite
2017	33%	29%	21%	20%
2022	36%	32%	28%	26%

Despite modest gains over the past several years, women – and especially women of color – are still dramatically underrepresented in leadership roles in corporate America, McKinsey says, adding that the difference becomes more pronounced with each step up the corporate ladder: Only one in four C-suite leaders is a woman and only one in 20 is a woman of color.

they also tend to be more highly educated, which leads to more diverse perspectives. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, women in the United States hold:

- 57% of bachelor's degrees
- 62%+ of master's degrees

1. Gender bias: One of the biggest barriers for women seeking leadership roles is the persistent gender bias that exists in many organizations. Research has shown that men are often seen as more competent and capable of

align with the traditional roles and expectations placed on women.

5. Limited access to networks and opportunities: According to the World Economic Forum, women have a harder time building strategic networks that help them to envision the future, sell ideas and get the information and resources they need to advance their careers and become leaders.



We're lacking in viewpoints from our majority stakeholders

Given that women comprise 58.4% of the U.S. workforce, I believe it's high time we create a sea change in the number of women who hold positions of leadership in American businesses and government.

Leaders hold the levers of power, wielding decisions, influence and change that impact our country and world. It is not realistic to expect businesses or government entities to run fair, diverse and inclusive organizations without valuable leadership perspectives from both men and women from all backgrounds.

Businesses in the United States cannot afford to leave exceptional talent and skills on the table. The number of women hired into leadership roles is increasing, but by less than 1% a year. Let us redouble our efforts to eliminate longstanding barriers and challenges women face and create more leadership opportunities for women in every industry, at every level.

We must pursue gender parity at a more rapid pace!

- 53% of advanced degrees, such as PhDs, medical degrees and law degrees

Women experience bias because of gender and also due to race, sexual orientation, a disability, or other aspects of their identity. But bias in its many forms is just one reason we don't see more women in leadership roles.

Mila Smart Semeshkina, founder and CEO of Lectera.com and president of the Women's Empowerment Council, shared in Forbes five major reasons why women often struggle to become leaders, based on her experience in coaching women for more than 20 years:

leadership than women, even when they have the same qualifications.

2. Lack of role models: It can be challenging for women to envision themselves as leaders if they don't have strong role models to look to for guidance and inspiration.

3. Work-life balance: Many women face challenges in balancing their work and personal lives, which can make it difficult for them to pursue leadership roles.

4. Stereotypes and expectations: There are still many stereotypes and expectations about what a leader should look and behave like, and these often do not

The Cooper Group, Inc.
5 Concourse Parkway
Suite 3000
Atlanta, GA 30328
678-474-9678

To subscribe, e-mail us at
StrategyHQ@thecoopergroup.net



thecoopergroup.net

