

Management Styles: Does gender make a difference? *Well, ... maybe.*



Do women have different management styles than men? Well... maybe. It depends on how “manage” is defined. I interviewed six managers for this article, two from the East Coast, and four in Albuquerque. One manager resented the question and one manager stated emphatically he saw no differences. I have been a manager, of both men and women, and I have been managed by both men and women. I believe that men and women tend to manage differently, but that these styles are very much affected by corporate culture, age, and personal and cultural biases. And while I believe men and women are different, and therefore approach business differently, ultimately effectiveness boils down to the individual. The “sweeping generalizations” you read about here may or may not apply to particular individuals.

Jane Twyon, an independent media consultant in New York City, said, “Women are by nature, much more sensitive, interested, and concerned... it’s more than just a job.” She searched for words that would be considered business

words rather than women words—“They see their job, their function, as part of a team, they play their part, they’re caretakers.”

We talked about the bottom line, making the tough decisions. “There’s no difference [between men and women]. If they’re tough, they’re called ‘bitches,’ or ‘bastards’.” She went on to say that women can be as devious, as cunning, and as ineffectual as men, but that women tend to see the people they work with as individuals. Men try to be open, but still play games. And men more often see the product as something separate, something they build apart from consumers.

Twyon would rather work for a woman because overall she is more comfortable, and women are more open—they believe in managing, not just order and hierarchy, not just power. She now works for herself, as owner of World Wide Media Directors.

A very senior manager in a Fortune 50 company, who wished to remain anonymous because of his position, once told me I’d never be CEO of a major corporation because “I didn’t go for the jugular.” At the time, I took that to mean I wasn’t tough enough, that I didn’t “have the balls” to play the power games... at any cost. He was right. Other things were equally important to me. I did not want to spend my life, every waking moment, thinking about business and the power games I would have to play to make it in the big leagues. I asked him if his comment applied to all women. He was reluctant, but finally admitted he believed it applied to a higher percentage of women than men. But, then insisted, “All good managers have this skill.”

This Fortune 50 manager made it very clear he thought I was asking the wrong questions. He said there are so few good managers, either men or women, that the great ones stand out, and “What they have in common is a higher degree of rationalism, and an ability to communicate on a businesslike basis.”

When pushed about styles, he stated: “Women are every bit as talented as men are, but it is not uncommon for them to perform in different ways.” They often work in teams better, have greater group skills, and better qualitative/ interpersonal skills, and they implement decisions better. Men, on the other hand, are “tougher,” quicker to make hard decisions, are more forceful in implementing them, and are more quantitative (better with numbers). Hard decisions, he said, were those that adversely affected people.

In business, he emphasized, “Women need to understand that men, by some genetic wiring, have different priorities—and that issues, even those with high emotional content (like the desire for a corporate child care center) need to be dealt with in a business-like way.” A group of senior women managers came to him for approval of a corporate child care center, but they did not present the issue to him with any business/ bottom line implications. He was disappointed, but not surprised. For whatever it’s worth, knowing this man and how he works, I am surprised these senior managers did not make the “rational” arguments first, even if they were just estimates.

Catherine Cross Maple, Ph.D., Executive Director of the Albuquerque YWCA, believes “Women have their own patterns and styles of management.” As women have entered the work force in significant numbers, they are changing the organizations they work in. She said the growth of issues like “quality management” have come about because of women’s presence in the work place.

“Women have a tendency, as a group, to be more involved with the process, more involved with people, be closer to the product, the customer. They rely less on hierarchies than men do.” She said women have more collaborative skills, better people-to-people skills.

I asked Maple about going for the jugular. About women not being able to make the tough decisions. “Men will try to categorize... I don’t believe it’s true... It’s a male perception.” I asked if Janet Reno, taking responsibility for the governments actions in Waco, was a good example, and she said “Yes... A man would be more interested in protecting his title, his position, the system... Women tend to deal with real issues.”

“Women are good. Men won’t give up their power [easily.]” She agreed that part of this is generational. With the men in power being older, when they hand over the reins of their company they tend to hand them “like to like,” which usually excludes women. Each manager, and each company, she said, has to consciously decide to integrate diversity. It doesn’t just happen.

“It’s very chaotic with this new influence [of women],” Maple said. “It’s change. And most people find change extremely difficult. They need to learn new skills to deal with it.”

When asked if there were differences between men’s and women’s management styles, Joe McCabe, VP Manufacturing at Amity Leather in Albuquerque, said, “I don’t think there are.” And, importantly, he doesn’t differentiate between them—he expects all his managers to adhere to the same standards, rules, and goals.

McCabe said he’s worked with more women in the past 8-9 years (as long as he’s been at Amity) than previously. But he got his management training in pharmaceuticals, where there are above average numbers of women. 72% of his managers (13 of 18) are women.



"I look for the best in the individual, and make no performance allowances for sex or ethnic differences." He believes a bigger issue is generational. The numbers of women in management increased significantly when the company was sold in 1992 to younger owners.

McCabe rated his management team's effectiveness against any he's ever worked with. When asked about working for women himself, he responded "I reported to a woman one time, but didn't notice much difference."

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Joyce Godwin, recently retired from Presbyterian Health care Services, as VP in charge of Human Resources and Leadership Development, among other divisions, was very concerned that we don't overgeneralize, and label women as different, because labels are hard to lose. She believes the most important influence is corporate culture, and that may reflect generational differences.

However, she did say, "Many women managers are more attuned to the actual person rather than the function; they strive to accomplish more for the individual, project, and institution; and understanding the person as an individual helps develop the person and the organization."

Godwin believes that most differences are individual, and reflect the human condition. "Some people are too bottom line oriented and some are too people oriented."

Dan Lopez, President and CEO of Desert Hills Center for Youth and Family, strongly believes women manage differently than men. His opinions are based on the scope of his own health care company and experience. 85% of his mid/ upper managers are women. They fill positions from controller to plant operations, positions that might be expected to be filled by men.

In general, Lopez said "Women are more organized, their reports are better written, they never forget..." He believes women are smarter and more open to change. Women schedule their time better, know where things are (better memory), and have better organizational flow than men. He said they have told him they are less comfortable speaking in public.

"Women take longer to resolve conflicts." Their wanting to completely resolve differences slows the process and, in his opinion, not necessarily for the better. He believes men are better at conflict—they tell a subordinate they screwed up and expect to just get on with business. They are tough and direct and move on faster.

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Frequently, when dealing with conflict and other people issues Lopez comes up against "The crying thing." The crying makes him personally uncomfortable, and often he doesn't know what to do about it. "Men don't cry in front of their bosses," he said. Since this was an issue no one else mentioned, we discussed the possible connections to the specifics of his business. Virtually all of the women he works with have clinical backgrounds, and may be more emotionally aware and responsive than the norm. In addition, the issues his company deals with are highly charged emotional ones of long term psychiatric care and severely dysfunctional families.



Much to my chagrin, after this conversation, I had to admit there were times I, also, had cried in a business situation. I have repressed the details and still feel embarrassed. Yet, if I ask myself if I was an effective manager, I'd say yes—crying or no crying.

Lopez recognizes that women must take more time and care about how they dress to be consistently effective. "Women must go out of their way to be non-seductive." Fridays are casual dress day at Desert Hills and when the men wear tight jeans or a close-fitting shirt, no one says or thinks anything of it. The signals sent by a woman who wears a short skirt or a sweater that "fits," unfortunately, are often perceived as part of a mixed message.

I asked him if women didn't go for the jugular, if they weren't "tough enough." He said "Women are very tough."

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So, what does all this mean? Women are effective managers. In many environments they manage differently than men, and organizations are changing, slowly, to accommodate different approaches. But it's a slow process. No one changes, or gives up power, quickly or easily. The great news is the sense that people, both men and women, are trying to see individuals, regardless of gender, age, or ethnic background as the key to great management.

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