

The Missing Women



David Fielding MBE, takes a look behind the figures to see what woman can do to boost their job chances.

A recent report by the Equality and Human Rights Commission showed a continuing trend of women being passed over for top jobs in Britain.

More than 5,400 women are missing from Britain's 26,000 most powerful posts. The report, Sex & Power 2011, measures the number of women in positions of power and influence across 27 occupational categories and argues that at the current rate of change it will take around 70 years to reach an equal number of men and women directors of FTSE 100 companies.

Worryingly, the results of this year's report differ very little from those in the previous report of 2008. Figures from this year's report reveal that, while women are graduating from university in increasing numbers and achieve better degree results than men, and despite level pegging with men in their twenties, they are not entering management ranks at the same rate, and many remain trapped in the layer below senior management.

The report also states that in politics, women represent only 22.2 per cent of MPs and 17.4 per cent of cabinet members. Within local authorities, only 13.2 per cent of council leaders and 22.8

per cent of chief executives are women. In business, women represent only 12.5 per cent of directors of FTSE 100 companies and 7.8 per cent of directors in FTSE 250 companies.

We know from the attentive/acevo annual Chief Executive Remuneration Survey that whilst women make up 68% of the not for profit workforce, only 46% of chief executives are women.

Numerous studies have shown that outdated working patterns where long hours are the norm, 'old school' thinking by male dominated boards, inflexible organisations and the unequal division of domestic responsibilities are major barriers to women's participation in positions of authority.

Now, at risk of making sweeping generalisations, as often is the case in articles focusing on gender, I'd like to highlight two behaviours that can significantly affect career progression.

1. Confidence

As headhunters we have observed that (in general) women are less likely than men to put in applications for roles when there are a number of elements on the

person specification that they can't fully evidence. When helping charities recruit chief executives, we regularly receive a significantly higher proportion of totally unsuitable applications from men! However, when we look at the ratio of applications from highly experienced and well qualified people there is a pretty even balance between genders. Anecdotally a higher number of men will try to argue their case, demonstrate how ambitious they are and push for a step up as opposed to waiting until they consider themselves to be comfortably ready to make such a step.

2. Networking

It's critical to continue to put effort into this and having the right connections can make a difference when it comes to sealing a deal, getting that job or landing a new client. Nicole Williams, LinkedIn's Connection Director and best-selling author of the book, "Girl on Top." Is quoted as saying, "Women can sometimes shy away from networking because they associate it with schmoozing or doling out business cards, when in reality, it's about building relationships before you actually need them. Networking in person can be intimidating, so women should look at a site like

LinkedIn as a place they can go to cultivate their networking skills." Sadly we all know that the 'best' person for the job does not always get appointed! Lots of factors come into play. Remember you stand a much better chance of securing that top job if you increase your networking efforts before, during and afterwards; and if you are prepared to talk up your own ability to deliver.

David Fielding MBE leads the Executive Search practice at attentive and is one of the UK's leading head-hunters. He is a special advisor to ACEVO and for the past decade has contributed to various debates around service delivery, social investment, governance, funding and trust. He is a trustee of Equinox Care and as an Independent Assessor, David regularly advises on high profile Ministerial Public Appointments. Prior to becoming a head-hunter, David was a successful HR Director. He is a graduate of the Cabinet Office's Top Management Programme and a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, has an MSc in HR Development and an MA in Political Communications, Advocacy and Campaigning. He is an ex World Record Holder and four time Aikido World Champion.