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# The Business Benefits of Gender Diversity

## INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES WORK

To attract and retain women, organisations must take some key actions. If you are looking to recruit more women into your senior leadership roles, these are some things you can do right now:

### 1. Conduct an audit of your recruitment practices

An audit of your recruitment practices is a good first step to eliminating processes that continue to disadvantage women. Consider placing at least one woman on your selection panels and do make sure all hiring managers are aware of the company's equitable recruitment policies and procedures.

Be sure to base any measurement in your recruitment and selection practices on gender breakdown, including number of applicants, number of interviews, number of hires. This identifies gaps that may exist overall and in specific pockets of your organisation.

### 2. Review your position descriptions

Do you regularly review your position descriptions to ensure they truly reflect the qualities and skills required in the role today?

Say you want to recruit train drivers, and the requirement in the position description is for a candidate to have

at least eight years' experience. You then need to be ask: Why eight years? Is this essential? If you historically have had 90% male train drivers, then keeping this requirement means the odds of recruiting a woman are extremely low. This further exacerbates the lack of female talent in your pipeline into operational leadership roles in the future.

### 3. Mitigate bias where possible up front

As attitudes that affect our understanding and actions are generally subconscious, the key is to 'mitigate' bias. Such interventions include ensuring the applicant pools contain a specified minimum number of female applications. This requires good communication with your recruitment partners so they are aware of the importance and supporting your company's policies and gender diversity targets.

You can also specifically target recruitment and advertising campaigns at women. Review language in your advertising to see whether it engages and appeals to women. For example, is the language free of jargon and corporate speak? Is it highlighting flexible working practices offered by your organisation? Are stated selection criteria emphasising the qualities needed for the role rather than just the qualifications and experience?

All these elements together can make a big difference in the number of female applications you attract.

### 4. Educate your leaders on affinity bias

Affinity bias — the tendency to like people who are like us — has an impact on all facets of leadership performance and decision making in organisations. It is the reason that recruiting on 'merit' is in fact a misnomer, because biases affect the process of selecting on merit. There are many case studies on this and methods that organisations have applied to eliminate bias, where possible, such as removing names and even addresses from résumés to ensure selection is truly merit based. By taking out personal information and effectively using a blind CV policy, unconscious bias is reduced, and decisions are then based on people's ability and competencies.

The next time you make a recruitment decision and assess the potential cultural fit of a candidate, consider this: Are you really assessing the candidate's values, beliefs, outlook, and behaviour, or are you more focused on selecting someone who is just like you?

Mitigating affinity bias is a start to eradicating the 'merit trap' and creating change in the representation of women in senior leadership roles.

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### 5. Agree how to give feedback on 'bias in the moment'

Another intervention to help mitigate bias is agreeing to a way to provide feedback when bias is identified 'in the moment'. Rather than humiliating a colleague for their bias in action, a better approach is to collectively agree how feedback can be delivered. This creates buy-in in advance from all involved. This is crucial because being biased isn't something only the 'bad guys' do; every single one of us is biased. By acknowledging this and striving to learn, improve, and have the hard conversations, you create an environment where everyone feels they are safe at work.

## RETENTION IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS ATTRACTION

Once you recruit senior women into your organisation, it's important to retain them. The Bain & Co./CEW 2012 gender parity study found that women face issues around their 'style and fit' in traditionally male working environments. Retaining senior female leaders therefore requires following these strategies to be successful:

#### 1. Develop an inclusion mindset

When you practise inclusion in your organisation, you inherently understand the magic of the mix each person can bring. This is when gender diversity can thrive. To be inclusive, you first need to check your mindset, or your mental attitude and beliefs, when recruiting and promoting people. Inclusion is about creating a safe environment that gives everyone an equal voice. An ability to express your thoughts, feelings, and opinions without the fear of being shut down, ridiculed, or judged is imperative to a high-performing team and organisation.

#### 2. Measure your results

Monitoring and reporting systems are essential for internal accountability. Both workforce metrics and attitudes apply. This can include gender pay differentials, gender turnover statistics, engagement survey results, and representation on employee committees. Exit interviews should also be analysed for any gender-related reasons for leaving.

#### 3. Incorporate flexibility initiatives

It's no secret that flexibility is important to most employees. This goes beyond policy though and should extend to senior leaders using flexible work practices themselves. The old days of judging an employee based on 'face time' or the amount of time they are 'at a desk' has gone. Measuring on output needs to be the new norm. If your organisation doesn't provide flexibility, it is likely that women (and men) will seek it elsewhere.

#### 4. Provide sponsorship opportunities

Providing work and sponsorship opportunities across different functional areas increases general knowledge of the business and creates opportunities for women to move into more general management roles. In senior leadership, relationships and networks are everything. By sponsoring and connecting your female senior leaders into these networks, you have a much better chance of retaining them into the future.

#### 5. Recognize your differences as your strengths

As the poet, essayist, and novelist Audre Lorde once wrote, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognise, accept and celebrate those differences."

Fostering a mindset that leverages strengths and appreciates differences increases your capability to innovate, remain agile, and be profitable for the longer term. Organisations with a renewed mindset and supportive brand values are more likely to attract and retain women.

#### 6. Challenge the status quo

Acceptance is an important part of engaging others. Reflection allows leaders to ask themselves whether they are attached to the status quo or committed to being open to new ways of doing things.

When we are attached to the status quo, we engage in positional conversations that isolate and exclude. When we are committed to change, we are more courageous in our conversations and more caring, transparent, and curious about others, which creates belonging and inclusion.

If organisations commit to making these gender diversity changes, then we have the opportunity to change the shape of the future of work, ultimately creating opportunity for all. Businesses also benefit, as an inclusive and diverse workforce has a direct and positive impact on the bottom line.

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Gender diversity is more than meeting an agreed quota. At Drake, we are working with a number of clients to help overcome some of the many challenges associated with the attraction, selection and retention of female talent. If you recognize the need to bridge the workplace gender gap, email us at: [genderdiversity@au.drakeintl.com](mailto:genderdiversity@au.drakeintl.com). For information on Drake International's talent management solutions, visit us at [www.drakeintl.com](http://www.drakeintl.com)