

Women Impact Workplace Ethics

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Want to build a strong ethical culture? Try hiring women with good character to lead your organization.

Before I get off on the wrong foot, let me assure readers that this is not about bashing men or painting women as tattle-tales. Rather, it is about the benefits of hiring both highly ethical male and female leaders. The right combination can foster a diversity of insights and experiences needed to guide a business down the right path. Unfortunately, there are significantly fewer women at the top of corporate ladders and that imbalance may have created a major obstacle to promoting integrity at work.

According to a *Harvard Business Review* article featuring a 2012 study by McKinsey and Company, women hold only 19% of the C-Suite offices. As it turns out, the reason for this slim representation may not necessarily be the stereotypical path of opting out for more time with families. Instead, it might be that they are less interested in pursuing opportunities where they are pressured to suppress their values.

Last spring, a stir was created when CNN reported that researchers at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School discovered that "women are less willing to sacrifice ethical values for money and social status." This has been demonstrated through other studies, too.

Historically, while men tend to report more incidents of discrimination than women, they are less likely to speak up about other serious misbehavior. In 2009, the Ethics Resource Center indicated that women are more inclined to raise red flags when they encounter incidents of stealing (68% vs. 58%), as well as health violations, falsifying documents, compromising customers' privacy or lying to vendors or customers.

It is not hard to read the signs here. More women are needed at the top to help challenge the status quo and set important boundaries of behavior. Companies who want to promote integrity at work will not only wisely invest in the recruitment of women leaders who will demonstrate the courage of their convictions, but will strive to retain them by boosting company-wide initiatives focused on strengthening moral principles and honor. These endeavors can ultimately translate into a stronger bottom line because a good reputation leads to stronger profitability and staying power. Ultimately, that is a win-win for all parties.

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