



He Says, She Says

Overcoming gender-based communication barriers

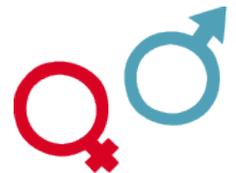
Warning: Contents may appear politically incorrect

Before you opened this link, you probably shut your office door or ensured no one of the opposite sex was approaching your cubicle. After all, if you are reading about gender barriers, you must be a terrible chauvinist or a radical feminist, right? Wrong. The reality is that our quest to create a workplace of equals shouldn't overshadow the fact that we are all individuals - of a different gender. Sometimes men are more direct than their female counterparts. Sometimes women take more time to express themselves. Now, don't get sensitive, these are not sexist generalizations. Workplace communication barriers exist for a number of reasons and gender *is* one of them!

We all talk our own talk and walk our own walk, and whether our feet are clad in boots or heels, we may stumble over our words from time to time. Our socialization, path to leadership and the perceptions of our colleagues and employees all create challenges. Read on to understand more about how we become engendered in our leadership roles and what we can do to be successful regardless of all that "he says, she says."

Snails and Puppy-Dog Tails vs. Sugar and Spice

If you could observe your colleagues through a time portal, you may see your no-nonsense female CEO practicing motherhood on a dolly or your male CFO swallowing his tears after a wayward baseball bopped him on the head. While every childhood is a little different, boys and girls are consistently treated differently by their parents and socialized to fulfill gender roles. While this fact of life doesn't mean that either gender is more or less qualified to sit in any seat at the board table, it does mean that his or her communication style will vary.



Amplify the Message:

Our socialization, which is impacted by gender, creates different communication styles.

From the Pens of Experts (Male and Female)

Research on gender relations in the workplace has continued into the new millennia. We've come a long way baby, but there is still a ways to go. Masculine values and practices such as "aggressive competition and the goal-driven and instrumental pursuit of authority, dominance, control and success" still embody our perceptions of a leader; regardless of the growth of female participation in leadership (Brannan and Priola, 2012). Women, contrarily, are still valued by employers "for their perceived abilities to manage team and customer relations through the use and application of their soft (emotional) skills" (Durbin, 2007). However, when studies of female leaders are conducted, it is evident that they "often adopt what might be considered more masculine characteristics...and as such challenge the idea of specific feminine and masculine gender differentiation" (Brannan and Priola, 2012).



Amplify the Message:

Men and women employ communication techniques that are stereotypically associated with a specific gender.

A Clouded Perception

Despite the acknowledgement that male and female leaders can and should flex their leadership and communication styles, the “power of sex roles is so strong that even when men or women are in sex-atypical jobs, they are still expected to conform to their sex roles. For example, a female [in power] is not expected to be tough and callous like her male counterpart, but rather be soft and nurturing even though her role requirements may be different” (Vikalpa, 2009).

We Need Not Wage a Battle

This isn't a call to take up a battle of the sexes at your office, rather an opportunity to recognize your individuality and determine how you can adjust your communication style and your expectations to facilitate more effective communications. in-FUSION Group is owned and operated by a group of female executives with more than 50 years of experience in navigating organizational-communication challenges. Throughout those years, we've identified a number of tactics that help leaders of either gender balance the communication needs of their colleagues and employees.



- Start constructive conversations with a positive comment.
- Be direct and focused; stick to the subject.
- Say what you mean and ask for what you want.
- Challenge each other.
- Don't nag, pout, or talk too much.
- Understand that communication techniques vary.
- Adopt your communication skills to the person you are talking to.



Amplify the Message:

These communication improvement tactics apply to both genders.

in-FUSE Your Solution:

So maybe we've made you more comfortable with reading about gender based communication challenges, but if you're still not up for discussing it, or don't know where to start, we can help! in-FUSION Group Senior Partner, Catherine Roberts, has more than 30 years of leadership experience in organizations successfully run by men and women. She can facilitate a leadership communication workshop that will help your team appreciate their differences and strengths. Whether you've climbed the corporate ladder in boots or heels, Catherine can relate to your communication challenges and provide you with well-weathered advice to overcome them.

{Contact Us: <http://www.in-fusiongroup.com> | info@in-fusiongroup.com | 877.224.2429}

Smart People We Quoted:

1. Brannan and Priola. "Girls Who Do Boys Like They're Girls"? Exploring the Role of Gender in the Junior Management of Contemporary Service Work" *Gender, Work and Organization*. March 2012
2. Durbin, S. Who gets to be a knowledge worker? *Gendering the Knowledge Economy. Comparative Perspectives*. 2007
3. Vikalpa, N. Gendered Behaviour of Men and Women in the Workplace: Time to move on. *Gender and Workplace Experience*. December 2009.