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### Letter from Joel A. Kurtzman to Ann Hopkins, June 15, 1993

Joel A. Kurtzman

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION  
*GEORGE F. BAKER FOUNDATION*

HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW

JOEL A. KURTZMAN  
*Executive Editor*

MAIL ADDRESS:  
HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02163

617-495-6804  
FAX: 617-495-9933

June 15, 1993

Ann Hopkins  
Price Waterhouse  
1801 K Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear Ann:

Leaders in many fields have made the HBR Letters to the Editor an important, national forum. When our articles raise a vital issue, it's important for significant and differing opinions on that issue to be spelled out as soon as possible to the same worldwide leadership audience that reads the original article. Writing about an issue raised in HBR sparks necessary and ongoing debate. It can also be fun. That's why I hope you'll have time to respond to the enclosed article by Nancy A. Nichols, "Whatever Happened to Rosie the Riveter?" for our September-October 1993 issue.

Rosie the Riveter rallied a whole generation of women with her war cry, "We can do it!" Women followed her onto the factory floor in unprecedented numbers during World War II, and together these new workers retooled U.S. industry from peacetime to wartime production. These women successfully raised productivity, decreased product cycle time, and improved quality; however, when the war ended, they were laid off in large numbers, and men were hired to replace them. Nichols contends that despite their wartime success, Rosie and her friends had not been able to change the strong cultural perception of factory work from men's work to women's work. As such, they fell victim to the power of definition, a demon that managerial women still struggle with today. She asserts that only a critical mass of women at senior levels can break this bind and help change our perception of managerial work. Just as Rosie's skills blossomed during a crisis, today's competitive crisis may be fertile ground for managerial women to step into the void and redefine the work of management.

We would be interested in your views on the article. Do you agree or disagree with Nichols' premise? Does her framework for action have merit? Should you decide to respond, please draw from your own experience and expertise in forming your comments. Also, please be sure to:

- \* Double space your letter;
- \* Limit its length to 2-3 pages;
- \* Include your title and affiliation as you would like it to appear in the magazine.

Press deadlines always have to be faced head on. To be included with the other comments on this article, your response needs to reach our Research Editor, Helen Rheem, by Wednesday, June 30. As the editor in charge of this department, Helen delights in strong ideas, and considers both substance and candid style to be heaven-sent. Call her at (617) 496-8065 or send a fax (617) 495-9933 if she can help in any way or answer questions.

While we won't change substance, HBR does reserve the right to edit letters, primarily for space, and to republish them as reprints. That's why we ask you to keep your letter to about 500 words. Occasionally, space does not permit us to publish all the letters we receive. In that case, we make every effort to publish your letter in a subsequent issue of the magazine.

I hope you will be able to participate. We would value your contribution.

Sincerely,



Joel Kurtzman  
Executive Editor

IN QUESTION

*The legendary war hero has a few lessons to teach today's working women.*

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## Whatever Happened to Rosie the Riveter?

by Nancy A. Nichols

Rosie the Riveter is both a romantic and a heroic figure from the World War II era. A former housewife turned war hero, Rosie emerged

**Not only did Rosie do it.  
She did it better than  
anyone had ever done it.**

from the kitchen and built the machinery necessary to fight and win World War II. Posters emblazoned with her picture became a symbol of wartime courage and patriotism. Her motto "We can do it!" stirred countless women.

And not only did Rosie do it, she did it better than anyone had ever done it before. Rosie was a key player in the retooling of U.S. industry from peacetime to wartime production. During the five years she was on the shop floor, from 1942 to 1947,

productivity rose, product cycle time dropped, and quality improved.

Yet despite her success, Rosie was forced off the factory floor when the war ended, her achievements buried in books, all her accomplishments wiped out of our consciousness. She had proven her abilities, but she remained that cultural enigma: a woman in a man's job. Rosie's skills, which had helped win World War II, were deemed unnecessary in the fight for competitiveness that began about the time she left the factory. Rosie, it seemed, would have to spend the rest of her time baking cookies, not building machinery.

While Rosie may seem like a quaint historical figure to some people, her story contains prudent, even urgent, lessons for women in management today. For they too work in

what have historically been "men's" jobs. As such, Rosie's story can help us understand the plight of modern managerial women. That's why we ask, whatever happened to Rosie the Riveter? And, more important, what can we learn from her?

### Rosie Was Robbed!

During World War II, women were free to be men; they were even encouraged to be men. In the face of the fervent demands of wartime production, the social and ideological barriers that had kept women off the factory floor gave way. Women took on jobs as riveters, assemblers, and machinists, building bombers and tanks by day and tended their victory gardens by night.

A new study by two University of Michigan researchers, published in the *American Economic Review*, documents the dramatic rise in the number of women working in factories during this period. According to Sherrie A. Kossoudji and Laura J. Dresser, there were never more than 45 women working at Ford's massive River Rouge complex prior to the war. But as the war escalated and women were called in to replace men sent to the front, women suddenly accounted for 12% of the 93,000-member work force.

Their tenure in the plant was short, however. By war's end, women made up less than 1% of all hourly factory employees. As Kossoudji and Dresser explain, "Women were laid off from industrial firms disproportionately, and women with seniority rights were not recalled, nor were new women hired when postwar auto production expansion was associated with new hiring." To justify laying the women off and hiring male replacements, Ford managers claimed that the production process had altered so completely after the war that the occupations where women had proved themselves no longer existed.

Bombers were riveted; cars would be welded. Therefore, it was possible for Ford managers to make a some-

*Nancy A. Nichols is senior editor at HBR, where she covers finance, health care, and women's issues.*

what unconvincing argument that women were no longer qualified. They claimed that the new auto production would require heavy lifting, not necessary in building bombers. As one woman put it, "They hire men there, they say, to do the heavy work. The women do light work. During the war, they didn't care what kind of work we did..."

But after the war, they sure did. Kossoudji and Dresser conclude that, even when the jobs remained exactly the same, the ability of women to do them suddenly became suspect as the men returned from the front. "These women had, during the war, many of the exact jobs that became men's jobs after the war, using the same machines and drills..." Even though the women had proven themselves capable workers, often more efficient than the men who had preceded them, the prejudice persisted that these were "men's" jobs. The brief time that women had spent in these jobs was not enough to change our cultural perception of factory work from "men's" work to "women's" work.

As such, Rosie was done in not by the men who came home from the front, nor by the men who ran the plant. Rosie was a victim of the power of definition, a demon that managerial women still struggle with today. For deeply embedded in our definition of what it means to be a manager is the belief that the manager will be male. In fact, being male and being a manager have been synonymous since the inception of the managerial class in the early 1900s.

### If Men Are Good Managers, What Are Women?

As Rosabeth Moss Kanter explains in her ground-breaking work, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, professional managers succeeded in wresting control of the organization from its owners only by establishing their "expertise" in the "scientific" methods of management. This expertise was rooted in the characteristics our society has traditionally labeled "masculine": a tough-minded approach to problems; analytic abilities to abstract and plan; a capacity to set aside personal and emotional

"The End of a Riveting Experience: Occupational Shifts at Ford After World War II"  
by Sherrie A. Kossoudji and Laura J. Dresser  
*American Economic Review*  
May 1992.

*Men and Women of the Corporation*  
by Rosabeth Moss Kanter  
New York: BasicBooks, 1977.

"Are Women Executives People?"  
by Garda W. Bowman, N. Beatrice Worthy, and Stephen A. Greyser  
*Harvard Business Review*  
July-August 1965.

"If 'Good Managers' Are Masculine, What Are 'Bad Managers'?"  
by Gary N. Powell and D. Anthony Butterfield  
*Sex Roles*  
April 1984.

*Games Mother Never Taught You*  
by Betty Lehan Harragan  
New York: Warner Books, 1977.

"Management Women and the New Facts of Life"  
by Felice N. Schwartz  
*Harvard Business Review*  
January-February 1989.

considerations in the interest of task accomplishment, and a cognitive superiority in problem solving and decision making. As Kanter reminds us, "These characteristics supposedly belonged only to men."

Women, on the other hand, historically have been viewed as having characteristics that were antithetical to modern management. They were "unfit" for the managerial role because they were "too emotional" and lacked the analytic abilities of men schooled in the scientific approach to management.

This link between masculine traits and managerial abilities had become well embedded in our organizational psyches by the middle of this century. A study published in the *Harvard Business Review* in 1965 entitled "Are Women Execu-

## On Women and Work

*The Female Advantage*  
by Sally Helgesen  
New York: Doubleday, 1990.

"Ways Women Lead"  
by Judy B. Rosener  
*Harvard Business Review*  
November-December 1990.

"Ann Hopkins"  
by Ilyse Barkan and Joseph L. Badaracco, Jr.  
Harvard Business School Case No. 9-391-155  
Boston, Massachusetts:  
Harvard Business School, 1991.

*Justice and Gender*  
by Deborah L. Rhode  
Cambridge, Massachusetts:  
Harvard University Press, 1989.

"Gender, Language, and Influence"  
by Linda L. Carli  
*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*  
Volume 59, No. 5, 1990.

"Organizational Demographics and Women's Gender Identity at Work"  
by Robin J. Ely  
Working Paper  
Cambridge, Massachusetts: John F. Kennedy School of Government,  
Harvard University, 1992.

tives People?" reported that 32% of the respondents believed that a woman's fundamental biological makeup makes her unfit for a managerial role.

As recently as the mid-1970s, researchers found that the traits most commonly associated with being male continue to be synonymous with the traits managers are expected to exhibit. In "If 'Good Managers' Are Masculine, What Are 'Bad Man-

**Women historically have been viewed as "unfit" or "too emotional" for the managerial role.**

agers'?" from the journal *Sex Roles*, Gary N. Powell and D. Anthony Butterfield report that the traditionally "masculine" characteristics of self-reliance, independence, aggres-

sion, and dominance have become inseparable from our definition of managers. Their poll of 1,368 business students of both sexes revealed that between 67% to 85% describe a good manager as possessing these so-called "masculine" traits. It was this

## The first women managers dressed like men, they talked like men, they even used sports analogies.

belief that men were made for the job that greeted women managers when they first joined corporations in large numbers in the mid-1970s, and it has plagued them ever since.

### The Metamorphosis of the Managerial Woman

Not surprisingly, the first women managers attempted to fit themselves into the managerial role by adopting a "masculine" style. They dressed like men, they talked like men, they even tried to use sports analogies as men did.

In her best-seller, *Games Mother Never Taught You*, Betty Lehan Haragan argues that, in order to succeed as managers, women need to understand the elaborate sports metaphor after which business is patterned. She asserts that "management pat-

terns its functions after the most sophisticated of all team games—football," then goes on to coach women on the intricacies of the game. "If you recover a fumble, complete a long pass, or make a long run into scoring position, press your advantage and capitalize on your opportunity to confound the opponents; try a trick play on the next down."

Unfortunately, as Rosie had already proved, it isn't easy for women to fit themselves into a male model. Women would have to understand more than fourth-down plays to be successful in business. After a decade of failing with the football paradigm and an equal number of years wearing bad clothes, women began to realize that it was impossi-

ble to disguise their essential nature in the workplace. Most obviously, it was impossible to ignore pregnancy and motherhood and their impact on a manager's worklife. So it was that in the late 1980s the "Mommy Track" was born.

In "Management Women and the New Facts of Life," published in *Harvard Business Review* in 1989, Felice N. Schwartz wrote, "The one immutable, enduring difference between men and women is maternity." As such, Schwartz points out, pregnancy remains one issue where "female socialization" comes face-to-face with a male corporate culture. Male executives "place every working woman on a continuum that runs from total dedication to career at one end to a balance between career and family at the other. What women discover is that the male corporate culture sees both extremes as unacceptable. Women who want the flexibility to balance their families and their careers are not adequately committed to the organization. Women who perform as aggressively and competitively as men are abrasive and unfeminine." Not to mention bad mothers.

Part of Schwartz's solution to this dilemma is to separate women into two groups: "career primary" and "career and family" women. The corporation then can channel women onto different tracks: the fast track or what the *New York Times* later dubbed the "Mommy Track."

This simple suggestion started a heated national debate. On one side were critics who fervently believed that, since men were not being asked to choose between work and family, women shouldn't be asked to either. On the other side were those who sought to be "pragmatic" and argued that, since most women would leave the work force at some point to have children, it was logical to separate them out anyway. The debate ricocheted throughout the national media for several weeks before the concept was derailed altogether.

### A Return to the Basics of Sexual Politics

More recently, it has been in vogue to argue that women, who al-

legedly possess special intuitive and caring abilities, actually make better managers than men, who are now hopelessly trapped into the outdated scientific paradigm of management. Recent publications have extolled the "special" capabilities of women managers, arguing that women have a unique ability to engage in the interactive forms of leadership that are needed in corporations today.

In *The Female Advantage*, Sally Helgesen writes, "As women's leadership qualities come to play a more dominant role in the public sphere, their particular aptitudes for long-term negotiating, analytic listening, and creating an ambiance in which people work with zest and spirit will help reconcile the split between the ideals of being efficient and being humane. This integration of female values is already producing a more collaborative kind of leadership, and changing the very ideal of what strong leadership actually is."

In this equation, women who were once thought to be inferior leaders because they were "too emotional" now turn out to be excellent leaders because they can exhibit "special" emotional qualities.

For authors like Helgesen, motherhood is no longer a liability; it is actually an advanced management training program. As one woman executive who is quoted in *The Female Advantage* says, "If you can figure out which one gets the gumdrop, the four-year-old or the six-year-old, you can negotiate any contract in the world."

In its way, this is as simplistic as the application of sports metaphors to management. Managers aren't mothers any more than they are quarterbacks. Both the sports metaphors and the new maternal metaphor of management are elaborate extensions of prevailing sexual stereotypes, the strong beliefs we hold about the way men and women should behave, translated into a business context.

Still, there exists a persistent notion that the special sensitivity of some women can lead us to a new kind of interactional leadership. For example, in "Ways Women Lead," an article published in the Novem-

ber-December 1990 issue of HBR, Judy B. Rosener speaks glowingly about the work of a woman in an investment bank who "hosts dinners for her division, gives out gag gifts as party favors, passes out M&M's at meetings, and throws parties 'to celebrate ourselves.'"

Most likely, these women lack the organizational power necessary to create change and therefore fall back on the soft skills of nurturing and feeding people to gain allegiance. After all, women have been using food to cause groups to coalesce for years. By extolling this brand of manipulation, authors like Rosener are doing little more than making a virtue out of necessity.

And while there is much to be said for creating more humane work environments, and much debate over whether M&M's will do the trick, it is hard to imagine a book written for the male manager that suggests that what he needs to do to be successful is to bring cookies to meetings—unless, of course, he happens to be the Pillsbury Doughboy.

Despite the popularity of the idea that women bring something special to the management table, there is also a certain danger inherent in this belief. For even as we seek to define gender roles, we perpetuate our prejudices. For it is the very definitions that authors like Helgesen suggest women cling to that have effectively excluded women from managerial ranks in the past. The skills that Helgesen claims will make women exemplary managers are the same skills that Rosabeth Moss Kanter told us were the emotional characteristics that define the other—the lesser skills that sit beside the rational manager.

Women, therefore, have bought into and are currently promoting the very definitions that have been used to exclude them from the work force in the past. If women start to define themselves as good at the soft skills of communications, you better believe that someone will say that the "real" work of managers is number crunching and strategic analysis—things that women, well, just aren't

up to. Remember, as soon as Rosie got good at riveting, factory work was all about welding.

### The Double Bind

Adding to the complexity of this issue is one inescapable truth: women today cannot avoid being judged as women. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter warned, women are "often measured by two yardsticks: how *as women* they carried out the sales or management role; and how *as managers* they lived up to images of womanhood." By claiming that women bring "special" emotional and communications skills to the workplace, we damn the women who do not.

Take the case of Ann Hopkins, a woman who approached her job as an accountant by exhibiting a traditional male approach to authority. Hopkins was in her early forties in 1983 when she was denied a partnership at the accounting firm of Price Waterhouse. Even though she had generated more business and billed more hours than any other candidate up for partnership at the time, Hopkins's application was rejected. When she discussed her rejection with the firm's chairman, Joseph Connor, she was told to relax and "take charge less often." Another partner suggested that she try to appear more feminine and wear more jewelry and makeup. Ann Hopkins had succeeded at being an accountant, but she had failed, in their eyes anyway, at being a woman.

This double yardstick of gender appropriateness and managerial effectiveness often leaves women in an unbreakable, untenable double

rectly and showing concern for others, risk being seen as "ineffective," as someone skilled in the soft side of communications but unable to do the hard work of management.

After looking at a large number of sex discrimination cases, Deborah L. Rhode, a law professor at Stanford University, found that women have been denied promotions both for being ambitious and argumentative and for being old-fashioned and reserved. In other words, she found that there is often no acceptable way to bridge the gap between womanhood and work. And no way to break the bind that keeps women out of the top ranks of corporations.

If the norm is male, women will always be the other, the deviant. Superior or inferior, she is not the same. She is caught in a catch-22. If she attacks the problem by trying to be male, she will be too aggressive. If she attacks the problem by trying to be female, she will be the ineffective other.

Day to day, this translates into a minefield for women who must manage both their sexuality and their managerial performance. A recent study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* shows that women who communicate indirectly or "nicely" are more effective than women who do not. In other words, women whose behavior is consistent with our cultural expectations of femininity are more successful than women who choose to behave in an "unfeminine" way. For example, women who use disclaimers such as "I'm no expert," "I don't know," and "I mean" and phrases such as "kind of," "sort of," and "you know" have a greater chance of influencing men than women who are more direct in their speech. Even though the women who use these phrases run the risk of undermining their message.

To come to this conclusion, Holy Cross Professor Linda L. Carli asked 229 undergraduates to rate female and male speakers on persuasive ability. She found that "men were influenced to a greater degree by women who speak tentatively than

by those who speak assertively." She concludes, "It may be important for a woman not to behave too competitively or assertively when interacting with men in order for her to wield any influence, even if she may risk appearing incompetent."

To make matters worse, a woman will actually hurt her credibility with women colleagues when she uses the "indirect" style that works with men. Ask any woman who has ever tried to navigate this cultural and linguistic minefield, and she will tell you that it is next to impossible. Indeed, a growing number of researchers are pointing to this complex set of contradicting gender and managerial expectations as the chief nemesis of women in the work world. At the very least, the need to first and foremost manage their sexuality puts an extra burden on women already carrying a heavy load and trying to compete as managers.

As Rosie proved, what matters most is the ability to get the job done. What matters least is whether a man or a woman is doing it. Yet, ironically, that is what we have come to focus on.

### A Way Out

Rosabeth Moss Kanter in *Men and Women of the Corporation* put forth the hopeful hypothesis that sheer numbers of women in the work force could overcome this problem. Once a critical mass of women had been achieved in any organization, she surmised, people would stop seeing them as women and evaluate their work as managers. Unfortunately, and only with the benefit of hindsight, is it possible to say that this hopeful hypothesis has not been borne out. Large numbers of women are clustered at entry-level and mid-level positions in both the professions and the corporations, and still women have not reached the top nor broken many of the sexual stereotypes that hold them back.

New research conducted at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government by Robin J. Ely shows that it will take more than a critical mass of women at mid-level to eliminate women's token status in the

## What matters is getting the job done. What doesn't matter is whether a man or a woman does it.

bind. Women who attempt to fit themselves into a managerial role by acting like men, as Ann Hopkins did, are forced to behave in a sexually dissonant way. They risk being characterized as "too aggressive," or worse, just plain "bitchy." Yet women who act like ladies, speaking indi-



work world. The key to changing the way women are perceived in any organization will be a critical mass of women at the senior levels. Ely states that "until women receive adequate representation at the top levels of the organization, sex role stereotypes will persist, largely to the detriment of women, as the basis for women's own sense of how they differ from men and as the basis for their own sense of their individual and collective value to their organizations."

After studying eight law firms, Ely's surprising finding is that not only do men view women differently when there is a critical mass of female senior executives in an organization, but women also view themselves differently. For example, Ely reports that women in firms with few senior women are less serious about their work, less satisfied with their firms, less self-confident, and less interested in promotion compared with women in firms with significant numbers of women in senior positions. Ely concludes that

this "may account for the disturbing rate of turnover among talented women many organizations are facing today."

Which, of course, presents us with a sort of Gordian knot. If the only way to get more women to the top of corporations is to have more women at the top of corporations, we are left with a riddle, not a breakthrough.

Unless, of course, we remember what Rosie taught us. Rosie was suddenly able to "man" the war-making machine because the whole country was in a crisis, a crisis not so radically different from the competitive crisis we are all facing today.

It is often possible during times of crisis to overlook gender identification and look simply for those who can do the job. Surely, if women can be middle managers, then women can be senior managers. The key is not seeing them as women. The key is to focus on their abilities to perform the job at hand.

We know that effective leaders use both the more traditional, male, authoritarian style and the new, feminine, interactive style. Women must be allowed to use both as well, without confronting or confounding some rigid sexual stereotype.

**If thousands of women managers are effective in middle management, surely some can cut it at the top.**

If Rosie can rivet, she certainly can weld. If thousands of women managers can be effective at mid-levels of the corporation, surely some can cut it at the top. The key is to evaluate those near the top based on results, not on whether they've ever been mothers or plan not to be mothers. Not on whether they dress well or poorly. The key question is, can they do the job? And even more important, can they be taught to do the job? After all, a woman who can rivet can learn to weld. As Rosie once said, "We can do it!"

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*"Omigod, here comes Mrs. Clinton!"*