

# Promoting Women's Leadership



## **AUTHORS**

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The goal of the Leadership Community is to provide a space where leaders of financial institutions can practice continuous learning and reflection, build supportive relationships with peer leaders, share successes and challenges and practice new behaviors.

*Much of the recent discussion around promoting gender diversity seems to come from two distinct sides – those who say that it is up to women to take action and take up leadership roles, and those who say that the problem is systemic and that it is up to institutions, public and private, to create an enabling environment for women to thrive.*

*We believe that both are needed. Individual women, and women as a collective, can take specific actions to become leaders and promote diversity. Women also need the support of institutions to translate these individual actions into lasting and systemic change.*

*Recognizing that the approach to promoting gender diversity will vary depending on cultural context and from institution to institution, this list seeks to include many of the possible approaches that our community of financial inclusion leaders has observed as contributing to a successful outcome.*

*We know that diverse perspectives lead to stronger decisions and healthier, more vibrant organizations. Women do not need special treatment; they just need truly equal opportunity.*



## WHAT FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS NEED TO HAVE IN PLACE TO SUPPORT WOMEN LEADERS

- 1 Vision and strategic plan for gender diversity – in order to succeed, diversity must be championed by the senior leadership team as a strategic business imperative
- 2 Strategy for diversity that includes targets for the desired percentage of men and women in each cadre throughout the organization but also maintains a commitment to finding the right talent and best fit for each position
- 3 Tracking and monitoring of key diversity statistics - including hiring, promotions, percentage of men and women at all levels, as well as gender-disaggregated satisfaction and exit data
- 4 Broad and consistent communication about the importance of gender diversity – cascade the vision for diversity beyond senior management using all channels to communicate concepts of equality and women rights; use social media to influence the younger generation and achieve long-term change
- 5 Policies and programs that support, and are appealing to, both men and women—including clear, gender-neutral career development planning that allows employees to envision their growth
- 6 Awareness that equal opportunity is not always gender-sensitive
- 7 Training in technical and management skills – make sure these are equally available and equally accessible to men and women staff
- 8 Coaching, mentoring and sponsorship opportunities, either from more senior members of the leadership team or through external networks or other resources
- 9 Gender-sensitivity training – both women and men may have internal biases. Training can help to reveal and diminish these biases
- 10 Policies that protect everyone and clear, safe mechanisms for reporting violations – sexual harassment, non-discrimination
- 11 Work-life balance programs including flex hours or remote arrangements where possible - flexible working arrangements can help women to take on and stay in leadership roles
- 12 Strategies for business continuity during maternity or paternity leave so that there are smoother transitions out of and back into the office
- 13 Assertiveness and communication training for women – build self-confidence among women staff, help them to recognize their potential and how to communicate in a way that gets their ideas noticed by colleagues
- 14 An inclusive culture –ensure that people are living the value of diversity in their daily decisions, speech and interactions; reward desired behavior and eliminate disruptive behavior

# *In Practice*

## Diversity strategy

An organization in Kenya staffed by mostly women has recently had some complaints from men saying that the organization is not diverse. The organization is now consciously communicating to staff and potential hires that they are not looking for women to fill open positions; they are looking for the best fit and the best talent.

## Equal opportunity

*A microfinance bank in South Asia has a strong commitment to being a gender-sensitive organization where women and men are equally encouraged to apply. However, in their largest cadre of staff—loan officers—motorbike ownership is a requirement of the job. Women are unlikely to own or feel comfortable riding a motorbike and are therefore, despite the policy of equal opportunity, excluded.*

## Skills training

In many countries women are far less likely to have the time available to pursue professional development opportunities that occur outside of their daily work schedules. A Women's World Banking network member in South Asia has designed its professional development strategies to support women's multiple responsibilities. The organization conducts internal skill-building opportunities such as trainings and provides financial and leave opportunities for female staff to improve their work skills.

## Gender-sensitivity training

*A manager assumes that women do not want to take certain roles that involve travel to less developed parts of the country or require spending the night in the villages. Now, during hiring and training, she has started asking herself, "are there truly no women that would want to take on these roles, or is this my own internal bias at work?"*

## Maternity leave

A Women's World Banking network member in Latin America has created a pool of highly-talented floating loan officers. In the case of maternity, or other long-term leave, the floating loan officer steps in, takes over the portfolio, maintains its quality and then hands it back to its originator at the end of the agreed period. This eliminates stress for the women returning from maternity leave, ensures good customer service and overall portfolio quality.



## WHAT WOMEN NEED TO DO TO GROW AS LEADERS AND SUPPORT INTERNAL DIVERSITY

- 1** Believe in yourself – everyone has the potential to be a leader
- 2** Know yourself – assess strengths and areas for development by seeking feedback to identify possible blind spots and then create an action plan for self-improvement while staying true to your values and who you are
- 3** Recognize your strengths and then surround yourself with team members that have different strengths in complementary areas
- 4** Build your skills in key areas – negotiations, handling difficult situations, giving and receiving feedback, communications
- 5** Build the leadership skills of the people you manage – coaching and mentoring other women will enhance and sustain gender diversity
- 6** Be proactive – suggest and negotiate work-life strategies that are beneficial to women and employers, like flexible working arrangements, and share your ideas with Human Resources so that action can be taken
- 7** Ask for what you want – to be included in meetings, a promotion, a pay increase, a mentor or coach, a challenging (stretch) assignment
- 8** Don't be afraid to try something new – take smart risks and show your confidence
- 9** Achieve superior performance and seek continuous improvement – if you are taking advantage of flexible working arrangements, demonstrate that you can still deliver excellent results
- 10** Talk to partner/family about professional goals
- 11** Pursue further training in specific areas needed – strive for excellence in your current role and develop the skills needed for your next role
- 12** Build a network of support that includes men – create a diverse team of supporters
- 13** Find an accountability partner – tell this person about your professional development plans and ask them to help you stay on track
- 14** Remember that, as a woman leader, you are a role model for the next generation of women leaders - they are the future talent of your organization

# In Practice



## Know yourself

After attending a Women's World Banking leadership program, a manager decided to conduct her own, personal 360 degree feedback process with her colleagues. This anonymous process gave the manager a view into her personal strengths, and areas for growth, and helped to promote a culture of giving and receiving feedback among her colleagues.

## Be proactive

After attending a Women's World Banking leadership training program, a manager of two departments started negotiating with her boss each time a new deliverable was requested, for example about the resources available and the time required to achieve the best results. Since starting to negotiate on objectives, she is less stressed which makes her more effective at work and has helped her achieve better work life balance.

## Ask for what you want

A woman in an individual contributor role's goal was to be promoted to manager. When a new junior staff person joined the team, she asked her boss if she could act as manager for the new staff member. Her boss agreed, and this practice helped her to build skills and credibility needed for her next promotion.

## Pursue further training

A woman manager's goal is to one day be CEO. In order to get there, she realized that it is not enough to build the skills needed improve her performance in her current role. She also started asking "what are the skills required for my next role?" and, "what are the characteristics of a successful CEO?"



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