



6 WAYS TO
BATTLE
GENDER
BIAS AT
WORKPLACE

THE 
CRITICAL
DIALOGUE

BY

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6 Ways Women Can Battle Gender Bias At Workplace!

“Battling workplace bias requires women to deploy deliberate strategies, including learning to say ‘NO’, not afraid to engage in difficult conversations, and helping and encouraging others to do so”.

While many organizations focus on creating an inclusive workplace, I observe that women continue to battle bias as they navigate their careers. This despite the fact that I’ve seen many women in leadership positions scoring higher than their male counterparts on important leadership skills.

Battling workplace bias while trying to level-up is not easy for high-potential women leaders.

When I spoke to women who have been able to navigate this tough road, some common themes emerged as to how they could achieve success.

Their ability to say “NO”, comfort in holding difficult conversations with co-workers and encouraging and helping others to speak up were a few strategies which they adopted to create a climate of inclusivity.

Obviously, there is a need to make a conscious effort and affirmative action to make the change and that would happen only when each one makes an effective contribution in this regard.

1. Sensitizing through feedback

In one such leadership workshop I was facilitating, I observed that the CEO who was a male colleague, during a brainstorming session, was always addressing fellow male co-workers and each time a couple of women leaders asked a question or presented a point of view, he was taking it to his male colleagues for discussion. The women were left wondering whether their questions were even seen as important for him to answer directly looking at them. It almost felt like they were a side note or noise in the meeting. I could see that they were

extremely uncomfortable and eventually fell silent, not offering any opinion or participating – just nodding their heads in disinterested approval.

When during the break, I confronted these ladies and asked them as to why they did not confront the issue head on? They said they didn't want to make it uncomfortable for the CEO in front of the whole group. I urged them to let him know the moment he does that and see for themselves the outcome and when they did eventually do that, the CEO had this to say "I never thought or noticed that I was doing this! Gosh, I am so sorry, thanks for letting me know".

It is only when we sensitize people and show them the mirror can they see the effects of their behavior on us. I am not suggesting that it will almost always have the same effect as I noticed, but no harm in giving it a shot. At least the rest of the group may get sensitized and start thinking about it for the future. Don't be afraid of making the unconscious-conscious of people who are biased.

2. Becoming comfortable having difficult conversations.

The example I gave above also highlights the fact that it is time for women to become comfortable in holding difficult conversations with fellow co-workers. It simply means that you do not get derailed often by these people and their biased behavior towards you. Give yourself the permission to confront any issue head-on. It's you who suffers the consequences after all. Ask yourselves the question "By not confronting this right here-right now, is it going to change how I feel or think about the situation?"

So simply "talk about it".

3. Invite people into The Critical Dialogue

"I just want to talk" is a powerful way by which you can extend an invitation for people to come into a conversation with you. Imagine you telling someone "Hey, I just want to talk". Many won't know how to react. What do you say to a person, who just wants

to talk!

You must remember, the meaning of “dialogue” is “through words” – *dia logus*. It doesn’t have agreement, disagreement in it as in the case of a discussion. It is not about right or wrong, agree or disagree, it is about engaging in a dialogue, which could go a long way in creating a climate of enhanced sensitivity and inclusion.

4. Develop self-awareness – leverage

You must spend some time in building self-awareness - Who you are and what strengths you bring to the table. Learn to leverage your strengths and always be the best version of yourselves. You are unique, so bring that uniqueness to shine. Do not try to live or present someone else’s version of who you are.

5. Deal with the likeability bias

Women often find themselves in a double bind. When they are ‘nice’ to people and work hard to be

likeable, then they are called people pleasers and meek. Those who are assertive are called aggressive, abrasive and all that negative judgment. The unfortunate situation women have to cope with is the fact that they have grown up being taught to be people-pleasers. Learn to say “NO”. It’s important to know how you feel rather than always being worried about what others view of you.

6. Practice inclusion yourself

Do not always try to create an exclusivity wall around yourself. Don’t just be part of an exclusive women’s group. Remember “it is not us Vs. them”. How can you solve problems of gender bias without including those who are part of the problem? It is important that you sensitize your male counterparts and practice inclusivity. As much as you hate the concept of “boys club”, your male colleagues may hate the exclusive “girls club” as well.

Find yourselves some allies at the workplace. Why not male mentors and friends who could act as able

allies when you face up to gender bias challenges? Try that before entering team meetings. Enlist the support of a male colleague to help you when he sees you to be withdrawn or side-lined during conversations.

Well there could be many more ways for women to win the war against “gender bias” at the workplace, these 6 steps could help in winning the mini-battles!