

Women as a Business Imperative

by Felice N. Schwartz

Memo to: Peter Anderson
President, Chairman, and Chief Executive Officer
Topform Corporation

From: Felice N. Schwartz, President, Catalyst

Re: Women as a Business Imperative

A year ago, you asked me to analyze how Topform deals with its women and to advise you about your policies. Since then I have studied your company and talked at length with your top managers in order to arrive at a clear understanding of Topform's treatment of women.

You believe, I know, that you have made strides toward offering women equal opportunity. However, you think your efforts haven't been appreciated. The women who stand to profit most from your help don't seem grateful. You worry about the perplexingly high turnover of women within your managerial ranks, but, at the same time, you express annoyance at the messy details of modern double-gender business life, such as maternity leave and sexual harassment in the workplace. These problems seem distracting at best and, at worst, are obstacles to accomplishing your most important objectives: to make better products and to run a more profitable company.

Even though you value candor, you won't like what you're about to hear. If you are like most CEOs, you will want me to say that everything is all right, that the policies you've implemented have already made yours a family-friendly company. You will receive no such reassurances. In fact, my view is virtually the opposite: you must make a radical change now, not take more incremental, ad hoc steps. I must challenge you, not reassure you.

It is imperative that you help women advance in your company—and not just for their sake but for the sake of Topform as well. Moreover, the atmosphere of your company, which you regard as tolerant and welcoming to all employees, is actually corrosive to women. But if you accept this challenge and make a radical change in your treatment of women, you can effect tremendous improvement in your bottom line.

You and your peers who lead the most powerful companies in the United States are missing a huge opportunity. In fact, because you fundamentally misunderstand how to manage and motivate one-half of your human resources, you tap only a fraction of their capacity. One reason you continue to ignore these problems is that a conspiracy of silence precludes discussing the matter openly. You don't voice your concerns for fear of litigation, and you are joined in this conspiracy of silence by women who don't want to be seen as different from men. You pretend that everything is all right. But you cannot fix a problem that you tacitly avoid talking about.

Your company is not alone. Women encounter unpleasant, even harsh circumstances at most companies in our nation, even if CEOs and managers consider themselves enlightened, thoughtful, and compassionate people. Actually, Topform is better than many other companies. But the fact that you are neither alone nor the worst offender should not console you. You still need to change.

The solution is not merely instituting some "feel good" policies. The solution is fundamental change.

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It is a revolution in thought and action that will have a terrific impact, an impact that can be measured in dollars and cents.

What, for example, might be the economic power of this radical policy change? Imagine for a moment that you were not considering human resources policies but were instead attending a presentation from your R&D shop about a spectacular new product. This product, which has been under develop-

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ment for years, is now nearing completion. If its introduction succeeds—and you believe that it will—your revenues will skyrocket. Wouldn't you react impatiently after that meeting ended, eager to get cracking? *Treating women as a business imperative is the equivalent of a unique R&D product for which there is a huge demand.* It promises to be the most important "new product launch" you and your company could implement. Making a radical change and accepting the women's imperative is the right thing to do; but, more important, it makes good economic sense.

U.S. Companies: From Zero to Five

You asked me to evaluate Topform. As you know, I travel all over the country, visiting and discussing these issues with hundreds of top executives yearly. These site visits and discussions have given me an empirical basis for comparing your company with many others.

From your vice president of human resources, I learned that almost half of all Topform employees are women. In fact, 40% of your exempt employees and 7% of your vice presidents are female. These percentages compare favorably with national averages. But simply counting women employees, vice presidents, or board members is not an effective way to appraise corporate performance. Both of us realize that setting arbitrary numerical objectives can produce spurious accounting, which in turn produces false reassurances, while chronic underlying problems go unaddressed. Attempting to measure complicated personnel questions by using only the blunt instrument of the adding machine is a mistake. As subtle as these issues are, and as difficult as it may be to translate them into cold mathematics, it helps nonetheless to look at them critically. Consequently, I have developed a simple but effective rating system that runs from zero to five to gauge how motivated companies are to accept the women's imperative as a *business imperative*.

At the low end, Zeros are companies that are dead to the issue of developing women. They simply don't care. These companies make no effort to recruit, train, or promote women. Executives at Zero companies work with blinders on. They are even blasé about the law. They get sued, repeatedly in some cases, but apparently accept the costs of settling those suits as just another annoying part of doing business—their way.

Next are the companies that simply want to keep ahead of the law. They are Ones. They track num-

bers and fill out Equal Employment Opportunity Commission forms, but they don't take any initiative in leveling the playing field for women or addressing the needs of working parents, which are still, unfortunately, the needs of working women. According to one study, for instance, a third of U.S. companies have done virtually nothing that is not legally mandated to help their employees cope with family problems. By my standards, those companies are Ones.

Twos are companies that want to do what is fair and right. The *Twos* have formulated two or three specific policies for child care, part-time clerical jobs, or unpaid maternity leave—but those who work at the company still feel it is a man's world. *Twos* give little thought to women's upward mobility or to removing the obstacles to women's productivity. Deep down, the men who run these companies believe that women should not be part of the real action. They go through the motions of improving women's situations, but they have not come to terms with their deeply rooted preconceptions.

There are only a few employers who can legitimately say, "We are doing well by women," even in a limited sense, on family and work issues or leadership development. Those companies that do I call *Threes*. For example, newspaper giant Gannett, where there is a passion to develop women, is a *Three*. (In fact, the former publisher of Gannett's successful *USA Today*, Cathleen Black, is a woman.) The Federal National Mortgage Association, which increased the number of women employees from 4% in 1981 to 26% in 1988, is another *Three*. IBM, which built on Thomas Watson's respect for the individual, and Corning, which has a strategic plan for change, are both *Threes*.

Fours are mythical companies where one day the playing field will be leveled for everyone. No one is there yet, but some companies such as Xerox are at least trying to get there. Companies at the *Four* level would be truly responsive to women. These would be companies managed by men and women who

There simply are not enough capable men today to fill all the managerial jobs.

have examined their own preconceptions and shaken off those vestiges of old-fashioned, outdated thinking that prevent progress.

Fives are off today's charts. The *Five* level is a place where the playing field itself starts off flat for both men and women. This exemplary vision includes an

ideal, egalitarian environment, where the whole management structure is not a power-oriented hierarchy of ascending status at all but a jungle gym with lateral sidebars and many-leveled challenges, with help and rewards available for employees at every step. Becoming a *Five* will represent the ultimate achievement, and it will yield the ultimate payoff.

Right now, most companies stand at levels *One* or *Two*. Their executives ardently believe that they are "OK on women," that the policies they've adopted are appropriately enlightened. Of course, they don't think they are on the cutting edge—but, then again, they don't want to be ahead of the curve.

They are complacent—and they are in danger.

Your company, like many others, is stuck at *Two*.

Eight Costs of Where Women Are

Here is another way to view the problem. Imagine that your corporate management group takes the form of a pyramid. (Whether or not Topform's structure should be a pyramid or a different shape is an interesting question by itself but not one we will discuss at the moment.) In 1960, virtually all of the white-collar employees in your company—and in the management ranks of almost all companies in the United States—were men. Today more than a third of your managers—370 out of 1,000—are women. That represents improvement.

This improvement was almost inevitable, of course, given the changing demographics of the country. There simply are not enough capable men available today to fill all of the managerial jobs. Your human resources director can tell you that the nation's labor pool isn't growing fast enough to keep up with management demand. Family size contracted from an average of almost four children per family in the 1950s to fewer than two children per family from the mid-1970s to today. The new generation of college graduates—52% female—from which you recruit your future managers is much smaller than anticipated. This age group is actually only half the expected size based on demographic predictions that assumed the baby boom would continue.

Of course, the current downturn, as well as mergers, restructurings, and job consolidations, has had a crushing impact on the lives of those managers who have lost their jobs. This pain and despair is experienced by both men and women. We should acknowledge and sympathize with those who are suffering. However, this dismal period will end, and we must regain our competitive position in the world economy. To do so, we must mobilize our talent.

Women are not part of the problem, they are part of the solution.

There are already women executives today throughout U.S. business. As a matter of fact, about 37% of your managers are women. That's progress, of a sort. But consider where most of these women are: in jobs at the bottom of your team's pyramid.

You are recruiting the best women – and letting them languish.

Picture the company pyramid in your mind's eye again. It is a geometric truth that if you divide any pyramid into four slices of equal height, the top slice will contain 1.5% of its volume, the next slice will contain 11%, the third slice will contain 29.5%, and the bottom layer will contain 58%.

Now note that out of 1,000 managers at Topform, 15 are in the pyramid's top slice, the corporate pinnacle where all of your other ambitious staffers set their sights. In the second slice are 110 of your managers, with 295 on the third level, and 580 on the bottom. The pyramid's bottom slice contains the entry-level management jobs where promising junior people as well as competent but unexceptional older managers are found.

When we analyze where Topform's women are, we find that their distribution is typical of the pattern for Two companies in the United States. Half of your entry-level managers on the lowest level are women. Fewer than one-quarter of the jobs in the next level up are held by women. Of the managers on the second tier, only 10% are women. And only 1 of your 15 highest ranking managers is a woman.

What is wrong with this picture? Over the last decade, you have led an effort to recruit bright, promising men and women to join Topform's management ranks, as most U.S. companies have done. You have searched for talent in the best undergraduate and business schools in the land, schools in which there are more women in attendance every year. You yourself have told me that the women at Topform are as strong in basic leadership traits like intelligence, energy, and analytical ability as the men because your standards are exacting and you expect to hire only the best people. And yet women languish after you hire them.

If women are as smart, capable, and eager to exercise their skills as men are, all of which you say you believe, then why are the highest two levels in your company almost exclusively male domains? Ignore the matter of what is right or wrong. What does

that segregation, intended or not, cost you? How are you hurt?

1. You're not mobilizing your best people at the top.

Any successful business today is only as good as its senior management team. Traditionally, the most prestigious corporations (like yours) and the top professional companies have confined their hiring to the top 10% of potential management employees. In the past, that meant selective recruiting of the highest ranked available men who could be found at elite business schools. However, today women have displaced men in these schools. Women now earn 55% of all undergraduate accounting degrees and 35% of MBAs. So if you attempt to depend solely on male graduates from the top 10% of the best schools in the country, you will drastically reduce the pool from which you draw.

2. You're not maintaining quality at every level.

Today the marketplace offers little leeway for managerial error. The nation's leadership needs are growing rapidly both in quantity and in quality – and doing so faster than the work force itself is growing. Competition has become global and more intense. International corporations vie with one another in every sizable industry and in every market that offers promise. Products grow more sophisticated each day. Technology grows more complex. Managers have to be very, very good.

Now that a significant number of women are in management, you can concentrate on enhancing the quality of your people at every level by identifying and promoting the best women instead of benignly ignoring them after you hire them. In fact, one of the United States's greatest assets in international competition is its pool of qualified female managers. Recognition of the contribution that U.S. women can make to business success, whatever this country's current shortcomings, gives the United States a terrific advantage in competing against some of its toughest competitors like Japan. In that nation, women have barely gained token entrée into lower management circles. Japanese salarymen already seem to be working at peak capacity, which leaves little room for ratcheting up the intensity they already bring to their jobs.

Thank goodness women are available for consideration as part of the talent pool in the United States. But unless you actively draw from the entire universe of people with high potential, *including* women candidates, you will hurt your company and yourself. If you fail to draw, train, and advance women candidates, you will neither hone this national advantage, nor will you compete successfully in the United States or beyond.

3. You're treating a big portion of your employees as dead weight.

There is a psychological lag between Topform's decision to employ women and your will to use them. You accept women as workers, but in your mind, they really have not entered the mainstream of business. Not only are most of the women in your managerial ranks situated at the bottom of the pyramid but they have also been shunted off to the sides. In your mind, women are ancillary. Is it possible that you still think as bosses did 30 years ago? Do you secretly think that men belong in business, while women create problems? Are you hiring, training, and advancing women only to ensure mere *adequacy*? Does adequate female managerial representation mean doing just enough to quell women's restlessness, avoid the wrath and litigation of women employees, satisfy the corporate conscience, and develop a few high performers for show? Do you pay lip service to equality between the sexes while unconsciously sabotaging that equality?

If nearly half of your managers are women who are discounted in this way, then you're dragging a very heavy anchor.

4. You're putting a lid on the contribution individual women can make.

You stifle people when you make them report to less talented bosses. Many female managers, who occupy the sides and bottom of the organizational chart, are working for men who are less talented than they are. Thus their talent and vision are constrained by the limitations of the underqualified men to whom they report.

A person who works for someone less competent is stunted and thwarted by that relationship. The capable but underappreciated subordinate soon realizes that recognition for effort is not commensurate with output and that the rewards of her work are not sufficient. It is enervating to work for a boss whom one does not respect. The results are predictable: the more talented subordinate throttles down, begins to cut back, produces less, or leaves altogether.

Inequity and injustice of this kind have real fiscal costs. The company suffers from decreased productivity and inefficiency. These problems are compounded when they are systemic; for instance, when it is clear to all of the women managers in an organization that women are victimized by consistently insensitive treatment and by relegation to second-class managerial citizenship. Add to this already punishing environment the effects of inadvertent sexist behavior. To be sure, not all sexist behavior is overt, such as a pinch at the watercooler, an off-color joke that is intended to throw the woman who hears it off-guard, or much worse, pernicious sexual ha-

arrassment. Some of it is tacit, unspoken, and attitudinal. Most of it is unconscious. Regardless, for many women, working means encountering a series of hurdles and tests. The problem is exacerbated at the upper levels of the company hierarchy, where negative experiences become more intense because women are fewer and more isolated.

With each step backward, women are further debilitated, and attrition among your highest potential women increases. This may, in fact, explain the relative overrepresentation of talented women entrepreneurs. Some of the best women set out to work for themselves in a supportive environment of their own creation where talent can be recognized and rewarded.

5. You're undervaluing promising people who wish to take a role in family caregiving.

Very simply, if you see commitment to your company as the inverse of employees' commitment to their families, you're creating a false and damaging dichotomy for judging employee potential. Worse, this division of commitments perpetuates the prejudice that it is not possible to combine career and family. As a consequence, business loses good people who would bring the same high standards to their work that they bring to their families—if given the choice *not* to make a choice between work and home.

It is almost second nature to think of child and elder care as "women's work," domestic issues, matters that have nothing to do with the rough-and-tumble business world. Revenues, margins, rates of return, market share—these are supposed to be the primary concerns of business. Making things and selling things are business concerns. But rearing children is a women's issue. Because women haven't been assimilated fully into business, child care isn't considered a business issue, nor is flexibility thought to be an important company priority.

No one can deny that since women have entered the nation's work force in vast numbers, there is no longer a solid family-support structure at home. On-

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ly 16% of full-time workers go home to a nonworking spouse, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In two-career couples, neither parent can expect that the other will automatically tend to the needs of their children. Since high-quality, affordable day care is rare, many working parents are permanently anxious about their children. And as the population

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"I interpret your dream to mean you should reorganize your department and raise performance expectations for long-run productivity improvements."

ages, these working parents are often responsible for their own elderly parents too.

But the clock will not go backward. If all of the United States's working women were to return home to cook and clean tomorrow, businesses would disintegrate. U.S. business depends on women. Companies may not use them as well as they should, but they depend on women employees no less.

The result? When companies don't offer child care and flexibility in scheduling work as matters of course, these companies suffer along with their deprived workers. And those individuals who drop out may be some of the most responsible employees, those in the company who could bring the same uncompromising standards to their performance in the workplace that they do to the rearing of their children.

6. You're wasting recruiting and training money.

On average, college-educated women postpone the birth of their first child until they are 31 years old. If a woman joins your company after her college graduation, Topform makes a decade-long commitment to her training and development. If she leaves you when her child is born—because your culture retards her career growth, or because parental-leave provisions and family support are inadequate—you fail to amortize that ten-year investment. It is worse for you, of course, if she leaves Topform to work for a competitor and puts her experience to work against

you. Ironically, wherever she goes, the unhappy cycle continues because chances are good you'll replace her with another woman who may not work out at all and will in any case need training and development for years before she (or a male counterpart, for that matter) can perform on par with the original woman you lost. Then, when the replacement has a baby—which is also probable—the whole cycle begins again.

7. You're failing to create beacons for the best women entering the workplace.

You know that women constitute an increasing proportion of a shrinking work force, and you believe that Topform needs all the help it can get. But do you view hiring women as a last resort? If so, that is shortsighted.

Companies that do not take pains to develop and retain able women will continue to feel the absence of women at higher levels in the future, when all talent will be scarcer. The smartest women graduating from the best schools will scout out their employment prospects, searching for the right beacons. They will conclude, reasonably enough, that companies that advance few women to the upper tiers are less attractive than those that have already demonstrated they value women. Companies that fail to develop women for leadership positions now will be forced to settle later for women who are not as qualified. Nonetheless, half of your management pyramid will be women in the future. If you attract only those woman who are second tier, you will lose a competitive advantage.

8. You could be capitalizing on a tremendous opportunity.

Women can lead your company to new profitability.

When you expand the pool from which you draw your top management, you will see greater talent at every level of the enterprise. In an information economy, an economy of ideas, an economy of knowledge, nothing is more important than the thinking skills of your people and their capacity to make smart, timely decisions. Better decisions lead to enhanced productivity, improved pricing and packaging, and more ingenious innovations. You need to attract—and win—the commitment of managers with those skills. The best way to win their commitment to Topform is to demonstrate your commitment to them. You can earn the loyalty of the women in your organization at a time when loyalty is a vanishing U.S. corporate virtue. By providing flexibility, you will retain good women through the childbearing years just as they become most useful to the company. And a solid cadre of women at the senior levels will serve as role models and mentors to junior women as they rise.

This new approach will appeal to your stockholders, more than half of whom are women, both for economic reasons and reasons of principle. Your public image will improve, which is not an insignificant issue. Today companies compete through their values as well as their products. Customers want to know what a company stands for. When a company can demonstrate that it has moved aggressively in the way in which it recruits, trains, promotes, rewards, and values women, it will not only attract the brightest women, it will speak directly to the millions of women and men who care deeply about this issue. A company's reputation for good human values is as valuable an asset as capital equipment. When your customers, clients, and employees realize that you value women as a central resource rather than inadvertently perpetuating a system that defeats them, a new, positive cycle will be born to replace the old, unhappy, expensive one.

Women are not going to go home again. The clock ticks forward, not back. So you can either force women and men who wish to participate in family life to make some very unpleasant choices, or you and your company can change. You can insist that women play by men's rules, and as a result, they will fail. Similarly, you can insist that men follow in their father's footsteps and focus their energies on careers, limiting severely their participation in their children's lives. You can require women and men to give up the dream of having children. Or you can urge those who have children to turn them over to full-time surrogate care. And some of your employees will leave Topform to work elsewhere or to start businesses of their own that give them more flexibility and career satisfaction.

Or you can do everything possible to support families while clearing away the barriers to women's—and men's—progress.

Four Actions for Change

The biggest obstacle to corporate change is the reluctance of leaders to see the need for it. When you accept the notion that women should be full participants in the management of your company, when you are ready to consider changing, you'll find that implementing a solution is neither difficult nor expensive. *The restraints that now hold women back can be loosened easily, and these problems will be swiftly remedied.*

There are four actions you should take to ensure that the women you employ will function as effectively as the men. The first is to acknowledge the

fundamental difference between women and men, the biological fact of maternity. The second is to provide flexibility for women and men who want it. Third is to provide women who already have basic leadership traits with the special additional management skills and tools that are vital to excellent performance. The last action you can take is to improve



Some 85% of women have babies. That's a fact that companies don't handle well.

the corporate environment by removing barriers that exist for women but not for men.

Acknowledge maternity. End the conspiracy of silence in which leaders as well as workers pretend that they think the biological differences between the sexes do not exist. Of all women, 85% have babies. Giving birth is a uniquely female experience. These are facts. But they are facts that companies don't handle well.

We should distinguish pregnancy, childbirth, and disability from parenting. Maternity, when defined as childbearing, is predictable and finite. It is good practical policy to acknowledge this natural process and to help women as they move through it. You can manage maternity so that it takes a small fraction of current costs in productivity and attrition.

There's no denying the physical and emotional impact of pregnancy. Yet most women find pregnancy an experience of heightened energy and happy anticipation. Within the last few decades, the average woman has changed her pattern from one of leaving work at the end of the first trimester to working right up until the month, if not the week or day, of delivery. What discourages pregnant women are the attitudes of other people in the workplace. The supervisor and colleagues of the mother-to-be tend to discount her and see her condition as something negative rather than the plus it is. At best today, a pregnant woman's condition is ignored. At worst, she is forced to hide her pregnancy as long as possible and to avoid natural coping responses such as walking around at intervals during long meetings, elevating her feet when seated, or wearing comfortable clothes.

You should formulate clear, comprehensive disability and maternity-leave policies—as differentiated from a parental-leave policy—that will enable you to retain your best women. Do not require an unequivocal statement of intentions from the mother-to-be before the baby is born. Wise, self-interested companies will allow women to return to work

when they are ready, when child-care arrangements are in place, and permit those women to have flexible schedules that will help them be productive. It is my belief that most women will opt to return early on part-time schedules. Thus paid maternity leave is not an issue – and a modest fraction of the expense of that forgone paid leave could be used to subsidize the part-time return of low-income women.

Finally, work coverage when the woman is on leave must be jointly planned by both the employee and her manager. Encourage frank talk. When you help women employees with maternity rather than punish them, you'll inspire their confidence and be rewarded with candor that permits you to plan accordingly. The fact that women have babies doesn't alter their commitment to a job or the quality of their work – except when maternity goes unacknowledged, unplanned for, and unmanaged.

Provide flexibility. Begin by accepting that parenthood is linked to business and that intact families include two parents. Note that there is no evidence that men are less nurturing than women. Just a few years ago, talk of "co-parenting" would have taxed the patience of male senior managers, so advocates of shared parental responsibility had to tackle maternity first. Now we can talk openly.

A small percentage of men *and* women are singularly career-focused, while a small number are entirely family-focused. But the vast majority of men

Learn how to measure productivity instead of counting hours spent in the office.

and women want to combine family and career, and they want to switch their main focus of attention from time to time throughout their lives. Here is the main point: these men and women require flexibility in order to be productive at work and to be active, responsible parents.

Now that women are in the work force, children have a business impact. Today you must accept parenthood as a part of doing business. You can reduce its cost by consciously disregarding the traditional roles of men and women. The result will be that you, the employer, will get the best, most committed workers and that children will get the best, most committed parents. Moreover, the net return to the employer when husbands and wives share parenting will be greater. When women are forced to be primary caregivers, their productivity and their careers become stunted because they cannot come to work

early or stay late. However, when parenting is shared, either parent can be home with the children and both parents are free to make a serious, sustained commitment to their employers, their careers, and their children.

Permit parents to cut back to half-time (at prorated pay) and then reenter the competition for senior management jobs, partnerships, or tenure if they choose. Let new fathers take paternity leaves in sequence with their wives. Encourage and legitimize the growing desire of men to take an active role in parenting. Since some women choose to spend five or six years with young children, don't shoot yourself in the foot by denying them reentry and the chance to move up when they return. It is crusty tradition that makes us think that the thirties are the prime career years. When these women return refreshed, guilt-free, and ready to go at full throttle, they can produce for 25 or 30 more strong years.

Let parents (and other executives) work at home. New technology – personal computers, fax machines, modems, and so on – makes working at home practical. Take advantage of the freedom this technology affords. And, finally, learn how to measure real *productivity* instead of counting hours spent in the office.

Provide training. Helping women maximize their potential helps not only them but also your company. You recruit only the best managerial candidates, good men and women, from a pool that is both diminishing in total number and increasingly female (51% of all master's degrees, for instance, now go to women). But don't stop at simply avoiding discrimination in hiring. Recognize that women face a tougher challenge than men do after they join your male-oriented company.

Women are newcomers to the male world of business. Their socialization does not prepare them for this new world. Some men view them as temporary, uninvited guests whom they treat insensitively and accept grudgingly, if at all. Often women are penalized for lacking aggressive instincts, but, contradictorily, they are scorned for being too aggressive. So you must help your promising women with training and education that includes behavioral advice. Permit them to display the qualities that are traditionally inculcated in men: competitiveness, aggressiveness, risk-taking, and long-term, dependable commitment to a career.

Fortunately for women, the work world has become increasingly information-oriented, which means that supposedly innate feminine skills in communication and sensitivity are at a premium. But if you need managers to act authoritatively, give women permission to be as tough and aggressive as

you need them to be; you'll find they respond accordingly. Watch women managers grow after they become comfortable in the workplace.

Improve the environment. Removing the barriers that obstruct women entails first accepting the premise that women belong in the work force—and then eliminating the corrosive atmosphere that pervades most companies. The glass ceiling is not a physical barrier erected by nefarious CEOs. Rather, it is an attitudinal hurdle consisting of largely unconscious stereotypes and preconceptions. So make men aware of negative behavior. Sensitize your male managers to the new demographic realities and the practical reasons for proper conduct between the sexes at work. Eradicate sexual harassment.

Next, coach women as you do men, and accept in women the behavior that usually characterizes successful men. Assign them to line jobs that will tax and teach them. At the same time, don't feel betrayed when women plateau or drop out; instead, ask yourself whether conditions in your company forced them out. And don't worry about raising women's expectations too much by announcing your intention to change. If you don't raise expectations, women will despair that the status quo will never change.

My hope is that Topform and all U.S. companies will work to integrate the lives of their employees, permitting work and family to fit smoothly together instead of conflicting with one another. When work supplies energy to the home, and home revitalizes life on the job, each half joins to make a vibrant whole. If, on the other hand, the status quo does not change, bitterness and frustration will grow.

Can we achieve this ideal? We have come so far since the revolution began 30 years ago, when women began pouring into the work force. Further movement, accelerated movement, is not only logical but also eminently practical.

But it is not inevitable. If the status quo goes unchallenged, many more women will leave corpora-

tions and professions to become entrepreneurs. Men who remain at these corporations will be forced to work harder. They will suffer from fatigue, frustration, diminished productivity, and further estrangement from their families. The women who continue working and remain primarily responsible for home management and child care won't be able to compete for leadership positions.

Most likely, if unchallenged, the pace of change will be just fast enough to perpetuate the conspiracy of silence. In that case, we'll remain where we are now, where it is not working. Everybody knows it, but nobody is talking about it.

I believe the process of change must begin with CEOs who now cling to an image of the past that tells them women should be home rearing children. They think women's careers burn out prematurely because work is not really as important to them as it is to men. They believe there always will be enough high-performing males to replenish their ranks.

But CEOs will change because business is quintessentially realistic. Senior executives will see the many changes in the workplace that have already succeeded and the many changes that are still necessary. And they will cast aside their stereotypes and preconceptions.

The logjam impeding women's forward movement will be broken by a top-level acknowledgment that the status quo is unacceptable. As this movement accelerates, we should see more women and men break with traditional sex roles. We should see more self-determinate women. Men will grow more comfortable inside the home, and this too will have positive ramifications. Couples may be able to build partnerships that preclude feelings of exploitation and anger. Families will grow stronger.

But the best news I can offer is this prediction: your company will gain tremendous financial benefits when you accept your responsibility to women and working parents. 

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