

MEN AND WOMEN ARE IN THIS TOGETHER

Interview with Robert Baker (Global Client Director at Mercer) on Gender Balanced Leadership

Currently, 80% of the top positions at most European organizations are held by men*. This makes them indispensable on the road to gender balanced leadership. But how can men be engaged in helping more women to the top? And what's in it for them? Robert Baker, acknowledged champion for gender equality and balanced leadership, provides some answers.

by Marc Mijer

On October 11th, the Professional Women's Network (PWN) is hosting an Executive Dinner Event in Amsterdam. The official theme: 'Engaging Men to Advance Balanced Leadership'. The working title: 'Bring a man'. Women are encouraged to bring their male boss, colleague, husband or in fact any member of the opposite sex. At least one man is sure to be there: keynote speaker Robert Baker. He is Global Client Director at Mercer consultancy, and a member of the firm's UK Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Council. Also, he is Co-President of PWN Global. What will his central message be on October 11th? "Men and women need to work together. We have complimentary skills, that are all needed to enable change for a better future".

Better decisions

Baker's message may have an abstract ring to it, but he can point out specifically how gender balanced leadership will help organizations reach their goals. "All-male boards and executive teams are unbalanced and are bound to make unbalanced decisions. Women provide different perspectives and styles of thinking. This leads to better decisions, because more aspects are taken into consideration."

Good for business

A second advantage of gender equality at the top is that it will put organizations in touch with the talent of the future. "Millennials want to see a balanced work environment", says Baker. "And: women make up a large and increasing part of the customers of a lot of companies. If you want to understand them, and offer them the services and products they really need, you have to have women on board yourself."

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For those who aren't convinced by these arguments, Baker refers to a study by Credit Suisse: investments in companies with a gender balanced leadership, generate an excess return of 3.5% a year**. Women at the top are simply good for business.

What's in it for men?

So gender balanced leadership has a number of advantages that increase the quality and performance of organizations. But there are personal benefits, too. Baker knows this from experience. "Working in balanced teams gives you new insights and makes you a better leader. In the global board of PWN, I am the only man alongside twelve women. Imagine my learning curve! This is improving my leadership style and capabilities."

Empathetic *and* assertive

Baker: "Other men can also benefit from this and become the kind of leader that more and more companies will be looking for in the future: the one who knows how to collaborate, be humble and empathetic, as well as being decisive, assertive and resilient. If you don't tap into this, you will be old fashioned and in low demand in organizations that want to innovate and grow." Another plus for men working in gender balanced organizations: they will open up to a better work-life balance (integration), and relate better to their wives, mothers and all other women in their personal environment.

How to engage men?

Now it is clear that both companies and men profit from gender equality, one question is left: how to engage men in helping women forward? Baker sees it as a matter of spreading the word. "At Mercer we offered male colleagues a safe space to talk about this. We started out with men-only meetings. There we explored any concerns they had and discussed how gender balance is a win-win outcome. Then some of them went off to share the message elsewhere. They took it to their teams, looking at their work practises (e.g. flexible working), and reviewing any discrepancies in their promotion rates, pay levels and other relevant aspects."

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Gender balance = cool

Baker: “Engaging in gender balance is no rocket science. It’s reaching out, listening to women in your organization, learning from them, mentoring them. Don’t be afraid to get in touch with your feminine side as a man. Leaders, like Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, show us it’s cool to be pro-gender balance.” Baker has also seen many male executives become really engaged in gender quality as soon as they reflected on the type of organization they wanted their daughters to work in.

Accelerate gender equality

At the PWN Executive Dinner in Amsterdam, Baker will use his keynote speech to give the audience tips and tricks to promote gender balance. Why should women join the event, and why should they bring men? “Women can talk about what it’s like to be a woman in an organization, and it will be good for men to hear that. We will be sharing new ideas on how to engage men and help accelerate the journey towards gender-balanced leadership. All parties involved will benefit. Women will be enabled to employ their talents at the right level, men will be better leaders and relate better to the women in their lives, and organizations will attract the best talent and achieve a better performance. This is definitely the way to go. I’m proud and happy to contribute to speeding up the progress towards gender equality and balanced leadership.”

* *The 2017 Gender Equality: Global Report and Ranking*, by Equileap

<http://equileap.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Equileap-gender-equality-global-report-ranking.pdf>

** *The CS Gender 3000: The Reward for Change*, by Credit Suisse Research Institute

<https://glg.it/assets/docs/csri-gender-3000.pdf>