

1

Men: The Missing Ingredient in Gender Equity

What does it mean to be a good guy to women at work? A few things probably come to mind. Don't harass women. (That one should be obvious.) Mentor women when you can. Encourage gender equality programs in the workplace, and as a manager, make sure women have the opportunity to participate. Offer fair pay and, when available, flexible work arrangements, especially for working moms.

You can do more.

That women struggle with gender inequality is well known. They feel invisible, unheard, and disrespected in the workplace. They face inappropriate comments, sexual harassment, and in worst cases, assault. They miss out on career opportunities and promotions, and face motherhood penalties if they have children.

On a broader scale, workplace inequities in recruitment, hiring, and compensation create disadvantage not only for individual workers, but also for their families and broader national and global economies. The gender wage gap is the most widely recognized

2 GOOD GUYS

workplace inequity and is a particularly useful example in understanding how these issues affect society and the economy at large. In 2018, the gender wage gap in the United States was 81.1 percent and has remained nearly unchanged, with less than a 1 percent improvement since 2008.¹ As with other disparities at work, the gender wage gap is amplified for women of color. Beyond race and ethnicity, the gap is particularly crushing for single mothers and women below the poverty line. Eliminating the gap has the potential to increase the pay for 60 percent of women, reduce poverty for women by half, and add 2.8 percent to the national gross domestic product (GDP).² On a global level, there is more reason to achieve gender parity sooner than later, as it could add up to \$28 *trillion* to annual global GDP.³ With this kind of economic prosperity, many of the world's enduring social problems aren't quite as daunting.

Despite these worldwide benefits, gender equality is largely seen as a women's issue. Organizations and their male leaders see gender inequities as something women need to solve, and men are historically missing in efforts to address these problems. And because most men are not meaningfully engaged in addressing gender inequities, it may take another 202 years to create gender parity, according to 2019 World Economic Forum estimates.⁴

Gender inequities are not women's issues—they are leadership issues. Framing gender inequities as “women's issues” gives men a free pass—“we're not women; it's not our problem.” If gender equity is perceived to be a women's issue, men are more likely to believe they have no psychological standing or ownership to support taking action. The perception that men lack legitimacy because they aren't women, don't share women's experiences, or don't have the expertise keeps men silent.

Men need to do more to be a good guy in the workplace and pave the way for gender equality. The truth is that in most organizations—especially those that are traditionally male-dominated—men are more likely to occupy key stakeholder positions. Men have the influence and power to create change, and they are crucial to altering the status quo.

So, why is it that so many men don't see or understand women's experiences at work? The simple answer is that it's hard to see problems we don't encounter.

It's Good to Be a Man in the Workplace

The workplace was created by men, for men, to do men's work. Because men are the workplace norm, the entire business and workplace environment is based on men, with a few exceptions (e.g., women's restrooms). The ideal room temperature for offices, conferences, and work activities is set at a lower temperature based on men's work wear—business suits—and their higher metabolic rates.⁵ Wherever you may work, the workspace and job-related equipment are probably based on men's average height, weight, and build. For example, aircraft cockpits, commercial vehicles, carpentry tools, safety protective equipment, body armor, and so on are all geared to men. In one recent example, NASA had to cancel a scheduled space walk with two astronauts because it had only one spacesuit available that was designed for a woman, but both astronauts were female.⁶ Male as the default gender also extends to many areas of research, most importantly, safety, health, and medical research, making the world a safer and healthier place for men to live and work.⁷

One of the primary roadblocks to male awareness of gender disparities relates to our *mis*perceptions of women at work. As one illustration, men often presume that women leave their companies at higher rates than men because they want to pause their careers to have children. In fact, McKinsey & Company's annual *Women in the Workplace* report in 2017 revealed that women are *not* leaving the workforce to have children—80 percent of the women planning to leave their company in the next two years were *staying* in the workforce.⁸ Instead, they're leaving a workplace that doesn't treat them fairly, hoping to find one that might. Like men, less than 2 percent of women say that they are leaving the workforce for reasons related to family.⁹

4 GOOD GUYS

Male misperception extends to how men and women perceive opportunity and equity in today's workplace. CNBC's "Close the Gap" research on the finance industry indicated that male senior leaders generally believed that gender discrimination had significantly declined.¹⁰ In the survey, it found that 56 percent of male participants believed that men and women were just as likely to become leaders in their industry, while only 37 percent of women said the same. Similarly, 75 percent of men indicated that men and women working at similar levels of management were paid equally, while only 40 percent of women agreed.¹¹ Clearly, many men don't perceive gender inequities in the traditional workplace. It's hard to fix what you can't see.

Obstacles to Male Engagement

Men have told us that they don't know how to get started in the fight for gender equity, and some encounter obstacles when they do. These obstacles include unclear rationales for inclusion, lack of support from senior leadership, or fear of making mistakes. Who wants to inadvertently offend someone or hurt their feelings when you have good intentions? It's easier for you to avoid taking action, so you don't engage. If you're not comfortable talking about gender, women's work experiences, harassment, discrimination, or emotions, then you'll probably avoid those conversations.

Another challenge to solving gender inequities and making real change in the workplace is *zero-sum beliefs*. People who hold a zero-sum perspective believe that gains for a nondominant group (women) are a loss for their own dominant group (men). In the case of gender, men are more likely to hold zero-sum beliefs related to gender equality and are therefore less likely to engage in action that reduces inequality for fear of losing in some way. Men who are older and have stronger beliefs in social hierarchies, more sexist beliefs, and less awareness of gender inequality are more likely to hold this perspective.¹² Zero-sum thinking is one of the many stumbling blocks for diversity and inclusion initiatives. Diversity is a tough sell in organizations where many

people see diversity as a threat to their identity, job, or advancement opportunities.

No one is blaming men for inheriting a workplace that fits us so perfectly that we don't even notice, but that doesn't mean we can ignore the negative effects on women's lives and careers. It's time to focus on fixing the systems within our workplace that reinforce and normalize the institutional sexism that creates gender inequities. The only way to drive significant long-term change is to fix our organizations' behavior and culture and to engage men in partnering with women to make this change.

Traditional Workplace Gender Rules

When the workplace rules are designed for workers based on specific gender roles, it's hard to see why there's a problem if you fit into those roles and follow the rules. *Gender rules* are expectations derived from social beliefs we share about appropriate behavior for men and women.¹³ In the traditional workplace, they look like the following rules:

- Men work outside the home and women work inside the home.
- Work that women perform is inherently less important than the work men perform.
- Women are not competent at performing men's work.
- There is something fundamentally aberrant about a woman who performs men's work, and the corollary, men should not perform women's work.

Almost every gender bias and norm in the workplace flows from one of these traditional gender rules. While we may disagree with these rules—and we do—they still tacitly operate, shaping workplace behavior. Let's see how these gender rules operate in our everyday lives.

6 GOOD GUYS

When women are visible in the workplace, they are expected to occupy roles that are appropriate for women's work—administrative, support, or caregiving. In the workplace, this can take many forms, but “office housework” (i.e., taking notes, planning social events, bringing coffee or snacks) is particularly prevalent and challenging to overcome—if you're a woman.

Even less visible to men are gendered expectations for work roles when men and women become parents. Because we see women as caregivers, they are often perceived to be less committed at work and evaluated similarly. You might assume that actual performance should help overcome this discrimination against mothers. Testing this hypothesis, researchers found that even when presented with unambiguous performance information, evaluators rated mothers lower than single women or men based on perceived deficiencies in interpersonal qualities. Successful women with children were specifically evaluated as less warm and likable, resulting in poorer organizational employment outcomes.¹⁴

These same gender rules also reinforce behavior for men in terms of what they *do* see. Men receive signals and messages that there is something wrong with them if they want to devote time away from work to care for children. One father with two young boys was asked by skeptical coworkers about his decision to take paternity leave: “Why would you want to be home with a baby for that long?” Reinforcing the perception that childcare is women's work, other coworkers quipped, “I bet your wife appreciates what you are doing.”¹⁵

It might seem easy to dismiss this kind of workplace banter as harmless, but it has a real and measurable impact on men's perceptions and decisions about workplace flexibility and parental leave. While men and women are just as likely to espouse attitudes of support for flexible work schedules and parental leave, men are less likely to actually use the benefits.

Traditional gender rules also lead to implicit bias in the way men see their female colleagues.¹⁶ For example, when men are asked anonymously how they feel about women, they offer a list of positive traits (e.g., “Women are great. I love women. They are kind, caring, and gentle.”). This is the well-researched *women are wonderful effect*.¹⁷ Yet,

we still find widespread biases against women in the workplace. Men’s “wonderful” assessments of women serve to mask the things they *don’t* say about them: that she’s a brilliant leader, she has innovative ideas, she’s ambitious, and so on. In other instances, they hold women back from career or growth opportunities as a form of protection—“She wouldn’t want to travel now that she has kids” or “This project will take a lot of time, and she is already so busy”—what’s known as *benevolent sexism*.

It’s important to recognize how we label sexist and harassing behavior in the workplace. Too often, harassment is considered another women’s issue, yet men are the people most likely to harass women. Labeling harassment as a women’s issue is a form of hostile sexism that evokes a negative reaction toward them. There’s also the issue of ownership of the problem. As Gretchen Carlson, TV commentator and author of *Be Fierce* who ignited the latest cultural revolution regarding harassment in the workplace with her lawsuit against Chairman and CEO of Fox News Roger Ailes, told us in an interview, “When men hear something is a women’s issue, they tune out. Not because they don’t care; they just assume they don’t have to pay attention because it’s for women. Let’s start calling harassment exactly what it is—a men’s issue.”

Male Allies as the Missing Piece of the Puzzle

How do we solve our problem? Men need to get involved. We need to learn to work together as gender partners and allies for each other. We define allyship as:

Actively promoting gender fairness and equity in the workplace through supportive and collaborative personal relationships and public acts of sponsorship and advocacy intended to drive systemic improvements to the workplace culture.

Allies exhibit both affirmation and informed action. We use the terms *partner* and *ally* because they conjure images of women and men

8 GOOD GUYS

as equals in the workplace, working together to achieve their mission. Allies in an alliance acknowledge the power of relationship and prize interdependence and responsibility to each other.

Debra Meyerson and Megan Tompkins would frame male allies for equality as “tempered radicals.”¹⁸ Allies are cultural insiders who understand the dominant culture, but have an outsider’s (nondominant) perspective. They understand the behaviors and characteristics of traditional workplace culture and are aware of and understand how gender inequality works and have the courage to change it.

Allies aren’t *saving* women. They don’t see an opportunity to take control of gender initiatives and rescue women from inequality, reinforcing the heroic, masculine stereotype and strengthening the status quo. Instead, allies emphasize humility and gender partnership—men and women working together in complementary roles—to create and support inclusive workplaces.

In their work with men as advocates and accomplices for women in the global development sector, Sahana Dharmapuri and Jolynn Shoemaker concluded that “when men are involved, it’s a sign that gender equality benefits all of society, not just a certain portion of the population.”¹⁹ Effectively, this demonstrates to the women these men work with that we’re all in this together. And when men speak out on gender equity issues, they’re also influencing their male colleagues—and junior men are watching and listening.²⁰

When you’re getting started, allyship can feel complex, with competing expectations. Allyship demands that you simultaneously become attuned to women’s experiences and enter into conversations about gender equity. As an ally, you must learn when to speak up, listen, ask questions, and sometimes become invisible. Then you must go bigger. Involve men directly in gender equity work.²¹ Ask men to participate, volunteer, and contribute ideas, and give them a role in changing policy. Integrate gender diversity initiatives into operational business outcomes and then hold managers and leaders accountable. Make it clear that women are not the only beneficiaries of gender equity, and more men will act. That takes being a “good guy” to the next level. (See the sidebar “Note to Men: There’s a Lot in This for You, Too.”)

Note to Men: There's a Lot in This for You, Too

The benefits to men of partnering with and supporting women are significant but may not always be obvious. Kimberley Doyle, director of corporate engagement at Catalyst, commented about benefits accruing to male allies: “One of the things holding men back from being better allies is they don’t often understand what they have to gain from being an ally. Some of the benefits include better physical and mental health, more rewarding and intimate relationships, not to mention the business case for making more money and being more influential leaders at work.”

There’s more, especially for white men. Developing allyship with women brings the added bonus of developing allyship skills that are transportable to other groups in the workplace. Rachel Thomas, co-founder and president of LeanIn.Org and OptionB.Org, said, “Men who are good at working with women also learn skills that make them more effective working with people of color. By getting better at allyship with women, you are going to be better at working with a substantial and growing slice of the workplace population. This is a competitive advantage for men that delivers real value to your organization.”

Allyship also crosses over from the workplace to the home front when we support each other in our roles as caregivers. Josh Levs, author of *All In*, elaborated that men need women’s support, too: “Just as women need help from everyone to ensure true equal opportunity in the workplace, men need help from everyone to ensure equal opportunity as caregivers—it’s the big unknown half of gender equality. If the message to guys is ‘be one of the good guys, help women,’ it’s nice but it fails to address the fact that men have challenges too.” It can be difficult even for the most courageous man to talk about caregiving challenges or flexible work-family roles when facing the resistance of the status quo norms in the workplace. Lev’s research finds that it helps when men can acknowledge that we don’t have all the answers and that we can learn something from our female colleagues.

10 GOOD GUYS

One of the true paradoxes of male allyship is the consistent social psychological research evidence showing that when men advocate for women or call out gender inequities, they are perceived to be more credible because they are not acting in self-interest.²² The research shows that when men advocate for gender equity initiatives, their voice and message are given more weight because they are supporting initiatives that benefit women. Women are all too familiar with these double standards. It's time for men to open their eyes to this opportunity and privilege and use it. As apparent outsiders to the cause, our voices on the topic of gender equity carry considerable weight.

Engaging men at every level of the organization is critical to changing the traditional workplace culture. Rachel Thomas of LeanIn.Org and OptionB.Org warned that “junior men fall into the trap of thinking there is nothing they can do. Junior men can actually do a great deal to partner with women for equality and inclusion. Some of these allyship acts are small but still bring a lot of impact.”

As it turns out, men can do so much more because of their innate privilege—even at the junior levels. Being members of the dominant gender at work, we are free to navigate the system through our knowledge of the culture and use our understanding of women's experiences to disrupt the status quo. To develop our sense of being allies, we learn to see the world through others' experiences. This requires being more aware, challenging assumptions, reading, learning, asking questions, and listening. Without this effort, we risk falling into the trap of silence—doing nothing. We can do better.

Fortunately, over the past several decades, more men have been willing to speak out publicly and act to level the playing field for women. The research evidence is clear: when men are actively engaged in gender diversity, both women and men have a more positive outlook about their organization's progress toward eliminating gender inequities. One international study asked women and men if they agreed that their company had made significant progress in the last three years in improving gender diversity at all levels of the company. These responses were correlated with whether they agreed that men

in their company were involved in championing gender diversity. The results show that in companies where men are actively involved in gender diversity, 96 percent of people report progress, whereas where men are not engaged, only 30 percent see progress.²³

Allyship and support for gender equity must be public, too. It's not enough that we hold ourselves individually accountable—we must be advocating for gender equity in public spaces, even when women aren't in the room, *especially* when women aren't in the room. Marine Corps Colonel Maria Pallotta's advice for men is: "You've got to be out there saying this organization is better for the contributions of the women on our team. If you don't, her male peers will undermine her. It's not enough to be neutral. The entire organization has to know you are a proactive advocate for women."

There are lots of ways that men can deliberately involve themselves in increasing gender diversity. Some include supporting flexible work policies, modeling the right behaviors, communicating fairly, sponsoring high-potential women, and getting involved with company-specific initiatives.²⁴ This book aims to help you get started with just that.

The Allyship Journey

There are three types of male allies. In our conversation with Subha Barry, President of Working Mother Media, she described them as "a small group of men who are already allies, know what they have to do, and do it all the time. A large middle group who are aware of the inequities, but watching the lay of the land, deciding if it is politically smart to act or use political capital. Finally, there is a small group of misogynists with very strong views who aren't going to change."

In this guide to male allyship, we focus on the first two groups: first, leveraging and reinforcing all-in allies into leadership roles; second, motivating the large middle group of men to lean in to the good work of inclusion and equality. Whether you are a leader, manager,

or a junior employee looking to support your female colleagues, this book will give you practical tips and advice to help you be a male ally—to learn from the women around you, to get over your fears and hesitations, and to make real change in the workplace and beyond.

The skills you need to be a better ally for women at work will also make you a better ally for everyone. Think of them as gateway skills. What makes you an ally to women also applies to being a better ally to someone of a different race, sexual orientation, military veteran status, or generation. This will become clear as you learn how to develop these important skills for today's workplace.

The book is organized into three parts: *interpersonal allyship*, *public allyship*, and *systemic allyship*. The chapters comprise sixty action-oriented strategies that will guide your skill development and personalized ally action plan.

Part one, *Interpersonal Allyship*, examines how you show up in workplace relationships with women. Chapter 2 encourages reflection on your gender intelligence (GQ) and employs strategies to expand your knowledge about how women experience the workplace. Of course, you can't be an all-in ally at work unless you're an ally at home, so strategies in chapter 3 will arm you with actions to make you a world-class ally for your own partner and children. Chapter 4 is loaded with strategies to ensure your everyday interactions with women at work are creating a work environment that tells women that they are included, valued, and respected. Part one ends with the importance of developing friendships with women based on trust and reciprocity. The strategies in chapter 5 equip men for the relational aspects that are key to forging a network of women colleagues who are part of your personal board of advisers.

After mastering crucial ally relational strategies, part two prepares you for public allyship by offering strategies on how to be a proactive ally despite the occasional anxiety and some obstacles you will likely face. Chapter 6 is full of strategies and best practices to help you navigate the prickliest of scenarios. Many of these challenging scenarios happen in meetings. Chapter 7 gives you specific strategies to handle

these ubiquitous inequities. Being a public ally requires advocacy, and the final chapter in part two outfits you with ways to boldly sponsor women and promote their excellent contributions.

Finally, part three addresses systemic allyship and equips you with strategies to advocate for allyship and organizational change at any level. Chapter 9 explores the multitude of organizational processes in which systemic inequities are perpetuated and the strategies you can apply to vanquish them. Allies need support too, and we know there's strength in numbers. Chapter 10 contains strategies for growing a robust community of allies and developing a rich culture of allyship.

Whether you work for, alongside, or manage women, deliberately engaging with them in the workplace is the only real solution to overcoming the systemic sexism and inequality that keep all of us from maximizing potential and our organization from thriving.

Making Mistakes Is Part of the Journey

Allyship is a continuous learning process—a journey on which we will need to leverage and learn from each other—men and women in partnership. As Karen Catlin explains in her book, *Better Allies*, even seasoned allies with wide-open minds are constantly learning and absorbing new information about how to support less privileged people around them. Maintaining a learning orientation, a growth mindset, and a healthy dose of humility goes a long way toward being better allies. This is a marathon, not a sprint.

There are no perfect allies. As you work to become a better ally for the women around you, you will undoubtedly make a mistake. You'll be stepping out of your comfort zone and you'll be putting yourself on display as a partner and supporter. Brené Brown, author of *Dare to Lead*, research professor, and Huffington Foundation–Brené Brown Endowed Chair at The Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston said, “You can choose courage or you can choose comfort. You can not have both.” In many ways, allyship is a test of

14 GOOD GUYS

courage. If it were easy, we wouldn't be talking about it. Allyship requires us to enter spaces and conversations that can make us feel uncomfortable and take the occasional misstep.

Many men have never been in a space where they were a minority; they can find this both uncomfortable and powerful. (Take it from two guys who routinely speak and work in female-dominated spaces.) Most people don't want to unintentionally offend someone or hurt their feelings. And others worry that they'll experience resistance, backlash, or the dreaded *wimp penalty*.²⁵ They fear they'll be stigmatized through association with women's initiatives at work.²⁶ When faced with these uncertainties and fears, they naturally want to step back, rather than push forward.

But men need to get comfortable with these situations and conversations. Allies must immerse themselves in spaces where they can use their curiosity and learning orientation to ask questions and just listen. They must change the prevailing discourse from a wimp penalty. Instead, recognize that it actually takes a stronger, more secure man to support women's initiatives. This requires showing up in spaces where you don't think to venture and in ways you are unaccustomed to, and speaking up when you see backlash behavior. And in the process, make mistakes, learn from them, and figure out ways to improve.

In our experience, we find that when we make a mistake, we benefit from the honest relationships we've developed with women who trust our good intentions. As Catlin said, "[T]he best allies are willing to make mistakes and keep trying. As allies, we must acknowledge when we're wrong or could do better, and correct our course. We resist getting defensive and insisting that we're already doing enough. We listen and learn. We iterate."²⁷

Speaking out isn't easy, and no one expects perfection. But becoming a partner and ally to women is a crucial element of helping them reach equity in the workplace. If you think you're doing enough, you're probably not. Push further.

Jennifer Brown, CEO of Jennifer Brown Consulting, a true inclusion thought leader, provided her insight on diversity and allyship: "I

think the work of allyship needs to be sustained and over time—and you're only an ally when someone says you are. The caution there is that being an ally is a journey and not a destination. Allyship is something you can aspire to, but you have to be careful when you claim it. Acknowledge we have our own work to do. Let's both go together."