

Women in HR must end seen but not heard mentality

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Ex-*The Apprentice* contestant Jo Cameron now runs her own consultancy, URhired. She thinks that women in the HR profession need to get noticed more, something she did to good effect on the reality TV show.

Women are used to taking second place when it comes to men. They are used to sitting in the passenger seat of the car and bringing up the rear in the traditional 'Mr and Mrs' relationship. Female faces are rare in the upper echelons of business as well.

I worked for many years as a senior manager in the motor industry and I was often left wondering why my ideas weren't being taken on board or why my points didn't get heard (hard to believe, I know, if you watched my performance in *The Apprentice*).

Train to gain

Since then I have been researching and studying why women don't get to the top and it's simple - because we have not been taught the language of the boardroom. Sending a woman into a male-dominated environment without awareness of the sexes is like sending an employee to China without any cultural awareness training. It's doomed to fail because it's hard for both parties. The men are left wondering: 'Why doesn't she get to the point?' and the women are left pondering: 'Why do I never get any recognition?'

Women are traditionally more modest than men when it comes to putting themselves forward. They use passive language and think out loud. Women also have a tendency to apologise for slip-ups and look after everyone else before themselves. They become 'please-aholics' - happy to let everyone cry on their shoulders as they pick up the pieces.

These are all very gracious and positive traits at home - but are not so handy at work. Let's take the use of passive language. Using 'perhaps', 'should', and 'maybe' gives the impression that women don't know what they are on about. Most do, and should be more pointed. These are immediate changes that women can make today to improve their chances of progression.

Culture status quo

Is this why women in the workplace are too accustomed to being seen, but not noticed? Waiting for an attitude and culture change will see us all in our graves before anything changes because it's too hard and takes too long.

Modern organisations need both men and women to outperform the competition. It's not about women's rights, it's about the company's bottom line and profit. It's not about giving women a leg up, it's about organisations stepping forward acknowledging that they need to do something differently.

If this doesn't happen, nothing will change, women's voices will go unheard and organisations might just miss that next big idea.

As women in HR, we must learn to put ourselves forward more, get to the point quicker and learn to understand that unless we are seen and get noticed we will always be debating 'what value does HR bring to the bottom line?'

Jo Cameron, URhired.