

Show Them the Money?

Increasing gender diversity may bring in the money, but numbers aren't enough to make real change in the workplace.

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October 2, 2015

This week I've seen at least a half dozen articles talking about how profitable it is to increase gender diversity.

The Economist ran "The Power of Parity" (<http://www.economist.com/news/finance-and-economics/21667949-world-would-be-much-richer-place-if-more-women-had-paying-jobs-power?fsrc=scn/tw/te/pe/ed/thepowerofparity>) and said the world would be a much richer place if more women had paying jobs. Then, *The Guardian* (U.K.) wrote that (http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/24/tackling-gender-inequality-could-add-12tn-to-world-economy-study-finds?CMP=share_btn_tw), "Tackling gender inequality could add \$12 trillion to world economy, study finds."

But I can't help but wonder if that's the next logical step — explicitly connecting diversity and profit. It's funny because I've always been in favor of showing them the money, so to speak. It seemed like a surefire way to get people to listen to discussions around the business value of diversity. Businesses are there to make money, right? It's a no brainer, an easy way to promote inclusion and encourage people to overlook details around gender, race and sexual orientation, which, in the grand scheme of things, don't typically matter to high-quality performance. Performance is the goal because performance leads to profit. Simple.

Not really. It's wonderful this data is out. Let's put some teeth behind what some of us already know. It will help to convince the holdouts who prefer the status quo that there's a better way. But if we're going to make real change in the workplace and in the world around gender equality, if we're going

to achieve gender parity — particularly in the senior leadership ranks — we need to address the mindsets that make it easy for some people to conveniently block out this kind of data, no matter how compelling the numbers are.

That's a tall order. I haven't a clue how to convince a man, for instance, with a marked prejudice against women in leadership, that his attitude is both inaccurate, unfair and just plain not smart for the future of a business. That kind of bias digs deep into a person's psyche and life experiences. A few studies saying something different won't necessarily make a dent in that individual's widespread belief of the opposite.

What would it take? Good question. Training, deprogramming, divine intervention? You'd think money would be an incentive. But perhaps the money these studies are talking about is too nebulous. Perhaps what's needed is a more direct line of behavior to wallet action, like a bonus or a reward. Companies like Sodexo have had great success connecting executive compensation to strategic diversity goal attainment.

But it's kind of icky, right? Having to pay someone to do the right thing? Of course, on the other side of this particular coin, the ick factor isn't nearly as important as the result: more women in leadership positions means their talents are actively working to create a positive effect on the bottom line.

What do you think it will take for the powers that be, these preservers of the status quo, to get on board to make gender parity less a study we read online and more of a strategic action, or series of actions, from which we reap benefits on the job?



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