



BOY'S CLUB & GIRL'S CLUB

FACT? **OR** CORPORATE FICTION?

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*She's got balls...
Language is a killer*

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Fact. It wears navy or grey fitted suits. It starts early and finishes late, dropping everything at its bosses' whim. It defines itself in terms of its organisation, rather than itself.

It's a boy's club, and its members – whether willingly or unwillingly, and either consciously or unconsciously – have given up a piece of themselves for the chance at career expansion, often at the expense of all else.

But is it really his fault?

Men have no choice, while us women are turning down entry

The irony of the boy's club is that, for the last few years, women have been fighting and resisting in droves. Rather than conforming to the male corporate model in practice, we have been redefining what leadership in business means, and small business entrepreneurs are leading the way.

While we earn (on average) 17.5% less than our male counterparts on the corporate pay scale, and hold only approximately 3% of CEO positions and 8% of executive management positions in ASX 200 companies, women are making huge strides in redefining what it means to be successful in business via the small business landscape.

We are developing the confidence to redefine our values, voting for flexibility over finance, family over the 80-hour working week, and innovation and leadership over tradition.

Our cultural conditioning

We have been, and continue to be, culturally conditioned to see an acute difference between men and women in business. From a young age we have been taught not only the definition of gender, but also the values that we assign to each role.

This wouldn't be an issue, except that the corporate model is very much built on a foundation defined by men and for men. From our physical features to our language, both men and women are confined by stereotypes.

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Assertive women are often considered 'pushy'. Our male counterparts? 'Passionate'.

Men are 'responsive' and 'think on their feet' – women are 'reactive' and 'emotionally-driven'.

Men 'kick goals', while us chicks are told that we've 'got balls'. (Not only is this again referencing women in terms of men as the benchmark, but it is also disparaging and disheartening – I don't have any need for balls, so why assume it is something I would aspire to be complimented on???)

Even to talk about it openly, we see forums that inadvertently reinforce these misconceptions through their own appropriation of language – bitchmagazine.org (run by Bitch Media) is one such approach to trying to turn the tables, but this too often results



*Not a go-getter,
just BOSSY?*

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in inadvertently reinforcing the negative stereotype rather than undermining it.

Why is there an assumption that I need to be a bitch in order to succeed?

Not a go-getter – just bossy

We've been conditioned to see assertiveness as a male trait. When a man is assertive, he's a go-getter, but when a woman is assertive, she is bossy and demanding. As women, we've been taught from a young age to tread a fine line between being direct or confrontational, and instead navigate the corporate terrain passively, not rocking the boat.

This cultural conditioning has served to suffocate those traits in women that are rewarded in the male corporate model. While boys are taught to be assertive from a young age, and that self-promotion isn't shameful, girls are taught the opposite. Some of us find it difficult to express ourselves and stand up for what we truly believe in. Yet if mastering the male codes is the only way to rise through the ranks, then what hope do we have? Will the boy's club continue to uphold those unspoken restraints and barriers to entry for women, and continue to suffocate many of the men caught within its web?

Perhaps we will slowly erode the cultural, social and economic contributors in order to redefine the masculine model of 'upward mobility'. Or perhaps active discontent will see the adaptation of women –

it may change with our daughters, who will hopefully not even question their right to an opinion or position.

There is no definitive answer or quick fix. It is said that within the next three years 70% of the world's university graduates will be women – but will it be enough to combat the culture of unconscious bias that is so heavily embedded in our psyche? Can we redefine the learned behaviours that shape our understanding of what it means to be male and female?

I'm not sure of the answers. But I am sure of one thing – right now, women have a choice

We can move fluidly between family and career. We can create our own economic reality with small business. Our own career path. On our terms.

Spare a thought for your male counterpart – we are in the enviable position of (for the most part) having choice and flexibility. He has no choice but to respond, adapt and compromise to 'achieve'. To set the 5am alarm, wear that grey suit every day and follow the crowd.

Perhaps we've already taken the first step to change, acknowledging that while the corporate model may represent his definition of success, it certainly doesn't have to represent ours.