

# Why are successful businesswomen still reluctant to help their female colleagues?

As a woman in business you must continually ask yourself what you have done recently to help other women in your company



**Fiona Buckley**

**W**hy do women still not feel comfortable advocating for each other in work? Empowerment for women is certainly in vogue, and while the need for positive changes for women in the workplace has certainly been highlighted in recent years, have things really changed?

Gender quotas, pay parity, saying no to harassment – the right things are being talked about... however, we still have a long road ahead in our organisations, and it starts with each and every woman.

## Women helping women

Research shows that when a woman exhibits some act of kindness, it triggers a greater reward signal in women than it does in men. Therefore, women tend to feel better when they help other people. Research also indicates that women are generally more relationship-driven and more privy to these acts of kindness.

This invites the question of why we are seeing less of

these instances in the workplace. The reason why some women display aggressive alpha female behaviour towards their female colleagues remains unclear. The gender confidence gap still very much exists, and is the reason why more women need to lift others as they climb.

As Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State, is fond of saying: "There's a special place in hell for women who don't help other women."

Many successful women are still reluctant to help other women and are guilty of pulling up the ladder behind them, or even worse, actively kicking the ladder out from under other women.

From displaying harsh behaviour in the boardroom, to gossiping, to being aggressively assertive, to not having colleagues' backs, the list goes on. Is it down to competition over fewer high-level positions? Fear? Imposter syndrome? Or is it still attributable to that old trope of the "Queen Bee"?

## The enemy within

After coaching many businesswomen last year, I strongly believe inner confidence is still the main cause of this type of behaviour. An African proverb says, "when there is no enemy within, the enemies outside can do you no harm". It's a self-fulfilling prophecy as woman are not supporting other women because of their own fears and anxieties.



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The pressure for women to be perfect in this instant social media world is also a contributory factor. For working mothers, the mother guilt is at an all-time high now and this is spilling into the workplace.

As a result, people are lower in resilience; they are continually comparing themselves

to other women, which is the classic hallmark of low resilience.

Another theory is that when women are under-represented in the workforce, they see fewer opportunities for individual advancement.

This prompts the need to act in individualistic ways

and to evaluate other women more negatively to eliminate threats to their career opportunities.

Unconscious bias has been high on training agendas, and the awareness is certainly out there, but what are we doing to address this? Are we tackling our biases within our

organisations and calling each other out on it?

As a woman in business you must continually ask yourself what you have done recently to help other women in your company and/or sector.

If you have a female rising star on your team, are you supporting her and cham-

ping her as much as you could?

Are you creating opportunities to let her shine? Are you encouraging her to reach her potential? If not, why not?

Be the women who reach down that ladder with extended open arms. Break the self-fulfilling prophecy and be

the difference you want to see across organisations.

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# We have the tech, but do we have the empathy?

Despite the efficiencies of virtual teamwork, nothing beats establishing personal relationships



**Fabio Grassi**

**W**orking at IBM for the better part of nine years, I was introduced to virtual teamwork quite early in my career. At that time we used a combination of conference calls, 'Sametime' instant messaging and (of course) emails.

Today's technology is much more advanced and the options almost endless, so from a practical perspective, organising teamwork across the globe should not present too many challenges if the technology works as required.

So what are the real challenges of effective virtual teamwork today? We can probably identify three major challenges, time zones, cultural diversity and team dynamics. All three are somewhat inter-related, as most things are when we work in teams.

## Time zones

There is very little we can do

when we work across time zones, but there are important considerations to be made.

Part of effective teamwork is coming together to resolve problems, identify critical actions and make important decisions.

This means we have to find the right time to convene using whichever technology of choice. If the team is spread across the globe, this means that while a team member has just started working the team member on the other side of the world has been working for the past 12 hours.

This is challenging for several reasons, from the level of energy and focus each member has to dedicate to the meeting, to the potential pressure they might face in wrapping up their day's work to get home.

I know that when we work at executive level, we have to be tough-minded and work hard through these difficulties, but we are still human.

Despite what is expected, the reality is that some team members will be less effective and efficient than others in their thinking and decision-making and that will have some impact in the quality of work the team does as well as the quality of



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interaction.

The only two pieces of advice I have on this front are these. Firstly, make sure that we rotate the meeting times as much as possible, so as to give everyone the opportunity to give their best.

Secondly, it will be important to develop some empathy skills to make sure we are considerate about not rushing into judgment about the possible impatience and irritability of our counterpart across the world.

## Cultural diversity

There isn't a quick way to learn about cultural diversity. In my IBM times, we had a database that provided critical cultural information including appropriate behaviours, use and customs typical of each country with some suggestions of how to best engage.

The most valuable source of information for me came from Hofstede's cultural dimensions study, which was used within IBM as an initial ground of study. Today I still

use the Cultural GPS app to get some quick and generic understanding of what I should expect working in multicultural environments.

The more recent work of Erin Meyer builds on Hofstede's work, and provides a wide range of practical insight on behaviours when interacting across cultures.

Ultimately when we work with a team it is not enough to know and understand a culture: it is much more critical to find the way to "include"

team members effectively so that they can be the best they can be for the team.

Inclusion is a much more challenging aspect of cultural diversity, because it requires us to understand that there are different approaches in thinking and engaging with each other and it is not only a form of mutual respect, but also a key resource to look at every problem differently.

Diversity, when included, gives us the opportunity to break out of static mental

models and group think.

I believe inclusion is a critical must-have for virtual teams to be successful and effective. Far too often, we are tempted to install a leader from our culture in all regional offices so that we can find a level of comfort in working globally. I believe that raising local leaders and working on team dynamics is a much more effective approach to virtual teamwork.

## Team dynamics

Team dynamics are part of every team, what is different about virtual teams on this aspect is the distance. I'm sure we've all heard the adages "a long-distance relationship never works" or "away from the eyes, away from the heart".

Proximity makes it easier to relate to each other, share rituals and develop mutual understanding. Relationships are the other half of effective teamwork. People don't do things because we tell them to, but mainly because we have relationship of mutual respect. Developing a strong relationship starts by sharing common interests and solidify that relationship by sharing adventures, and experiences together.

I know this sounds antithetical to virtual working, but on the contrary it does build the foundation to virtual working. I run many in-company training programmes for managers and the one feed-

back I get every time is about the value of getting to know each other in person and to have the time to share some experiences.

Typically, the nature of the relationship changes once they have shared some time working together, and it is usually the cause for new unexpected collaborations or the clever resolution of critical problems that would never have happened otherwise.

Rupert Sheldrake defines it as the "morphic field". When we engage with each other in sharing experiences, we develop a form of mutual resonance that can then be carried forward, no matter how far away we go from each other. The more meaningful the experience, the stronger the bond.

I believe the most effective way to build successful global virtual teams goes beyond technological sophistication.

The way our internal social engine is built already means that it has what it needs to be effective while working in teams.

The only thing we need to do is kickstart it and maintain it by coming together in real life often enough to share meaningful interpersonal experiences.

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# How to beat the bots with soft skills



**Tanya Sheehan**

**O**ur world of work is rapidly evolving. Developments in automation and artificial intelligence have been predicted to mark the biggest shift in work since the

shift from agriculture to manufacturing. It will be critical for organisations to prepare for "the fourth Industrial Revolution", as they anticipate future skills requirements.

These developments indicate extensive change across industries. The changing needs of the workplace mean a far greater emphasis on cultivating a workforce with a substantial soft skills capability. Soft skills such as communication, creativity, emotional intelligence, initiative and resilience are abilities

that artificial intelligence will have difficulty replicating.

The path to opportunity, for organisations and individuals alike, is changing. Businesses are fighting to stay ahead of the curve, to hold onto their best talent and to fill key positions. Individuals are conscious of staying relevant and employable in the age of automation.

The LinkedIn 2018 Workplace Learning Report surveyed 4,000 people, a combination of talent development professionals, employees,

managers and executives. All agreed that the number one priority for talent development in 2018 was training for soft skills. In the age of automation, maintaining technical fluency across roles will be critical, but the pace of change is fuelling demand for adaptable, critical thinkers, communicators and leaders.

As technology accelerates, soft skills are in high demand to fuel people and business growth.

"Workers of the future will spend more time on activities

that machines are less capable of, such as managing people, applying expertise and communicating with others.

The skills and capabilities required will also shift, requiring more social and emotional skills and more advanced cognitive capabilities, such as logical reasoning and creativity," said McKinsey & Company.

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**Artificial intelligence will have difficulty replicating soft skills such as emotional intelligence**