

LEADERSHIP

Are You an Ally for Women?

There is a strong business case for more gender diversity in workplace leadership.

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When women lead alongside men at the top of the organization, that gender diversity drives an average 21% higher profitability rate, according to McKinsey and Company. However, the U.S. has a long way to go — currently ranked 51st in the world in gender equity, according to the World Economic Forum. The status quo puts us at 208 years away from true gender equity. Addressing the recent ISA Women in Industry virtual conference, speaker and author Julie Kratz provided practical tips on how men can be inclusive leaders and serve as allies for women in the workplace. As the McKinsey data show, it's in their best business interest to do so.

UNICEF defines gender equity as “the concept that women and men, girls and boys, have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development.”

We must start by unpacking gender bias, the primary factor holding women back, Kratz said. What does gender bias in the workplace look like? Asking women to do the office housework, take notes in meetings or be in charge of the food. With 70% of women as the primary caregiver in their family, that assumption carries over into the workplace. For example, assuming they can't travel, don't want to be promoted or can't stay late.

An Active Role

Making the workplace more flexible and inclusive benefits everyone. And that means men and male leadership taking a more active role in promoting gender equity. Among companies where men are actively involved in gender diversity initiatives, 96% report progress whereas those that do not have men involved report only 30% progress.

Kratz noted that not all allies are created equal. There are do's and don'ts of allyship. It starts from a place of empathy, but there is a big difference between empathy and sympathy. According to Kratz, allies do not:

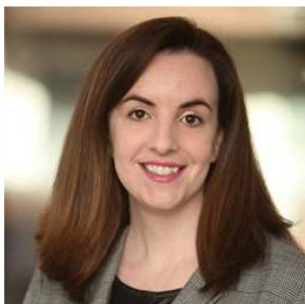
- Save the day. Women do not need a white knight to come in and save the day. It feeds the old 'damsel in distress' narrative and is not sustainable.
- Claim to be an ally. A real ally does not announce that they are one, but rather shows up as one.
- Act as 'work fathers.' This often comes from a good place, but can leave the woman feeling younger or belittled.
- Cross the boundaries of healthy relationships. These are not workplace romances.
- Exert power. Allies don't say, 'Let me take care of that for you.' They model power with power, not power over power.
- Make assumptions about what is needed. Allies listen.

There is no perfect ally. But making the effort to become one is worth it for your business. To get the conversation started, Kratz provided several questions men can ask themselves, including:

- What are your go-to questions for learning more about women in the organization?
- How could your organization benefit from an inclusive ally organization?
- How will you speak for those less represented?
- For the women you have chosen to positively support as a male ally, how will you be part of their plans for their future success?

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About the Author



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Elizabeth Galentine is editor in chief of Modern Distribution Management. Prior to joining MDM in 2018 as Editor, Elizabeth Galentine ran her own content services agency and led the editorial team for a national employee benefits media company for nearly 10 years.