

It's not a matter of why we should empower women at work - it's how

 By Jackie Carroll, issued by Juta and Company

14 Aug 2018

When it comes to talking about the empowerment of women in the workplace, it's all too easy to quote the statistics at hand. They remind us that, on average, women earn between 60 and 75% less than their male counterparts globally and that, in South Africa, they hold only 28% of senior management positions. The numbers point to systemic patriarchy, naturalised discrimination and entrenched gender roles that have proven difficult to dislodge.

Fortunately, the argument promoting gender parity in the workplace and especially the importance of promoting women to positions of authority has been all too clearly made. These moves have been shown to benefit organisational effectiveness, to increase national economic growth and even to reduce child mortality. The motivations are not only ethical, they are social and economic, too. We have therefore gone beyond the discussion of why we should empower women in the workplace; we now need to understand – and implement – how.

A weak starting point

In South Africa, most working women are already starting from a disadvantaged position. The country's education system, by and large, is failing its learners – girls even more so than boys. In the matric courses offered by Media Works, one of South Africa's leading adult education and training providers, the majority are women who were unable to complete their schooling. The reasons for this are myriad: financial, in many instances, but also circumstantial. Unplanned pregnancies and familial obligations fall hard on young women, and their education often suffers as a result.

Even if they obtain a matric, these women are often prevented from advancing in their careers because they lack the requisite tools and resources to do so. They need both theoretical knowledge and practical training in order to become the managers and leaders they aspire and have the potential to be.

From why to how

In early 2018, Media Works and academic publisher Juta and Company launched Effective Leader, a course that aims to help aspiring employees become great leaders. It is a fully accredited National Certificate in General Management qualification that is ranked at NQF Level 5, which means it only requires candidates to have a matric to be eligible.

The course is comprehensive and covers several key managerial issues, including how to deal with relationships, diversity and conflict, people, finances and change. As an introductory management programme, it not only helps aspiring managers to gain the skills they require, it also aids employers in identifying those who have the willpower and capability to succeed.

Although businesses in South Africa are showing signs of growth in developing and empowering women, mostly as a result of the requirements of the BEE Scorecard, they are also starting to see the value of helping them to further their professional ambitions. As they do, courses that provide the necessary knowledge and on-the-job training become more relevant than ever.

The knock-on effect

As women further their careers through courses such as Effective Leader, they're put in the position not only to achieve their own goals, but also to help the next generation achieve theirs. These women become icons of hope and of inspiration for other young women whose families have struggled to support their education financially, or whose circumstances have

prevented them from succeeding.

With more non-white women signing up for Effective Leader than any other group, their desire to learn, succeed and lead is evident. And as more and more women are empowered this way, they stand the chance to mould their working and personal lives, to benefit their communities, to change the face of business in South Africa, and to transform the country socially and economically.

ABOUT JACKIE CARROLL

Jackie Carroll is the CEO and co-founder of Media Works, South Africa's leading provider of adult education and training for over 21 years.

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