



EQUALITY, PARITY, LEVEL PLAYING FIELD & GETTING STARTED

For students about to graduate and begin their sales career, managers who'll be adding these new hires to their sales teams, and sales leaders overseeing a sales organization, there are many questions to answer. The first one is usually "Is this job/candidate/prospect a good fit?"

THERE'S NOTHING NEW ABOUT THE NEED TO QUALIFY AN OPPORTUNITY/PROSPECT. WHAT IS NEW IS AN AREA OF RELATIONSHIP THAT HAS BEEN DISCOVERED WHICH WARRANTS PLENTY OF CONSIDERATION.

MedReps, a Jackson Healthcare company, specializing in staffing for the medical industry, recently released a study of 750 sales reps with the title, "The State of the Sales Industry: 'Boys Club' in 2019."¹ In their 9th annual salary survey, they found that the base salary of women was lower than men, which led to this follow-up study.

My assumption has always been that in the field of sales, gender does not/could not play a role. No company has a sales comp plan that has differences based on gender. How could women consistently be paid less in the same role(s)? It may be that total comp was the same for the same roles, but what the data did show was women started at lower base salaries than men. The question is why?

The survey did not define what a "Boys Club Mentality" is, even though nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated it exists in their companies. My interpretation was that this might mean favoring males in assignments (territory, quota, promotions), evaluations, and opportunities. All of these contravened my own opinion of a level playing field. I decided to go looking.

STEREOTYPES ARE REAL

Two articles published by the Harvard Business Review provided research-based perspectives in my early search: "How Gender Stereotypes Kill a Woman's Self-Confidence²," and "Gender and Competition: What Companies Need to Know."³

The first article begins with the notion of "occupational sorting," with men choosing higher paying careers, such as, computer programming. But sticking strictly to sales, what it said next was eye-opening.

She gives herself a morning pep talk to remind herself every day to raise her hand and speak up in meetings.

New research identifies one reason women might be shying away from certain professions: They lack confidence in their ability to compete in fields that men are stereotypically believed to perform more strongly in, such as science, math, and technology. Women are also more reluctant to share their ideas in group discussions on these subjects. And even when they have talent—and are actually told they are high-achievers in these subjects—women are more likely than men to shrug off the praise and lowball their own abilities.

If you're a woman choosing a sales career, you've already bypassed occupational sorting. Yet women sales candidates are offered, and regularly accept, lower starting salaries for the same jobs/roles as their male counterparts (more on this in a bit). Where does this women's pay inequity begin and why does it persist?

For starters, I'll suggest this is not discussed or recognized in day-to-day management practices. Two women I heard from reminded me, this is a shared responsibility of both the individual employee and the sales manager.

The first of these is a senior female executive at a company on the record to promote equality, diversity and parity. Yet, this capable, experienced and successful woman told me, she has "to remind herself every day to raise her hand and speak up in meetings." She gives herself a morning pep talk to remember to do just that.

Men tend to see themselves as fully qualified and/or reasonably so if they have 60% of a job's stated requirements, while women often see themselves as "not ready," if they don't have 100% of requirements. The combination of accepting lower starting salaries, along with reticence to reach for higher roles can, and probably does, contribute to lower overall compensation and the continuance of a Boys Club mentality. It's not just in the Boys' heads!

THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES

The second article I recommend looks at competition versus cooperation, with experiments involving 236 women and men.

The researchers didn't find a significant difference in performance between the cooperative and the competitive payment schemes for either men or women. "This is in contrast to previous studies," says Fletcher. Prior research had found that men exerted extra effort and performed better than women when they were in a competitive situation, whereas women exerted similar amounts of effort whether or not they were competing.

Fletcher says that *homophily—our tendency to associate and form relationships with those who are similar to us—might lead individuals to feel more comfortable and perform better on same-gender teams, whether cooperative or competitive.*

"THERE'S A STRONGLY HELD ASSUMPTION THAT MEN ARE COMPETITIVE AND WOMEN AREN'T, AND OUR RESULTS SHOW OTHERWISE," she says. "Men and women work together differently when they're dependent [on each other] versus independent and when they work on stereotypically male or female tasks."

The three findings point to stereotypes that do not serve men or women in sales. While sales is a competitive occupation, increasingly, collaboration and co-creation with customers and/or colleagues is part of the mix. Avoiding competition will get you nowhere, but being super-competitive may also limit how far you go. Remember the proverb: If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

The take-away from this article for sales leaders, at every level, is to recognize gender but not pander to it. As with any coaching, it needs to be tailored. In fact, coaching equals feedback.

Diversity today is reality. It can make managing harder but also make teams stronger. Again, the key is to avoid stereotyping and, instead, rely upon principles and values (e.g., Win/Win, transparency, etc.).

Continued on page 30

THE ARTICLE HAD THREE KEY FINDINGS:

WOMEN ARE LESS CONFIDENT THAN MEN IN CERTAIN SUBJECTS, LIKE MATH

WOMEN DISCOUNT POSITIVE FEEDBACK ABOUT THEIR ABILITIES

WOMEN HOLD BACK ON EXPRESSING IDEAS ON 'MALE TOPICS'

The combination of these stereotypical behaviors telegraphs to the topic of this article. When companies advertise a range of base pay for a role, the data shows women are more likely to accept a lower starting salary, rather than negotiate for a higher one, even though they may be skilled negotiators (e.g. avoiding discounting) when they are selling. It's not hard to generalize this tendency toward acceptance of a low initial offer being true of recent grads with little/no sales experience.

The opportunities for growth and improvement lie just outside the zone where you currently operate.

Another female executive I interviewed offered this observation about her comfort zone and gender homophily. She's a COO in the hi-tech industry and often the only woman in the room. At a recent conference in Atlanta, there were 2 other women among the 125 attendees.

In the past, she would have thought, "Wow, there are only two other people like me here." But then she realized that beyond gender, there were many people like her there who likely shared her introverted personality, or were there to make new acquaintances, with the common goal of making sales to Microsoft, the host.

FOR FEEDBACK TO BE MEANINGFUL/ USEFUL IT NEEDS TO MEET 5 TESTS:



This notion of reframing to see new possibilities is key to creating new opportunities. And what is sales, if not creating new opportunities? Below are some action items that can improve the situation.

RECENT GRADS:

BE TRANSPARENT. When being offered a position/salary, ask if this is the same for all people in this role and be clear on the requirements. More companies are saying up front "This is the salary, these are the requirements, for everyone." One woman said she was 40 before learning to ask for money. Her take: "Girls are raised to accept what's presented to them. Boys are taught to fight." Without being overly accepting or confrontational, come from a position of confidence and transparency.

SPEAK UP. Give yourself a pep talk before starting out each day, reminding yourself to "raise your hand" during meetings, to speak up. The COO who talked about reframing said, "I want to hear from you. If you don't say something in the first 10 minutes of a meeting, I'll assume you have nothing to say." Here's a tip: prepare for each meeting, have something to say, and say it in a way you're heard.

STEP OUTSIDE YOUR CZ. Whether it's speaking up, reframing, practicing a new skill, approaching a new prospect, trying a new way is a start.

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BOLD. Sales is an occupation that rewards those who are bold, it's that simple.

SALES MANAGERS:

MAKE SURE EVERYONE GETS THEIR UPS. When running a team meeting, realize new reps may be reluctant to speak up. Help facilitate everyone speaking up by asking, "Cindy, what do you think about what Roger just said? Do you have a different thought on that topic?"

SALES LEADERS:

CONDUCT A SALARY AUDIT. Do you have a pay gap or inequities in hiring practices? Find out. If there are, take positive actions to end these; if there aren't, let everyone know. Why?

Per the MedReps survey, more than a quarter of sales respondents stated they would consider leaving current employers for an offer from a company that has proven gender parity, and 60% said they would turn down an offer if there's evidence of a gender pay gap.

CONCLUSION

While a "Boys Club" may still exist, either overtly or otherwise, there are things both women and men can do to promote the equality, parity and level playing field of dreams.

When it comes to the workplace, stereotypes are not helpful and need to be recognized so that a transparent, culture of growth that is helpful and encouraging leads to a successful career in sales for all men and women. ▲

¹ <https://www.medreps.com/medical-sales-careers/the-state-of-the-sales-industry-boys-club-in-2019>

² <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/how-gender-stereotypes-less-than-br-greater-than-kill-a-woman-s-less-than-br-greater-than-self-confidence>

³ <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/gender-and-competition-what-companies-need-to-know>



BARRY TRAILER
Sales Mastery