



OWNER EQUITY BY CHAD CRANDELL

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It's lonely at the top...Let's change that! (Part 2)

(The views and opinions expressed in this blog are strictly those of the author.)

[In Part I of this series on gender equality](#), I shared research [published by the Castell Project](#) demonstrating that women comprise approximately half of the workforce (and make 75% of all travel decisions impacting our industry), yet fill less than 10% of the most senior positions in hospitality companies (CEO, president, partner), lagging other industries and making little improvement in recent years. In Part II of this series, I'd like to explore some of the factors contributing to the lack of women in leadership positions within the hospitality industry.

It is a statistically proven fact that the greater gender diversity (and diversity in general) of an organization, the greater the profitability. This has been proven time and time again across many industries, and I've seen it first-hand within my own organization. So the burning question is, why haven't we been more successful in moving women up the ladder, even when it makes sound business sense?

While there are several factors, much can be attributed to unconscious biases, which are the assumptions built into our decision-making – shaped by culture, background, environment, collective experiences, upbringing, etc. – that allow us to function efficiently, except when they don't. It is the internal lens that guides countless decisions that we are not even aware we are making throughout the course of a given day.

Here is a common example used to demonstrate unconscious bias:

You walk into a doctor's office for a consult on a surgery. Two people, a man and a woman, enter the room wearing white coats. You direct your questions about the surgery to the man, who turns and replies, "Best to let Dr. Smith answer that. She is your surgeon. I am her assistant."

By the way, the patient in this example is a woman, who has a successful career. So why did she assume the male in the white coat was the surgeon? She just did. That's how unconscious bias works. Bias is not a man thing or a woman thing; it's a human thing.

As Peggy Berg, director of the Castell Project, shared, "I'm a woman, working on a nonprofit to advance women, and I had no idea how strong my biases against women were. They sneak up on me. They seem intractable. Overcoming them has been an exercise in awareness and self-discipline. And it's been so very worthwhile."

So, if women are susceptible to bias against other women, what about men? We'd all like to think that we don't exhibit biased behavior, but the reality is, we do – even well-intending, compassionate, supportive men who believe elevating women in the workplace should be a priority. And, because this happens at such an ingrained, unconscious level, it all too often remains unchallenged, which is part of the reason we have the situation we have today in our industry. If we can't see it, it doesn't exist.

How can we change this?

What can leaders do to address unconscious bias in the workplace and continue to promote the elevation of women in our industry?

- First, recognize that unconscious prejudices do exist!
- Change the paradigm internally. Diversity shouldn't be regarded as a "requirement" but rather as an opportunity to enhance a company's culture and bottom line.
- Challenge your leaders to identify signs of gender bias. Is the female in the meeting always taking notes or delegated the "party planning" tasks? Shake it up and assign men nontraditional roles to create a more equal playing field.

- Look for opportunities to illuminate bias in recruiting and hiring. It's amazing how much unconscious bias can influence decisions even for the most well-intended professionals. Find ways to remove it so it doesn't come as readily into play. Consider "gender blind" resume screening and balancing gender applicants for positions at all levels, and in particular at the senior level.
- Create a clear path to the top (for women and men) and socialize heavily within your organization. What does that look like and how can the team support one another in getting there?
- Recognize that specific training is available for women to navigate unconscious bias and conditions that may hold them back beyond their control. As Castell points out, "Most companies do not have the internal capacity to offer top-caliber, gender-focused, leadership development to their high-potential women. Yet with the right leadership development, companies gain loyalty and improved productivity from their most valuable employees."
- Last, have honest and open conversations about gender diversity within your organization and make it a priority. Look at the statistics for our industry ([2019 Castell Study: Women in Hospitality Industry Leadership](#)).

This is not a "women's" problem. It's an "industry" problem. And, in fact men can and should be every bit part of the solution.

