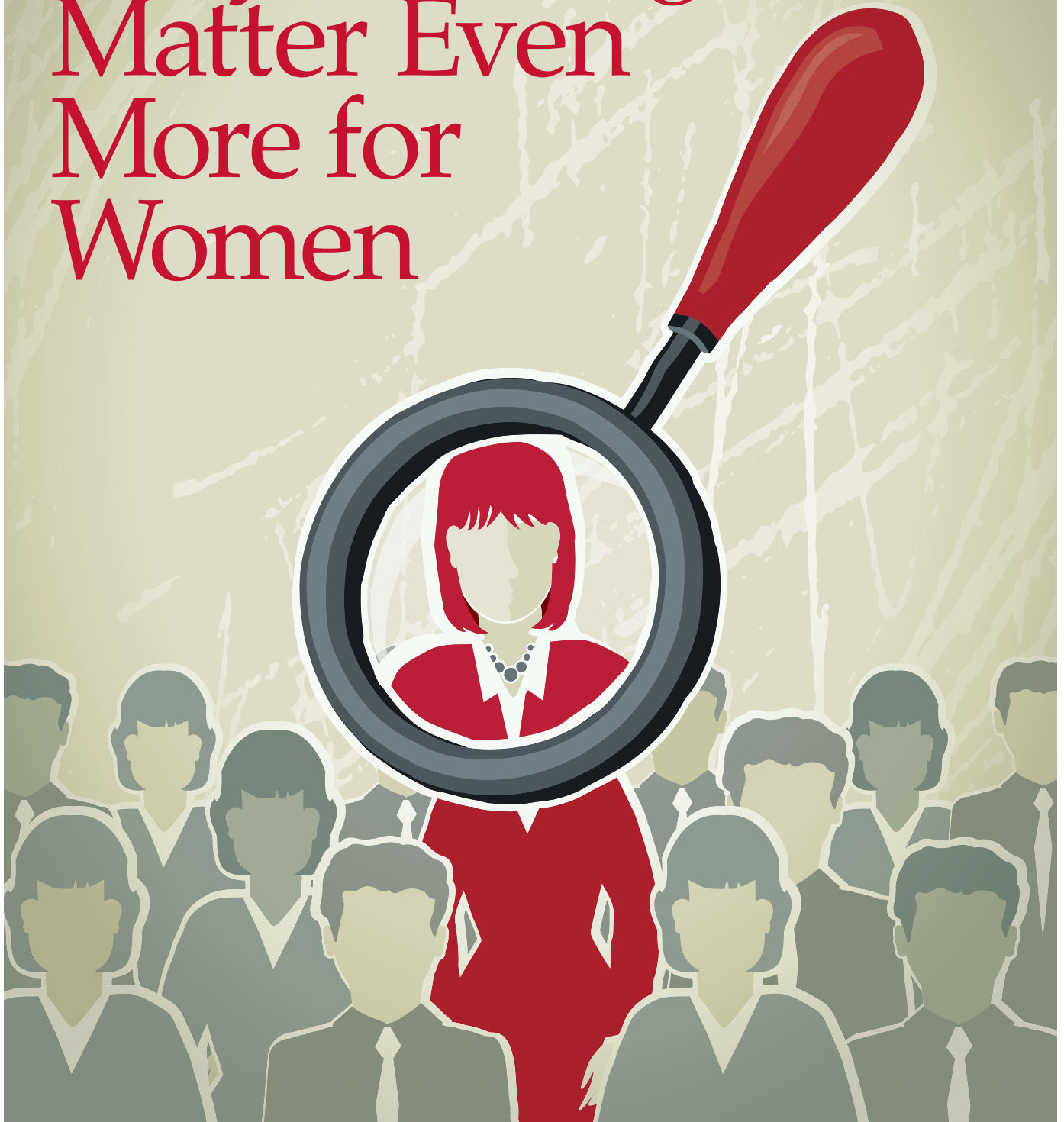


Success on the Corporate Stage:

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Why Meetings Matter Even More for Women



By Kathryn Heath, Jill Flynn, and Mary Davis Holt

Buzz.

During an executive committee meeting, one executive among 20 around a large conference table received a text message. It was from a colleague sitting just a few chairs away. It read: “Say something right now. Make sure your voice is heard. Ask a question.” Later, the executive learned that the CEO was planning to shrink the size of the committee. There was a general concern that a few of the individuals in the room were not contributing enough to make the cut.

Another senior leader, 15 years into a successful career as a marketing executive, had a similar experience. The executive, generally considered by peers to be assertive and insightful, was surprised when a colleague stopped by after a meeting to deliver some stern advice: “Stop acting like a facilitator. Start saying what you stand for!”

Finally, a division leader managing a \$50M business unit, who according to performance feedback was widely admired and respected, had the same type of wake-up call. After failing to contribute in senior manager meetings because “you need to shout to be heard,” colleagues said the executive’s silence in strategic discussions was one reason this person had not been promoted into a C-suite role.

These three executives have a few things in common. First, they are all successful. They are ambitious and motivated to take their careers to the next level. Second, they are all well liked by colleagues and superiors; yet, they have been dinged repeatedly for a lack of engagement, lack of powerful behavior, and lack of visibility in meetings. Finally, all three of these executives are women.

Our research tells us that these stories are quite common. In a study canvassing male and female senior executives, 46% of the women we surveyed said they have significant difficulty inserting themselves into key meeting discussions. Likewise, a full 50% of men said the most important thing women should address in meeting settings is being more confident and direct, less equivocal and apologetic.

Why Meetings Matter More for Women

In the process of coaching and training over 1,000 women leaders over the course of a decade, and reviewing their 360-degree feedback surveys, we noticed a common thread that remained intact over time: Women leaders consistently admitted to feeling less effective in meetings, compared to other settings, particularly when they were outnumbered in the room by senior male colleagues. Some reported that their voices were being ignored or drowned out, others said that they simply couldn’t find an opening to get into the conversation. In the same 360 surveys, we saw that their male colleagues and superiors mostly corroborated their concerns, reporting that the women appeared less confident in key meetings where they were expected to speak up and contribute. In fact, in several cases men reported that their female colleagues “get rattled” or remain silent even in meetings where the topic is one on which the woman is the resident expert.

This is frustrating for everyone, both men and women, and it happens even at the director level. As Bob Mintz, a former Chief People Officer for several global companies and C-Suite consultant, put it: “Too often, the one or two women on the board remain silent. The men do most of the talking. Just as often, female directors circle back informally to the CEO after the meeting with their thoughts. It’s neither effective nor efficient for the CEO and the board misses the opportunity for a truly robust and direct dialogue.”

This theme attracted our attention for a number of reasons. First, meetings—whether in-person, by video-conference, or conference call, are the “center stage” at corporations. Meetings allow executives to showcase and own their ideas and achievements. They also allow executives to take part in key decisions about the business. Given that many women report feeling stuck in mid-level positions, this idea of meetings as public

forums becomes highly relevant. Meetings afford a direct line to senior decision makers and a seat at the table, thereby leveling the playing field in terms of access. In other words, meetings are the place where decisions are made and reputations are created.

Meetings represent a crucial opportunity for all leaders. Why? Because they are the main venue where business reputations are made and lost. This is especially true for women executives. As minorities at the top tiers of business, their every move draws critical attention that either opens doors or holds them back. Simply put, at this point in time women have more on the line in these high-stakes interactions than their male counterparts.

Meetings can also open doors for women. In the initial 10-15 years after entering the workforce, employees rise in their careers based on the merits of their individual contributions. After that (according to what we have learned from coaching over 1,000 executive women), the fortunes of senior-level women executives accelerate or stagnate based on two altogether different metrics. Not surprisingly, the first is the financial performance of their unit. But the second factor is more interesting—it is the ability of a woman leader to gain the active sponsorship of at least one C-suite executive. We have seen that a major way to gain that sponsorship is to perform well in meetings.

This theme of women struggling to have their voices acknowledged in meetings is not entirely new or surprising. Yet, beyond this larger theme, we isolated two important findings that took us by surprise.

Our first finding, over the course of our yearlong study, was that even women at the very highest levels stepped up to corroborate the extent of the problem.

First, beginning in 2012 we examined over 7,000 360-degree feedback surveys on 1,100 high-ranking female executives working at the vice president level and above. We found that meetings were a clear stumbling block, regardless of rank and job title. Next, in 2013 we surveyed 270 female

managers in *Fortune* 500 organizations including McDonald's, Procter & Gamble, and Walmart. Over half of the respondents reported that meetings were a significant issue for them, or a "work-in-progress." Lastly, we went on to interview 65 top executives, both male and female, including CEOs, not only to get a gut check on our findings, but also to hear their own experiences and rationale pertaining to the problem. While specific comments from our interviews may signal individual opinions, we coded responses from each executive to identify themes that represent a dominant perspective. These leaders, from JPMorgan Chase, Deloitte LLP, PepsiCo, Lowe's, Time Warner, eBay, and several other organizations, helped us piece together the specifics of the gender divide in meetings.

What we found is that women leaders, vastly outnumbered in boardrooms and executive suites, with fewer role models and sponsors to bring them into what amounts to a private club, feel alone and outside their comfort zones in many high-level meetings. As one of only a few women in the room, they also frequently reported feeling unsupported and less able to advocate forcefully for their ideas and perspectives. As one female executive said, "It is harder to read the room if there are no other women around the table."

A second major finding was that certain discrepancies emerged in how women and men described their understanding of the problem. Women and men agree that the problem exists, but disagree about why.

Where Women and Men Disagree

The women and men we interviewed agreed on a few key ideas. First, 35% of men and 38% of women said that women are perceived to be less confident in meetings. This issue of confidence was a common denominator in both our surveys and interviews and it came up repeatedly. They said: "...when women lose the attention of the room, they panic and freeze

up." "They allow themselves to get interrupted." "...they apologize repeatedly. The apology mindset is a detractor." Regardless of the particular comment, both men and women ultimately attributed these behaviors to a general lack of self-assurance.

In addition, many of the executives we interviewed mentioned that women frequently struggle to be heard in meetings. Whether it is because they are not speaking loudly enough to have an impact or because they are not finding a way into the conversation at all, their otherwise strong voices are in many cases absent from the room. In part, women attributed this effect to the fact that they sometimes feel "out-muscled" by male colleagues who take up more space and power their way into the dialog.

"Creating a physical space at the table can be a challenge for some women," acknowledged a female vice president of human resources at a consumer products company. "Taking back the space that men assume naturally when they sit down—like on an airplane, for example—is important. Otherwise, women tend to feel less fully at the table, less present," she said.

Finally, 43% of men and 68% of women say that women seldom receive direct feedback on their meeting behavior. Candid criticism shows up in 360

feedback surveys, such as ones that we reviewed, but it seldom happens face-to-face even when women ask for it. One male executive admitted, "We talk about them, but not to them."

On the topic of feedback, Chet Wood, Vice Chairman and Managing Partner, U.S. Merger & Acquisition Services, Deloitte LLP, echoed the general sentiments of many of the women and men we interviewed, saying, "It is a challenge for women to get the candid feedback they want. They receive it only indirectly through body language. The non-verbal clues: either a thumbs-up, head nods, or sometimes the opposite." He also noted that direct feedback is uncommon at senior levels, for men and women, and that "the most positive feedback you can get is to be invited back to the next meeting."

The men and women in our study agree on the problem, and are all similarly well-intentioned and constructive in their orientation. Yet, they earnestly disagreed about why the problem exists. The differences in how women and men look at the issue, and explain its causes, can be separated into three categories:

1. Asserting a Point of View
2. Expressing Emotion
3. Maneuvering Conflict

Make your language more muscular

Male executives we interviewed said that in order to hold the floor in meetings, they use active words and authoritative statements, avoid hedging, take ownership of their opinions, and build on others' ideas instead of just agreeing with them. Here are some ways in which women can follow suit.



Instead of this:

- How about...?
- I tend to agree.
- I think maybe...
- I agree.
- Maybe we can...
- Well, what if...?

Use this:

- I strongly suggest...
- That is absolutely right, and here's why...
- My strong advice is...
- I agree completely, because...
- Here is my plan...
- I recommend...

Asserting a Point of View: Being fact-based and concise

In large part, the male executives we interviewed and surveyed said that women need to articulate a stronger point of view in order to be more persuasive when they have the floor. A full 37% of the men we interviewed said specifically that women do not communicate their perspective effectively enough and 27% of women said the same.

One male CEO told us: “Women struggle to find the right avenue for getting their thoughts in the room. These are high-octane meetings that are filled with domineering personalities. Women are often either quiet and tentative, or they pipe up at the wrong moment and it sounds more like noise to some of us.”

Interestingly, although men and women agree that this is a genuine issue, a gender-based dichotomy emerged when we tried to get to the root of the problem. On the one hand, men in our study indicated that they believe women are less successful in getting their perspective across because they fail to present facts as evidence and they are less on-point in their remarks.

One male executive recalled a meeting recently where he watched “two highly successful and powerful female leaders take hits consecutively” because they needed to be more concise. “One woman went off on tangents, bringing in disparate points with few facts; it was like a snowball going down a hill and picking up stuff in its path. The other got wrapped up in the passion she feels for the topic and she said the same thing three different ways.”

Women, on the other hand, believe that the perceived problem they have in articulating a point of view has more to do with positioning ideas than with facts or focus. First, most of the female executives we interviewed said that they refrain from repeating an idea that is already out on the table. They strongly oppose “restating the obvious.” Next, they are hesitant to simply put a new spin on an existing idea—as they felt their male colleagues were apt to do.

“Men have a way to neatly repack-age ideas,” says Lynne Ford, Executive Vice President and Head of Distribution at Calvert Investments. “They restate and amplify what you just said.” Even as she acknowledges that she has seen this tactic used very effectively, she adds, “It’s gamesmanship.”

Finally, in our coaching sessions, women have told us that they sometimes receive lukewarm responses from the room when they pivot to an opposing point of view after the group has started to settle around an idea. Several surmised that the problem is more about timing than about the message itself.

All in all, men say that women need to bolster their point of view with concise facts; whereas, women say they need to be ready to articulate a new idea early, and consider the timing of their remarks.

Expressing Emotion: How men and women perceive “passion”

The question of whether emotion has a legitimate place in business meetings came up repeatedly in our interviews. While women said they struggle with how to use it in the right doses, men wish women would use it much more strategically. Perhaps more interestingly, men and women fundamentally disagree about what emotion looks and sounds like. In our read of 360-degree feedback surveys, we saw that when women said they felt “passionate” about an idea or opinion, their passion was sometimes viewed by their male managers and colleagues as “too much emotion.”

Steve Boehm, a senior vice president at eBay, put it this way: “Passion is a key component in persuasion. The question is how passionate can women be? I think there is a gender element to passion that can be either wildly compelling or overused.”

Some of the women executives interviewed admitted that they occasionally get carried away, allowing their emotions get the better of them. A female executive said, “I can recall a meeting when I got emotionally consumed in trying to make my point. In the moment I thought I was being

passionate, but in retrospect I realized that I had come across as emotional and weak.”

Despite the *mea culpa*, this executive, along with others we interviewed, was quick to point out that women get much less grace and latitude than men when expressing emotion. As one male executive at JPMorgan Chase told us, “There is a fair amount of sensitivity about a woman losing her cool. If a man loses his cool and gets emotional or angry it can work. But when a woman does, everyone’s antennae are raised high and you can feel the tension.” Another male executive put it this way: “The opposite of the ‘too aggressive’ dynamic is when a woman is labeled as weak. Either way, it’s a lose/lose situation. They have to be mindful to stay within the guardrails, being neither overly aggressive nor too quiet. Men don’t have to play within these guardrails. Quiet men don’t get labeled as weak, they get labeled as thoughtful.”

Both men and women believe that passion is a key tool of persuasion, but they disagree about what that looks like. When women are passionate advocates, men often view it as overly emotional. A retired C-suite executive, currently serving on several corporate boards, told us: “There is an art to having a burning platform without burning down your platform.”

Maneuvering Conflict: How women respond to confrontation

Both men and women say that women are more likely to become nervous and uncomfortable in meetings when interpersonal challenges arise. They agree that heated exchanges in meetings are more off-putting to women. Yet, men talk more about debate, whereas, women mention confrontation. Men say that women often lose their composure when they are met with a direct challenge.

“I think that women in business meetings sometimes get frustrated. They get defensive when they are challenged and they get their buttons pushed too soon,” said Dave Furman, Senior Vice President, Human Resources

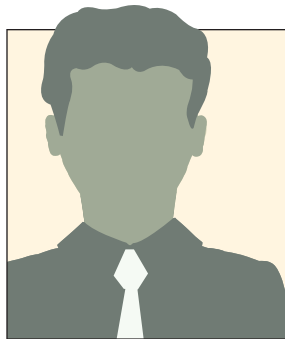
Manager at Wells Fargo. “That response takes away their power,” he observed.

One female vice president put it this way: “When men dismiss women, women may interpret it as being ‘put in their place.’ They either don’t like the conflict or they don’t know how to come back in a way that does not appear defensive. Some of it may be a lack of confidence.”

Another point of divergence is that while some executives said that women are quick to become defensive, and get derailed when someone sharply disagrees with them, many women reported having a negative response to conflict in general. They find it unsettling when someone—anyone—receives a sharp public rebuke and they become uncomfortable when a meeting takes a confrontational turn. They talked more about feeling empathetic as opposed to defensive.

One woman we coach told us about a board meeting that she felt went off-track. A male CFO was being upbraided by successive board members who were angry about how a quarterly earnings shortfall had been communicated. The news of the earnings surprise had leaked to the press before the full board was briefed. The exchange went on for 25 minutes and “became heated and personal.” She said she was “as upset as everyone else” about how the quarter-end situation was handled with the press. But she “literally could not find her voice” during the conflict because of how the CFO was being treated.

Regardless of exactly why, both men and women say that female executives are more likely to withdraw in meetings, exhibiting what looks like a sort of “conflict paralysis” when confrontations arise. Several men said that when things get “charged-up,” men think of it as another part of the game and they “move on to the next contest” without taking confrontation personally. They believe that women are more apt to get stuck in that moment or caught in a downward spiral. One woman executive vice president put it this way: “When I lose my cool in meetings I may brood silently and become distracted. That is when I begin to miss other things that are happening in the meeting.”



In interviews and written comments, men acknowledged that women often struggle to make themselves heard at meetings, but they didn’t always agree with their female peers about the reasons.

He said...

We are afraid of how women will react to criticism.

Women need to be concise and remain on-point.

Women need a stronger point of view.

Women get defensive when they are challenged.

Women need to speak informally and “off-the-cuff” in meetings.

Women are more emotional than men.

Women are less confident than men in meetings.



She said...

We don’t receive feedback, even when we ask for it.

We don’t like to repackage old ideas or restate the obvious.

It is difficult to get a word in.

We obsess about the meeting days after it is over.

We prepare to present.

It is not emotion, it is passion.

Yes, but we are outnumbered 5 to 1 and tend to feel less fully “at the table.”

Rave Reviews on the Corporate Stage

The competencies that land women in executive roles—ambition, experience, intelligence, and talent—are only some of the tools they need to help them forge a path for themselves, and other women, to positions in top leadership. Women who are running organizations are able to establish their own style of interaction and rules of engagement. Until then, the specific recommendations we offer, in real-time to the women we work with, spring from tactics that yield results in the context of everyday business. These are some of the strategies that we suggest.

1. Remember the meetings-before-the-meeting.

Most of the men in our study, and very few among the women, said that the “meetings before the meeting” were where much of the real work happens.

In the days, hours, or minutes prior to a meeting, men connect with each other to test their ideas and gain an indication of support. These conversations are informal and occur in passing: in the hallway, the elevator, or on the walk to the train. Taking a page from trial lawyers, being fully prepared for a meeting means never asking a question that you do not already know the answer to.

According to a male senior vice president, “Men are really good at the pre-meeting. They go by the office to talk, throw the ball to each other almost in a conversation, and they work their agenda for the meeting. This pre-meeting behavior enables them to be successful because they’ve got support for their ideas. This is their preparation. It happens before anyone gets to the table and it’s very important.”

The pre-meeting has multiple benefits: It allows individuals to increase their familiarity with the issues, vet ideas, canvass for votes, and refine their point of view. Taking part in the informal conversations that happen in advance also helps women identify the “real” purpose of the meeting.

Women could go a long way toward addressing their feelings of isolation by getting in on the “meetings before the meeting.”

Frequently, the actual rationale is not reflected in the written agenda. Is the meeting being called to drive a consensus? Establish power? Solve a problem? The purpose of a meeting may also be somewhat subjective, depending upon the politics of the group. Regardless, the meetings-before-the-meeting will help to clarify any distinction between the stated and actual purpose of the meeting.

In addition, it is important to realize that key issues are often fully resolved in pre-meeting discussions, before the real meeting even starts. As one male executive told us: “The decisions are made in advance and some women don’t seem to know it.” This leaves them out of the decision-making.

2. Prepare to talk, not to present.

Perhaps because they have created a platform prior to the meeting, or maybe because they feel comfortable shooting the breeze around the table, more men than women report coming prepared to speak informally and “off-the-cuff” in meetings. They are selling their ideas in a conversational way. Conversely, women say that they are likely to prepare in a more formal way. They prefer to make presentations, alone or with a few trusted colleagues on their team, using slides and supporting documents that make their case.

The type of preparation that is required, formal or informal, is specific to each meeting. To make the call, do at least these three things in advance: Know the purpose of the meeting. Know who will be sitting around the table and what they will be looking for from the meeting and from you.

Then, decide what you need to do to best prepare for this meeting.

Lynda Talgo, Vice President of Global Trust at eBay, adds a fourth prerequisite: “Before walking into any meeting a woman should ask ‘What impression do I want to make?’ Is it the impression of being knowledgeable, competent, an expert, approachable?” Posing this question, she says, helps a woman consider every facet of how she shows up at the meeting: “How to walk in, what to wear, where to sit, when to talk, and how to respond.”

Ideally, these questions will help with formal as well as informal preparation. Interestingly, we heard from women that informal dialog in meetings is often more difficult than presenting with slides, and for some people it requires more preparation.

Lynne Ford of Calvert Investments said, “You need to have written down some things you want to talk about. Even some of the casual remarks you hear have been rehearsed. If it sounds good, it was probably prepared.”

3. Take the conversation to the next level.

The famous quote from hockey great Wayne Gretzky, “Skate to where the puck is going, not where it’s been,” is entirely appropriate in terms of having influence and adding value in meetings.

Getting just slightly ahead of the point at hand is step one. Because women say they are less comfortable restating or echoing existing ideas, they need to be prepared to take the conversation forward by anticipating where it is headed. Conversations, like tennis, move from point to point, and players need to be ready and alert when it is their turn to serve and volley.

The next step is to get out in front and lead with an insight or a thought-provoking question. Something as simple as a comment or question may be enough to forge an opening into the discussion. Anne Taylor, Vice Chairman and Regional Managing Partner at Deloitte LLP, says that she has had the most impact in meetings when she finds an opportunity “to turn the meeting in a different and more productive direction by using insightful questions. Have you thought of this...? Or, What if we looked at it this way...?” She said that questions start a type of dialog that can be transformative.

Yet, in some executive settings, Taylor concedes, the discussion can move so quickly it becomes tricky even to stop and breathe before the conversation moves on to the next point. One of the male executives we spoke with said that holding onto the floor has everything to do with the words one uses. He suggests using “muscular” words that are authoritative and precise as well as focusing on communicating “meaningful specifics.”

Finally, we coach women to get their voice heard early-on in the meeting, particularly if they are one of only a few women in the room, or if they are a new member of the group. By doing this, women can claim airspace and carve a place in the ongoing conversation.

4. Remain on an even keel.

It is a fact: Keeping emotions in check is more important for women than men. According to our research, the stereotype of the “emotional female” is one that continues to linger. As one male executive said, “There is an

ongoing perception that women are more emotional than men. It is a challenge, but they always need to be aware of that and remain composed as they maneuver through meetings.”

This is a particular concern for women who struggle with the type of conflict paralysis that we mentioned earlier. If a woman is uncomfortable managing confrontation and dealing with conflict, she needs to work harder, and act deliberately, in order to remain in the conversation in a constructive way.

Regardless of the specific challenges, staying on an even keel helps all of us remain fully engaged in what is going on in the meeting and how we can make a meaningful contribution.

5. Come early, stick around after.

One of the things we heard from men and women alike is that female executives are very efficient. They come to meetings on time and they leave when the last agenda item is completed. They rush to the next meeting or head back to their office to put out fires. Whereas, the men in our study (and also some of the women) said that men are more likely to come early to get a good seat at the table and chat informally with colleagues. They stay after the meeting is finished, to close off the discussion and talk informally about other issues on their minds.

Establishing a bond with the people prior to the meeting can help women feel more comfortable in a particular meeting. Feeling like you are “on the team” or “in the club” makes it easier to participate and engage in the discussion. In the same way that getting to know the room in advance of a speech helps individuals become acclimated to the space, connecting with people informally creates a sense of familiarity.

Far from being a mere schmooze-fest, the time before, during breaks, and after a meeting represents an opportunity to connect with colleagues, share your ideas, and gain their trust.

In the rush to cross items off your to-do list each day, it is easy to forget that reading email and creating PowerPoint slides are discretionary tasks compared to influencing big-picture strategy, gaining sponsorship, and impacting the course of business. The time right before and after a meeting is a chance to do all of that in person with colleagues and superiors.

As one woman told us about meetings: “I said I wanted into the boys club. Well, now I’m there. You can believe that I’ll use that time.”

6. Live to fight another day.

Women need to move on when a meeting does not go their way. As one woman told us, “I need to refrain from taking business so personally.” In addition, we found in our review of 360 feedback reports, and in our research, that women have a certain retained angst. That is, they second-guess themselves after a meeting and take events to heart instead of letting go of them.

Karen Dahut, Executive Vice President and Group Leader of Strategic Innovations Group at Booz Allen Hamilton, offered this example: “I was in an executive committee meeting a while back and I put out some controversial points. I knew they would be controversial. We debated for a good while. I led the debate but eventually realized we could go no further, so I closed the conversation. But I thought about it all weekend. I worried about harming my relationships. I wondered what it would take to get them back to where they had developed. Then, on Monday, I saw some of my male colleagues and they greeted me as usual – ‘Hey how was your weekend?’ There was no problem, no hangover or remnant of Friday’s disagreement. I worried about it all weekend, and to the men it was nothing!”

A male senior executive told us: “Men can be intense and challenging, but then we go out and get a beer together. Women do not do that; they are more apt to hold on to things longer.”

The Stakes are Even Higher for Organizations

Coming across as powerful and persuasive in meetings is a critical issue for women. Given the differences in how men and women position the specifics of the problem, it is clear that a part of this dilemma is perception. Perception is always an issue when gender politics come into play. Still, the fact remains: success in visible forums such as meetings is a part of what gets people promoted. Even beyond career success, meetings, from the board level on down, are where decisions are made. By not being their best in meetings women yield their power to men.

If true, that is a problem for women, to be sure, but from a business perspective it is arguably a larger problem for organizations. Women are as educated as men, earning as many or more advanced degrees. Women comprise about 50% of professional management positions.

Organizations are relying on women to manage their divisions, and in the future they will rely on women to run a much higher percentage of their overall operations. The success of women equals the success of organizations.

The reality is that a great many of the issues that keep women from greater positions of power are systemic. There is much that organizations can do.

First, fix broken feedback mechanisms. Women say they don’t receive regular feedback from their managers on their meeting performance, even when they ask for it. Their managers, particularly male managers, don’t like giving direct feedback about development issues.

Next, take a hard look at the number of women present in top-level meetings. If the percentage of women in crucial meetings does not adequately represent your workforce, your executive ranks, and your customers or clients, take steps to increase female representation. Invite women to

meetings. When a woman walks into a meeting with 15 people and only 2 are women, it takes its toll. Peer supporters and role models make a difference.

Finally, pull women into conversations in meetings. Don't think you need to? In separate interviews we asked 30 women, all senior vice presidents and above, what one important thing they would change about how they interact with men in meetings. Thirty-eight percent said "ask us direct questions" or "pull us into the discussion."

One female executive vice president told us: "Eighteen years ago, a male partner that I had been in a series of meetings with recognized that I had something to say, but I was uncomfortable speaking out. He looked around the table. He said he knew I had a point and he would like me to just say it, and not to worry about how it might be received. He got the guys around the table to make it a safe environment for me to speak. I have been speaking up ever since."

Women are looking for a way into the conversation and they have something important to say. ■

Methodology: A Yearlong Research Study

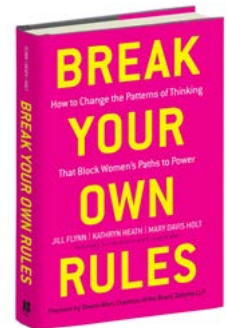
Over the course of our research, we took a systematic look at how women were perceived in meetings by their male and female managers and colleagues. We began, in 2012, by examining 360-degree feedback we'd collected on 1,100 high-ranking female executives working at or above the vice president level—more than 7,000 surveys in all. Next, in 2013, we surveyed 270 female managers in *Fortune* 500 organizations including McDonald's, Procter & Gamble, and Walmart. Finally, to get a picture of how the gender divide plays out in the highest-level meetings, we interviewed 65 additional top executives, both male and female, including CEOs.

In all of our investigations, we found that men and women generally agreed on the problems but often disagreed on their causes. While specific comments from our interviews signal individual opinions, we coded responses from each executive to identify themes that represent the dominant perspective. The leaders in our study, from JPMorgan Chase, Deloitte LLP, PepsiCo, Lowe's, Time Warner, eBay, and several other organizations, helped us piece together the specifics of the gender divide in meetings.

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