

FALSE TRADEOFF OF BEING A WOMAN LEADER



by Belinda MJ Brown, Executive Coach & Women Success Expert

In recent years, I started to question the impact of my practice of executive coaching with women. Indeed, empowering women has become a passion, and I happen to be recognized as skilled in supporting the growth and expansion of corporate leadership for women. Nevertheless, I owed my clients and myself to analyze and evaluate the impact of women's success as a whole, not only as professionals. Women have taken the lead, raised their hands, and broken their own glass ceiling. They celebrated their successes, managed their energy and time to be even more productive, and yet, at times, a part of



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them felt neglected and smaller.

Organizations have done a fantastic job developing programs, sometimes legislation has supported parity and equality. There is no doubt that it has brought greater value to all women I know and have supported. The investment has been proven to be beneficial for both women and their organizations. Women's expansion at senior leadership and executive positions have improved financial performance, morale, and changed the decision-making processes, the approach to business for good. But what has struck me is that women adapted, shifted their mindset, challenged their fears and limiting beliefs, and organizations have not made very profound changes to adapt to women's specifics and intrinsic needs. I embrace equity as the way to truly support equality and inclusion. Equality leads to unfairness. Hoping for women to fit the corporate mold with "their feminine" attributes is unfair. Women and men are designed differently to complete each other, not to compete against each other. The fact that women are having to choose maternity over their career, because maternity does not seem to fit any moment of their life and career. To be independent, to reach status and be successful, women I work with have often sacrificed a part of themselves. Many have chosen to not have children, not because they did not want them but because children did not fit their schedules, they felt it would have been unfair to their family since they were working hard. Those women were and are on the quest for freedom and independence, which are more important than anything else for them. I am praising those women, yet I feel women should not have to sacrifice any part of themselves to be free and independent. Some other examples I encounter are women who realize at 40+ that the biological clock has

ticked one more time and that the process to catch up on their fertility is lonely, defeating, and disempowering. Others have waited for the next promotion to find out they have an illness affecting greatly their ability to have children, and their world shakes greatly, realizing they have little to no chance to conceive, creating an immense void in their heart and in their flesh.

Society and organizations have created a belief that women have to choose which part of themselves they have to nurture most without empowering them to make an informed decision about what their future might look like and how it does align with their deepest aspirations.

Empowering women is attending to all of who they are and potentially can become and be. It is also organizations adapting to employees' needs and women's cycles, not the reverse. We created businesses around supporting women's infertility as a way of life, while I am convinced another path is more respectful of the specific needs of women, but also aligned with what diversity and inclusion truly mean.

I am on a mission to create this truly inclusive and diverse workplace that takes into consideration women's cycles as their energy varies greatly as it progresses and a greater understanding of women's seasons. Each season holds opportunities and challenges that can be anticipated, supported, and addressed to prevent mental charge and mental illnesses for women. Moreover, it is enabling true fulfillment by designing new approaches to support professionals, males and females of organizations, to meet their profound aspirations and set clear ambitions aligned with them.

The changes driven by the past decades are not sustainable as they are, as they again require women to carry unbearable burdens for society and organizations. The next steps have been taken by a few organizations offering

awareness and support to women as a whole and families through coaching programs opening conversations about parenthood and support to transition in and out of a maternity or paternity leave. Another investment organizations want to make is to fully embrace diversity, inclusion, and belonging. More can be done by integrating in women's lives long-term aspirations to build sustainable life and career roadmaps compatible with their intrinsic needs and desires, their cycles and physiology, by paying attention to the season they are in. It doesn't mean that the path will be the same for all women. Some will choose to have a family early because it is the right time in their heart and their body, others will accept to choose their career first then to found a family understanding from the early stage what the path needs to be in anticipation for this so they do not find themselves struggling, and some will choose to not carry a child and to adopt, others might want to not have a child at all to pursue different aspirations, a few might not have met the right person and still desire to want a family Be it! All those paths are unique and must be seen as powerful journeys where women thrive without compromising or sacrificing. The cost is too high, and emotional and mental fitness of women depend on taking into account the whole parts of who they are and want to be.

As I am concluding this article, I am wondering what you are wanting to share and how is this topic related to a season of your life, current or past or future? What suggestions or ideas would you like to offer to other women on their path to fulfillment?