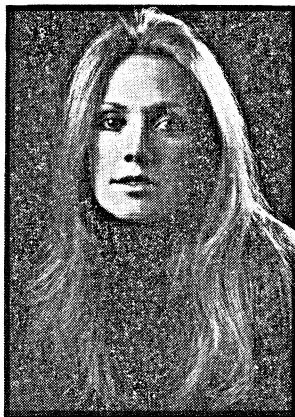


WOMANPOWER IN SOUTH AFRICA: PROPOSING A BUSINESS STRATEGY*



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OPSOMMING

Die vermorsing van "vrouekrag" is tot nadeel van die hele Suid-Afrikaanse ekonomie. Die skryfster bring die probleem met betrekking tot vroue-werknemers onder die aandag van die sakewêreld, en bespreek dit aan die hand van drie klasse van vroue: Dié wat na skool of universiteit 'n loopbaan binnegaan; dié wat reeds in 'n loopbaan is, maar tans nie ten volle benut word nie; en dié wat na 'n tyd van gesinsvorming na 'n loopbaan in die sakewêreld wil terugkeer. Aanbevelings word aan die sakewêreld gedoen oor 'n strategie wat gevolg kan word ten einde beskikbare vrouekrag in almal se belang meer doeltreffend te gebruik. 'n Verandering van houding en inisiatief van die kant van bestuur is van groter belang as wetgewing oor gelyke geleenthede.

Womanpower in this country is being wasted and as a result the entire S A economy and the quality of life of its people is suffering. As a result each and every business and institution is suffering and will continue to lose productivity until something is done about it.

The problems of women in business are complex. Change is needed if we are to maximize our country's manpower resources — and business once again will have to accept the responsibility and challenge for change.

There's nothing new about discrimination, we've lived with it for many years. The irony though, is that the impact of racial discrimination is only beginning to be understood by most and it is only now, after all the talking has been done, that something is being done to eliminate it.

Perhaps serious racial problems in business have overshadowed the problems relating to female discrimination — and it deserved greater attention.

Now though the time has come for those of us who are prepared to speak up and make constructive suggestions for change, to talk and continue talking until something constructive is done. Constructive not only for South Africa and women, but more than for anything else, for business.

At this stage I see my function as twofold, firstly to make business *aware* that there is a problem — and then to assist in *implementing* change in their organizations. And in the same way as the more progressive businesses acted as catalysts for change in racial relations in business — so I know that they will react and

act as the catalysts we need to give women the right opportunities in business.

As we know, change comes about when it is *necessary*, *not* when it is *fair*, that is why I will discuss what I consider to be necessary for business, rather than what is fair for women.

THREE TYPES OF WOMEN — THREE TYPES OF PROBLEMS

Women are different from men — we all know that. They think differently, have different perceptions, even behave differently. But then, all individuals are different. A woman also brings special stresses to the work situation. But then, so do a lot of men. She does fall pregnant. Men don't, but often they are away sick for long periods or go on military service.

Let's divide the different types of women in business, who have problems. There are three types of women — three types of problems.

1. The woman who has graduated or gone to college or leaves school and goes into business to work

Her attitude more often than not is to get a job for pocket money and for a limited time period. Why? — she's been brought up that way. Her parents probably told her that she should do something "in case" she becomes divorced or marries an economic unfortunate — "in case" something goes wrong.

She has been taught that to be feminine, she should sit behind a desk and leave at 4.30 sharp — she has been taught that women are "too delicate" to do

* Talk given in Johannesburg at "Women in Business" Seminar on April 25, 1978.

certain work — “too emotional” to carry responsibility, “too dependent” to have to make it in the real world. She’s been taught that in fact a “real” woman gets married and stays home *unless* she *has* to work.

If she has shown leadership characteristics they have probably been hidden or redirected “in case” she is branded as ‘aggressive’ or ‘masculine’ or ‘forward’.

She’s been conditioned to believe that women only make good in business in certain jobs — perhaps P R O if they are really good! And she has been *contaminated* with a feeling of inferiority.

Generally the result is that she behaves in a restricted way, selling herself short without real interest in a career and worse still without long-term commitment to her job or her company.

Management over the years has made provision for this —

They have sex typed women, regarded them as temporary, and generally been unwilling to invest time or money training or motivating them. In fact, they expect women to get married within a year or two. They expect a woman to give a couple of weeks’ notice and they are rarely disappointed!!

Because of their traditional views about women and their experiences with them, they have male-oriented attitudes and companies.

Advertising is rarely aimed at inviting females into management positions. If women are recruited, very little career development is done and generally the attitude is that whatever job she applied for, will be her permanent job. Often she is not evaluated or is uncertain as to how her progress is assessed or what her opportunities, if any, are.

A man is viewed differently — as an investment — someone to train and motivate, someone who today starts off low down the line, but tomorrow with luck, experience and training should reach the top. He is given attention, observed for progress and evaluated and appraised.

The woman has to keep *proving* she’s good — if she wants to retain her job.

A man has to prove he’s no good to lose his!

2. Women in existing jobs who could, and still can, given the opportunity, advance beyond their present levels

Corporate mobility is, however, often difficult. Often they themselves are to blame because they haven’t really tried to progress in the organization — often they are blocked — often they haven’t a hope because of outright discrimination. Clearly the spectrum of possibilities is wide but the frustration and remarks are always the same:

- “I have to train the man and he gets more than me”.

- “If I were a man, I would have gotten that job”.
- “If she were a man, she would have been G.M. long ago”.
- “She’s really special, that’s why she made it”.

Of course this is typical — the attitude that a woman, in order to be given real management opportunity, must be “extra special”, one of the “special few” the “chosen one”; *or*

“She made it by pure coincidence. Her boss died, so she had to take over. Of course we gave her the chance and now she’s developed a whole empire of her own”.

Women who have made it, often use their excuses as well:

- “Well you know, I had a special kind of boss”.
- “Actually the environment was right”.
- “It just happened, I wasn’t looking for it”.
- “I made it despite them — I was dragged up the ladder spitting and fighting”.
- “I work for a special kind of company, you know”.
- “I think like a man, that’s why I made it”.
- “I’m O.K. as long as I don’t disagree, then they call me a woman”.

All too often, business is sitting on a pile of potential. Converted into money, they would be horrified at their ‘opportunity cost’. Faced with the reality, they would be horrified at the frustration their women employees feel.

The truth though, is that there is frustration and a terrible waste of manpower and a great deal of discrimination — of pay and fringe benefits; of opportunity; and of recognition.

Business has long passed the stage in this country where they believe people only work for money — long passed the point at which they have to be persuaded that a “rate for the job” is needed to maximize efficiency, motivation and profitability — irrespective of race.

There are not many companies left who are not doing something to provide better working opportunities for non-White employees. But what about a rate for the job irrespective of sex?

The Chamber of Commerce in the Cape recently got the signatures of more than 700 firms committing themselves to a policy of anti-race discrimination in business. Seven hundred companies signed a manifesto for change — I am delighted and congratulate them. But I have a question. Why do they only forbid discrimination based on race and colour? What about discrimination based on sex??

3. The woman who wants to re-enter business after having her baby or when the children grow up

This kind of person could also make a contribution at a higher level in companies. She represents a problem

— she has undoubtedly lost contact with her work and because she has probably had no formal career planning or management training, she is often mentally and psychologically handicapped in the work situation.

Invariably she sells herself short and works below the level of her competence — invariably she is frustrated, demotivated and underutilized.

Often too, due to our peculiar tax system, the married woman decides that it isn't worth her while financially to work any way. The demotivating double taxation aggravates the fact that she is unlikely to be given challenging and inspiring work or to be retrained.

All this represents a waste of human resources. To point a finger and say business or government or parents or women are to blame, is an oversimplification of the problem. Its a vicious circle and the crux of the problem is that, if women are to be brought into management positions because companies are either in need of them or progressively inclined, we need a *change of attitude* on everyone's part — and this takes time.

Also, we need more vigorous action programmes to help prepare women to assume more senior positions now and in the future, and to help provide the opportunity and environment for them to experience the same options about their careers that men do.

WHAT OF LEGISLATION?

As far as legislation is concerned, clearly it can provide the formal structure within organizations — the rules. It can provide too, the impetus for change that we desperately need but the implementation of change must come through the mechanism of the informal structure in organizations — the relationships and attitudes of the people in the firm.

Discrimination of pay can be avoided by laws but discrimination of opportunity can't. Even if business were forced to accept a male/female work force ratio, or equal rate for the job, they cannot be forced to treat women equally once they get into business. In other words, saying a person can't be kept out doesn't mean they will be let in.

Neither can laws give women the confidence and competence and attitude of mind to face a future of Equal Employment Opportunity.

Legislation can set the ground rules for Equal Employment Opportunity in business, but the guarantee of equal opportunity is empty unless opportunities are created for women to acquire the skills they need to compete for meaningful positions.

Real equality can only take place with *top management's full commitment to change*.

Another problem with legislation is that, taken to an extreme, instead of preventing discrimination against women it can promote discrimination in favour of

women. If this happens it is not only a hazard for business, but also a danger to our Free Enterprise System — in fact it could defeat the whole object of the exercise, which is to maximize our human resources thereby maximizing company profitability and the economic potential of the country.

Legislation is no substitute for the willingness of businessmen to change. Business cannot accept the present situation as a simple answer to the future. As they have always done, *they* will have to contribute to societal change in South Africa *by taking the initiative* — and their vehicle is their manpower policies and departments.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO BUSINESS

Business can solve the problem of women in business:

- If they accept that there are women who can excel as managers, given the opportunity;
- If they accept that while women are being underutilized, their company and the economy suffers; and
- If they accept one and one principle only, that the only thing that makes business sense is, that the right person is in the right job at the right time.

My recommendations to business are:

- That they clarify their objectives with regard to employing women, with a manpower policy applicable to man and woman alike, accepted and understood by everyone in their firm as part of their company creed
- That top and senior management show their commitment to a programme of change by taking part personally — reinforcing their belief in using women more effectively
- To recruit and hire women on the same basis as men, using the individual's ability, personality and potential as criteria for evaluating their management ability and promotion and growth in their company
- To specifically advertise for both females and males to do jobs of work; this will attract women who normally wouldn't reply to adverts
- To develop career planning for men and women employees and a system of supervising the performance of their employees; this should be incorporated into their personnel policy
- To have more adequate forms of appraisal and supervision of appraisal, so that men and women can both aspire to better positions in the company and work towards their career goals
- To provide management training programmes to women to groom them for management positions — with special emphasis in the short-term given to filling the knowledge gap between men and women. Because of the difference in the management training so far given to men and women, women with management potential should have special programmes to eliminate their management

knowledge backlog. The programmes must be especially geared for women in a management situation.

- To develop firm policies regarding maternity leave — realistic for female employees and the company in the same way as any sick-leave policies are formulated and implemented in organizations
- Review relocation policies — individuals may find the prospect of moving unpleasant, impossible or exciting, irrespective of their sex; it depends on the individual's circumstances
- Consider flexitime hours for both male and female employees and motivate staff by recognizing achievement as the most important single factor, rather than when the work is done
- To appoint people to part-time positions irrespective of sex, thereby allowing men and women to work different schedules

- To fund day-care centres as part of their contribution to their employer/employee relations.

Let us explode the myths regarding women. Let us beware of the statistics which tell us that things are improving, when we know in our heart of hearts that compared to male participation in management, in reality, female participation is frighteningly low. (I believe that only about 1% of all management positions in the country are filled by women).

My appeal to business is as a woman perhaps, but it is an appeal made *in the name of sound business strategy*: "Use your womanpower more effectively".

For business, the real problem is productivity — the real issue is profitability. For women the real problem is Equal Employment Opportunity — the real issue is that NOW women are genuinely ready to participate seriously in our man's world.

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL CLUB OF SOUTH AFRICA AWARDS GOLD MEDAL FOR BUSINESS RESEARCH PAPER

The Harvard Business School Club of South Africa has introduced an annual competition for papers/articles for a Business Research Paper Gold Medal award. Particulars on the award for 1978 have been circulated to business schools and related university departments.

The Competition

1. The competition has been launched by the Harvard Business School Club in the interests of promoting research within South African Universities, but it is open to all interested contributors.
2. Papers will initially be screened by a panel of judges appointed by the Harvard Business School Club, who will jointly choose a maximum of five papers which they consider to be superior contributions.
3. These papers will then be submitted to the editorial panel of the *Harvard Business Review*, who will select one paper for the Gold Medal Award. *The Harvard Business Review may elect to publish the article.*

Contents of Paper

1. Papers must be previously unpublished. They should preferably be based on original research into the business process and its environment. However, consideration will also be given to papers which argue for a new position in management theory or practice (e.g. Levitt's paper on *Marketing Myopia*).
2. In evaluating each submission, the judges will take into account:
 - its originality
 - the quality of its research and argument
 - its relevance and contribution to management
 - its readability to the executive/managerial public.The opinion of the judges will be final, and no correspondence will be entered into with regard to their judgment.

Submission of Papers

1. Three copies should be submitted; these will not be returned to the author(s) unless specifically requested by them.
An article on business writing which appeared in the *Financial Mail* of February 17, 1978 could serve as a guide for prospective authors.
2. Papers to be considered for the 1978 award must be submitted to:
The Secretary
The Harvard Business School Club of South Africa
P.O. Box 7818
Johannesburg
2000
by January 15, 1979.
3. Since the award is to be made annually, authors who cannot make the deadline for the 1978 Gold Medal are invited to start working on papers for the 1979 award.