



Improving the Gender Balance

Business leaders share their practical advice on how to reach gender parity in the workplace. **Mary-Anne Baldwin** reports

Gender diversity is on the agenda for every big business but often their aspirations don't translate into measurable results. For some, the issue is so large and complex they become despondent, others lose sight of practical solutions, or worst of all, pin their hopes on just one.

Yet the problem persists; we need more women in business and not just for the sake of fairness. **Steven Cooper**, CEO of Personal Banking at Barclays explains: "The vast majority of purchasing power lies with women, be it at home or the workplace. So there is a very commercial need to make sure there is a gender balance and an understanding of why those purchasing decisions are made."

Seeing diversity as a customer issue may lead businesses to take a new approach,

one that's advocated by **Laura Haynes**, Chairman at Appetite, a company that helps others drive change.

"If you were trying to create a more customer-driven organisation you wouldn't simply set up a small network or train only the sales force to create new ways of behaviour. Of course not, you would look at the business as a whole to decide where change needs to take place and implement that across the company," she says.

"This is about systemic change, not taking one area of the population at the exclusion of others. It's about looking at business systems, processes and culture."

According to **Laura**, not only has there has been too much focus on isolated or

piecemeal methods, but those attempts have often verged on being archaic.

"The approach to diversity hasn't really changed for decades, until recently it has focused exclusively on fixing women through training, mentoring and confidence building programmes and the ubiquitous women's network," **Laura** shares. "Today, unconscious bias training seems to be trending like the Great British Bake Off with people spending a lot of money on it, yet just taking any single line of approach will not deliver the sustainable results we seek."

No enterprise will invent the elixir for gender parity, results rely on multi-faceted experimentation and personalisation. These are two tenets of [HeForShe](#), a campaign for gender >



diversity led by the United Nation's Women's National Committee, of which **Laura** is the UK Co-Chair.

The two-year old campaign started with the impetus to include men and those in a position of power in the gender debate. It evolved into a crusade that's had businesses, charities, governments and individuals across the world commit to taking steps towards gender diversity as a means to drive change and measure what works.

"It's a social platform for learning, sharing best practice and engaging men and women in the topic," explains **Laura**. "The data we are gathering will help influence policy change with governments and offers companies a new understanding of what can really bring about change."

Barclays, which is one of HeForShe's proponents, is taking a holistic view of diversity, tackling it at all levels from executives and the board down to customers and the supply chain.

One of its pledges is to bring more women up the ranks. "We want to get more women at the senior leadership level by improving it by one per cent a year. That sounds unambitious but actually it's not easy, particularly in some parts of financial services," says **Steve**.

The company is encouraging a pipeline of female talent by having a 50/50 gender split on candidates for hire and by shaping how it's perceived by those candidates. "We changed our job adverts having found that the language we used was masculine. Just a few words here and there and the reply from women was significantly more," **Steve** shares.

"We've also focused on how we promote and support talented women and have made a list of 'women to watch', connecting them with male mentors. In some cases that's turned into some very constructive reverse mentoring."

The Controversial Quota

Whether they are publicly proclaimed or government set, targets are a good way to promote fast-paced cultural change. For example, The French Government's board diversity quota has increased the number of women both at the board and executive level.

Under the rule, some 2,000 companies in France (which are either listed, have more than 500 employees or €50 million in revenues) will need 40 per cent of their boards to be women by 2017.

Failure to meet that quota would mean the company is no longer entitled to remunerate its board members.

"Initially the reaction was that it would be impossible to achieve because as a nation we'd need 6,000 new female board members and we do not have that in France," says **Frederique Dupuis-Toubol**, a Partner at Bird & Bird who is based in Paris.

Yet France has made great progress and **Frederique** believes similar legal requirements could work for the UK. "It was incredible considering the debate that went on before. Companies actually found it quite easy to get women on their boards. It was also very helpful in improving gender diversity at the top executive level, which wasn't expected," she says.

Phillippa Crookes, Relationship Manager at Criticaleye also acknowledges the impact targets can have. She shares: "Although there may be initial resistance, both corporate and national targets can set new norms and expose bad behaviour, but they only work when they are transparent and measurable."

These qualities should be at the core of any gender change programme or it risks falling into lip service. "It's important to ensure that your programmes don't get hijacked or deteriorate into cynical marketing initiatives," says **Laura**. "Of course, being a brand that supports diversity and the empowerment of women will enhance your reputation, but you must be sure these beliefs are genuine and are supported by actions." ■

These insights were shared during Criticaleye's recent Global Conference Call, [Practical Ways to Increase Gender Diversity](#)

Featuring Commentary From:



Steven Cooper
CEO
Personal Banking
Barclays



Phillippa Crookes
Relationship Manager
Criticaleye



Frederique Dupuis-Toubol
Partner
Bird & Bird



Laura Haynes
Chairman
Appetite

Contact the contributors through:
www.criticaleye.com