

Women should also leverage the strengths that are intrinsic to them, set their own standards and not make men their benchmark. They should not try to do things that men do.

## Ahead

**E**mpower women, diversity, inclusive governance are buzz words that we have begun to float in the last decade. It is true that traditionally women were known to be homemakers; however, things have changed over the years. Should there be equality between a man and woman? My approach to the subject is slightly different. God has made woman and man differently. The difference is best echoed by the words of Swami Vivekananda, who said, "If you teach a boy, you reach only one individual; whereas by teaching a girl you teach a whole family". In the practical sense, women should also leverage the strengths that are intrinsic to them, set their own standards and not make men their benchmark. They should not try to do things that men do. In a subtle way, this mindset will pave the beginning of women empowerment. Let me share a personal story. In the late 1940s, my late mother-in-law went to a Medical College to do her M.B.B.S and stayed in a hostel along with many other girls. In those days, it was her father who empowered her to go out and study. Post her marriage, she went to the clinic twice a day, brought up three children and selectively socialized as well. Then it was her husband who empowered her. She was an expert at multi-tasking, performed her duties exceptionally well and simultaneously led a fulfilled professional life. I never heard her use words like 'Ambition' but when I reflect back on her life; I realized that she achieved a lot more in life than many of us today. Initially, she faced resistance being a lady doctor in a man's world but with time it actually became an asset. Being compassionate comes naturally to most women and it is this quality that helped her connect with her patients. The point I am trying to make is that women need to set their own benchmarks, retain their femininity even if they need support in the initial stages. It is also important that women learn to stand up for themselves, rather than envy other women's success. From the above, the keys to woman empowerment are education, financial independence and good health. For me, the ability to earn is most important, which needs vocational skills more than formal education.

### How would women empowerment work in a corporate environment?

A level playing field without any special privileges/ concessions is the best way to start and stay on course. It amounts to hard work, personal sacrifices and strong commitment that holds true irrespective of the gender. Using the above thread, women could focus on areas that leverage on their strengths (not to mean they cannot excel at other jobs) for e.g., finance, human resources, marketing, CSR and creative work. Sometimes we discount the cash and stock management skills of a homemaker who has to ensure that the home is run within a budget and adequately stocked up all the time. Even if many of today's working women do not do this, I am sure they have seen their mothers do it and imbibed the skills sub-consciously.

### Some specific ways to empower at work

The key way is equal opportunity at work and skills development. This does not mean that we ask for a team of women commandos. However, it includes making women stay on all women floors in hotels and similar safety precautions. Again God has empowered women with the responsibility of child birth, so they should be supported during pregnancy and post delivery. This could take the form of crèches at work, flexible working hours and denial of loss of seniority for women who opt for career breaks. Off ramping, mass career customization (mcc), mentoring, phase back to work, etc., are programs that organizations have introduced to ensure integration of women back into mainstream careers. Three, the company must set up targets for a percentage of women employees at various levels. Fortunately, the number of women CEO's in India Inc. is only rising. They are an inspiration to thousands of professionals and home makers. Women constitute a large part of the potential work force today. They are educated and possess balanced hard and soft skills. An organization can ignore such potent talent only at its own peril! **BM**

## Let's not make Men out of Women

- *Aparna Sharma*  
Country Head-HR  
Lafarge India Private Ltd.

