

# VIEWS FROM THE GLASS LIFT

THE GLASS LIFT

MARGARET DAVIES, Occupational Psychologist and Director, The Glass Lift, shares her top three priorities for balancing leadership in 2017.

WINTER  
2017

## Balancing your leadership

2016 WAS A CURIOUS YEAR FOR LEADERSHIP: America voted for a 'hero' leader to save them, seduced by Trump's personal promise to "make America great again". Putin's autocracy continued to be revered or feared. Britain's second female Prime Minister was immediately likened to the first and the media took some time to accept that Mrs May will do it her way.

We know more about leadership than ever before, yet good leadership is patchy in society and the corporate World. I guess that's not surprising. Good leadership is difficult and we tend to choose the person who looks the part, promises change or has the 'charisma' to lure us into a false sense of security.

*Balance at the top stimulates innovative thinking, better decision making and ultimately more effective leadership*

Good leadership is a process that comes from groups of leaders working together. Yes, one person needs to endorse the decision, but it's the blend that makes the difference. Groups of leaders who bring different thinking, approaches and experiences, working together to find the best way forward. We call this **balancing leadership**.

Balance at the top stimulates innovative thinking, better decision making and, through collaboration, leads to more effective leadership. Leaders that surround themselves with people like them or rule with an iron fist will sooner or later fail their people or themselves – history is the judge of that.

**So, here are our top three priorities for balancing leadership in 2017:**

### **1. Equip all leaders to lead**

Leaders are made, not born. Technical knowledge, ambition and confidence move people to positions of seniority. But leadership is a different thing. In fact, some of these attributes may be the reason leaders fail, as confidence turns to arrogance and pressures of the position mean there is insufficient time to maintain technical expertise.

Effective leadership today requires leaders to be great thinkers, curious, adaptable and strategic. But once leaders are in positions of leadership, they are still work in progress, openness to growth is a key attribute towards success. This comes over time, through experience and knowledge, but balancing leadership is a skill that is learned.

Currently, 83% of directors in the UK FTSE 350 are men, 96% are white. 80% of leaders in the NHS are men. These leaders know that diverse senior teams lead to higher profits and performance. They know diversity matters, but this knowledge is not driving change.

Recent research by Gillian Hyde and Geoff Trickey at PCL found **overwhelming evidence that men rated women's performance lower than their male colleagues.**

Gender bias, together with bias towards people from ethnic minorities, LGBT and people with disabilities remains a huge barrier to balancing leadership.

PCL analysed over 30,000 360-degree feedback ratings from colleagues across 24 competencies and 25 companies across industry sectors.

They found that males' performance was rated more or less equally by males and females.

**BUT females' performance was rated lower by males than by females.**

Men rated women significantly lower on: *Potential, Persuasive Communication, Customer Focus, Creative and Leadership.*

In a post-Brexit era, competition for talented leaders will become even tougher. The issue is as humans are drawn to 'people like us', and so embracing people we perceive to be different requires us actively search for the potential leaders of the future and enable them to work together to produce something great. That's the difficult bit. It's rather like learning a musical instrument, we forget to practice.

If we don't equip leaders to lead well and balance leadership, we are setting them up to fail. At the same time, aspiring and current leaders must accept they have a responsibility to learn to become effective (and ethical) leaders. If they are not open to this, they are setting themselves up to fail. The outcome in both cases will lead to them failing us.

## 2. Create a climate where people thrive

The narrative about productivity is often focussed on technology, systems and processes.

At the same time the biggest cost to organisations today is absenteeism and presenteeism through sickness and 'stress'. It follows, that if we enable a climate where people thrive at work rather than get sick, there is huge potential to increase productivity.

What sort of climate enables people to thrive? Evidence from neuro-leadership research points to some basic needs: A job we enjoy (or that at least does not cause us pain), relationships at work, some autonomy and feeling like we fit in.

Balancing leadership means creating an environment where people feel they fit in and can contribute to their full potential.

So how do we create an inclusive climate? Many organisations are embarking upon unconscious bias training to raise the awareness that we all have unconscious biases to those we perceive to be different to us. Yet once I know I am biased, what do I do with this information?

This is akin to telling me I have a habit and then expecting me to break it and if you're giving up chocolate for Lent, you'll know how difficult it can be to change a habit. Providing people with information that they are biased must be accompanied by support and guidance on how to positively engage and include people who we perceive as different to us. After all the bias is unconscious – we don't know we are doing it!

**Being truly inclusive means anything from hearing the views of those that oppose us, to changing the habits of a lifetime.**

We cannot rely on changing systems and processes to fix our biases - as humans we are very adept at getting around systems and processes. Instead we need to look to providing support to help us to act more inclusively towards those different to us and being truly inclusive means anything from hearing the views of those that oppose us, to changing the habits of a lifetime.

### 3. Build communities of inclusive leaders

There are a plethora of networks and groups doing valuable work to raise the awareness of the equality and diversity agenda in organisations.

The women's marches on Trump's inauguration demonstrated the power of numbers in reminding the World of equal rights and opportunity for women. These groups also provide a source of support and inspiration to women, people from the LGBT and black and ethnic minority groups.

The World has moved on and it's now crucial that these networks and groups broaden their remit to drive the equality agenda forward. A shift in focus from raising awareness of the benefits and moral need for equality and diversity, to a focus on making change happen.

These networks work best when they are integrated and interdependent with the strategy of an organisation or an industry sector. Networks that fail to do this now risk becoming isolationist and exclusive – rather like 'the old boys' club!

Inclusive leaders are those that seek out opportunities to balance leadership and who role model inclusion.

One way to do this is by creating communities of inclusive leaders, those leaders that are equipped to lead well and inclusively. Those that seek out opportunities to balance leadership and who role model inclusion. The leaders that fish for talent in a bigger pool and create cultures where all people thrive.

The benefits of this are the power of numbers again, but demonstration does not mean protesting, rather showing others how inclusion is done.

At the very least these networks need to enable robust CPD and career opportunities for all. At best, they will be hooked into the decision making that enables balanced leadership in their organisation or sector.

Do you recognise, champion and equip **all** potential leaders to lead, irrespective of their gender, race, sexuality, disability and class?

So, look carefully at the leadership, climate and communities within your organisation. Do you recognise, champion and equip **all** potential leaders to lead, irrespective of their gender and race, sexuality, disability and class?

Are you creating a climate where all people can thrive? Do you have a community of inclusive leaders who are proactively driving change? This is crucial to our future success. I hope someone is asking Mr Trump these questions.

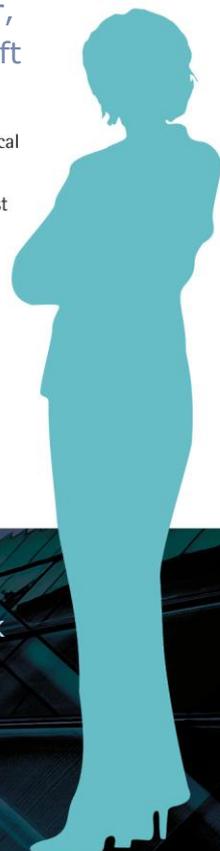


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ELEVATE – creating inclusive leaders

INTEGRATE – creating inclusive cultures

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