

Playing to Strength: Leveraging Gender at Work

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Numerous books address the challenges women face in the workplace; many of them make a valid case that when it comes to opportunities for promotion and pay scale, gender inequality is real. *Playing to Strength*, on the other hand, highlights the common ground between men and women and offers strategies for building a workplace based on equality.

Alice Adams begins by acknowledging that “we all tend to hang on to old ideas about gender difference, whether or not they reflect our own reality.” She points out that such ideas are only reinforced by articles and books that depict the “Mars and Venus” differences between men and women, leading to erroneous perceptions about who can do which jobs. In the workplace, Adams says, it should be about who is *best qualified* to do a job, not about whether that individual is a man or a woman.

Adams explores and rejects many of the common themes surrounding gender differences, such as the beliefs that men are more career-oriented than women, women are better at communicating emotions than men, and children of working mothers have suffered emotionally and academically. She offers research, anecdotes, and workplace scenarios that debunk many of these claims.

Studying the issues, however, would be of little value if Adams didn’t provide solutions. That’s why the second half of *Playing to Strength* is a working manual of sorts that offers guidance for what *not* to do, as well as how to succeed at correcting gender inequalities in the workplace. Unfortunately, it is likely that many company managers will be more familiar with the negatives than the positives.

The author’s hope, however, is that these same managers will begin to use the set of “tools” she includes in the book, which include instructions for making a business case for gender inclusion, involving middle management, the correct kind of mentoring, effective recruitment and retention strategies, and understanding where gender bias really comes from. Adams provides a “game plan” with specific step-by-step instructions. She also includes a sample outline for a “gender role education program” and a sample project plan for “gender inclusion on a male-majority workplace,” both of which will be extremely valuable to senior managers who are serious about implementing change.

The author’s straightforward, unbiased approach and the wealth of instructional material in this book make *Playing to Strength* a valuable and welcome addition to business literature.

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