



BREAKING BARRIERS TOGETHER: HOW BUSINESSES, SOCIETY, AND WOMEN CAN TRANSFORM MANUFACTURING LEADERSHIP

In today's ever-evolving industrial landscape, women's leadership in manufacturing has never been more crucial. Yet, despite progress, barriers remain that prevent women from fully accessing leadership roles. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024, women represent only 33% of entry-level positions in manufacturing, which drops dramatically to 16.5% at the C-suite. I believe that this gender gap, particularly pronounced in manufacturing, requires a tri-party solution — a concerted effort by businesses, society, and women themselves. Together, we can change the narrative and ensure that leadership is defined by capability, not gender.

The Role of Business in Driving Change

Businesses play a pivotal role in dismantling the barriers that hinder women from advancing into leadership roles. Manufacturing organizations must adopt inclusive policies, such as structured leadership pathways, mentorship programs, and transparent promotion criteria, to ensure equal opportunities for career advancement.

A significant challenge for women in leadership is balancing professional ambition with caregiving responsibilities. According to the AAUW, women in manufacturing are more

likely to leave their jobs due to the lack of work-life balance support. The reality of being “always on” — leading critical business discussions while coordinating a child's football game — creates an invisible burden that is often overlooked. Without flexible work policies and parental leave, many women opt out of leadership tracks before reaching their peak potential.

Beyond structural changes, businesses must foster a culture that challenges gender bias, harassment, and discrimination, ensuring a safe, inclusive environment where women



can thrive. Providing flexible work options and paid family leave are key steps in supporting women's leadership. Investing in mentorship, skill-building, and leadership training further empowers women, helping businesses benefit from the diverse perspectives and innovative solutions they bring to the table.

Society's Role in Shifting Perceptions and Creating Opportunities

True change cannot occur in isolation—society must also play a crucial role in re-shaping perceptions of women in leadership, particularly in manufacturing. Education systems must actively encourage young women to pursue careers in STEM fields, highlighting the potential of engineering, production, and leadership roles. By promoting STEM education and providing mentorship opportunities, we can inspire young women to enter traditionally male-dominated industries and prepare them for leadership positions.

Moreover, societal perceptions about gender roles must evolve. Long-standing gender norms that limit women's ambitions need to be challenged at home, in schools, and through media representation. Encouraging girls to aspire to leadership roles, as well as technical careers, helps break down stereotypes and fosters a more inclusive view of what women can achieve.

Empowering women to pursue careers, particularly in industries like manufacturing, helps them become financially independent. Financial independence enables women to have greater control over their lives, make autonomous decisions, and reduce dependency. This empowerment can ultimately shift power dynamics, reduce gender-based violence, and contribute to creating safer, more equitable communities.



Women's Agency in Shaping Their Own Futures

While systemic changes in business and society are crucial, women also have a role to play in shaping their own futures. Women must continue to advocate for themselves and future generations, pushing for greater representation, equal opportunities, and professional growth. Embracing technology and a data-driven approach in the manufac-

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turing sector is one of the key ways women can position themselves at the forefront of industry change. By gaining expertise in emerging technologies, women can lead the transition to Industry 4.0, driving innovation and competitiveness in the sector.

Moreover, women can support each other by actively participating in mentorship and networking initiatives. Through these collaborative efforts, women can share experiences, provide guidance, and inspire one another to rise to leadership positions. By empowering next generation of women leaders to embrace their innate strengths- resilience and adaptability women leaders can redefine the future of manufacturing, one strategic decision at a time.

Uniting for Change: The Collective Role of Businesses, Society, and Women

The journey toward gender parity in manufacturing leadership requires a tri-party solution — an ongoing partnership between businesses, society, and women. Businesses must lead by creating inclusive environments, offering support for work-life balance, and developing programs that foster leadership potential in women. Society must work to shift perceptions of women in technical roles, encouraging young girls to pursue STEM careers and challenge traditional gender norms. Women, in turn, must

continue to break barriers, embrace new opportunities, and empower one another to reach the highest levels of leadership.

The manufacturing sector, at its core, is built on resilience and innovation. By working together, we can create a future where leadership is defined by ability, not gender. We all have a role to play in this change, and through collective action, we can ensure that the next generation of women leaders is ready to lead, innovate, and thrive in an industry that values diversity and inclusivity.



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