

Module 4 - Step 3: Gender Differences - Audio Transcript

“As a woman, my style defines my leadership. It’s a gentler, more compassionate approach. I consult, I listen and I compromise where it is in the best interest of the citizens.” Kama Persaud-Bissessar, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago

I have used this quote to open this next session as it outlines a gender norm for women. I’ve put together some images that, generally speaking, illustrate how men and women bond differently and how, actually, it’s important to retain specific gender only groups which create mutually beneficial networking situations and can provide a safety net for support, where needed. Men may not look for support in a group situation but they will certainly have a ‘mate’ with whom they can talk through life’s troubles and share stories and advice. So we can see here, the football on the men’s side and shoes and make-up on the women’s side...



Male Bonding



We are, obviously, different biologically but we are also wired differently; men like to have clear-cut priorities and deadlines, solving issues head on (or burying their heads in the sand and hoping the problem goes away (we can relate this to women’s issues).) Whereas women have a more collaborative style; their approach is often ‘tend and befriend’. When under stress, women will start building relationships, connect with someone, or focus on looking after others.

To improve relations between the sexes it is necessary to create an understanding of our differences that raises self-esteem and personal dignity while inspiring mutual trust, personal responsibility, increased co-operation (and, on a personal level, greater love). Once this is better understood, walls of resentment and mistrust will melt down.

Men, will choose the 'fight or flight' strategy - in the workplace this could be described as 'solve or avoid'. Men will either face the situation and solve the issue, or avoid it altogether. This male strategy is all about survival of the fittest.

Psychologists show that the different ways of feeling secure come with a different strategy for stress. When I say stress, I mean any situation that is unfamiliar, has an element of uncertainty, or is new to you. This can be interviewing, staff appraisal, visiting a potential client or giving a speech but can also be as small as disagreeing with a colleague in a meeting.

Research, by endocrinologists, shows that hormones in our brain cause the strategy. Under stress the male brain releases testosterone, cortisol and adrenalin - all action-orientated hormones. An alternative would be to bury oneself in work, a form of fleeing and may well lead to results but they see little benefit from collaboration.

Under stress, the female brain releases the same action-orientated hormones as the male brain. However, it also releases oxytocin, known as the love-hormone. It's this hormone that creates an impulse to bond with others and it is fundamentally different from the fight-or-flight impulse.

Female Bonding



In the case of the symptoms of peri-menopause, we see quite a different reaction altogether where this is totally thrown out the window and women can be seen to go against type and

get very angry and demand to know why they are being ignored and that nobody is listening to them or carrying out instructions! Hormones are flipping them out of their normal collaborative style and creating a monster but only because of a lack of understanding of what is happening to them. We can also attribute this lack of knowledge to male colleagues.

Try this Remedy: Imagine the benefits if women were shown how to react differently. This may not prevent a heated moment but it will surely start to help women see the effects of hormonal anarchy. It's worth making this suggestion: After a heated moment, get them to sit down, take a few deep breaths and instead of resenting what she perceives is happening, question themselves - Wow! Where did that come from? and then, to think about their hormones, their monthly cycle and PMS, and, if the dates don't seem to fit, come to the realisation that maybe something else is going on that they don't understand.

This is where your new knowledge and support comes in, spreading the word that the organisation knows about hormonal health and menopause and can help. How powerful is that!

What men do is much more visible in an organisation. Men, with their preference for clear and fast decisions, facts and data analysis, clear priorities, deadlines and solving issues head on; this fits right in with the current prevailing business culture. Add to that their strong drive to let others know they have achieved and it's easy to see why they are seen as people that add value. And, because of the gender differences I have outlined here, women can sometimes find it difficult to be heard above this other 'noise'.

But, women do need to find their voice especially at menopause and YOU can help them do this by giving them the information they need and by setting up a Personal Action Plan with them, if needed. Small steps, great results. The results will grow and grow, as long as the support is there. Help them create a path of clarity.

I'd now like to get you thinking about this, so make some notes in answer to these questions:

- What would you do if you knew that because of your new knowledge around the subject of menopause, you recognised your skills were needed? What would you do differently at work?
- If you speak up and show the way to your colleagues and staff, how has this made an impact?
- By sharing your thoughts and perspectives to your colleagues, staff or senior leaders, do they recognise what you are trying to achieve?
- Have you thought of building a female only networking group?

You have embarked on this training because you know, you understand, you have an instinct that recognises the benefits of challenging the status quo; educating yourself in order to advise and support other women which you know will ultimately result in you becoming more effective and helping those women to potentially undertake more fulfilling roles.

We are currently living out scripts handed down to us by others - families, associates, friends, enemies, and the media. In other words you are constantly being sold the stereotypical view

of how women should be, what to say, do, wear, etc. and some parts of this script may seem constructive, while other parts may be destructive. Good or bad, these scripts can keep us from connecting with who we really are and what we are about and becoming better at what we do.

For women, feeling undervalued and unrepresented can be counter-productive. Focus on the job is lost and bitterness and frustration sets in and the next step could be resignation. And I would like to emphasise again, here, what about hormones? Hormones and the role they play, are not normally mentioned and it's time they were. Don't be shy about bringing this up. Utilise the 'evidence' the valuable information contained in the research - see PDF with links to all the research.

Task:

This course is not just about advising and supporting women through menopause, it's also about engaging with the 'Establishment', your organisation, helping to make the subject of menopause simple, to be recognised, understood and support given where needed. *So, think about this:* In order to get some decisions taken by leaders, it's always a good idea to prepare your ground first and when presenting an issue or a challenge, present a solution alongside it and outline what actions can be taken to achieve that beneficial outcome. A win: win situation, if you like and I'll be dealing with more of this later. So with the knowledge you are receiving here, you can create a strategy, with an outcome; a cost/benefit analysis effectively because you will be able to track your successes by incorporating 'checks' utilising existing systems that already cover absenteeism, productivity, annual reviews, etc.

So, have a think about this, what already exists that you can utilise to include new checks on the health of women working through menopause?

In the past, most of what leaders get taught has been based on research done with male students, simply because there used to be more male students. It's been the same when drugs needed testing; research was and is still mostly done on males because the female monthly cycle interfered with outcomes, it skewed the results - the menstrual cycle would throw out all sorts of anomalies so it was thought best not to include women in drug trials! For me, I see this as an interesting time for menopause. It's going to be challenging to introduce new thinking in such a pro-active way, but the results will be so beneficial, don't you think?

Colleagues, Managers, Partners

Partners: Encourage dialogue

All Staff: Have women in their lives and are aware of “women’s problems”

All have mothers, sisters, partners

Let’s get everyone together and make
Sense of Menopause



Menopause in the workplace is getting more recognition. It’s not difficult to understand once you look at the basics of hormonal anarchy and the fact that it can be tamed. However, it’s clear that *women are going to lead the way*; they need to lead the way because this is a very female orientated and sensitive subject affecting them on a huge scale. This is pioneering stuff and a fresh approach to learning and getting it accepted at all levels as being of value and benefit to all staff can only build a more effective and collaborative organisation.

It’s important to let your superiors know about your plans to do more and how you believe it will create substantial business value. Show them how you work and why it is a good approach.

For their part, organisations are making a real effort to retain female staff and even to bring them back after a career break, offering a host of benefits to make it more attractive for women to work for them so it makes sense for them to recognise menopause in the workplace and that it is not the ‘devil’ but a transient female condition that can be tamed and utilised to good advantage.

Women have the talent to build engagement with colleagues and superiors and be people-focused. This is exactly what women bring and what organisations are asking for. Recognising menopause in the workplace will help avoid losing good, valuable and highly trained, female staff and will improve your supply of mentors and role models. As we have seen in previous exercises, the female workforce goes into steep decline over the age of 45 and this now needs to change.

It is worth mentioning here that in the hierarchy stakes, women compete, too and it is just as fierce as when men do it. However, women compete on something different. As a species,

women have less physical strength. Building the pecking order on physical prowess wouldn't be practical or sensible. Girls and women have a different way of finding security; they compete on a mental level. They compete on being 'nice'. This is about being a 'nice girl' and there is a direct link to being valued by others and being popular (going back to childhood).

This can manifest itself in a meeting situation; women, regardless of their rank, tend to sit around the corners of the room, kindly leaving space for others. Taking up a space at the table wouldn't be nice if it turned out someone of a higher rank came into the room. Besides, it would place you above others, which isn't nice either. Have you seen this happen?

There is scope and opportunity in a fresh approach, where a woman's way of working is seen as equally effective and is valued and we don't want to muddle up symptoms of menopause when women are showing a lack of focus or concentration.

When talking to people about your ideas, how working through menopause doesn't have to be a nightmare, you can do this by giving them instructions, managing their expectations, as this creates clarity. Everyone knows what their role is and what they need to do. Team members know what the expectations are and what the end result will be. This type of command-and-control style has worked well for many organisations for decades and fits into the female psyche.

Gender Differences

- Different approaches
- Men can show great insight
- Encourage understanding from both sides
- What are your own thoughts on this?



A gender-smart manager will be worth their weight in gold.

Don't forget, men can show great insight, where women are concerned and shouldn't be left out in the cold on this. They often know instinctively what the problem is but whether it's at work or in the home, it's difficult raising the sensitive subject of menopause. However, by

raising awareness, discussing it openly, the stigma can be removed and menopause will become a normal phase in a woman's life (which it is anyway) but it's accepted as something that may need advice and support, just as pregnancy does, just as mental health conditions do and just as heart health does. By adding 'menopause' to the organisational health agenda, it normalises it.

With grateful thanks to the following: **Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus by John Gray** and **Be Gender Smart by Inge Woudstra** both available online and from good bookshops from which I gained useful insight, some of which has been adapted here.

Next? We're going to look at some case studies...