

# Take a Woman to Work Today: Yourself



*By Valerie Graves, Creative Advertising Guru and Author, "Pressure Makes Diamonds: Becoming The Woman I Pretended To Be"*

As I sat down to write a few words about gender in the marketing/advertising/communications industry, I was struck by the stark differences between the two most visible communicators of the moment, the presidential nominees of the two major parties. Whatever one's preference, it is hard to deny that Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump are stylistically diametric opposites. Large in personality as well as stature, loud, uber-confident, impetuous and imperious, Donald Trump is a sharp contrast to the smaller, calmer, thoughtfully prepared, steely but collaborative Hillary Clinton. Clinton's campaign theme, "Stronger Together" reflects her very different way of thinking about leadership.

What is interesting, though not surprising, is how seldom their differences are discussed in terms of gender.

While one can argue that it would be of no particular benefit to bring up the subject, when has that ever stopped the press from probing? Even a surface examination would reveal that if stereotypes are at all based on reality, Donald Trump is running like a typical man and Hillary Clinton is handling her bid pretty much the way women do. So why is no one talking about it? My theory is that everyone –including the press– fears that to say Hillary Clinton is campaigning like a woman

would be considered a negative attack, implying weakness, softness and a general lack of “the right stuff” to handle a job that, based on the evidence, seems to require a healthy dose of testosterone as a qualifying factor. To remark, on the other hand, that Donald Trump is running like a man would imply good and admirable things. Take this sharp contrast out of the world of high stakes politics, and you will be left with a situation that is played out daily in the nation’s executive suites.

Less well-known women are getting things done in the same less bombastic, more thoughtful and inclusive way as Clinton, without getting or taking credit for handling the task “like a real woman.” Maggie Wilderotter, former CEO of Frontier Communications, was quoted by CNN as saying women are “very good at multitasking, have a sixth sense with people, are nurturing and service-oriented.” In more than one circumstance, I have witnessed situations where male executives, entrusted with powerful leadership positions, owed much of their success to female subordinates who, far from merely implementing the ideas of their bosses, were actually major contributors to the ideas themselves. Those women generally received credit only for being “good at their jobs,” rather than being innovative, effective leaders and team builders. According to CNN Money, although only 4.4% of CEO jobs in Fortune 500 Companies are held by women, females hold 16.5% of the four executive positions just below CEO in the S&P 500— chief financial officers, chief operating officers and other key roles at major companies. Although still a dismal number considering that women comprise more than half the population, it seems proportionally significant.

It is time to recognize and legitimize the value of womanliness in the workplace. That way, a new generation of females can be cognizant of the value of high emotional intelligence, collaborative, communicative inclinations and even –dare I say it- a bit of maternal instinct. As a Creative

Director and ultimately a Chief Creative Officer of two advertising agencies working for Fortune 500 clients, I found great use for the skill set common to wives and mothers, who cannot simply fire their mates and children. Understanding, on an individual level, what motivates people and nurturing the best out of them is a necessity of competent mothering, yet few children doubt that Mom is in charge. Respectful collaboration and partnership, as opposed to subordination, are often the hallmarks of successful marriage. Affirming and consciously incorporating a woman's proclivities can be expected to yield great dividends. Companies with a high representation of women board members, for example, significantly outperformed those with no female directors, according to a 2011 analysis of financial results at Fortune 500 companies by nonprofit research organization Catalyst.

Most of all, it will be beneficial for women themselves to realize that what makes us women is also part and parcel of what makes us successful. In my book, "Pressure Makes Diamonds: Becoming the Woman I Pretended to Be," I detail the career breakthrough that occurred when I realized that life as an African American had given me an empathy and insight that translated to expertise in communicating with black audiences and being a manager and executive in multicultural environments. In an era that places great stock in authenticity, I look forward to the rising realization that we females do not succeed in spite of being women, but because of it. Our "womanly" characteristics can be the counterbalancing energy to the "masculine" tendencies that too narrowly define our concept of leadership. For too long, recognition for women has been too dependent on our ability to behave and perform like men. Moving forward, we should seize the opportunity to bring our whole, authentic selves to the job. Today, take a woman to work and turn her loose.

*About the Author: Author and creative guru Valerie Graves, whom Advertising Age magazine named one of the "100 Best and*

*Brightest" in the entire industry, is a nationally recognized creative director of such Fortune 500 accounts as Ford, General Motors, AT&T, Burger King, General Foods, and Pepsi. A former teenage parent from the factory town of Pontiac, Michigan, Graves broke barriers in advertising as one of the first black copywriters at BBDO, Kenyon & Eckhardt, and JWT. She went on to an award-winning career as chief creative officer at the UniWorld and Vigilante/Leo Burnett agencies, senior vice president of creative services at iconic Motown Records, and creative consultant to President Bill Clinton. In 2007, recognizing Graves's stellar career and public service via the Advertising Council and the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, industry coalition ADCOLOR granted her the title of "Legend." She resides in New York City.*