



# Blind Spot

WHY WOMEN AREN'T ADVANCING IN CANADA'S LARGEST WORKPLACES –  
AND WHY MEN NEED TO CARE

By Heather Hudson



He calls it his “white male epiphany.”

In 2000, Jeffery Tobias Halter’s employer, Coca-Cola, faced a \$200-million discrimination lawsuit. Overnight, he was reassigned from running sales training to pioneering a diversity education program.

“What did I do to get this job?” he said. “I’m a straight, white guy and now I’m in charge of diversity and inclusion (D&I)? I really did not know about white male privilege, but I quickly learned some valuable lessons.”

His deep dive into the company’s candidate selection, performance management, succession planning, pay equity and diversity revealed Grand Canyon-sized gaps in D&I. What’s more, there was no through line to other business areas, including the big engines – sales, marketing and operations.

Halter says Coca-Cola was not alone in their shortcomings, particularly when it comes to advancing women.

“Most organizations have a series of unrelated programs and processes to advance women, but there are



*“Engaging men in the advancement of women is truly the new frontier for every company in America, and this is the book that will show you how to do it.”*

—From the Foreword by Betsy Meyers,  
Founding Director of the Center for Women in Business at Bentley University

# WHY WOMEN

The Leadership Imperative  
to Advancing Women  
and Engaging Men

Jeffery Tobias Halter

*Jeffery Tobias Halter’s book,  
Why Women*



very few companies that approach it like a business imperative,” he said.

Some startling – but ultimately unsurprising – statistics:

According to a 2013 study by the Canadian Centre of Policy Alternatives, at the current pace of change, women won’t achieve full economic and political equality in Canada for 228 years.

A CNNMoney analysis reveals that only 14 per cent of the top leadership positions at S&P 500 companies are held by women.

The Canadian Board Diversity Council reports that between 2001 and 2013, gender diversity in corporate boards increased only 4.7 per cent. At that rate, they predict women won’t achieve gender parity on corporate boards until the year 2083.

All this, even though 85 per cent of companies agree that a diverse and inclusive workforce is crucial to encouraging different perspectives and ideas that drive innovation, as reported in Forbes’ Global Diversity and Inclusion study, titled *Fostering Innovation Through a Diverse Workforce*.

“Advancing women today is a lot like diet and exercise – everybody knows it’s the right thing to do and nobody does it. We have to move from a conceptual head nod to true advocacy and passion,” said Halter. “It’s not one thing, it’s issues that no one wants to address...because they’re complex, they’re interrelated and most companies have not done the hard work to measure what success looks like and articulate that.”

He says connecting all programs and processes makes it work. To wit, 12 years after the lawsuit, Coca-Cola received the Catalyst Award as a top workplace for women.

## **ARE MEN THE NEW CHAMPIONS FOR WOMEN?**

Halter has made advancing women in leadership his life’s work. As the author of *WHY WOMEN, The Leadership Imperative to Advancing Women and Engaging Men* and president of YWomen, he provides consulting services that drive actionable business plans and strategies to help organizations create integrated women’s leadership strategies.



It may seem incongruous for a man to be a leader in this cause, but Cathy Gallagher-Louisy, director of knowledge services at the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI), says it's critical that men are as engaged as women.

"It comes down to the credibility of the messenger," she said. "Unfortunately, some men who are resistant to have conversations about D&I will hear the message more effectively from another man."

In fact, in their work educating leadership teams, they occasionally

send in their male CEO, Michael Bach, to deliver the message.

"For some people, they're going to hear the message better from someone like them. If a man is talking about women's advancement, the men in the audience are less likely to think he's doing it because he has a personal agenda," said Gallagher-Louisy.

When it comes to "making the case" for women, Halter goes straight for the bottom line.

In his work with leaders, he points out Catalyst statistics that suggest when you add women on

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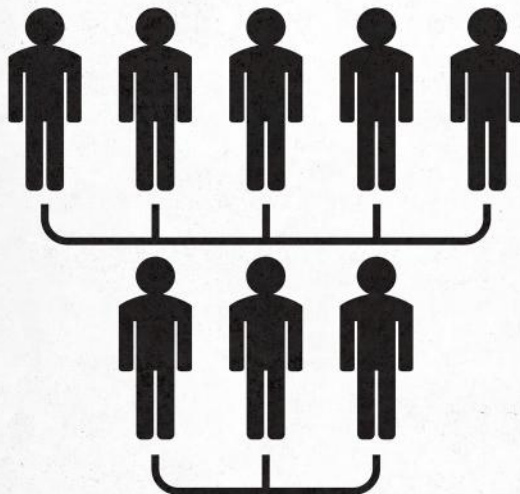
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He explains that companies with more women at the helm can talk to customers better (noting that consumers with purchasing power are women), have better employee engagement, more productive employees and enjoy a better reputation in the marketplace by being recognized as a great place to work.

“Any business metric, from revenue to profit to company engagement, goes up when you have more women in the mix,” he said. “That’s what success looks like.”

### **HOW CAN MEN PROMOTE WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN THE WORKFORCE?**

Have you noticed that women are more likely to be interrupted in a meeting (even by other women) than men? Or that there’s an assumption that women will take



notes, plan and follow up – even when among colleague peers? Recognizing the subtle barriers is a first step, and taking action follows.

“One of the simple things I ask men to do is take a woman coworker to coffee and ask her genuinely about the experience she’s having at work,” said Halter. “Chances are, she’s not going to tell you initially because most women don’t want to be the flag bearer for ‘all things women,’ but if you ask two or three times in a genuine manner, you will find root cause issues [of gender inequality] you didn’t know about.”

He advises that men’s first response should be to listen and the second is to learn to deepen their awareness of gender competency.

Gallagher-Louisy says simple actions like speaking up in a meeting when a woman is talked over or interrupted can have huge benefits. She says informal sponsorships,

which happen all the time among men, can effect dramatic change over time.

“If there’s an up-and-coming guy in the organization, a leader may notice and recommend him for an opportunity. Generally, people sponsor people who are like them. But if you create sponsorship programs for the purpose of advancing inclusion in organizations, that’s where males can make a huge difference and they can advocate for and sponsor women coming up in the organization, as well,” she said.

## HOW CAN HR PROFESSIONALS PROMOTE WOMEN’S ADVANCEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE?

Gallagher-Louisy says acknowledging the blind spots or gaps in knowledge is a great first step to making meaningful D&I changes within an organization. CCDI has

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– CATHY GALLAGHER-LOUISY, CANADIAN CENTRE FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION





used a diversity census tool with 50 organizations and found that senior leadership and HR teams think they're doing well on D&I, while equity seeking groups within the organization have an entirely different perspective.

"Most male leaders don't know how their average employees are experiencing the organization," she said. "HR professionals need to educate themselves and provide information to leaders about the value of promoting D&I in their organization. The conversation should be had on a regular basis. HR has a lot of influence if they choose to use it."

Here are four key ways that Halter believes HR professionals can help make a demographic shift in the organization:

1. When succession planning, hold leaders accountable for preparing a diverse talent pool for leadership positions in the future. "What does talent look like two and three levels down? If you don't have women in your pipeline, you need to ask your leadership team, 'Are you telling me you can't recruit, develop and advance people unlike yourselves?'"
2. Ensure diverse interview panels when hiring new candidates. "You can have women interview, but if they show up to talk to three men, they'll rightly ask themselves if they belong in this organization."
3. Help address the wage gap. "Every senior leader can run a report and know what women are paid vs. men by job grade and seniority. It's just a matter of choosing to do that." HR professionals have valuable input and influence to work



toward pay equity.

4. Look at the big picture when it comes to performance reviews. “If you analyze performance management on a small scale, you don’t notice minor disparities between men and women; but if you analyze 1,000 performance reviews, you’ll see women are routinely rated at one to 1.5 points lower than men for the same performance. It’s very subtle.”

He says the subtle bias in staff functions live in hard-to-measure metrics. For example, if a project fails to live up to projected success and a man is responsible, he might be given the benefit of the doubt. If a woman is at the helm, it may be more likely perceived as a failure.

“You don’t notice this in small numbers, but if you run performance reviews analysis you start to uncover what bias looks like in meaningful ways,” said Halter.

## WOMEN’S EQUALITY ON THE HORIZON

Gallagher-Louisy says awareness is slowly seeping through the public consciousness, which is the first step toward change.

“We definitely see more organizations making sincere attempts to improve and it’s been exciting to see a number of research reports quantifying bottom-line impacts for D&I,” said Gallagher-Louisy.

Halter is also encouraged by the gradually warmer reaction from leaders. When all else fails, he applies simple math to a complex problem.

“Women are 50 per cent of the population and the workforce. [American business magnate Warren Buffett] says, ‘You’re trying to fight a battle with half your team on the bench.’ It doesn’t pass the common sense test.”

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