



Believe This...The Tides Have Turned

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"Women of New York: We don't just believe you. We believe IN you."

A billboard on a Manhattan building grabbed my attention — and struck a nerve. Rubbernecking through traffic, I saw this unequivocal statement of solidarity. "We believe IN you" — I mouthed the words out loud. I've been waiting my whole life for these words to herald this exquisite moment in time of the glass ceiling breaking.

Studies done in 2017 by Pew Research Center show that four in 10 working women reported they've faced gender discrimination in their jobs. Take Tammie Jo Shults, the nerves-of-steel Southwest Airlines pilot who safely landed her plane with 148 passengers aboard after an engine blew out. Years earlier, she wisely ignored a disparaging high school instructor who told her there was no place for women pilots. Shults became the first female F/A-18 Hornet pilot in the U.S. Navy.

Why believe in women? Because women like Shults, who survive and thrive despite obstacles, aren't operating from a sense of entitlement. Obstacles fall before their fiery determination, intense work ethic and penetrating intelligence. Aren't these the qualities we need in business?

Credit for the billboard goes to Ellevest, a financial services firm founded by longtime Wall Street executive Sallie Krawcheck. Ellevest is a new kind of firm recognizing women's value and teaching us to increase wealth and personal power through financial smarts. This tectonic shift is happening in many industries that historically exploited our contributions, stunted our careers and — literally — shortchanged us



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And the business world is finally getting real about what sexual misconduct is. It's criminal. And it's anti-business.

Rather than be divided by the old, "he said, she said" ploy, we are seeing the situation clearly and unifying to clean out insidious behaviors. Women are untapped powerhouses who positively change how we do business.

Look up

Owners of the privately owned and operated companies I coach and know well are invested in building visionary cultures. These owners are making a choice to create cultures of inclusion and run positive, productive operations. They're not about to undermine their investment by derailing employees' careers. They set a different tone. They're ready to believe. Are you?

Step up

For starters, crank up productivity by knowing that women's contributions reduce lost-opportunity cost. This might not have been obvious before but overlooking the capabilities of some of your employees is leaving money on the table.

- Capitalize on the talent pool's mistrust of corporations who neglect their responsibility for well-being of employees and often ignore wrongdoers.
- Conduct talent inventories internally to find whether managers are misrepresenting women employees' when openings arise. Are they assuming women don't want to advance? Do they deliberately discourage women from pursuing new opportunities? Felice N. Schwartz in Harvard Business Review way back in 1989 noted that the top 10% of MBA students consisted increasingly of women. What's become of these women?
- Announce to available talent that your company focuses on quality work and encourages employees to grow and advance. Then prove it by taking the steps below.

Muscle up

Microsoft announced that sexual harassment claims will no longer be arbitrated secretly. This eliminates a loophole allowing abusers to hide workplace misconduct. Estée Lauder recently added two women directors to its board. Now eight of the 17 directors are women. Trade associations like Women in Trucking and Women in Manufacturing are also working with a new agenda and creating opportunities.

How can you operate with higher standards and a proactive leadership approach?

- Create safe channels for people to report misconduct and hold abusers accountable.
- Engage your people in defining and fostering a respectful workplace.
- Equalize the number of women in leadership positions.
- Expand your safety compliance initiatives to include employee codes of conduct.
- Extend your customer-care guidelines to employees.
- Include cultural values in a continuous improvement project to identify ways to embody your beliefs.

Now is the time to break old paradigms. Nurture talented workers who are ready to step up. Weak leaders hold people back. Strong leaders use their power to help people develop. By believing in your women employees, you're pro-business.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

"When you start a conversation with Stacy, prepare to be engaged."

Dr. Stacy Feiner is a business psychologist & coach. Stacy's distinctive coaching method brings psychology and the responsibilities of leadership to the forefront of business, so owners get the results they want faster. Her approach improves complex dynamics within owner-operated companies, family businesses, management teams, and boards. Stacy's latest book is *Talent Mindset: The Business Owner's Guide to Building Bench Strength*.