

Who Wins More Business—Men Or Women?

BY CANDY TYMSON CSP

The way of doing business has changed dramatically in the past ten years. No longer are we operating in a predominately male workspace, using the traditional male style of direct communication. So what impact has the influx of women had on using their natural style of relationship building to win business, and are they doing it better than their male colleagues?

In doing the research for my book *Gender Games: Doing Business With the Opposite Sex*, the key difference as to how the genders use language to communicate was that men typically focus on information, while women typically focus on relationship.

The most popular tool for measuring individual style and preferences, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, distinguishes between 'thinking' and 'feeling' styles of making decisions and communicating with others. Not surprisingly, two-thirds of all men who complete the profile score highly as 'thinkers'; while two thirds of the women rate highest as 'feelers'.

Well-known linguist and pioneer of male/female communication style differences, Deborah Tannen, proposes that generally speaking, men use language to preserve their independence and maintain their position in the group while women use language to create connection and intimacy.

There seems to be a theme here! And yes, we are generalising, there are always exceptions to the rule.

How Men and Women Network

Let's be a fly on the wall at a typical networking event. What would you observe as the differences in behaviour as you move from group to group?

An all-male group is likely to be talking business or sport, with most members of the group competing with each other to demonstrate their status and knowledge. It is rare for any personal information to be exchanged, or vulnerability shown.

In contrast, an all-female group is likely to be having quite a personal conversation. While they may also be talking business it will be from the perspective of sharing information, offering assistance and showing their vulnerability by talking about mistakes they have made so that the others can benefit from their experience.

And a mixed group? Well it depends on the occasion, the status of the individuals and even the venue.

One of the key elements in the way that networking has changed is that it is now seen more as a method to create 'strategic alliances' rather than as a means of 'selling' your products for services.

Latest Research

A recent article in *Harvard Business Review* by Herminia Ibarra and Mark Hunter (January 07), has identified that there are three types of networks: Operational, Personal, and Strategic; and that effective leaders learn to develop and employ all these networks for strategic purposes.



According to Ibarra and Hunter, the operational network helps you to manage your internal responsibilities and build strong working relationships with people who enable you to do your job; your personal network enables you to build contacts outside your organisation for referrals, information and often coaching and mentoring support; and the purpose of building strategic networks is for creating leverage and links—the ability to marshal information, support and resources from one sector of a network to achieve results in another.

So which communication style would be the most effective in developing operational and personal networks, and creating strategic alliances? That's where the conundrum occurs!

Research clearly shows that business today is about relationship, making and maintaining contacts—and women, who are predominately relationship focused, are naturally exceptional at that. So when it comes to building good networks in their operational and personal spheres, women are usually stronger than men. However, men seem stronger when it comes to using contacts and connections to build strategic alliances and ask for the business.

Self Promotion

When I surveyed 1,200 businesswomen on what they felt was the major thing holding them back in business today, 38% said 'lack of self promotion'. Research consistently confirms that men generally are far more confident than women in promoting their abilities—they tend to oversell themselves, while women tend to undersell themselves.

So could it be argued that women tend to shine in the forms of networking where building relationships and making connections are important, in the areas of operational and personal networking for example; while men still lead the charge on the networking that generates successful strategic alliances?

That's how I see it—what have you observed? Are you actively working all three networks to build your profile or your business?

CANDY TYMSON

Candy Tymson is an expert in communication and gender differences with a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management and Coaching. Based in Sydney, she is a professional speaker and facilitator and the author of *Gender Games: Doing Business With The Opposite Sex*. For information on her workshops, presentations and products:

Phone: 02 9976 6777

Fax: 02 9976 6788

Email: candy@tymson.com.au

Website: www.tymson.com.au

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