

Breaking the taboo and male dominance

Maggie Berry, managing director of Women in Technology, explores why women are often wary of top management jobs in male-dominated industries

TECHNOLOGY



Maggie Berry runs womenintechology.co.uk, an online job board, recruitment and networking forum for women working in the UK information technology industry, which plays a vital part in attracting – and retaining – women in the IT profession; in March, she was honoured by the World Economic Forum as a 2012 Young Global Leader

■ There will always be women who are not aware of the opportunities available to them. This may be attributed to several factors – they are not actively looking for a new position or, due to their circumstances, they are not receiving relevant information and therefore may be overlooked.

However, the real concern is that many females are simply put off applying for positions in all-male dominated industries. It is this issue that needs addressing not only by women themselves, but also by employers and the wider business world.

Studies have shown that females are often under-represented in top-level jobs due to certain barriers they face. Women in Technology's 2011 *Women's Careers in the Technology Industry* research revealed, for example, that the "motherhood penalty" impacted a female's career and therefore her opportunities to progress.

Many believe that they have to pay a heavy price for taking time out for their children and, what's more, returning to employment as a mother means that their hopes of being promoted diminish.

These factors may prevent women from applying for roles and can even result in some females not returning to work at all following a career break.

Another reason why women appear to be put off can be attributed to a lack of confidence. Research by Canada's McGill University's Desautels Faculty of Management, *Do Women Choose Different Jobs from Men*, claims that some females are simply taking themselves out of the running for certain jobs. This is due to a perceived assumption that they may be unsuccessful, coupled with a preference for roles with a better work-life balance and a lack of identity with stereotypical masculine jobs.

And Women in Technology's 2011

research appears to concur with 80 per cent of respondents claiming they would only apply for a role if they filled over 75 per cent of the criteria. Men, on the other hand, would apply if they fill approximately 60 per cent or more.

Women clearly need to help themselves by exploring the many networks and mentoring opportunities available, which not only offer information on roles, but also help build up their confidence. However, if we are to "break the taboo", more needs to be done by business leaders to work with

females to propel them up the career ladder.

While quotas and targets are an option, companies themselves need to address the issue from within by not only encouraging and attracting female talent, but also by retaining and promoting them.

Facilitating genuine flexible working, childcare, support networks and paternity leave are all imperative. However, so too is realising not only the benefits of having a diverse workforce, but also the benefits of having women in senior leadership positions. ■



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