



10 Myths About Your Women Employees You Should Leave Behind in 2017



OrangeGrove
Consulting

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INTRODUCTION

Why Are We Talking About Myths?

Myths are stories we believe to be true but are in fact not. In our research, and work with companies and women, we've found consistently that women are being held back because of myths (we also call them assumptions) about women: their capabilities, their potential, their career ambitions.

We want to shift that. We've put together a guide of some of the most common assumptions we've encountered that keep women from advancing within the leadership pipeline. Myths that can be reframed and reconfigured in order to deliver improved outcomes.

Do you want more women in your leadership pipeline? Do you want to leverage your full talent potential? Here, we offer alternative strategies and behaviors to help you implement a lasting improvement towards gender parity.

The structure of the e-book is as follows: Each myth is described. Then, we've reframed it using a different perspective. As a bonus, we share some activities you can try in order to put the reframe into action.

We hope this guide will help you question some of the outdated assumptions your organization may be basing decisions on, and make you curious about new approaches.

Please let us know how you're faring as you leave behind these myths in 2017!

Jodi and Kelly

Managing Partners, Orange Grove Consulting



Jodi Detjen



Kelly Watson

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MYTH #1

Women Quit Because They Can't Manage Work and Family

Have you heard, “She quit because she wants to spend more time with her family. No wonder we can't get more women in management.”?

True? Think again: *Women quit because they aren't being paid sufficiently.* Women leave to find better opportunities.

When we label a woman's departure as *she quit to be with family*, guess what – we don't have to do anything! We feel free of responsibility.

WHAT'S THE REFRAME?

Women Quit For Many Reasons Including Poor Wages And Better Opportunities

Instead, organizations can look at the real reasons why women leave and share this information. Once the root cause is identified, then managers can fix it, improving the organization. Instead of avoiding conflict and rationalizing, we can work to make things more effective.

And, women can reframe too. Instead of relying on a reason that avoids pointing fingers, women can say, if I give the real reason why I'm leaving, I will help shift the assumption for other women.

Reflect on your assumption about women's decision to leave.

TRY THIS!

Talk to your team about why team members have left. Reflect on your assumptions about their decisions. Which part of their decision was your responsibility? What could you change to help others?



MYTH #2

Women Just Need A Seat At The Table

There is this idea out there that if women can get themselves into high-powered rooms – be they boardrooms or situation rooms – the struggle will be won. Once in that room, a woman can simply turn on whatever wisdom, charm, or acumen got her there in the first place, and not only will she hold her own, she will thrive. All she needs is a place at that table. But the male-dominated workplace contributes to intense female rivalry. Often, there is only one seat at the table, only one place in that room, and women need to compete mightily with one another to get it. And as any woman can tell you who has occupied that lone seat, once there, it can be quite difficult to make yourself heard.

WHAT'S THE REFRAME?

Women Need A Voice At The Table

A Washington Post [article](#) about President Obama's first-term female staffers made the rounds recently. In it, women with a place at arguably the most powerful table on earth talked about what it was like to work in the White House and feel silenced. They complained of being shut out of conversations by male senior staff. When a woman's idea was deemed to have merit, male colleagues often received credit for it. A few women had a place at a very important table, but they were not being heard.

Their solution was a simple one: amplification. Whenever a woman put forth a great idea, another person echoed it. Sometimes it took several reverberations, but the women continued to repeat their colleague's otherwise overlooked idea, and made sure that wisdom got air time with the President.

Instead of falling prey to competitiveness and professional rivalry, these women took a lesson from [Shine Theory](#). They realized that one woman's success did not counteract their own. As a collective, they

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became members of a more valuable team simply by going to bat for one another. As a result, in the President's second term, the senior staff was a more balanced, nearly equal split of men and women. There are more places at the table. There are more voices being heard.

TRY THIS!

Play the role of amplifier at your next team meeting. Instead of pushing your own agenda, listen more carefully in that room. Echo and underscore other people's good ideas. Did you find yourself valuing someone you usually overlook? What did you notice about how this person responded to your efforts? Who else can you recruit to this team so you all can shine?



MYTH #3

Women Need Flexibility

Based on our research, both men and women equally – especially in the Millennial generation – need and more importantly, demand flexibility.

We've been hearing all around the country that dads want to be involved in their family affairs as much as their female counterparts. No wonder that the Department of Labor issued a [new policy of paternity leave](#) and books like *All In* by Josh Levs, a former CNN journalist, who covers the topic of how current work culture is failing dads, are popping up right and left.

Flexibility is no longer an obstacle but rather a prerequisite that fuels workforce high performance and leadership pipeline regardless of gender.

However, some might still be unaware of this dynamic and feel trapped by the outdated assumption that taking care of the family for women comes first, and career – last.

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WHAT'S THE REFRAME?

Women *And* Men Need Flexibility And Support, So Both Can Build And Lead Meaningful Careers

Equal support could be defined as:

- Encouraging female employees to enlist their spouse's help
- Giving female potential leaders bigger challenges to engage them more meaningfully in their work.
- Giving everyone more flexibility in how they accomplish their goals rather than slavishly coming to work at set times.
- Helping busy professionals outsource domestic duties.

Flexibility helps everyone. Everyone wants to be successful at work and build a meaningful career.

TRY THIS!

Ask your entire team as to how they view flexibility and what support they might need to be more successful at work and build a more meaningful career. What would it take to provide this support? What skill can your team develop to help?



MYTH #4

She Doesn't Want The Promotion; She's Not Ambitious

Have you heard that women just aren't ambitious? Men ask for a promotion all the time but women? Hardly ever.

Recent research suggests that women are equally ambitious as men (Lean-In, Bain) but often get frustrated and blocked by existing

corporate structures. Additionally, this percentage drops precipitously two years in and even more when they start a family.

Many women believe they “shouldn’t” make career important because family is “most important.” There’s no time for promotions anyway.

WHAT’S THE REFRAME?

Why Is Overt Ambition The Primary Criteria For Promotion?

When we rely solely on people asking or who-knows-who to determine the best candidate, then yes, women will continue to look as if they don’t want the position.

But if we make the process more transparent, clear, and focused on the skills we want, we will open up possibilities to get the best candidate – not the most well connected or overtly ambitious candidate. (Unless, of course, being well-connected is the skill this particular job demands.)

Women can reframe too, recognizing that career and family *are* compatible. It’s not an either/or choice; it’s a decision that says yes to both. Our research suggests women do want both. Once women reframe their mindset, they can then figure out when, not if, a promotion is something they can handle.

Why do we rely solely on people asking to determine the best candidate?

TRY THIS!

Look at the criteria you use to evaluate candidates for promotion. How is it biased? What data points do you use? How might you expand the criteria and make the data points more objective?

Try a policy that says you want a minimum of 30% of all promotion candidates to be women. Watch what happens.



MYTH #5

The Best Negotiator Deserves the Raise

Women are **regularly counseled to negotiate more** (and our research suggests that women assume that they “shouldn’t”).

But there’s an underlying assumption being made: Why are raises distributed based on someone’s ability to negotiate?

No one has found a link between ability to negotiate and ability in a job but organizations regularly pay more based precisely on that skill.

WHAT’S THE REFRAME?

We Pay Based On Merit Not Someone’s Ability to Negotiate

From an overall business perspective, question the costs and benefits this brings your organization. Reframe to “Here are the expectations for the job and here’s what we are willing to pay.” In these cases, negotiation is not allowed.

What happens as a result? What kind of talent will you promote?

Why are raises distributed based on someone’s ability to negotiate?

TRY THIS!

Have a conversation about how pay is defined. How might you incorporate more transparency into pay? What effect might it have?



MYTH #6

The First Woman to Take the Job Needs to Be Perfect

We hear this a lot. When an organization (or a nation) considers the first female for an important position, the bar is set very high. As well it should be. Top executives should be smart and savvy, innovative and strategic. They should inspire employees to dream bigger, and challenge all personnel to learn, grow, and adapt. An organization has a right to expect the best from its top hires.

But it should not expect more than that.

It is often maintained that the first woman in any important position is a trailblazer. In order to open the door for others to walk through, she must be head and shoulders above the competition. She must rise above the fray. Otherwise, she will set all women back. If she is not flawless, the door will slam shut for good. The first woman to hold the job is expected to be an elusive and perfect thing, soaring high above the field.

Except women are not unicorns.

WHAT'S THE REFRAME?

The First Woman to Take the Job Will Be Human

The first female CEO, CFO, or Chairman of the Board of any organization will be a real person. Like the first male CEO, CFO, or board chair, she will make mistakes and guess wrong. She will succeed and fail, wilt and flourish. If that female executive does a great job, she may stay and continue to add value to the company. If she does poorly, she may be asked to step down. This is the way of things. Gender should have no bearing on any of it.

The first woman to take any job may, indeed, open the door for others to follow. But her performance should be judged individually. No one bats an eye when an underperforming male executive is replaced with another male exec. No one says, "Gosh, that last fellow did not

No one says, "Gosh, that last fellow did not achieve. I don't think we should hire another man."

achieve. I don't think we should hire *another* man." One man in a key role is not expected to represent all men. No woman in a key role should be expected to represent all women.

TRY THIS!

Have you ever had a female manager? If so, was she the exception or one of many? How did you respond to her management style? Is your workplace an equitable home for both male and female leaders? Could it be?



MYTH #7

Women Are Natural Networkers

We hear this a lot: if you set women up with a network, networking will happen. Because women are social beings, right? They form book clubs and go to one another's trunk shows. They buy raffle tickets and attend charity events. All of this camaraderie and friendship nurturing *must* make women good networkers.

However, **the reality is** that often women join networking groups and plateau. They attend meetings. They make friends. They offer assistance to other members of the group *without ever asking for any help in return*. Putting women together in the same room or online group does not guarantee any networking will happen at all.

WHAT'S THE REFRAME?

Women Are Fantastic Networkers . . . With A Little Guidance

Networking is about conscious, quid-pro-quo collaboration. It is not friendship, it is business. It's listening, follow-up, sharing of goals, and mutual assistance to attain those goals. Once women learn the give and take of leveraging a network, once they master *the ask*, they can be unstoppable.

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TRY THIS!

Train the women in your organization how to network.

Throw colleagues together to collaborate. Send them outside of your organization for conferences and industry best practices. Have them report back on their findings. *Who did you meet? What is your follow-up?* Define expectations and track results. Expect a measurable return on your networking investment.



MYTH # 8

Recruiting From The Best Schools Will Promote Diversity In Our Organization

There are plenty of top-notch colleges and business schools that attract talented students. And companies have historically relied quite heavily on that talent pool.

Those highly selective schools work hard to create diverse classes. They attract students of different gender, race, and cultural backgrounds. It is easy to believe that if you recruit graduates from these schools, your organization will develop into an equally diverse place to work.

However, the reality is that graduates from top schools – no matter their backgrounds – are only one type of worker. Sure, they are highly educated, but to create a winning team, you need a variety of players with an assortment of abilities.

Think about football. In the NFL, first-round draft picks are snazzy and alluring. Fans love to hear when their team gets a highly coveted, highly publicized first-round pick. But, when it comes to bang for their buck, second- and third-round selections are almost always **less expensive and better performers** overall. The same **argument** can be made for hires *outside of* America's most elite institutions.

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brings together people
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WHAT'S THE REFRAME?

Recruiting From Diverse Experiences Will Promote Diversity In Your Organization

Diversity is much more than a box checked on a business school application. A truly diverse work place brings together people with different perspectives and backgrounds to produce high-functioning, creative teams. The best business schools often miss out on some of the most experienced workers: military veterans, mothers (and fathers) returning after childcare sabbaticals, and motivated employees from smaller companies or other industries looking to branch out and scale up.

TRY THIS!

Ask yourself—*what are my hiring biases?*

- Do your “ideal” applicants tend to fit a single mold?
- Who is underrepresented on your current team?
- What voices are you missing?



Challenge your recruiters to expand the definition of diversity. Remind them to look for unorthodox candidates, the applicants with work, education, or life experiences outside of the typical talent bubble.

MYTH #9

We Are A Diverse Organization. We Already Have A Woman On Our Leadership Team

- In 1980, there were no female senior executives in the top 100 businesses in America.
- In 1994, there were no female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies.

Since then, obviously, much has changed.

- In 2014, women held 19% of the board seats in S&P 500 companies.
- In 2015, 14% of the top five leadership positions in the Fortune 500 were held by women.

It can be tempting to view such advances for women in the work place with satisfaction and even complacency. *The times are changing. We are diverse now. We've done enough.*

But have we?

Women make up 51% of the population of the United States. They earn 47% of all law degrees, 48% of all medical degrees, and 44% of all master's degrees in business and management. They are 47% of the U.S. labor force. But they only hold 14% of the top jobs.

This is not diversity. This is inequity.

And there is growing evidence to support that these numbers are not just inequitable. They do not even make good business sense.

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WHAT'S THE REFRAME?

We're Working To Increase The Number Of Women In The Leadership Pipeline To 40-60 Percent To Reflect The Population We Serve

Gender diversity is not just equitable, it is profitable. The more women you have on your leadership team, the better your organization will perform.

According to a [comprehensive global study](#) of more than 21,000 firms from over 90 countries, the presence of female top executives is consistently associated with greater company performance and profitability.

These correlations are not small. Data suggests that when profitable companies employed women in even 30% of leadership team positions, this corresponded with as much as a 15% increase in net revenue. This growth makes sense. A leadership team should reflect the population it serves. A group with diverse backgrounds and experience leads to more thoughtful deliberations and decisions. The natural result of a gender diverse team is expanded reach to both male and female customers, clients, and consumers. True diversity grows the bottom line.

TRY THIS!

Examine your organization. Are you guilty of the “lone woman” hire? Do you point to the one female on your team to check the diversity box? Or do you have a pipeline? Is your organization a place where *both* men and women are mentored and groomed for future leadership opportunities? A truly diverse business reflects the population it serves. If 40-, 50-, or even 60-percent of your customers are women, consider mirroring those numbers in your leadership team.



MYTH #10

We Are A Family-Friendly Workplace – We Offer A Generous Maternity Leave

What working mom wouldn't love a cushy maternity package? Time off before childbirth, **extra income to spend on diapers and take-out meals, 12, 26, or even 52 paid weeks at home with the new baby.** All the while secure in the knowledge that the boss supports this time away and your job will be waiting upon your return to work -- a transition that will be made easier with subsidized on-site childcare, generous sick leave, and flexible scheduling.

These are not daydreams or wishes made on magic beans. The Family and Medical Leave Act, signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1993, requires large employers to give caregivers 12 weeks off after the birth of a child. Though the law doesn't require any pay, with more women entering the workplace, the past 25 years have seen **companies around the globe stepping up maternity leave.**

But we must be careful what we long for.

By lobbying for generous childcare leaves of absence, women have unwittingly set themselves up to be held back. When a company touts its maternity leave, it is setting in writing an organizational bias that women (and not men), moms (and not dads), should be the primary caregivers for children. When management provides women workers with more time away to spend with their children, the underlying assumption is that the working fathers are off the hook.

WHAT'S THE REFRAME?

We Are A Family-Friendly Workplace – We Offer A Generous Maternity *And* Paternity Leave

Research shows **no statistical correlation between generous maternity leaves and an increase in female leadership.** Companies

There is an organizational bias that women (and not men), moms (and not dads), should be the primary caregivers for children.

that offer women extra time at home with the kids seem to feel justified in overlooking these same women when promotions are handed down.

There is, however, an exception to this scenario: if men are afforded the same childcare leave, the playing field levels. There is **a significant relationship between paid paternal leave and the presence of women in the C-suite**. That's right: firms with more generous paternity leaves actually demonstrate increased female leadership at the corporate level.

And that's not just better for women, it's better for families. **Fathers today are more invested and involved** in their kids' lives than at any point in American history. And like moms, dads often fear punishment or retribution when they dare to take childcare leave. When organizations offer more equitable childcare opportunities for both men and women, everybody wins.

TRY THIS!

What's the parental leave policy at your institution? Is it equitable? Gender neutral? What organization biases, if any, does the policy assume? If there is work to be done, seek out interested colleagues and begin the conversation.



ABOUT

Orange Grove Consulting

Orange Grove Consulting specializes in research-based women's leadership training and organizational change that improves recruitment, retention and promotion of women across an organization. We address limiting aspects of the current talent pipeline with a focus on addressing the unconscious bias women have about themselves. Our end goal is to create happier, more productive workplaces for men and women.

Led by Managing Partners, [Jodi Detjen](#) and [Kelly Watson](#), our network of consultants, trainers, and coaches provide the highest level of service for our clients.

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