

How Men and Women Lead Differently

For much of the twentieth century, most scientists assumed that women were essentially small men, neurologically and in every other sense except for their reproductive functions. That assumption has been at the heart of enduring misunderstandings. . . . When you look a little deeper into the brain differences, they reveal what makes women, women and men, men.

—Louann Brizendine, M.D., author of *The Female Brain*

Female Leaders	Male Leaders
Interactive	Transactional
Participative	Hierarchical
Collaborate connectively	Collaborate competitively
Group problem solve	Personally problem solve
Inductive in problem solving	Deductive in problem solving
Define themselves by being relationally literate	Define themselves through accomplishments
Prefer to be recognized	Ask to be recognized
Ascertains the exact needs of each team member	Cares more about larger structural needs
Emphasize complex and multi-tasking activities	Single task orientation and completion
Helps others express emotions	Downplays emotions
Directly empathizes	Promotes independent resolution
Cognizant of the specific needs of many at once	Cognizant of the needs of the organization
Verbally encourages and praises	Encourages less feeling and more action
Resolves emotional conflicts to reduce stress	Denies emotional vulnerability to reduce stress

Female leaders:

- Tend to be more *interactive*, wanting to keep interactions extended and vital until the interaction has worked through its emotional content.
- Tend more toward *participative* teams—to find ways in which colleagues are complementary. It is probable that higher oxytocin levels affect this leadership quality—the more support women build around them, the lower their stress level, and the more effective they may be as leaders.
- Tend to *collaborate connectively* by seeking possible connections between each person’s different ideas—and try to find developmental elements in the connectivity.
- Tend to enjoy solving problems *with others*, for many of the brain-related reasons described above.
- Tend to be more *inductive* in leadership problem-solving than men. This is about listening, hearing viewpoints, building a sense of what to do in a woman’s mind from hearing all voices around her. When she knows what to do, she’s not as worried as a man might be about proving it with data: she can already see that it works.

- Tend to define themselves by being relationally literate, *keeping personal or workplace relationships intact* Women are reluctant to brag about their accomplishments.
- Tend to feel the work should speak for itself and want to be recognized for the work without having to draw attention to it.
- Provide as much hands-on connection to the coworker as possible. Given their higher oxytocin levels and greater verbal-emotive ability, women are more likely than men to try to ascertain the exact needs of a person, sensing how morale-needs impact productivity on a daily basis.
- Emphasize complex and multitasking activities, actions, team development—expanding leadership into various tasks and away from dominance by one task. They discover a panoply of possibilities for a product, as well as within a worker’s untapped capabilities. With a brain that cross talks between hemispheres constantly, women tend to value multiple connections.
- Work constantly toward helping others (especially men) express emotions in words rather than just in actions. Greater verbal-emotive brain activity stimulates this (as well as the following attribute of female leaders).
- Search for a method of direct empathy when someone’s feelings are hurt (“How are you feeling? Tell me about it. What happened?”), even at the expense of other current goals.
- Relinquish personal, daily independence in order to be cognizant of other’s needs. Female leaders are more likely than male leaders to adapt their schedule toward concentration on a person’s immediate needs; their higher oxytocin and more active cingulate gyrus help them to be more attuned to the specific needs of many individuals at a time.
- Promote the development of skills and talents in coworkers through an emphasis on verbal encouragement and praise. Females’ higher oxytocin and reliance on verbal encouragement often lead them to issue lots of praise, not realizing that many men are suspicious of too much praise.
- Try to help the coworker resolve emotional conflicts and stresses so that the whole bonding system can feel better. An individual’s immediate sense of distress or anxiety triggers oxytocin in a woman, which can direct her to try to quickly defuse obvious conflicts, more so than her male counterpart.

Male leaders:

- Tend to be more *transactional* in their interactions; that is, they are unconsciously thinking “I am in this relationship to give something in order to get something.” Once the transaction of the interaction is complete, they tend to move away from the interaction and back to their more solitary task.
- Male leaders tend toward a strong/weak *hierarchy*: they tend to see colleagues as potential competition, and they focus on who is in charge—and even who can be weeded out. It is probably that higher testosterone levels affect this leadership quality—the more competition certain men experience, the more comfortable they are.

- Tend to *collaborate competitively* by including more testing of each other's ideas against worst-case scenarios.
- Tend to spend more time in a day working *alone*, without friendly words to others. It is often a personal challenge for a man to see if he can "solve the problem himself" or prove himself by doing the job well *himself*.
- Tend more toward the *deductive* style in their problem solving. This involves more risk-taking guesses, but it also relies on more linear data and proof. Men will often see a solution and act on it, but expect to be challenged constantly on the data, the proof.
- Tend to define themselves more than women do by their *accomplishment and performance*. Men are not as abash as women are in tooting their own horn about their accomplishments.
- Focus on leading workplaces and hierarchies through order assessment, pattern thinking, and ritualized action. Male leaders will tend to care less about minutiae of workplace needs, but care more about larger structures and tools the corporation might need for future survival.
- Downplay emotion, even at the risk of hurt feelings, in order to play up performance. Males are chemically and neurally directed toward immediate rewards from performance, and they often prod—and sometimes even humiliate or shame—coworkers in this direction.
- Promote risk-taking and independence of the employee. Male leaders tend to assume independence in others, and consider it weakness in a coworker's part if he or she needs "to have me hold her hand."
- Expect and enforce discipline and provide contests and tests of skill. Male leaders at the top tend to be more competitive than nearly anyone around them, especially in their assertion to others that being able to compete in tests of skill against others is the key to future success.
- Teach coworkers to fight against personal and group vulnerability. With less of the male brain's blood flow devoted to emotional processing than the female's, males in general, and male leaders in particular, tend to either deny emotional vulnerability or problem-solve it quickly. Emotional vulnerability stimulates high cortisol in the male—his stress hormone—and he uses his most efficient tack against that high-stress hormone: he shuts down his emotions.
- Guide the coworker to sacrifice his or her own thinking and feeling in deference to authority-thinking until the coworker has proven his or herself to be strong enough to become authoritative. Direct a coworker's search for self-worth in the larger corporation through specific tasks and actions—that is, encouraging less feeling-introspection and more immediate action.
- Tend to try to help the coworker feel stronger even if the person does not feel better in the moment. Male leaders tend to care less about whether a person feels good.

How Men and Women Manage Differently

Female managers:

- Tend to be more *descriptive* in their management—they tend to describe what they are looking for, and spend more time detailing to employees—and hearing from employees—how to accomplish the goal.
- Tend to feel their work life disrupted by direct conflict, so they tend to accomplish more behind the scenes. Conflicts. With higher oxytocin levels and lower testosterone levels (such as greater internal push toward continuity of relationship and less push toward disruption of relationship), and even though women will indeed say nasty things about each other, they will generally try to hide them so that at least a semblance of relationship still exists. Because women remember interactions, including conflicts, longer than, men may perceive that women are holding onto a grudge, and thus distrust female managers.

Male managers:

- Tend to be more *prescriptive* in their management—they will prescribe, direct, tell people what to do more aggressively, in general, than women do (obviously, some women are exceptions to this rule!).
- Tend to seek out more *direct conflict* than women (of course, individual personality, as well as upbringing, can factor into conflict-seeking or avoidance). Because of their aggression hormone reliance, from early in life males seek out and experience contest, conflict, and disruption and try to shape their own personal power assets through confronting the power of other males in hierarchies. Most males get a lot of practice with this!

How Men and Women Lead Meetings Differently

Women:

- Tend to look around the room for more verbal opinions than men do. They also tend more than men to want data fleshed out with “the human factor.”
- Tend to let people speak longer to make their point than male leaders do.
- Tend to ask others what direction they want to go in, and they accept more oblique references to how a process might be furthered. This can be seen as a lack of confidence instead of simply a gender difference.
- Tend to have longer memories for conflicts, emotional battles, and emotional stresses from the last meeting than men do. Women are more likely to remember specific situations, the relational details about looks or tones of voice, or competitive maneuverings than are men.

Men:

- Tend to use fewer words to describe things, in general, although they tend to take more airtime in a business situation (compared with at home) and spend less time getting everyone else's verbal opinions!
- Tend to interrupt more. Not only is interrupting a competition and dominance behavior, but many men, especially those who tend to be more right-brained—more spatial and less verbal—find it neurally frustrating to hear a lot of words. They often interrupt and need help managing conversations better.
- Tend to be more directive and more direct in their input and requests.
- Tend to have shorter memories for conflicts, emotional battles, and emotional stresses from the last meeting than women do. Men are less likely to remember specific situations, the relational details about looks or tones of voice, or competitive maneuverings than are women.