

FC Expert Blog

Navigating The Tricky Terrain Of Gender-Related Communication Gaps

BY FC Expert Blogger [Belinda Parmar](#) Tue Dec 6, 2011

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Picture this: A man is speaking to a woman about a business proposal. She is nodding along, letting him know she is listening, but he assumes her nodding signals agreement. When they discuss the proposal at a meeting later on, and she disagrees with his ideas, he feels duped and angry. She is left confused.

What's going on here? Why is there this disconnect? Lady Geek spoke with the insightful [Tammy Hughes](#) of the [Heim Group](#), a "GenderSpeak" expert, to find out why men and women sometimes aren't hearing each other in the workplace.

Hughes shared with us the story of one woman who had made it to the top of her field. One of her secrets? She stopped nodding at men in the workplace, concerned she was sending the wrong signal. Will this break barriers? Will we reach gender equality if women merely stop nodding at men? Not likely, but if we take the time to understand these differences in communication styles, we will only benefit. Gender differences, whether they are nature or nurture, aren't going away. "This isn't about good or bad or right or wrong, but about difference. Valuing these differences will add commercial value to our organizations," says Hughes.

Whenever Hughes speaks to corporate audiences, beforehand, she asks what the male to female ratio of her listeners is. More than half of the time she gets an answer that sounds something like the following: "There are 47 men and 3 women, but 2 of those women don't count."

We've probably all heard of a woman described this way--*tomboy, manly, butch, bitchy*--all meant to say that they aren't feminine. Many women feel they must adapt to the masculine environment of so many organizations. She might be acting "manly," but this could be a survival method in a world where, astonishingly, three times as many women would [pick a male boss](#) rather than a female.

The problem is that when a woman "acts like a man" as a coping strategy for climbing the career ladder in male-dominated companies, it blocks the path for other women. The glass ceiling remains intact. Instead, we should welcome gender diversity, showing just how much value it adds to a company. Research shows again and again that [gender diversity outperforms homogenous intelligence](#). Plus, we won't need a [Rosetta Stone](#) for men and women to understand each other, just some gender speak.

[Tammy Hughes](#) is President of the [Heim Group](#).

[@BelindaParmar](#) is the CEO and Founder of [@LadyGeekTV](#). Please join the Lady Geek campaign to end the stereotypes and cliches towards women in tech and Like us on [Facebook](#).

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This article originally appeared at <http://www.fastcompany.com/1799245/bridging-the-gender-communication-gap-at-work> and http://www.huffingtonpost.com/belinda-parmar/gender-speak_b_1130988.html?ref=women-in-tech