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JAISHTHA 17, 1426 BS

e-mail: nextstep@thedailystar.net

NEXT STEP

Women should be demanding professional development

THE BOSSMAN
BY E. RAZA RONNY

As we celebrate International Women's Day every year and commemorate the achievements of said women, we should perhaps take a moment to reflect on whether equality has yet been established. Gender biases still plague the so-called advanced corporate world. Organisations still fail to utilise one half of its existing workforce—the females. The good news is that, most companies are now realising that they are lacking in this. The woman-workforce is a vital source of competitive edge in the industry.

There has been research by numerous organisations and entities that having women at the top, heavily involved in the activities, can result in better performance and stability. As a result, gender diversity is being chased by organisations of all sizes; however, the effort falls short at leadership levels.

From entry-level to C-level positions, women workers face more barriers and advance at a slower pace compared to their male counterparts. Even when training is available, the opportunity to advance and apply skills may not always exist. In a Skillssoft survey, 486 women worldwide answered on the topics of imbalance of women in leadership and senior management roles, what it means for working women who make up 50 per cent of the work force, and the importance of programs aimed at women leaders.

More than half of the respondents (54 per cent) highlighted the importance of offering leadership training specific to women, but nearly 70 per cent of the female participants believed that their employers do not currently provide adequate resources and support to help them progress in their careers.

According to an analysis by Harvard Business Review, only 6.4 per cent of Fortune 500 companies were run by female CEOs in 2017. The pool of female executives is small, not because of a lack of ambitions from the women's side, but because we are missing opportunities to develop and inspire them earlier in their career. Bottom line is that there just isn't enough women in upper management leadership positions, and that is seriously alarming!

As keen observers have noticed, there are several obstacles blocking women from getting promotions. The women in question can see the other side and feel that it's nearing but cannot reach it. This is appropriately known as the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon.



In order to break it, there are some critical factors. One key factor is that women need to learn skills and acquire knowledge that can enable them to have a fast growing career and leadership success.

Another factor is the level of professional development. It's a term we see people throwing around. Lots of companies claim to provide it. There are two kinds of professional development companies can offer. They could either provide straightforward training or provide training that invokes meaningful development. Does either really help women grow?

There is one key difference between women and men in the workforce—the type of on-the-job development they receive. On one hand, male employees are picked from the clutter, spoon-fed identified growth opportunities and connected to people who can facilitate their growth. Whereas, females are given the talk on how to survive in the workplace and advised on what not to do and what to expect. In the end, men

end up getting institutional and full-blown professional development, while women get "training" for training's sake. It's no wonder that women are left behind.

With the help of colleagues and surroundings, women can further their career development. As a woman, ask and keep a lookout for the jobs that give you the right experiences that enable professional brand-building and prompt the learning of strategies quintessential for juggling work and life. Female CEOs tend to fix their trajectory high at the start of their professional journey. They do not sit around and wait for a recruiter to call with an opportunity. They use their entrepreneurial drive and expertise to prove themselves throughout their professional journey.

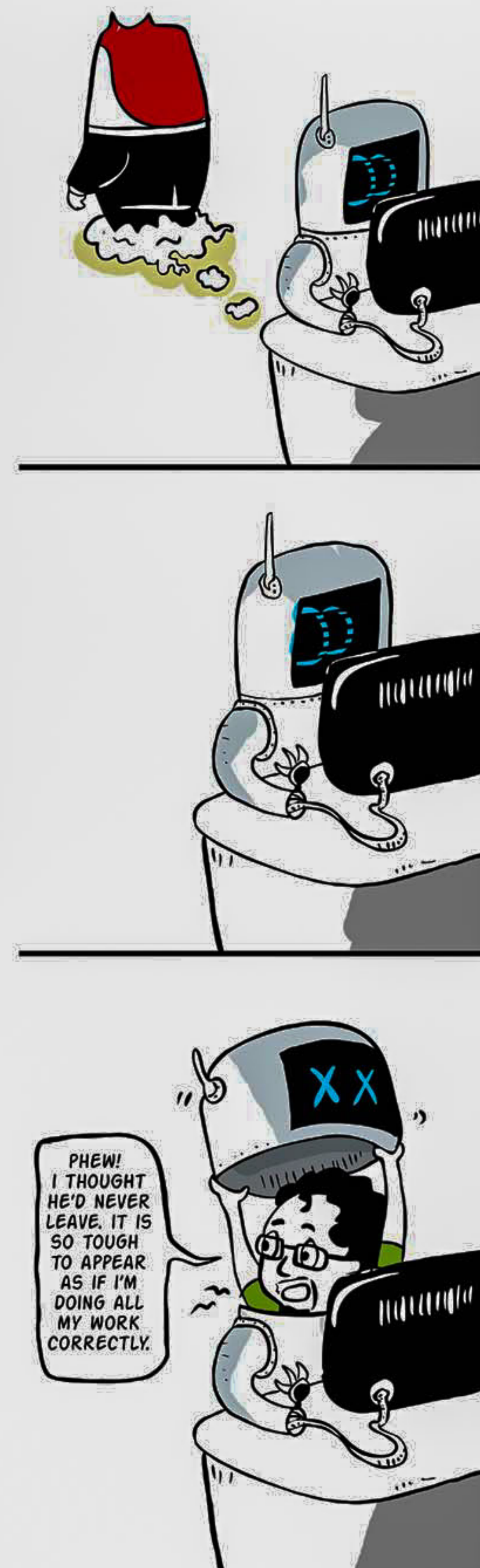
At the end of the day, the goal of professional development isn't limited to learning vaguely about your role. It's equipping yourself with the skills and experiences that will help you grow within and outside your organisation. This might not, however, serve

as a solution to other issues women in the workforce face such as career-gap or the infamous pay gap.

To conclude, what role can an organisation play in encouraging their women employees to seek professional development? How can they ensure that the women (in all positions) are equipped enough to climb the corporate ladder with the right learning and development opportunities? Organisations should take a proactive stance on providing access to continuous learning and design a customised learning experience for its robust woman-force. Alongside, they should provide on-the-job performance support.

SHABIBA BENTA HABIB

Shabiba graduated from BRAC University and is thinking of retiring to the mountains. Reach her at shabiba.bhabib@gmail.com.



THE MYTH OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

It is considered to be common knowledge that extroverts are great communicators. Interpolating from that, it is widely believed that people who take the lead on group discussions spontaneously display reliable leadership skills. Banking on these myths, Dhaka has cultivated professional communications trainers and life coaches who train you to break your shell. Many flock to these sessions hoping it will help them build a better impression. Exorbitantly flamboyant styles are adopted during presentations by students hoping to earn some extra credits. While communication skills are indeed an important set of skills to have, we often make the mistake of equating extroversion with being skillful. For effective communication, here are some common myths you should be careful about.



Improvisation is everything

Interviewers can be greatly impressed at your ability to adapt if you improvise and handle any impromptu situations. But what impresses them even more, is diligent preparation. If you come across as someone who appears to tackle questions on a surface-level without a deeper understanding that comes with preparation, you'll also come across as ignorant and lazy. You don't want to be the student who always answers questions of faculty members by japing. So it's best to have a strategy and researched preparation before any interactive class or job interviews. Preparation can be done for curveballs too, if you give the effort. Everyone can tell when you're prepared and when you're aimlessly winging it.

Interruption is boldness

Bold figures make great leaders and leading discussions in

any sector will help you stand out. However, interrupting whilst someone else is speaking is not bold. Often, it is noticed that, students who are probably more knowledgeable in a certain topic prefer to interrupt other students while they are speaking to share their version of information that they think is important. This not only comes off as rude, but also tells the listeners that you are someone who is too ignorant to learn from others.

The more the merrier

In their quest to deliver as much information as possible, interviewees and students often speak beyond their allotted time limit. Interviews usually don't have stopwatches calculating your speaking time, but any answer that exceeds one minute, unless the interviewer specifically asks you to elaborately describe something, is considered unnecessary. Concise answers that carry relevant information are preferred, as they are easier to keep track of and boasts of your time management skills.

Communication is a one-way street

If you are leading a program at your office and you conclude your speeches in meetings without engaging your group members, then you are doing it wrong. Even as a member who is just expressing their opinion on an issue, it is always best to frame your opinion with an ending that invites questions and opinions from others. Don't make the mistake of becoming a nonstop chatterbox in your quest to seem like a productive contributor, as a good communicator always listens first and speaks later.

Introverts are bad communicators

Effective communication is not just verbal communication. It can be non verbal, it can be in written form, and it can even be expressed in art. How you want to impact your audience depends entirely on you and your best skills are suited for this job. Introverts are often discouraged from taking on leadership roles or becoming influencers because of this myth. You don't need to radiate confidence and speak vocally, if you can effectively master some other method of communication.

NOSHIN SAIYARA

Noshin Saiyara is an aspiring conservationist who is deluded into thinking that she can save the planet from dying. Reach her at nsaiyara12@gmail.com to bring her back to reality.

Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

GETTING YOUR VOICE HEARD AT WORK

- 1 SPEAK WITH CONVICTION**
Don't downplay an idea by treating it like a suggestion and avoid disclaimer statements.
- 2 SPEAK WITH INTENTION**
Speak with clarity, assertion and emphasis. Don't sound aggressive. Use pauses to your advantage.
- 3 MAKE IT A CONVERSATION**
Engage people in conversation, instead of sounding like a monologue. Let them ask questions.
- 4 COME PREPARED**
Prepare points and practice with a trusted colleague. Record yourself or practice in front of a mirror.
- 5 GET TO THE POINT**
Be succinct. Start strong. Get people invested with the gist of your idea in as little time as possible.
- 6 SPEAK QUIETER, NOT LOUDER**
Don't shout to make your voice heard. Speak calmly, evenly and quietly so they listen intently.
- 7 LISTEN MORE**
Stop and listen to what others are saying. Really listen to their speech and reactions.
- 8 FOCUS ON BODY LANGUAGE**
Be mindful of your posture, sit up and stand up straight. Don't cross your arms and maintain eye contact.
- 9 PAY ATTENTION TO TIMING**
Pay attention to when the company undergoes quieter times and deliver your idea then.
- 10 BE SELF-CONFIDENT**
Believe in yourself because it shows. The confidence in your speech and body language is visible.

ILLUSTRATION: SYEDA ADIBA ARIFF

SOURCE: FORBES