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## **Management and the Mars-Venus Myth Integrating Gender Differences for Down to Earth Leadership**

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According to popular ideas about gender, men and women are not just different – they actually come from separate planets. When Mars and Venus become managers, men are directive, take action, and aim for results, while women favor relationships and a collaborative leadership style.

But is it this simple? Are we doing ourselves any favors by defining management styles according to planets? I suggest we leave Mars and Venus behind, and use gender to strengthen our management skills here on Earth.

Let's begin with a trick question: do you ever eliminate 50% of your most valuable options before deciding on a business decision? I trust that you don't. But this is essentially what happens when any of us try to "lead like a man," or "lead like a woman." When we do this, we end up partitioning-off styles that are attributed to the "other" gender. Men who do not call on their innate ability to nurture are losing a valuable management tool, for example, and women who do not engage their talents as tough negotiators may miss out on profitable opportunities.

Most people are not aware that they can access leadership skills that are attributed to both genders. We coach executives from all over the world, and are constantly asked how to get the best outcomes. They will often ask, "Should I stick to a results-driven method, or soften my approach and become more nurturing?" The

answer, is “Yes!” We tell leaders that they can do both - in fact, they MUST do both.

## **Integrated Management**

Many of my clients already know that successful leaders call on a full suite of traits. They are ready to employ both logic and intuition, to recognize both facts and feelings, and to express both technical competence and emotional integrity. Some of these styles are attributed to a masculine style, others are called feminine – but today’s leaders do not let these limitations define them. Instead, they blend the strengths of both genders and use an integrated management approach.

It is a sign of a good manager to move beyond the constraints of outmoded gender ideas - but what does integrated management look like in the day to day?

Bottom line, it’s about getting the job done. Do you need to change the department’s direction quickly, and with little overhead? Effective leaders take command, and use speed and efficiency, whether they are women or men. Do you have an internal issue that demands better communication and a new perspective on an enduring problem? Today’s managers take the time needed to build strong teams, listen, and inspire new and diverse ideas while keeping employees informed. All of these traits increase productivity, and productivity is good for both genders.

Please note that I do not discount the idea of differences, nor do I say that men and women are similar. The issue is not about whether we are the same or different – I don’t believe that is a conversation that will get us anywhere. What will move us forward is the recognition that we have a wide range of capabilities, and we can engage any of these whenever we choose to.

## **The Integrated Response in Action**

Here is a scenario to illustrate what it looks like when a manager integrates gender styles to get the job done:

Imagine this: You have inherited a number of projects from a colleague who transferred to a new division. You are familiar with the work, but are also experiencing a learning curve. The staff resents your lack of knowledge, and you know their attitude could undermine your efforts.

A manager using skills attributed to a “masculine” style will approach this situation with a direct, problem-solving approach. They may feel that all eyes are on them and their ability to deliver, so will hone-in on the key people who can move the projects toward deadline, and may overlook those who do not have an immediate impact on the results.

They might look around the office and ask, “What is the next product that has to get out the door? What will it take to meet the deadline?” or, “Where are the people in this department with the most important experience?”

A manager who relies on “feminine” skills will see the learning curve as an opportunity to grow as part of a process. The deadlines are important, of course, but using an inclusive style to meet them is considered to be part of the goal. This manager will zero-in on relationships, exploring ways in which to engage the movers and shakers of a department. They will also use this as a vehicle for mapping out the major events of the next six months, as this project will be seen as part of a larger web of other assignments. They keep an eye on the deadline, but not at the expense of long-term strategic thinking.

This manager also includes the opinions and thoughts of staff . They will ask, “What do you want from this department?” and, “How can we make the right changes together?”

Now let’s see what it will look like when a manager uses both skill sets. The integrated response combines a need to meet goals with the commitment to inclusive communication.

A manager who uses the strengths of both genders might call a meeting and say, “The turnover in leadership is a big change. Before we get down to work, how are people feeling about this? What are your concerns? I want to hear from everyone.”

Or, they may say, “This is your area of expertise. I value your knowledge. We have a tight deadline, so let’s work together to meet the goal.”

This situation represents an excellent opportunity for combining the traditional strengths of both genders. While the manager must be goal-oriented and maintain accountability, the new position also paves the way for increased inclusion. And, a strategy of honoring staff for their experience may be the most efficient for diffusing tension – and will help to meet tight deadlines.

A leader using an integrated response, therefore, will be deadline driven, but will make sure that timelines are met with the support of a team. This is not about being from Mars or Venus. It is about getting the job done, on time, and in a way that creates buy-in now and in the future. What could be more down to Earth?

### **What it Means to You**

I invite you to consider ways in which you can integrate gender styles to expand the scope and strength as a manager. Take a look at your leadership style.

Whether you are a man or a woman, you may favor communication and process

over deadline-driven strategies. Or, you might find yourself in the role of the directive leader, not wanting to weigh the input of the whole team. It no longer matters if these “look like” masculine or feminine skills. In fact, I suggest that in many workplaces it no longer matters if you are a male or female manager. What matters is getting the job done and staying competitive.

When reflecting on your own management style, here are three questions to ask yourself:

- Which gender related management strengths do I need to work with a full suite of skills?
- What will it take to integrate these skills into my management style?
- How will my effectiveness as a manager improve through an integrated style?

### **Goodbye, Mars and Venus**

I predict that in a few short years, the suggestion that Mars and Venus have a place in management will be replaced by the understanding that we do not depend on two planets to define our leadership strengths. Instead, we will come down to Earth and judge leaders by the smart management choices they make, and the sustainable results they produce.

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NOTE: A photo of Ms. Shambaugh is available to accompany the article upon request.

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION, IF DESIRED: *Rebecca Shambaugh has worked with women leaders from companies including AOL Time Warner, Fidelity, IBM, Marriott, Northrop Grumman and MTV Networks.*

*Ms. Shambaugh is the founder of Women In Leadership and Learning (WILL), the first-ever executive leadership development program in the United States devoted exclusively to the research, advancement, and retention of women leaders and executives. A remarkable 80 percent of her students receive promotions within eight months of taking her course.*