

GENDER

100. Pronoun Power!—Or: The Customer Is a "She."

"Forget China, India and the Internet: Economic Growth Is Driven by Women."—Headline, *the Economist*

"One thing is certain: Women's rise to power, which is linked to the increase in wealth per capita, is happening in all domains and at all levels of society. Women are no longer content to provide efficient labor or to be consumers. ... With rising budgets and more autonomy to spend, this is just the beginning. The phenomenon will only grow as girls prove to be more successful than boys in the school system. For a number of observers, we have already entered the age of 'womenomics,' the economy as thought out and practiced by a woman."—Aude Zieseniss de Thuin, founder of the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society, rated one of the top five global forums by the *Financial Times*

Hey, *g-u-y-s*:

If women are your/our primary customers (they usually are, commercial as well as consumer goods in the U.S.), knock off the likes of football analogies. If women are your/our primary customers, always (ALWAYS!) refer to the generic customer as ... "she." There's obviously lots and lots and lots more to this issue—it's been an obsession of mine since 1996. But ... *language matters*.

"She."
Starting.
Now.
Period.

101. Women Lead! (Can Men Learn to Be Good Sports About It?) A main message of *The Little BIG Things* deals with the-"soft"-stuff-that-is-really-the-"hard"-stuff that underpins organization and individual effectiveness. Fact is, a lot of "this stuff" (e.g., primacy of relationship development) comes pretty naturally to most women—and is Big News and a struggle to most males. Hence, I wonder sometimes, mostly as I toss and turn in bed, if this book, and its ilk, have much or any relevance to women. Or do some-many-most-damn near all women readers laugh themselves silly as, one more time, I treat the obvious as the un-obvious? (E.g., "Listening is a ... Very Good Thing.") Consider just one compelling example, from "Gender Experiments Surprise Even the Experts," a chapter sub-title in *Leadership and the Sexes: Using Gender Science to Create Success in Business*, by Michael Gurian and Barbara Annis:

"In the 1990s, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/CBC created a short film that recorded an experiment in leadership styles between women and men. CBC didn't tell the participants the objective of the work they would do that day; the director simply divided the male and female leaders into two teams, and gave those team leaders the same directions: build an adventure camp. The teams were set up in a somewhat militaristic style at first, including team members wearing uniforms, but also with the caveat in place that the teams could alter their style and method as they wished as long as they met the outcome in time.

"Leader one immediately created a rank-and-file hierarchy and gave orders, even going so far as to assert authority by challenging members on whether they had polished their shoes. Leader two did not have the 'troops' line up and be inspected, but instead met with the other team members in a circle, asking 'How are we doing? Are we ready?' 'Anything else we should do?' 'Do you think they'll test us on whether we've polished our shoes?' Instead of giving orders, leader two was touching team members on the arm to reassure them.

"As part of the program, CBC arranged for corporate commentators to watch the teams prepare. Initially the commentators (mostly men) were not impressed by the leadership style of leader two; the second team wasn't 'under control,' members weren't lined up, and they 'lacked order' (or so it seemed). The commentators predicted that team two would not successfully complete the task. Yet, when the project was completed, team two had built an impressive adventure camp as good as team one's, with some aspects that were judged as better.

"When de-briefing their observations, the commentators noticed that when team one was building the structures for the camp, there had been discord regarding who was in charge and who had completed which job and who hadn't. Team one exhibited a lack of communication during the process of completion that created problems (for example, 'Wasn't someone else supposed to do this?') Team two, on the other hand, took longer to do certain things, but because of its emphasis on communication and collaboration during the enactment of the task (such as 'Let's try this' and 'What do you think about that?'), the team met the goal of building the adventure camp in its own positive way, and on time."

Interesting, eh?

Lessons to learn: Many & Profound.

Over to you.

102. Men, "Get the Facts": Women Are Different. I love the writer Anita Shreve. I recently read her superb *The Weight of Water*. Few writers—and virtually no male writers, as I see it—deal so lucidly or movingly or in such depth, with life's painful tangles of relationships. Simple fact: Women by and large instinctively appreciate complex, inchoate sets of human relationships. Men are more or less clueless. (Research, including recent neurobiological research, increasingly supports this dichotomy.) Translating this into the emotion-driven, *all-important-these-days* world of design, I have by and large concluded, after 1.5 decades of study and writing and contemplation:

MEN CANNOT EFFECTIVELY DESIGN PRODUCTS-SERVICES-EXPERIENCES FOR WOMEN.

MEN CANNOT EFFECTIVELY SELL OR MARKET TO WOMEN.

MEN WHO DISAGREE WITH THIS ARE DELUSIONAL.

I can't change that, hard as I may try. But I can do ... something (and so can you):

I PLEDGE ... THAT I WILL NEVER ENGAGE IN ANY SORT OF DISCUSSION OF PRODUCTS-SERVICES-EXPERIENCES THAT INCLUDE WOMEN AS CUSTOMERS-CLIENTS, UNLESS ONE THIRD OR MORE OF THOSE PRESENT AND IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY ARE WOMEN.

I PLEDGE ... THAT I WILL WORK TIRELESSLY TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN'S VIEWS ARE HEARD FIRST & LAST AND ARE CLEARLY INCORPORATED IN A COMMANDING WAY IN ANY AND ALL ACTION PLANS INVOLVING THE DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING OF OUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES.

I FURTHER PLEDGE ... THAT I WILL BECOME A "PIONEER" IN GETTING WOMEN-CENTRIC VIEWS CLEARLY INTO THE MAINSTREAM—AND WILL WORK TIRELESSLY TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN ANY AND ALL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IS AT LEAST CONSISTENT WITH THE SHAPE OF THE MARKETS WE SERVE OR WISH TO SERVE.

(I'm not asking you to follow this slavishly—obviously there's no reason to think you would. And I know I've become a radical on this topic—not as a matter of social justice, but instead for reasons economic, namely the enormity of the opportunity and the fact that so few "get it" "strategically" and thus "leave so much on the table." On the other hand, I think it'd be hard to dispute a more or less "pledge" that's more or less like what you see here. Your call, obviously—why not discuss it with colleagues?)

103. Dressed for Success? Or: What the History of the Women's Suffrage Movement Taught Me About Innovation. I cross-dressed for the first time on March 31, 2007. I went to a local (Dorset VT) costume party, and tried valiantly to represent Elizabeth Cady Stanton, rightfully called the Mother of the American Women's Rights/Women's Suffrage Movement. I was shamefaced as I prepared to play Ms. Stanton-for-an-evening—shamed, after almost fifteen years of loudly and doggedly championing change to women's still diminished role in business and government, that I was almost totally ignorant of the astounding history of the American Women's Rights Movement. This story describes a personal journey (mine) away from ignorance, a journey that was, well, a blast—and, I believe, important. (I now speak noisily for far greater attention to the history of the women's movement—still woefully skimpy; a condition not corrected to this day.) I also dwell on this story because innovation, including social innovation, is the "business" theme nearest and dearest to my professional heart—and the most important business issue of this and, frankly, every era. It is my longstanding argument that all innovation is irrational, non-linear, and anything but the product of plans and focus groups; it is instead about anger to the point of rage that eventually boils over (from suffrage to the personal computer); "a little band of brothers" (whoops, the five Great Sisters of Seneca Falls and a slew of successors); willingness to suffer vicious smear attacks and unspeakable opprobrium of both a professional and personal nature, passion (!!!); relentlessness(!!!—72 years, 1 month and 7 days—from lunch at Seneca Falls on July 13, 1848 through 909 (!!) political campaigns to ratification of the 19th Amendment by Tennessee, the 36th state to do so, courtesy a 49-47 vote on August 18, 1920); resilience to deal with setback upon setback upon setback.

All the above made the sacrifice of wearing a wig and a long dress for five hours, in honor of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, seem like small beer! My hero, Ms. Stanton, per Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton*:

"She was defeated again and again and again, but she continued the struggle with passionate impatience."

"She had survived her husband, outlived most of her enemies, and exhausted her allies. Her mind remained alert, her mood optimistic, and her manner combative." [ECS 80th birthday celebration, attended by 6,000 people]

Lessons? I've got just one:

A record of 1 win and 908 losses [a "batting average" of .001 in 909 political campaigns] is just fine & dandy—and more than good enough for the Hall of Fame—if the cause is worth the effort and pain and personal opprobrium!

This document is #30 in a series of 48 highlights from Tom Peters' *The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Pursue Excellence* (HarperStudio, 2010). For more information, visit tompeters.com.

