

the forum

The Best Man for the Job May Be a Woman

An American businessman, traveling in Japan, enjoyed a native luncheon of Sushi. When he discovered that he had eaten raw fish, however, he became ill.

In the man's internal confrontation between his intellect (logic) and his emotions (feelings) the battle wasn't even close. His emotions won by a country mile.

It would take many months and well spaced nibbles of Sushi before these opposing forces within him merged. In time they did get together, but it happened slowly. Deeply instilled feelings do not change overnight—not even in the face of overwhelming logic.

Logic vs. gut feelings

Today, American businessmen are caught in a similar bind in the recruiting, hiring, training, and promoting of women into management and other nontraditional areas. Logic and law dictate that ability—not sex—be the determining factor in job selection. It takes a real Neanderthal to argue otherwise during these affirmative action, class action days. Yet, while the intellect says "go," the emotions scream "no" within many of the executives who are making the decisions which control the working lives of women.

Unfortunately, many executives, whose emotions cry out for Momma to stay home and make chicken soup, can recognize neither the battle going on within themselves nor within their lower level managers. Such executives have long prided themselves on being "hard-nosed" and unemotional—prerequisites for successful management.

"The best man in this company gets the job, by God, no matter if he is a woman," said one executive, slamming his fist on his desk. Did this executive recognize that he was being both emotional and illogical? Of course not. He was using "man" in its generic context and pounding his fist for emphasis. But how would he view a woman who behaved exactly as he did?

This executive perceives himself to be a no-nonsense, firm, fair, effective captain of a tight ship. His success is measured by his company's financial success. If profits drop, the captain will ferret out the culprits and fire them. He then will logically select "the best man for the job." Emotions will have no place in this determination, this executive firmly believes.

Of course, this man—and executives like him—long ago accepted a standard for successful business conduct based on so-called masculine traits. Successful business people should be hard, tough, striving, driving, smart, competitive, cool, and hard-nosed. If women measure up to these tough

standards, they measure up. If not, they should stay home, find men to support them, have babies, and shut up.

Successful women are considered the exception, not the exception. Ironically, if this executive has in his company a woman who is hard, tough, driving, smart, competitive, cool, and hard-nosed, he probably dislikes her. Women who have succeeded in business traditionally have been characterized as cold, unattractive, spinsterish, masculinized people who "think like men." They are usually described as "sexless," as hard, unfeeling freaks.

Executives, like other male human beings, don't want the women in their personal lives to be cool, detached, and unemotional. They want them attached and emotional—passionate as lovers and warm and understanding as friends.

This set of values has created a "Catch 22" situation for women who are, or want to be, in management. Since being hard-nosed, logical, unemotional, and objective are considered male traits, women who fit the criteria will appear to be less feminine. This puts male executives in the position of promoting women they dislike but believe will succeed, or women they like but believe will fail.

A similar "Catch 22" situation is created for the executive himself. Since "logic" is considered a masculine trait and "emotion" a feminine one, the executive is in a bind. If he admits that his gut feelings about women play a part in his executive decisions, it impairs his self image of his own masculinity—a fearful prospect.

Women inside and outside management are questioning both the so-called male criteria for success, and the gut reactions of those who apply the criteria. If enough of these gut reactions are put together, a pattern of psychological discrimination emerges. It is not the lack of qualified women, but psychological discrimination which is the number one barrier to affirmative action for women. And the evidence that the emotions of men are blocking opportunity for women is all around us.

An article in *The Harvard Business Review*, "Sex Stereotyping in the Executive Suite," by Benson Rosen and Thomas Jerdee (March-April 1974, pp. 43-58), dramatically revealed psychological discrimination in personnel decisions even though the personnel managers involved believed they were being totally objective.

Fifteen hundred *Harvard Business Review* subscribers, who are in management, responded to a questionnaire designed to explore the decision making process in typical business situations. Half the participants received questionnaires in which a particular business situation described

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should stay home and shut up. In exception, not the as in his company part, competitive her. Women who have been characterized as masculinized people described as employees, while the questionnaires of the other half described female employees in the same situation. Both sets identical except for the factor of sex. For example, one case described a 46 year old female employee without a college degree who had been with the company for 20 years. She competed for a promotion with a 26 year old man with a college degree and with the company only two years. Half the participants received a reverse situation in which the woman became the 26 year old employee competing with a 46 year old man who had been with the company 20 years.

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re questioning pure logic," impure bias In these and other situations, promotions based on "pure logic" turned out to be pure fiction. The conclusions, as reported by the article, were that "psychological barriers to women interested in a management or professional career will exist despite recent changes in policies on the employment of women," and that in decision-making, "managers tend to fall back on traditional concepts of male and female roles."

"Sex Stereotype and Thomas Aquinas' Beliefs" A young man on his way up the corporate ladder faces one of this sex-based discrimination. The male boss admires in other males traits he attributes to himself—coolness under pressure, objectivity, dedication, and a dash of ice water in the veins. An older, established executive brings along his chosen protege in the accepted business system by being a "godfather" or "mentor." He protects and guides the young man's career upward with the ultimate aim of replacing himself.

The same relationship becomes complicated for women, although for women executives, this too has been a track

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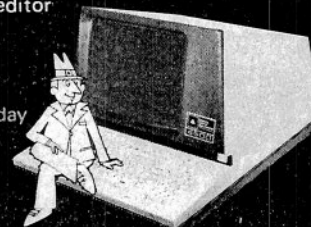
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"It worked for me for a while," said a young woman manager who is striving, smart, competitive, cool, and trying to keep from appearing hard, tough, and hard-nosed. Then it exploded in my face when my godfather decided he wanted to go to bed with me. I knew the relationship was never either way—if I did or if I didn't. I wish I had a godmother, but there aren't any in my company."

Regardless of the realities, many men believe that women use sex as a powerful competitive weapon in their search for success. While nobody denies that some women have kept their way to the top, using sex in business further complicates an already complicated set of male-female relationships. Women who have succeeded in business reject sex as a sane approach toward business success unanimously.

"If your objective is admission to a mental institution use sex," advised one woman executive who describes herself as having "schlepped" her way to the top instead. "I stuck around so long they had to promote me, explain me, or fire me; and it was easier to promote me," she said.

In a management awareness seminar I conducted recently, a senior vice president of a large New York bank admitted that he feels women are less intelligent than men, are too emotional to handle tough business decisions, and should be attractive in order to get ahead in the business world.

"But," he added, "I promote women in my bank on the basis of performance. I am objective. Whether it is a woman or a man makes absolutely no difference to me."

Another executive wrote down the attributes he admires in women, those he admires in men, and compared them with those he requires in his managers. For women he listed warmth, softness, devotion, attractiveness, sexuality, and intelligence. For men he listed leadership, coolness, strength, toughness, objectivity, and intelligence. The executive listed only one attribute in women that he felt important in a manager—intelligence—and he listed it last!

Whether it is a feeling that women don't belong in business, or a feeling that emotions in men are a sign of weakness, or finally, that business conduct must be ruthless—we ultimately must come to grips with two powerful forces within all men and all women: emotions and intellect. Both are at work constantly in our personal and business lives, whether we recognize it or not. When they fit together we feel comfortable. When they don't, we feel anxiety. There is a lot of anxiety in today's business world because emotions and intellect no longer fit neatly together.

Before the women's movement and anti-sex discrimination laws, emotions and intellect were kept in lockstep through the application of circular logic and a litany of misconceptions handed down through the ages: women don't want responsible jobs; women's hormones render them unfit for management; men won't work for women; women won't work for women; women haven't natural leadership qualities; a woman's place is in the home; and on and on.

Today, although they still may feel *all* these things are true or "ought" to be true, few executives attempt to argue these myths on the basis of logic. Women have proved they do want responsible jobs and do want to share in every facet of business—from the chairman's job to the computer's maintenance.

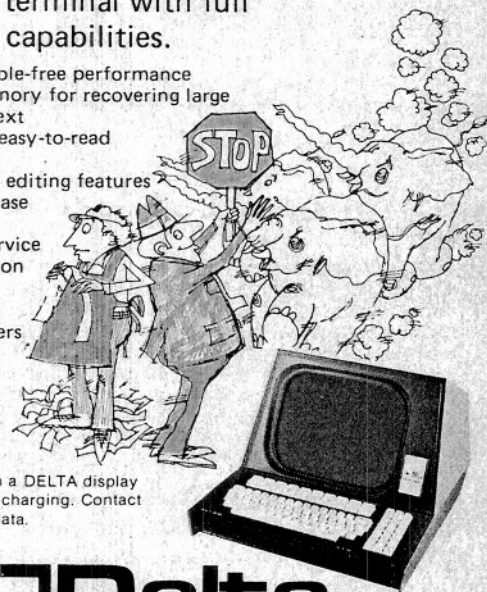
Psychological factors in promotions

The fact remains, however, that sometimes the decision to promote a woman may be a bad decision, and the decision not to promote her, a good one. The decision is not being questioned as much as the decision-maker and his motive.

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A degree (Computer Science, Computer Engineering, Elec. Engineering) and from 2-6 years professional work experience will round out your qualifications.

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Terminal Systems Division-Cambridge
NCR Corporation
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Phone: 614/439-0398

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CIRCLE 124 ON READER CARD

the forum

A growing number of executives are becoming aware of the impact psychological discrimination has had on the progress of women. With increasing pressure from government, the courts, and determined women employees, executives—for sound business reasons—are questioning their own gut feelings as well as those of their lower managers.

Robert L. Patrick's article, "You've Come a Long Way, Baby," which appeared as a Forum in this magazine several months ago (December '75, p. 193), was a classical example of writing by a man whose intellect told one story but whose emotions revealed another. Patrick, business consultant and contributing editor to *Datamation*, gave clear, sound, logical helpful advice to women in the computer field: be well prepared for the job, learn the business from the logic circuitry up, compete vigorously, be dedicated, results-oriented and expect a few hard knocks. He also pointed out that business is in business to make a profit—not for anybody's social welfare.

Patrick was probably stunned by the irate replies from women—"shrieking" as he so revealingly described them. He had failed, as they had not, to perceive his own underlying emotional message in the article. Along with his sound advice, Patrick was condescending, inaccurate, demeaning, paternalistic, and dogmatic. Up front he revealed himself to be a hard-nosed, no-nonsense man who has a difficulty saying "woman"—not uncommon. Instead of "women" he uses "gals," "girls," "ladies," and "baby," as in the title of the article.

Patrick dismisses an extremely important women's movement as a bunch of "bra burners" (a media invention which never happened). He implies in an example that the failure of one woman is the failure of all women, rather than what it is—the failure of one woman. He explained: "She had a husband and several kids, and they constituted one of her distractions and one of her afflictions." (Assuming Patrick has a wife and kids, does he consider them a distraction and an affliction?)

He suggests that this inept female will-of-the-wisp's job was taken over by a "tough SOB" who got the job done—sad commentary if applied to all men. SOB's generally get the job done despite their affliction, not because of it.

Sprinkled throughout the article, Patrick leaves evidence of a man trying to pass off as logical his emotional feeling about women. Scratch the surface of his article and you'll uncover a bundle of conflicts about the changing role of "ladies."

Patrick concludes his article with this advice: "I'm not counseling a secondary role for you ladies, but your boss is more interested in getting the work done than he is in having his social consciousness raised" (my italics).

Getting his social consciousness raised may well be the most important item on a busy executive's agenda today. The company's survival may depend upon it. Because when a high powered executive decides the company can no longer afford managers (or consultants) who live in the past, learn nothing from their mistakes, and bring on financial disaster she may decide to put the dead wood out to drift. Especially if she is a firm, fair, striving, driving, intelligent, no-nonsense leader who sees no place in business for a hard-nosed SOB who has a head to match.

—Gonnie Siegel
Ms. Siegel is a feminist management consultant, conducts seminars on women in management, and is president of Contemporary Communications, Bedford Village, New York. She has written on women's employment problems, authored a column "Changing Woman," and is former president of NOWestchester.

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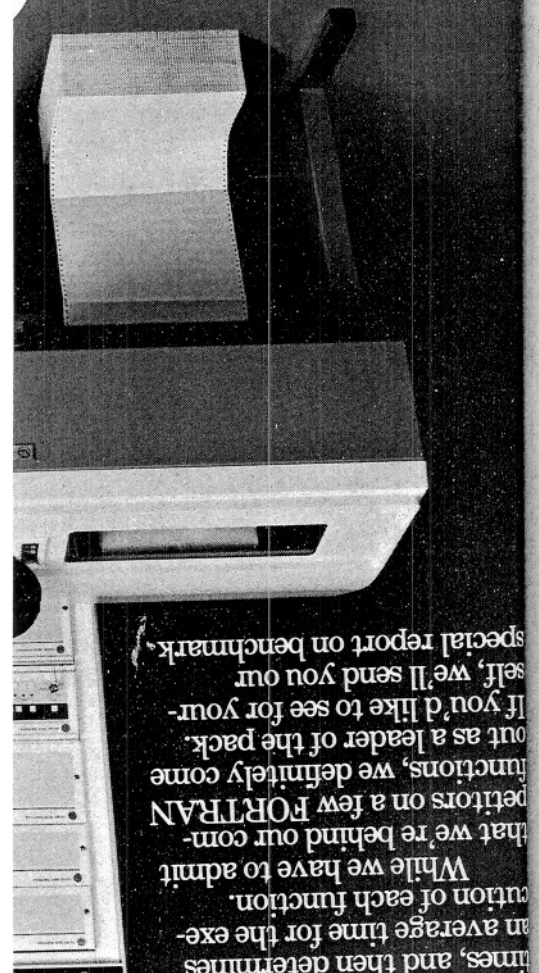
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"It worked for me for a while," said a young woman manager who is striving, smart, competitive, cool, and trying to keep from appearing hard, tough, and hard-nosed. Then it exploded in my face when my godfather decided he wanted to go to bed with me. I knew the relationship was never either way—if I did or if I didn't. I wish I had a godfather, but there aren't any in my company."

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Today, although they still may feel *all* these things are true or "ought" to be true, few executives attempt to argue these myths on the basis of logic. Women have proved they do want responsible jobs and do want to share in every facet of business—from the chairman's job to the computer's maintenance.

Psychological factors in promotions

The fact remains, however, that sometimes the decision to promote a woman may be a bad decision, and the decision not to promote her, a good one. The decision is not being questioned as much as the decision-maker and his motive.

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ld stay home, male employees, while the questionnaires of the other half shut up. described female employees in the same situation. Both sets ption, not the ere identical except for the factor of sex. his company For example, one case described a 46 year old female , competitive, employee without a college degree who had been with the . Women who company for 20 years. She competed for a promotion with been charac- 26 year old man with a college degree and with the com- culinized peo- any only two years. Half the participants received a reverse described as situation in which the woman became the 26 year old em- ployee competing with a 46 year old man who had been lon't want the with the company 20 years.

etached, and The "man" won out over the "woman" in both situations. emotional— The 26 year old man was chosen for the promotion because ng as friends, of his greater potential to the company. The 46 year old situation for nan won because of his greater experience plus his "loyalty t. Since being o the company."

ive are con- Among other things revealed by the survey, according a will appear o the article, were: companies try harder to keep male em- n the position ployees because they are more valued than females; milder will succeed, disciplinary action is applied to male employees in petty rule breaking; sexual misconduct is tolerated in men more than in women; women are expected to help their husbands the executive succeed in business but not the reverse. Family demands are ine trait and perceived as far less complicating for male than for female a bind. If he employees—which creates an upward mobility blockage for a part in his all women, regardless of individual circumstances. of his own

: questioning "Pure logic," impure bias and the gut In these and other situations, promotions based on "pure ough of these logic" turned out to be pure fiction. The conclusions, as psychological reported by the article, were that "psychological barriers to ified women, women interested in a management or professional career number one still exist despite recent changes in policies on the employ- the evidence ment of women," and that in decision-making, "managers ortunity for tend to fall back on traditional concepts of male and female roles."

"Sex Stereo- A young man on his way up the corporate ladder faces and Thomas none of this sex-based discrimination. The male boss ad- mires in other males traits he attributes to himself—coolness el decisions under pressure, objectivity, dedication, and a dash of ice elieved they water in the veins. An older, established executive brings along his chosen protege in the accepted business system by being a "godfather" or "mentor." He protects and guides subscribers, the young man's career upward with the ultimate aim of ionnaire des- replacing himself.

ed question- The same relationship becomes complicated for women, n described although for women executives, this too has been a track

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