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Dear Fellow Members,

I would like to take a moment to discuss the culture change that is occurring in regards to women in business and the gender gap and how it is currently affecting us and our union. As we are all very aware, we are slowly recovering from one of the worst economic recessions since the Great Depression. During these trying times, corporations have had to restructure their business models and critically review their operating procedures in order to remain competitive and profitable.

In their book, "Why Women Mean Business", Wittenberg-Cox and Maitland cite an aging workforce, the current economic crisis, falling birthrates and skill shortages as the main forces at work altering the way businesses will compete in the future. Using these pretexts, they argue that these forces, specifically the need for skilled and talented people, the importance of creating the right leadership teams and the purchasing power of women, are the main demographic and economic motives driving businesses to address the gender issue. Agreeing with Vladimir Spidla, the European Commissioner for employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, they believe "[i]n today's economic climate, equality between women and men is more important than ever,... only by reaping the potential of all our talents can we face up to the crisis." (New Europe, 2009)

The majority of college graduates in the U.S., Europe and other nations are women (Wittenberg-Cox & Maitland, 7). They also excel more than men in more subjects at various education levels. This gives them a competitive advantage among other candidates for employment. As stated earlier, in order to recognize the full potential of the talent pool, the best, brightest and most knowledgeable individuals must be recruited, including women.

In the past, executive committees and corporate boards have been mainly comprised of older, white, men. In recent years, there has been a fundamental shift in the way business is conducted. The authors contend that in order to maintain a relevant position in today's economy, new methods and business practices must be adopted in response to the current market trends. "While male values are about risk-taking, short-term gain and a focus on the individual, female values tend towards risk-awareness, the long term and team goals. What is needed for a successful future is a better balance of the two and a greater focus on long-term sustainability" (MailOnline, 2009). Once again, in order to achieve this balance, the gender issue must be addressed.

According to their research, women compose more than half of the consumer market place and are making 80% of U.S. purchasing decisions (Wittenberg-Cox & Maitland, pg. 15). They are also making up the majority small business owners. In an effort to harness the purchasing power of women, it is in the interest of businesses to better understand how to market this enormous demographic. What better way to fully understand women is there than to have them in the upper echelons of management offering their ideas and insight? As we know, men and women are unequivocally different when it comes down to thought processes, courses of action, and personal priorities.

In light of these studies we need to be actively searching for and grooming transformative leaders. This is not just a women's issue. We need to be inclusive of all potential leadership candidates, including women. Attending the Womens' conference in Sacramento provided a venue to network with individuals who we can look towards as role models. It was a setting that provided

inspiration and strategic thinking about future career paths and union participation. We, as participants, had the opportunity to witness innovative ways to bring women together and educate ourselves on the endless possibilities available to us to develop ourselves as meaningful contributors to our unions. The ability to be in such a nurturing setting, reinvigorated us with the confidence, conviction, and passion to come back to our individual locals and spread this movement of collaborative cooperation among all of our members. It gave us new perspective for contemplating and addressing questions such as:

“Where we can make changes that attract the most attention?”

“What are our future plans?”

“What do we want from our union?”

“What do we want to give our union?”

“How can we develop an action plan that brings us closer to these ends?”

“Where can we find the support to assist us in achieving our goals?”

“What knowledge, skills, and abilities do we need to possess in order to achieve our goals?”

Going forward, I hope that our newly founded Women's committee can operate under the framework of inclusion. These issues should not only be important to the women of our trade. In order to fully realize the benefits of this concept, we need the support of our union officials and our union brothers. I believe the most important obstacle for us in the future is to try to mend all of the factions in Local 28. It is only by working together that the changes necessary for the survival of our union can take place. In these trying times, no statement can sum it up better than “divided we fall, united we stand”.

In Solidarity,

Jacqueline Morillo

References:

MailOnline (2009, March 28) Would we be in this mess if our money was managed by women?

New Europe (2009, March 9) “EU campaigns to bridge the gender pay gap”

Wittenberg-Cox, A. & Maitland, A. (2009). *Why Women Mean Business*. United Kingdom: John