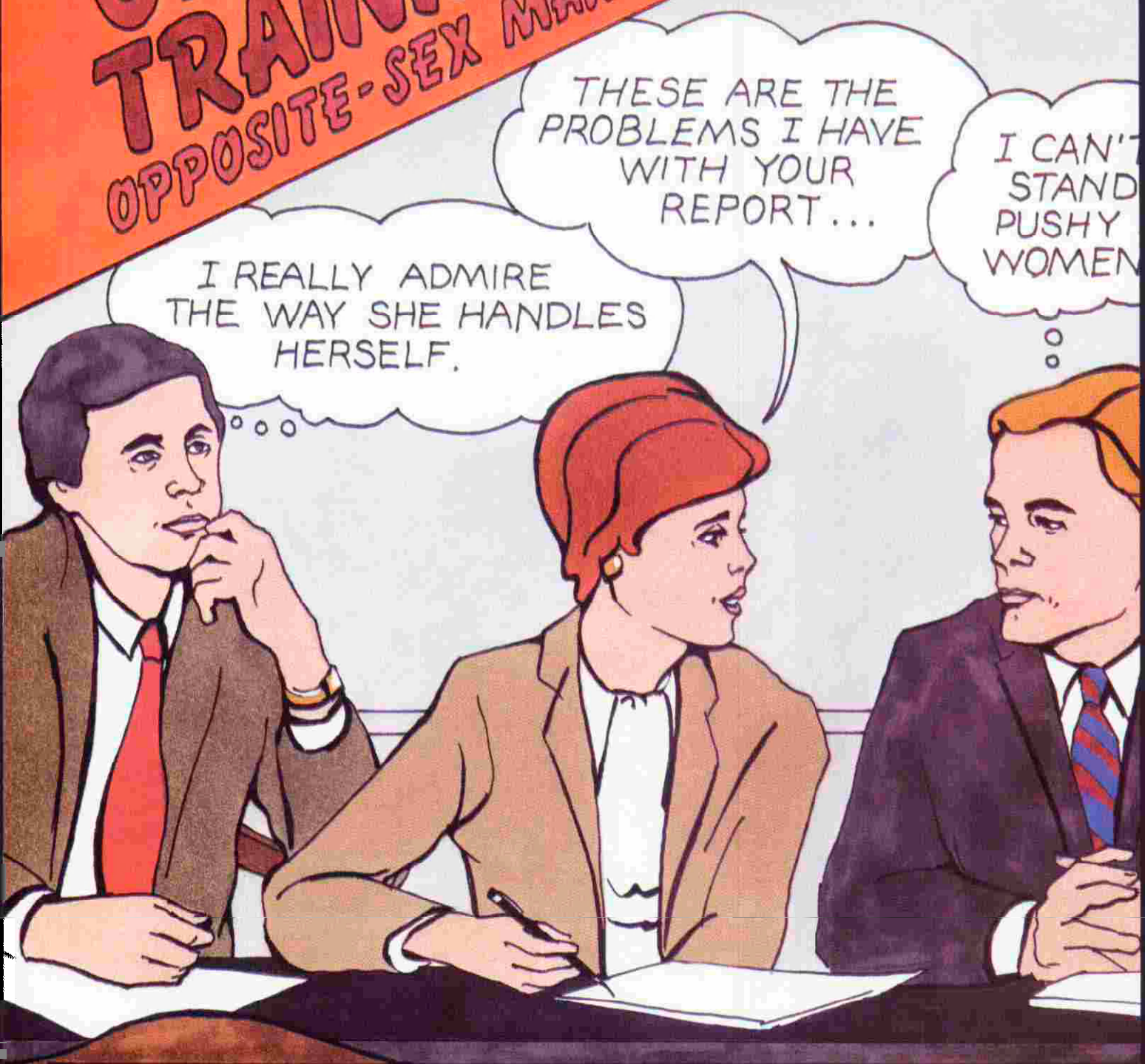


**L**IKE THE ATHLETIC TEAMS OF THEIR COLLEGE DAYS, MEN AND WOMEN RUN THROUGH SEPARATE TRAINING PROGRAMS.

# OPTIMAL TRAINING FOR OPPOSITE-SEX MANAGERS

By CYNTHIA BERRYMAN-FINK  
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**B**UT A LOOK AHEAD SHOWS A MESHING OF THE TRAINEES AND A NEED TO TEACH THEM TRAITS OF BOTH SEXES.



**B**etween 1970 and 1978, the rate at which women moved into managerial-administrative positions increased 16 times more rapidly than during the previous 20 years.<sup>1</sup> As a result, a women-in-management specialty has evolved in the social and behavioral sciences. Books, training seminars and networking groups dedicated to advancing the selection, development and promotion of managerial women now abound.

These efforts on behalf of women are surrounded by controversy. Proponents of women-only management development programs believe that because organizations embody masculine power structures, norms and perceptions, women need and deserve special training. According to this view, moving women into traditionally male-exclusive environments without addressing their unique needs is tantamount to ensuring their failure as managers. On the other hand, advocates of combining women and men in management development programs contend that singling out women for special training assumes deficiencies among women managers. It focuses undue attention on their uniqueness, and promotes gender-based factions within management.

This controversy presents a tough dilemma for HRD managers: What should progressive organizations do to provide their male and female managers with equal opportunities?

### **Shortcomings of women-only programs**

Women-in-management programs philosophically assume that women, by virtue of their gender, share differences or deficiencies. Their deficiencies hinder managerial effectiveness or, at the very least, limit their ability to function optimally within male-oriented organizations. Thus, no matter how well intentioned, separate management development programs for women (or any group based on social category) reveal a remedial focus.

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Many women managers resent this remedial bias. Being female in a male-dominated work place often increases a woman's visibility, isolation and performance pressures.<sup>2</sup> Women-only training, by increasing visibility and perceptions of differences, may create more problems than it solves.

Another limitation of women-in-management training lies in the content of such programs. A perusal of programs developed exclusively for women managers reveals these common training topics: assertiveness, confidence building, credibility and image, leadership styles, power strategies, delegation, conflict management and career development. It is assumed that women lack these skills and must work at developing managerial behaviors.

But what standards are commonly used for evaluating women's skills in these areas? Male models of management! Organizational structures and management theories traditionally derive from military and team-sport models, predominantly male spheres of influence. So management development for women often means teaching them to imitate male behavior.

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The irony of this is that women receive negative evaluations when they behave in ways perceived as masculine. Their "masculine" management style is judged least effective.<sup>3</sup> Competent women who behave in a masculine manner generally are not well liked by their peers.<sup>4</sup> Middle-level managers evaluate assertive women less positively than they evaluate assertive men.<sup>5</sup> So women managers may find themselves in a double-bind situation.

### **An androgynous future**

Progressive managers—male and female—no longer concentrate on male-typical traits and behaviors. The trend is toward a blending of male (task-oriented) and female (people-oriented) styles. Managers today and in the future must possess a repertoire of gender-flexible, or androgynous, behavior that combines competition and cooperation, confrontation and collaboration, telling and asking,

empathy and detachment, logic and emotion, discipline and compassion, aggression and support.

The call for an androgynous style of management is not new. Bolton and Humphreys offered such an approach as a way to meet the changing organizational norms of the American work place.<sup>6</sup> Garen called for examining the potential of men and women developing bottom-line, people-sensitive management styles.<sup>7</sup> Sargent articulated the need for and issues involved in androgynous management styles. Contemporary management theorists such as Argyris, Hersey and Blanchard, McClelland, Blake and Mouton, Peters and Waterman, and Ouchi emphasize the merging of people orientation with productivity orientation. Though they may not use the term "androgynous management" to describe this synthesis, they articulate a management style that draws upon the best of male and female behavioral styles.

### **Implementing androgyny**

While many management theorists call for androgyny in the work place, few offer a plan for systematically developing

these skills. The following steps make up a model for androgyny training. This model is a result of consultation with Fortune 500 to small regional companies in a variety of industries.

#### **Step 1: Conduct needs assessment.**

The type and size of the organization, the ratio of female to male employees, the existing organizational culture and the sex-role attitudes of managers dictate training needs. The first step, therefore, is to conduct a needs assessment through one or more of the following methods.

■ *Focus group discussions* —These are structured discussions with five to seven participants from one function, department or level to determine key gender-related issues. Initial focus group questions might include: "What perceptions do the men and women hold about colleagues of the opposite sex in this company?"; "What skills do male and female managers in this company need to learn?"; and "What are some barriers or problems



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involved in supervising employees of opposite sexes in this company?" The external consultant and internal HRD manager should determine relevant questions jointly. For the sake of candor on sensitive issues, however, the consultant should conduct the focus group discussions without having internal personnel present. Focus group leaders must select a sufficient number of representative employees to participate and skillfully probe the subtleties of participants' comments. They must then objectively summarize and translate key points into training needs.

■ *Personal interviews*—These solicit detailed information from key, knowledgeable people while providing confidentiality. Questions may relate to managers' perceptions of power strategies used by women and men, the amount and quality of communication between them, and career development opportunities available to managers of each sex. Again the consultant and HRD manager should collaborate on selecting questions, but outsiders should conduct the actual interviews. The interview method can be used as a follow-up to focus group discussions.

■ *Surveys and questionnaires*—These are used to determine quickly and efficiently the needs of large numbers of personnel. They may be standardized attitude surveys, behavioral assessment instruments or original opinion questionnaires. Instruments that measure sex-role attitudes, managerial styles, communication skills and androgynous behaviors are available commercially and can also be found in psychology literature. Original questionnaires can be developed on issues specific to an organization, such as cross-gender mentoring, sexual harassment and EEO policies. These methods allow the speedy collection and analysis of large amounts of information while ensuring complete anonymity.

Plan to give careful attention to the needs assessment phase. It will help ensure a program that targets relevant organizational issues, meets with support rather than resistance, and promotes the long-term development of effective androgynous management.

**Step 2: Formulate objectives.** The second step is to translate needs into specific program objectives. Because each organization reflects different needs, a

universal set of objectives does not exist. Yet certain objectives commonly emerge. The training program should be geared toward enabling managers to do some of the following:

- identify their stereotypes about appropriate behavior for women and men;

- identify company norms and expectations regarding appropriate behavior for managers;

- analyze their gender-related communication styles;

- identify bases of power for women and men in the organization;

- pinpoint key skills and training needs of male and female managers;

- determine motivating and restraining forces within the organization regarding androgyny;

- set goals for developing androgynous behavior in themselves and others;

- determine ways of increasing upper-management support of androgyny;

- articulate the company philosophy and individual attitudes on sexual attraction in the work place;

- cite legal definitions and company policies on sexual harassment;

- development methods of detecting and preventing sexual harassment;

- set goals for implementing current EEO policies;

- identify needs and set goals for equal career development programs for male and female employees;

- develop techniques for increasing communication, support and networking opportunities between the two sexes.

**Step 3: Conduct training.** Workshop content will vary according to specific organizational needs and objectives, but sessions typically cover these topics: sex-role stereotyping; gender-related organizational norms; verbal, nonverbal, and interpersonal communication styles of men and women; productivity-oriented vs. people-oriented management behavior; power strategies; androgyny; sexual attraction; sexual harassment; EEO policies; mentoring and career development opportunities.

The training team should conduct workshop sessions including equal numbers of women and men. A male/female training team is recommended as a model of cross-gender collaboration and communication. Such a team can reduce participants' defensiveness and

promote honest dialogue and empathy between the sexes. This approach also offers the advantage of dividing the group for separate discussions on particularly sensitive or emotional issues.

Training methods include lectures based on research findings, exercises, case studies, discussions and skill-development role playing with videotape feedback. Throughout, blame or remedial attention on either gender should be avoided, and the overall goal of developing androgynous management skills in both sexes should be emphasized. Women and men should be encouraged to coach each other in developing androgynous behavior. For example, a female participant skilled in empathic behavior might work with a male colleague who needs to enhance his empathy skills. Or a male participant might assist a female colleague in developing techniques of effective delegation.

Because sessions are lively and interactive and certain topics can be emotionally draining, limit training to four-hour segments. Full-scale programs can total anywhere from eight hours to a full week of training.

**Step 4: Evaluate.** Immediately after the training, focus group discussions, personal interviews, or surveys and questionnaires can be conducted to solicit feedback. Participants can comment on the feasibility of program objectives, the relevance of training topics, the quality of information and exercises, the trainers' styles, their motivation toward behavioral change, their sex-role perceptions, and the communication between female and male trainees.

Over time, the HRD staff should solicit quantitative data or behavioral measures of program effectiveness. Administering the same attitude surveys or behavioral instruments that were given during the needs assessment will provide pre- and post-test information on training effectiveness. The amount of change in sex-role attitudes and gender-flexible behavior can be charted for the training group. These measures can be administered periodically to determine the transfer of attitudes and skills from the workshop to the work place. In addition, the number of sexual discrimination or sexual harassment complaints can be used as indicators of program effectiveness.

Managers' androgynous skills should be

evaluated through formal assessment centers, videotaped role-play analysis or perceptions of subordinates and superiors. The criteria should be incorporated into performance reviews. Organizational support and incentives will help make androgynous management a permanent company norm rather than a fleeting training ideal.

## Progressive and profitable

Training employees separately based on gender is the way of the past. Honest dialogue and cooperative interaction between female and male managers, rather than blame, defensiveness or separatism, is the goal of progressive organizations.

Once male and female managers realize that both sexes are affected by society's role expectations, which restrict behavioral options, they can work together toward developing androgynous management skills in their work places. When the diverse talents of female and male employees contribute to the shaping of modern work climates, both the organization and all its members will profit.

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