

Special Training Course for Women: Desirable or Not?

“Should women entering management positions continue to be trained in courses especially designed for women?”

Alma S. Baron

According to the mail and the brochures that continue to pour into every company's training section, many people think women entering management positions should continue to be trained in courses especially designed for women. Each week several new courses, designed for training women to “climb the ladder” to successful business careers, are announced. The brochures have provocative titles: “Business Success for Women” . . . “The Emerging Woman in Management” . . . “Implications for Women in Management” . . . “Management Orientation for Women Supervisors” . . . “Women in Middle Management” . . . and many others. Prestigious institutions like the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, AMR, AMA, and many indepen-

dent consulting firms continue to offer these programs. It would seem apparent, just from numbers of courses being offered, that the need for special training for women is there.

Some of the reasons for having specially designed programs for women have been articulated in the brochures. Management Institute offers these tips, for example:

“This is a seminar that is designed to hit . . . with special input and force . . . the special problems that women face as they move into supervisory management.”

The announcement goes on to state, however, that the seminar also attacks problems that EVERY MANAGER, male or female, faces. Scanning other announcements of like programs, problems

such as helping women see the value of their skills and abilities in the management structure, testing these abilities in a supportive and professional climate, exploring women's biases in working together with women and male coworkers are delineated. These programs are also pointedly addressed to women seeking upward mobility, women aspiring to more responsible positions in business, industry and government and women new to the management hierarchy.

I would suggest that the reasons given for having these programs have been outgrowths of research that explores the woman's self-image. Anyone familiar with the women's scene since the Affirmative Action Legislation of 1972 is also aware of the emphasis placed on Assertiveness Training for wo-

men. The book, *The Assertive Woman*,¹ is a best seller, as are many other books emphasizing the need for women in the United States to look at themselves in ways other than the traditional role of homemaker. *Women as Winners*,² *Women in America*³ and recent works have all taken their momentum from Betty Freidan's⁴ startling jolt over a decade ago. And, over a decade along, trainers and educators still see a need to help women accept themselves.

Therefore, the premise that special programs should be designed for women entering management is acceptable . . . and desirable, at this time. As a practitioner in the field I see, however, other reasons beside those referred to above. They are strong influences in women's programming now; they may not be as

strong five years down the road.

Women's Training: Desirable

The registration blank read: "J. D. Smith." The participant turned out to be Jane Dorothy. She told me that she was reluctant to put down her first name as then everyone would know that she was a woman and perhaps would not accept her as a participant in a management session. "Yes," she said, "this was my first experience in a seminar outside of my company training sessions." "Yes," she answered my question, she had applied before for attendance in a management seminar but was never granted the opportunity. "They assumed that I wouldn't want to leave my family for three days."

1. Women in the past were not given the special educational advantages that were offered to men

in like positions. They have to catch up. They need more exposure to management concepts than men do simply because they have never been exposed before.

"I don't like women."

"The women whom I met on the job were never interested in the things I was interested in; most of them were working to pass the time or to help put a kid through school. I don't have kids and I'm not passing the time . . . I love my work."

"I am thrilled to meet other career-oriented women like myself . . . I find them equally as interesting as men. I didn't know there were so many of them; I've learned from their experiences, and most exciting of all is the fact that I find we share experiences. I may even begin helping other women know that we are not alone."

2. Women have as great a preju-

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dice against other women as men. It is necessary to expose them to all types of women in business. They gain strength and knowledge from one another. Men in the past have had many colleagues and friends with whom they could discuss job problems; women have not had this opportunity. They need to know that job satisfaction is also their province; they need to know that sisterhood is indeed powerful, if only to give moral support.

"I really didn't want to come. I'm 51, you know, and I figure that I've done the job for years with no training, why did I need it now. Well, I'm shocked at what I'm learning and also thankful that I lucked out in my job these many years. The mistakes I could have avoided make me want to scream. I never considered myself as a manager before . . . now I want to go on and learn more, do more; my job is important."

3. Women never considered the importance of the job they were doing, for their own self-perspective forced them to demean their position, not honor it. The position as woman manager was a thing to hide, from their family, from their friends, not a thing to be proud of. This demeanment of position in her eyes could only force the woman to do a poorer job rather than a better job; she was indeed afraid of success. The culture told her to be so. Women have to regard themselves and their jobs with deserved pride. Respect for job, with women, cannot be an assumed. Women's training programs stress respect, pride in job, development for even greater job success.

A brief look at enrollments in regular training programs at Management Institute gives a rather unusual picture of the proportion of women attending these offerings since 1974. Let's look.

In 1974, scanning only five programs offered for management ef-

fectiveness, the total enrollment was 2,893. Women enrolled in these programs numbered 320. In 1975, the same programs examined yielded a total enrollment of 3,901; women, 327. In 1976, up to October, the total enrolled was 1,783; women, 97.

The percentages drop. In 1974, 11 per cent were women; in 1975, nine per cent were women. In 1976, so far five per cent are women. What kind of an interesting trend is this one? It would seem that, as the smoke vanishes from the intense fire that ushered in the AA legislation, the opportunities for training continued but the women attending these sessions dropped. Perhaps a drop in the economy did not permit some companies to avail their employees of continuing education, although the number of participants climbs for men (1976 is not in as yet).

Perhaps women, after an initial push, were losing ground in the work force. Or perhaps the number was diluted by the women being trained in women's programs. A careful reading of the enrollments in the women's classes gives a positive picture of participant increase. In 1974-75, women attending the newly announced course for women moving into management positions numbered only 61. In 1975-76, the number jumped to 97 with the addition of one more seminar. So far, in the year 1976-77, 160 women have attended three different seminars aimed for women; there are 45 on a waiting list for a seminar in January and three more scheduled in before June 15th. Companies and women executives themselves are saying the need is there. Universities and training institutions are responding to a need that seems to be growing stronger rather than weaker.

Yes, women's training programs are viable right now. Women have to catch up, have to learn there are other women with the same

business background and the same problems, have to raise their own personal horizons and develop a plan for continual advancement and growth. For these reasons, the programs offered to women are necessary and beneficial at the present time. But, what about the future?

Women's Training: Undesirable

A rather strong case for continuing programming in management training for women has been presented. Women need to catch up; they do need to know they are a part of a whole sector of people like themselves; they do need to feel pride in their job; they do need to share experiences. But, what happens after this awakening pride and recognition of their abilities takes hold?

I have noticed that, as the woman manager masters the initial skills of management principles and is no longer afraid of her own ability, she looks around and decides that she is exactly like her male counterpart. The figures listing the total number of women enrollees in open courses that I quoted above do not indicate the breakdown. If one looks closely at the data, as I did, it becomes immediately apparent that the vast numbers of the women attending these sessions are in the upper-management levels. The numbers were almost two to one for women attending the top level courses, many in the nonprofit sector. These are the women who, after a slow start, mastered the concept of team management. These are the people who say the principles are the same whether you are a man or a woman, black, red or white. These are the managers of the future, some future executives, who understand that an initial "cram course" was necessary, but after it was absorbed, the need is gone. These women, when asked what their most difficult problems in management are become the ones who answer problems in communi-

cation, problems in delegation, problems in motivation. These are the ones who articulate the same problems that the male manager mentions. These are the ones who never say, "They don't accept me because I am a woman."

The question initially posed can now be better answered. For the women who still have to catch up in management knowledge, for the women who still are not accepting themselves in a management position, for the women who still are afraid of other women, the special training sessions are highly desirable and almost a necessity. For the woman used to her new role of greater responsibility and authority, the sessions are not valid.

As I see growth and development amongst our own participants here in our courses, I can only hope and believe that within a five to ten year period, all people

may accept and benefit from management courses, designed to hit problems of management, not problems of societal discrimination.

Then creativity of educational and training endeavors will rise to a new high and the results spread over into the public and private sector: the results of learning together to work together. Working together, incidentally, can only increase harmony, never diminish it.

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