



WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

Church can learn from business study: Gender equity boosts performance

By Elaine Moy

Making your church or workplace more “women welcoming” may benefit all people, according to a recent article in *Crain’s Chicago Business*. The article recounted the results of a study of more than 100 successful teams in 21 major companies.

Try these and you may realize these advantages in morale and ministry.

Recounting a study of more than 100 teams at 21 companies, groups with EQUAL numbers of men and women were “more likely to experiment, be creative, share knowledge and fulfill tasks than teams with other compositions.” So, too, the church can increase membership, participation and vitality if we learn to:

1. **Balance the number of males and females.** The study found that agencies with equal numbers of women and men demonstrate a higher level of cooperation and performance.
2. **Ask women why they leave—and why they stay.** Women in the companies studied routinely leave mid-career to go into the government and non-profit sector. We know a higher percentage of clergywomen than clergymen leave local churches for other ministries, citing the “glass ceiling,” lack of flexibility and challenge. How do churches and church agencies pigeonhole or stifle women? How do we engage and challenge women?
3. **Adopt family-friendly policies and practices.** The work-family balance issue is almost as important for men now as it is for women, the study found. For the church to increase the number of young clergy and lay workers, we must consider their social and family needs in our programming, ministries and work expectations.
4. **Think and act beyond gender stereotypes.** David Van De Voort of Buck Consulting admits, “There is still an issue in this country with females being intentionally or unintentionally directed toward non-lines roles, as opposed to line management roles. Organizations that are truly enlightened are the ones who don’t have pink assignments and blue assignments.” Women can do more than staff the nursery and the flower/altar guild.
5. **Offer variety, flexibility, and learning opportunities.** Twenty years ago, only women were asking for things like flex time, mentoring, continuing education and multiple entry points. Today, men and women alike name these as important options in the workplace—and in their churches.

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