

Girl power

 By [Heidi Myers](#), issued by [Meltwater](#)

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International Women's Day (March 8th 2016) - now in its 26th year - there's a lot to celebrate. Women's rights have risen up the political agenda, many countries have made progress towards eliminating gender discrimination and we're also seeing the introduction of initiatives to ensure the fair representation of women within senior political roles.

Yet, there are still improvements to be made - with official statistics showing that the gender pay gap in the workplace is, in fact, going nowhere fast (the total gap in hourly pay remains unchanged since last year, at 19.2 per cent). What's more, female employees have to wait another two years to find out if they are paid less than their male counterparts, as the government has unveiled its plans to release a league table ranking large firms by their gender pay gap from 2018 onwards.

While the gender pay gap shows that complete gender inequality is not here yet, the number of women in senior positions in the workplace has almost doubled in the last four years, with a quarter of all FTSE 100 boards positions being filled by women - how's that for progress?

Many of the skills often perceived to be not only relevant but required for successful leadership are often associated to be traditional female attributes. People who are collaborative, empathetic, loyal and selfless are usually shown to be more successful than those who are deemed proud, resilient or independent. This doesn't mean that we all need to start volunteering to do the tea run, but it's important not to underestimate team work and working collaboratively.

So with all of this in mind, what can women do to get ahead?

Set yourself challenges

Not all women strive for senior management roles, but if you are highly career driven and have your next promotion in-sight, make sure you never stop learning. Give yourself the best education possible and study hard; develop a core competency in an area of interest. Don't try to be good at everything, even if you think that is the only way to be the best. Just get noticed and seek out opportunities to solve real problems. What's more – surprise people. Take on unexpected tasks and projects without being asked and deliver a great result. People will soon begin to see you as a valuable asset to the company and a key player amongst your team.

Mentorship

Build a mentor network. Whether you're starting out in your career or racing up the ladder, building a strong support network around you is essential and will benefit you in a number of ways. A mentoring system is a great chance for people to bounce ideas off of each other. I've mentored a lot of women across different stages of their careers over the last 10 years, and it's great to watch how they grow and progress.

Be positive

Don't be a complainer. There's nothing worse than sitting back, filling a room with negativity and saying, "We're never going to get ahead, and we're never going to do this or that." Embrace opportunities, work hard and be positive. The most successful people are solutions focussed. It's an individual thing. If you want to do it, you can do it.

Shout about your achievements

Women are not always as proactive as men at blowing their own trumpets, but gone are the days of being 'seen and not

heard.' Don't be afraid to speak up and make sure your accomplishments are recognised by voicing your own achievements. Keep a list of your own achievements so that when people say 'what have you done in the last month to help the business' you're able to respond with a clear and supported answer. This will also help monitor your own achievements and ultimately make you feel like what you're doing is worthwhile.

Take Feedback

Listen to constructive criticism and act on it quickly and effectively. Listening is one of the hardest skills – but it will allow you to grow. What's more, stand up for what you believe in – don't be afraid to ask the obvious questions and if you believe there is a way of achieving something more effectively always challenge, constructively, what you're being told. Your colleagues will appreciate your honesty and proactivity.

¹According to the Office for National Statistics' Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings

²<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/women-on-boards-numbers-almost-doubled-in-last-4-years>

ABOUT HEIDI MYERS

Heidi Myers heads up marketing and communications for Meltwater across Central Europe, the Middle East and Africa. She was formerly managing director of Meltwater San Francisco and opened the Meltwater Wales office as managing director. Meltwater specialises in software for organisations to help master the social business environment and increase online intelligence.
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