

# PITCHING SEXISM: HOW BUSINESSES SET NEEDLESS CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN

We know it's not supposed to be easy to climb up the career ladder, please don't patronise us further. The question is; why is it so much easier for men to do it than women?

Last week I talked to a woman in business who had decided to set up a vegan beauty line. On the same day I spoke to a man who also set up his own businesses. Their difference in their experiences confirmed all the statistics I had ever researched; the man had decided one day that he didn't want to work for anybody and set up a couple businesses with no real funding, education or experience from his living room. He wasn't a pleasant person to talk to but nonetheless his now 4 businesses were doing well. He bragged about how he had a female secretary who did all the hard work for him "for basically no money" which was shortly followed by the comment that homeless people were choosing to be on the street. On the other hand, the business woman had spent about 7 years gruelling through admin job from admin job after graduating with a business degree before finally receiving a loan that allowed her to begin her cruelty-free beauty line. Say what you like, in no world should a man who verbally abuses people who give him bad online reviews have it ludicrously easier than a smart, driven woman who has done nothing but work tirelessly to expand her altruistic business on her own since day one. This poignant experience made me really consider all the ways in which the business world doesn't only overlook women but actually limit them. Turns out the challenges begin right at the very launch of any new business job. To explain this, I need to direct attention to [Lera Boroditsky' Ted Talk](#) about how language shapes the way we think. Summarised, humans have an amazing ability to use their voices to transmit thoughts and knowledge to each other, and how we structure our words can have a profound effect on how we react to certain situations. What I found extremely interesting was how

certain words are often assigned a gender; feminine or masculine. For example, the word “bridge” is grammatically feminine in German and so bridges will often be called elegant or beautiful, conversely “bridge” is masculine in Spanish and therefore words like strong or robust are more likely to be used by Spanish speakers. So, when I coincidentally saw an article shortly after discovering Boroditsky’s talk (I blame the Law of Attraction) about certain linguistic choices deterring women from applying for jobs, I wasn’t all that surprised. In business, masculine phrases rather than feminine are often used when creating and displaying job vacancies, an example of this would be saying; “we require a fearless, driven person to build strong relationships” instead of something along the lines of; “we are looking for a driven, focused person to create healthy relationships to develop our business”. [Atlassian](#), a software company, hired 80% more women just by changing the phrasing in their job adverts. Businesses benefit immeasurably by having gender diversity, why wouldn’t you want to appeal to more women?



Once we battle through the application process, the challenges only get bigger. Physically and emotionally the workplace was designed for men, by men. You might already be aware that everyday tasks

are made harder and more uncomfortable for women because, well, things weren't designed with women in mind. Feminism often fails to recognise that whilst women are incalculably strong in infinite ways, men are on average physically stronger, taller, generate more body heat and have better handgrip than women. So why is it that office thermostats are based on the body temperature of a middle-aged man, paper trays are next to impossible for women to pull out, water machines are too heavy to be replaced by women, shelves are too high etc? This alongside frustrating daily incidents such as being talked over, being hit on, sexist dress codes sometimes with crippling period pains means that we literally leave work exhausted and discontented. Now, women really are masters at adapting and evolving but in a workplace, that is supposed to be diverse and equal, making your female staff acclimatise isn't really a desirable trait to have.

Once we make it past the application process and battle through the obstacles, there are certain behaviours (more commonly possessed by women) that will always be deemed unprofessional at work. I don't know about you, but I will quite honestly cry at everything. If any one of my emotions is heightened in any way, I will cry. No doubt. This is a trait I've been embarrassed about for an extremely long time but I'm slowly learning to accept that it is normal and tearing up at work whether it be because of workload, criticism, office politics or a bad day, shouldn't be met with comments regarding unprofessionalism and being over emotional. Obama and Clinton's communication director very often cries at work; "It's just not professional' I know what that word means, that word means it's not what men do." Yes, I am probably more emotional than men, but I am also more in tune with other people's emotions and feelings. Also, let's not get into detail about the coping mechanisms that a lot of men use when they're feeling under pressure shall we.

Now, let's do that thing that millennials just don't do; talk about money. It might not be a comfortable topic but it is a poignant one for women in the business world. The hard to swallow pill is that women are paid less, especially women of colour. It's hard to progress in a world when you don't have a lot of money – how are women supposed to invest in themselves and their futures when they aren't being paid the same as men, for the exact same job? To make it worse, [Biz2Credit discovered that women were 20% less likely](#)

to get approval on a small business loan. To illustrate the discrimination that women face, take a look at Lourdes-Martin Rosa, the founder of Government Business Solutions, who couldn't get a loan without her husband's signature...we clearly have major steps towards equality to make.

On a more personal note, it is hard for women to forget what society has told us from the moment we were born. We're told to downplay our achievements, don't take up too much space, only speak when we're spoken to and not to be bossy. We've been conditioned to believe that the business world really isn't a place for a woman, and overcoming those personal challenges could be the hardest task to make. We very often mistake oppression for our comfort zone and to be able to walk out of a tough meeting with no worry about being overpowering, officious or exasperating would be an exhilarating feeling.

We totally get it, challenges are great in business, but only when they're letting you distinguish your skills and strengths. We want more than admin jobs, we want respect and opportunities.