

What Part Does Religion Play In Gender Roles at Work?

When Mark sees that Facebook is opening up positions in Kansas City, Mo., he jumps! He knows that he might lack some of what they require, but the opportunity and wide-open doors drive him to do whatever it takes to get the position. He'll study hard, get the best clothes for the interview, network to see if anyone has any suggestions for landing the job and he'll tell his fear to go to hell.

But when Mary sees the same position, her first response will be to question whether or not she really has what it takes. Her internal monitor will discredit her and she'll begin to assess whether or not she'll be viewed as "too aggressive" for pursuing such a top-paying position. Then her mind will go to family, responsibilities and whether or not it's really the right "season" for her to soar. She'll get some input from people on whether or not she should even pursue such a position and before long, she'll rationalize that she probably wouldn't get the role anyway, so it's best to be grateful for all she does have.

Why is it that after all these years of women's liberation, gender equality and the pursuit of our dreams, women are still holding themselves back in the corporate world? I believe one of the answers to this question will shock you.

The oppression of women is not a new topic. Do a Google search and you'll find women in third world countries still working as slaves to their husbands and tribal leaders accepted as normal. Do research on the role of women in the world, the church and the home and you'll find that the attack is still very active and very real. Women from various sectors within the U.S. still believe their opinions, ideas and even their talent should always be focused primarily on the home and children. Many still believe, after all these years of advancement in technology, smartphones and even the information age, that men should be leading the charge in our economy and women should be supporting them, on a side-role slot.

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I live in an area where the Amish are alive and well. But that is an extreme case, and wouldn't even hold weight when I begin to speak about women in leadership, so I won't go there. However, right in my own backyard, where I live as one of the top social-media influencers in the world, I am often asked the same question: "Are you sure you want to pursue all of this and put so much pressure on your family?"

Ironically no one has ever asked my husband Alan this question. When he pursued his career, no one ever questioned what it would do to our family, his lifestyle or his livelihood as a man. It was just a given that he, as the man, should pursue the best career he could. It was also understood without

any conversation or input that as he did this he would be a “good” man and one with upright character.

Where is this coming from? Is it merely a personality thing where some women, who have an instinctive nature to be a leader, are overriding what they should be and where their natural stationed position should be, meaning in the home?

Where did this idea that if a woman pursues an executive position the home will suffer come from? And why is the “I can have it all” mindset really not working for most women in the year 2014?

I write this column from the perspective of faith at work. You’ll find very unconventional topics such as prayer in the workplace, the prophetic in business and everything in between. You could say I write a column that compels some and repels others. As I unravel what I believe to be some real issues in this topic of women in executive positions in the corporate world I am sure this will escalate. Some will love me and shout a resounding, ‘AMEN!’ Some will hate me and call me a heretic. That’s OK. I want to create an uproar!

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The oppression of women started a long time ago. It started way before women began to enter the workforce and way before they were given the rights to vote. It started when a religious spirit decided to infect the minds of men and women into believing that God created women as secondary and subservient to the man. In many cultures, it’s more than subservient. It’s slavery.

Now many of you are probably shaking your head and thinking, “What the heck is she talking about? A woman decides to stay at home with her children and that is viewed as slavery?! Whatever!” Yes, that is typically the first response. The extreme one. The religious spirit has done a good job of programming people to react without even thinking about what they’re saying. It’s funny, isn’t it? When we talk about women it’s all or nothing. It’s one or the other. No one ever bothers to use the intelligence that God gave us to diligently process what this actually looks like in the real world. We’ll pull up an extreme case of a successful woman or two in executive positions who have unruly children, drug addicts or the like and we’ll conclude that any woman who pursues such a position is destroying her home.

I think it’s time we grow up.

God Himself wires us when we are knit in our mother’s womb. He gives us gifts, talents, abilities and drive. Just interview a group of people and you’ll find out we are NOT all wired the same. Not all men are natural-born leaders. Not all women are quiet, meek and mild. It has nothing to do with ambition, the pursuit of our dreams or the drive to get ahead. It has EVERYTHING to do with how we’re wired. Let me ask you this very critical question: Did you have anyone ask you, during womb service, what YOU would like to be?

I not only want to consider the topic of women in executive roles and their God-given and designed wiring and calling to pursue such things. I think it's about time we take some pressure off my brothers – the ones who have a gentle nature, are designed by God to be tender and caring and mediators. These men are not less manly, nor are they less of a leader with these natural instincts, talents and gifts. They are perfectly designed and created by a loving God who knew just what He was doing. Equally, the woman who is wired with a competitive leading nature, who has a drive and instinct to lead and govern is not going against her natural grain or bent. She is actually designed by a loving God to do exactly what her instinct is telling her.

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As women struggle to get ahead, slay their inner fears and find some form of confidence in the decisions they make, it is important to find the root of this struggle and where the societal programming has really originated. It is my belief it started in the religious system. I won't say it started in the church, or even from my own personal perspective in a Christian church, because that isn't the case. The religious system in general, across the lines into the Muslim community, the Mormons, the Catholics, Buddhist, Seventh Day Adventists, Masonic Lodge and the list go on all have a history of some measure of female oppression.

Our roots really do say a lot about who we become. Our beliefs about ourselves, and our beliefs about others, govern how we behave on a day-to-day basis. Sadly, these beliefs are rarely challenged, questioned or even assessed. Now let me throw out the wild card: The topic of living out the decisions of our fathers and mothers who have gone before us and making conscious choices about what we will believe, while also forgiving and releasing those who have wronged us, is the only way to reprogram our internal voice. When is the last time you heard that discussed in a corporate environment? Never. It is my belief that this is where we need to go.

What is in your bloodline? Has the oppression of women been a strong belief for many generations and you are the first one to challenge (or walk differently in) this pattern? What is in our corporate bloodline, the belief system of the organization we are considering working for? And how will that affect me, an executive woman, when I decide to walk instinctively and powerfully into all that I was designed to be? Let's go there, shall we?

Start challenging all you believe and see where you come up. Interview your family history and see if there are some things that need a cleanup.

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