

This week my name is Peter.



**"MEN KEEP OPENING DOORS.
AND WOMEN KEEP RUNNING
INTO THEM."**

RAFE ROSATO - CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER AT DLL

A WHITE PAPER TO SUMMARIZE THE CONCLUSIONS OF THE MEN AS
ADVOCATES FOR WOMEN'S VISIBILITY SUMMIT HOSTED BY BRANDEDU
AT HEADFIRST GROUP IN HOOFDDORP ON JUNE 27TH 2022.

“IF WE WANT TO INFLUENCE CHANGE, WE NEED TO INVITE MEN TO THE CONVERSATION”

NANCY POLEON - FOUNDER OF BRANDEDU

About BrandedU

Women have unique and distinctive qualities to bring to the table. Study after study^[1] shows that companies run by women perform far better. Yet, women still remain underrepresented in today's businesses. BrandedU works towards changing this and getting more women in leadership roles in the workplace. BrandedU's vision is that of a gender gap- free workplace, where there is equal representation in executive leadership and pipeline.

Background on the white paper

This white paper has been written to shed light on the stories and examples of men who have championed change and leveraged their leadership positions to influence gender equity in their own organizations. BrandedU gathered these leaders to inspire and influence more men, especially those in positions of power, to take up allyship and advocacy in order to perpetuate gender equity.

[1] "Women in the Workplace" - McKinsey 2021, "Why Gender Diversity May Lead to Better Return For Investors" - Morgan Stanley 2022



Men occupy most leadership positions.

A recent study ^[3] from international workplace culture specialist Great Place to Work shows that within leadership teams 25% are women and 75% are men.

The numbers show that when there are 30% or more women in the leadership team, employees score higher on the credibility of the leadership (76% versus 74%) and the pride they experience to work for the organization (77% versus 75%).

These data show that female leadership makes the difference on how to give back to society, how they communicate and how they share the profits made by the organization. This also leads to better business results.

Organizations with 30% or more women in leadership teams have a higher turnover percentage (36% versus 12%) compared with organizations with less than 30% women in the leadership team. This is also the case when we look at the voluntary leave ratio (19% versus 27%).

[3] This data is based on the Trust Index employee survey from Great Place to Work with more than 42.000 respondents in the Netherlands. The Trust Index consists of 60 statements on the topics Trust, Pride and Camaraderie. This survey is held yearly among more than 10.000 organizations worldwide.

The Manel

Men are a pertinent and often an overlooked resource for promotion of DEI initiatives in organizations.^[4] Research carried out by BCG in the UK showed that when men don't participate, progress is 30%. When men do participate, progress is THREE times higher, namely 96%. Men find themselves in a unique position with an opportunity to affect change and advocate for equity as powerful stakeholders within their organizations.^[5] Engaging men in conversations and them advocating for gender equity can not only expand but speed up the progress towards gender equity.^[6] When men join the conversation and advocate for gender equity, it inspires others to follow suit and can help organizations in creating inclusive cultures and embody diversity and equity. As a man, one way to affect change in the workplace is by leveraging the power and privilege in order to advocate for women's visibility so that more women are empowered. This behaviour leads to increased representation of women in leadership roles.

With the intention of including men in the conversation on gender equity and influencing aspiring male advocates, BrandedU hosted a manel on 27th June 2022 which comprised of

- Bart Kieffer- Channel Sales Enterprise Lead at Microsoft
- Clayde Menso- Director at International Theater Amsterdam,
- Dirk van Zon- HR Business Partner at Rituals,
- Han Kolff- Chairman of the Board at HeadFirst Group,
- John Olivieria- Publisher at OneWorld,
- Melchior de Ridder- CEO at Nationale Nederlanden Next,
- Noël Heinink- Marketing Director Benelux at L'Oréal,
- Phillipe Stulens- Chief Marketing Officer at Randstad,
- Rafe Rosato- Chief Innovation Officer at DLL,

This discussion was moderated by Nancy Poleon, founder BrandedU and Maarten van Rossum, VP Public Affairs at Lightyear.

[4] Kerr, G. & Pollack, A. (2022). Engaging men: The journey toward equity. Catalyst.

[5] Krentz, M., Wierzba, O., Abouzahr, K., Garcia-Alonso, J., & Taplett, F.B. (2017). Five ways men can improve gender diversity at work. Boston Consulting Group.

[6] Prioritizing equity at a pivotal moment: The Catalyst CEO Champions For Change. (2021). Catalyst

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BECAUSE I AM IN A POSITION OF POWER, I CAN MAKE A CHANGE

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CLAYDE MENSU - DIRECTOR AT INTERNATIONAL
THEATER AMSTERDAM

‘Manels’ or panels that only consist of men, have been traditionally criticized for excluding women from conversations and disregarding them as experts in subject matter. Including only men in conversations often sets the precedent that a man’s voice is more valid, discounting women’s voices and experiences. While a diverse panel discussing topics such as diversity and inclusion enables varied perspectives to come to fore, a homogenous panel only brings similar voices together, completely ignoring any alternative perspectives. Manels tend to reproduce the status quo and often misrepresent the interests of women.^[7]

However, in this case, the idea was to flip the script and have male allies and advocates tell stories on stage of how to advocate for women’s visibility and what other men can do. As long as men don’t participate in gender inclusion, we are stating that gender diversity is a woman’s issue.

At this summit the audience comprised of 50/50 men and women. The condition of attendance was simple - attend in pairs of individuals identifying as a man and a woman. A woman was encouraged to invite an inspiring male advocate to come to the event and a man was encouraged to invite a woman he would like to help move forward in her career. The goal was to ensure that the audience reflected the general population- a 50-50 gender parity. This also ensured that aspiring or practicing advocates in the audience had role models to inspire them by talking about their experiences and the various concrete steps they had taken to perpetuate gender equity in their respective organizations

[7] Rodriguez, J. K., & Günther, E. A. (2020, Oct 14). What’s wrong with manels and what can we do about it. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/whats-wrong-with-manels-and-what-can-we-do-about-them-148068>



The discussion ranged from being aware of your own privilege to practicing positive masculinity and everything in between. While allyship essentially means supporting a minority group while being a part of a dominant group and being able to leverage the social capital available by virtue of membership of the dominant group to create equity for the minority group.^[8] As Maarten van Rossum insightfully highlighted in his story about his time spent in Afghanistan, speaking to women made him realize the importance of getting men into conversations about gender equity. That Maarten, as a man, can influence other men, have conversations with them and influence them to take concrete steps towards gender equity.

That it is not only about empowering women but also influencing men!

The discussion was taken a step further from being allies to being advocates, which Rafe Rosato describes as ‘someone who takes action on your behalf whether you are around or not’.

Advocacy is essentially an active form of allyship which can be a crucial step in enhancing visibility for women and by extension contributing to gender diversity within organisations.

[[8] Madsen, S. R., Townsend, A., & Scribner, R. T. (2020). Strategies That Male Allies Use to Advance Women in the Workplace. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 28(3), 239–259. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1060826519883239>

Based on the engaging and insightful discussion that took place, here are some concrete strategies that all men in leadership positions can implement to advocate for gender equity.

STRATEGY #1 - LEVERAGING YOUR PRIVILEGE

With great privilege comes great responsibility. Men in positions of power can use the privilege to influence change within their organizations. As Clayde Menso aptly puts it, “because I am in a position of power, I can make a change”. The idea is not to speak on behalf of or on top of women’s voice but using your position and the privileges that come along with it to create safe spaces and learnings through uncomfortable conversations about the needs of the minority. Another step that can be taken, as John Oliveira said, ‘share your learnings and open up your networks’. Even today, the ‘old-boys networks’ are often where impactful decisions are taken and these networks give immense social capital to men as opposed to women. Therefore, using your privilege to open these networks for women and giving them space can go a long way in contributing towards women’s visibility. As Rafe Rosato noted, ‘men keep opening doors and women keep running into them’. When Rafe made the statement, his intention was to tell women that if they keep running into doors, they need to dust themselves off and run into them again and again until it’s open. He also wants men to encourage other men to open the doors, invite women in, lend them their credibility and support their efforts (because that is what men do for other men in what is known as the “men’s club”). Imagine how fewer the number of women running into doors would be if privilege was leveraged into opening these doors for them!



STRATEGY #2 - CREATING SAFE SPACE TO BE AUTHENTIC

Creating safe space for minorities is at the core of inclusive culture, as it empowers them to make their voice heard. Both, Melchior de Ridder and John Oliveira stressed the importance of creating a safe environment for women. And a genuinely safe environment would enable all employees to be their authentic selves. Han Kolff also underlined the importance of allowing people to be different. The idea is to create an environment that allows people to be their authentic selves. Melchior de Ridder described a safe environment as a space where one does not need to change or adapt themselves but can simply be themselves. As an advocate who has certain power and privilege one can create a safe space for women by holding themselves accountable to build a culture of inclusivity for everyone.



STRATEGY #3 - START BREAKING THE RULES

(Male) gatekeepers play a crucial role in women's visibility and their consequent success in organizations. More often than not, men in positions of power act as gatekeepers which inhibits women from gaining visibility. Homophily or homosociality are often cited as reasons for gendered gatekeeping.^[9] One way to overcome this as advocates is, as John Oliveira suggested, changing the rules especially when it comes to bias in job description, when recruiters act as gatekeepers countering bias in that process is essential. This notion is seconded by Rafe Rosato where he encourages to 'Not (just) changing rules but breaking them and challenging your own inherent bias' An excellent example of 'breaking the rules' was given by Phillippe Stulens who talked about promoting part time workers within the organization. More often than not, part time work is done by women, and they usually go under the radar when it comes to promotions. Breaking this unsaid rule and promoting part time workers ensures visibility for those women whose hard work would have otherwise gone unnoticed.

[9] Van den Brink, M., & Benschop, Y. (2013). Gender in academic networking: the role of gatekeepers in professorial recruitment. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(3), 460-492. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12060>

STRATEGY #5 - PRACTICING POSITIVE MASCULINITY

Both men and women, as agents of change, can mobilize different kinds of masculinities to impact gender equity in organizations.^[10] Toxic masculinity is a term that has been gaining traction in the past few years. This term refers to the dominant form of masculinity wherein men use dominance, violence, and control to assert their power and superiority. Positive masculinity is the idea that men can be emotionally expressive, have female friends or mentors, and express their emotions without feeling emasculated.^[11] Positive masculinity is an alternative to hegemonic masculinity and a tool that is crucial in creating an inclusive environment for everyone. While for Bart Kieffer positive masculinity is respecting others, for Dirk van Zon it is being able to be vulnerable and aware that femininity can be used to lead/ reach goals and being open to do so as a man and for Phillippe Stulens positive masculinity is letting emotions come into the forefront. Going by either of these notions of positive masculinity, it essentially means practicing behavior which is devoid of toxicity and archaic ideas of what masculinity entails. Noël Heinink provided an excellent example of how positive masculinity can be practiced through the Stand Up training program^[12] that is championed by L'óreal Paris in collaboration with other organizations, wherein individuals are trained to challenge toxic masculinity in the form of street harassment.

[10] Bleijenbergh, I. (2022). How change agents mobilise masculinities to support gender equality in academia. Organization, 135050842210968, 135050842210968-135050842210968. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/13505084221096810>

[11] <https://greenhillrecovery.com/toxic-masculinity-vs-healthy-masculinity/>

[12] Stand Up - Tegen straatintimidatie (standup-international.com)



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

- MELCHIOR DE RIDDER- CEO AT NATIONALE NEDERLANDEN NEXT
- NOËL HEININK- MARKETING DIRECTOR BENELUX AT L'ORÉAL
- MAARTEN VAN ROSSUM, VP PUBLIC AFFAIRS AT LIGHTYEAR
- JOHN OLIVERIA- PUBLISHER AT ONEWORLD
- CLAYDE MENSU - DIRECTOR AT INTERNATIONAL THEATER AMSTERDAM
- BART KIEFFER- CHANNEL SALES ENTERPRISE LEAD AT MICROSOFT
- DIRK VAN ZON- HR BUSINESS PARTNER AT RITUALS
- PHILLIPE STULENS- CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER AT RANDSTAD
- HAN KOLFF- CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AT HEADFIRST GROUP
- RAFE ROSATO- CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER AT DLL
- MARION VAN HAPPEN - CEO AT HEADFIRST GROUP

Conclusions

There certainly are obstacles on the path to be an ally and even more so an advocate. One must be open to have uncomfortable conversations and affect change. There will be those in power resisting change in the status quo and unwilling to be a part of the (uncomfortable) conversation and not present in the room for a discussion. The fact remains, we live in a society where systems were designed not to work for women and minorities. However, instead of resigning to this fact, change can be affected by those in power to enable visibility of women and gender equity. Advocacy is complex and not devoid of challenges and can be supported further with commitment from organisations. Involvement and commitment from the top of the organisation is an absolute condition for promoting the advancement of women.^[12] Organizational accountability coupled with leaders challenging the status quo will certainly enable higher visibility of women in organizations.

Finally, this white paper has been written to shed light on the stories and examples of men who have championed change and leveraged their leadership positions to influence gender equity in their own organizations. BrandedU gathered these leaders to inspire and influence more men, especially those in positions of power, to take up allyship and advocacy in order to perpetuate gender equity. The following list summarizes the various strategies that were discussed above, and male leaders can implement these within their own organizations to advocate for women's visibility and gender equity:

[12] <https://publicaties.mensenrechten.nl/publicatie/acc7bdac-51c0-45da-b8d8-83a9237b2284>

- *Strategy #1- Leveraging your privilege: Use your privilege to open doors for women.*
- *Strategy #2- Creating safe space to be authentic: Hold yourselves accountable to create inclusive spaces.*
- *Strategy #3- Start breaking the rules: Use your position of gatekeeper to change the rules, or better, break them!*
- *Strategy #4- Practicing curiosity: Ask questions, even the uncomfortable ones.*
- *Strategy #5- RESPECT. Be the one who shows your emotions.*

Of course, this is not an exhaustive list of actions which can be taken as advocates or allies, however, it is a list that has been compiled through inspiring stories and experiences of men who have taken the steps described above and influenced change within their own organizations. We hope it inspires you too!

Acknowledgments

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September 5th, 2022.

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