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7 reasons to include women in your organisation

In the first of a regular series for *Ecolibrium*, Jenny Bailey opines on the importance of diversity and inclusion for firms in the HVAC&R industry.

Why women? This is the first question we will ask in this first of a series of articles on women in HVAC&R. We will first ask the question as to why we want women in the industry and then how we go about attracting and retaining women into our industry.

Increasing women in HVAC&R will significantly add to the bottom line of your company, organisation and the sector as a whole. The business case for including women is extremely strong. However, only a relative small (but growing) percentage of AIRAH members are women, and the industry itself is famously male-dominated.

There are seven good reasons to include women in your organisation:

- Attract the best employees
- Reduce staff turnover
- Enhance organisational performance
- Improve access to target markets
- Minimise legal risks
- Enhance reputation
- It engages men more effectively

In this article we will address the first three reasons and in part two we will address the next four.

LURE THE BEST

Half of the world's population are women. They also represent more than half of the graduates at universities. Having the best people is critical to your organisation's performance. By only choosing men to work in your organisation, you are picking your team of employees from only half of the population. It is like picking the Australian cricket team from only Victoria, Queensland and South Australia. Half of your team would be missing to be replaced by B-grade players. Michael Clarke would never have made it into the team. Think women – think talent.



A Women of AIRAH social function.

REDUCE TURNOVER

Employees are very attuned to “fairness”. They want to work in an organisation that they consider to be fair and equitable.

Organisations that have low numbers of women either fail to attract or retain women and are perceived as “unfair” to women, or worse, discriminating against women. Even those individuals who are being advantaged by discrimination against others feel that the organisation is unfair and unfair workplaces are uncomfortable to be in. So people leave. Working in an unfair workplace is like playing football when the referee is biased. No one likes it. Although the calls might be going your way at the moment – it is not in the spirit of the game and the referee might turn on you any moment. In an environment like this, people leave.

The cost of employee turnover is estimated to be over 75 per cent of an employee's wage. The Australian Institute of Human Resources suggests that the cost of staff turnover is costing the Australian economy more than \$20 billion per year.

ENHANCED PERFORMANCE

Research in multiple companies has shown that organisations with greater diversity simply perform better.

Workplace diversity is like a legal performance-enhancing drug for the organisation.

The possible reasons for improved performance are many. Simply having better talent (as discussed above) is one of them. It also appears that greater diversity increases the diversity of perspectives and ideas, enabling better decisions to be made within an organisation.

It is also most likely that when people feel like they are working in a “fair” workplace that respects them for who they are, rather than having to project an image of being a “blokey bloke” that employees are less stressed, contribute more of themselves to work, and are more loyal.

And many of these reasons benefit men as well as the bottom line.

*Workplace Gender Equity Agency, *The Business Case for Gender Equality*, March 2013. ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Would you like to know more?

For those of you who want to further understand the gender-issue, search YouTube for Michael Kimmel's talk, “Why Gender Equity is Good for Everyone Including Men”.