



HILLARY CLINTON	SARAH PALIN
Feminist	Post-feminist
Tried to behave like a man to succeed	Used her difference as a woman to succeed
Followed traditional career woman's path, breaking to raise family	Raising family while maintaining career

Palin's legacy provides hope for ambitious women

Succeeding as a woman in a man's world

By Dr Paul Vanderbroeck

During the American presidential election campaign of 2008, Sarah Palin became a controversial figure for women and men alike. Yet, as regards the issue of gender balance in leadership, she has brought about a positive paradigm shift. Even though she was not elected, she has demonstrated that ambitious career women have more options to choose from than either postponing childbirth or emulating male behaviour.

Ever since Hillary Clinton attempted to become presidential nominee, gender has been on the public agenda. Hillary's experienced a painful double defeat – first to become the Democratic candidate and then to become Obama's running mate – a factor that no doubt helped to launch Sarah Palin's candidacy as McCain's VP.

HILLARY CLINTON ABOUT EQUALITY; SARAH PALIN ABOUT DIFFERENCE

When comparing Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin one can spot a generational gap between them. Hillary is feminist; Sarah is post-feminist. Hillary is about equality; Sarah is about difference.

Hillary tried to prove that she could be as good, as tough, and as serious as the boys – as many career women do. She even dressed up in a masculine way in her pant suits, for example. And she almost made it, as many highly talented women almost make it to the top.

Sarah Palin, on the other hand, tries to show that she is as capable as a man in a very different way. She effectively uses her difference as a woman to gain attention and to deliver tough messages with a smile. As a result, she got further than Hillary in the Presidential race.

Interestingly, at one point during the Primaries, Hillary managed to improve the odds in her favour by shedding a tear, in which she was displaying her femininity. If only she had continued on that path....

SARAH PALIN'S POST-FEMINIST MODEL FOR THE CAREER WOMAN

Furthermore, Hillary followed a traditional career woman's path. First, she went to college, then she started her career and then she started a family. Later, she restarted her career after her husband had had his turn first. Sarah Palin, however, turned this model upside down. Her path of family and career has shown ambitious women another option than waiting for the biological alarm bell to ring.

For this model to work, it is important to distinguish "home" from "office" so as to create a workable mix between the two. In her roles as mayor and governor, Palin used her powers to change the usual approach to office location, working times, and the place for child care to match her personal and professional needs.

Her husband, Todd Palin also seems to have been instrumental in enabling Palin to combine having a young family with her career, without him having to reverse gender roles.

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Feminists tend to confuse equal rights with being the same. Organizations tend to confuse equal opportunity with equal treatment when it comes to gender balance.

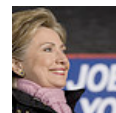
EQUALITY IS ABOUT TREATING MEN AND WOMEN AS DIFFERENT

Actually equal opportunity is about different and fair treatment. That means being aware of the differences between men and women when it comes to needs, ambitions, competition, communication, and motivational patterns.

To attract and retain female talent and to get the most out of its potential, organizations need to understand the different male and female leadership styles and to adapt their culture accordingly.

Sarah Palin has not broken a glass ceiling yet. She has not been in a job position that no woman has reached before. But she has shattered some paradigms:

- That a career women needs to be feminist and pro-abortion
- That women need to be like men in order to succeed in a man's world



Hillary Clinton, old-style feminist



Sarah Palin, post-feminist

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Women are individuals and both corporations and society will benefit from allowing them to break out of traditional and newly traditional stereotypes.

Palin has demonstrated that there are more options open to women. This is an important contribution to promoting gender balance in leadership.

It should give food for thought to any progressive CEO who still believes that women need to behave like men in order to succeed or that it is necessary to treat women and men as identical. Recognising women's individuality and difference will help any CEO build a set of leaders who are from both genders and truly complementary to one another, releasing the power of true gender diversity.

About the author

As executive coach Dr Paul Vanderbroeck helps female leaders to become successful. He is a co-author of Leading in the Top Team and lives in Geneva, Switzerland.