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### "Women Boost the Profession and the Bottom Line"

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The women's movement has long been based on the premise of equality—that women are just as capable as men.

A growing number of studies, however, are showing that female managers outperform their male counterparts in several key areas, from motivating others and fostering communication to producing high-quality work and listening to others, according to a recent report in *Business Week Magazine*.

The kicker is that none of these studies set out to compare the abilities of men vs. women. According to *Business Week*, they "stumbled" onto the findings as they compiled hundreds of routine performance evaluations.

You just have to smile.

How many women do you know, perhaps even yourself, who go around trying to emulate the men they work with? We try to care about sports; we learn to golf; we try to be one of the boys, when, all this time, they should have been trying to be one of the girls.

Some corporations, according to **Business Week**, even go so far as to admit having a profemale bias in their hiring.

Of course, just because women outperform men in many critical areas doesn't mean we're doing better than they are in the corporate world. Let's not kid ourselves. Of the 500 largest U.S. companies, only two are led by women: Hewlett-Packard Co. and Avon Products. Of the major U.S. law firms, almost none boast women managing partners.

And women are still barely making a dent in the partnership ranks, the legal profession's equivalent of "middle management". Of the 25 highest-grossing firms in Texas, women make up between 6 percent and 24 percent (the biggest firms were mostly in the teens), according to **Texas Lawyer's** recent report on women in the law. See "Women Lawyers Make Strides at Texas Firms—Slowly," **Texas Lawyer**, Nov. 27, 2000, page 44.

#### **The Problem**

So, what the problem? Why, if we're supposedly better at managing than men, are we running so far behind?

Part of the problem is that our drive to do good work keeps us hunkered down at our desks while our male counterparts are out forming alliances with the people who can make or break their careers.

Now, anybody who's familiar with this column knows that I've never advocated schmoozing meticulous work. I still believe that the unskilled lawyer who plays a great game of golf will eventually be exposed for the fraud he is. Conversely, however, the great technician who has no people skills will probably never be plucked from his office and tapped to lead the next big project.

The lesson, then, isn't for women to forego mastering their crafts in lieu of knowing how to charm a room. The lesson is that we need to look up from our desks long enough to see what's going on outside our offices. Often, the male-only powwow we dismiss as being counterproductive is what's helping cement the alliance between the associate and partner that may

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later help the associate elevate to the partner ranks.

Another weakness is that women, in corporate America and in the law, tend to shy away from risky assignments that could, if botched, wreck their careers. Whether they're delusionally self-confident or justifiably so, men don't do that as much.

In general, men tend to seek the spotlight when the stakes are highest. It's the same gene that makes Little Leaguers who haven't even hit a single all season say "put me in, coach" when the bases are loaded. It's the reason most men put the against-all-odds football movie "Rudy" at the top of their must-see list.

Women just don't get that. After all, why would you take the chance that you might throw away everything you've worked for?

Well, the truth is, the world can be a fairly forgiving place. And the death penalty is hardly ever meted out to those who screw up pleadings. So, go ahead and risk it. If you screw up, big deal. But if you don't, the payoff could be plentiful.

The long and the short of it is that while women definitely need to learn how to play the game better, the legal profession also needs to recognize the growing body of evidence that women aren't merely fungible billing units who can add to the bottom line. With proper care and feeding, women can do much to boost the profession's level of practice and its quality of life.

Which, come to think of it, can't help but add to the bottom line.