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Thursday, May. 14, 2009

Women Will Rule Business

By Claire Shipman and Katty Kay

Work-life balance. In most corporate circles, it's the sort of phrase that gives hard-charging managers the hives, bringing to mind yoga-infused, candlelit meditation sessions and — more frustratingly — rows of empty office cubicles.

So, what if we renamed work-life balance? Let's call it something more masculine and appealing, something like ... um ... Make More Money. That might lift heads off desks. A few people might show up at a meeting to discuss that new phenomenon driving the bottom line: Women, and the way we want to work, are extremely good for business.

Let's start with the female management style. It turns out it's not soft; it's lucrative. The workplace-research group Catalyst studied 353 *Fortune* 500 companies and found that those with the most women in senior management had a higher return on equities — by more than a third.

Are the women themselves making the difference? Or are these smart firms that make smart moves, like promoting women? There is growing evidence that in today's marketplace the female management style is not only distinctly different but also essential. Studies from Cambridge University and the University of Pittsburgh suggest that women manage more cautiously than men do. They focus on the long term. Men thrive on risk, especially when surrounded by other men. Wouldn't the economic crisis have unfolded a bit differently if Lehman Brothers had had a few more women on board?

Women are also less competitive, in a good way. They're consensus builders, conciliators and collaborators, and they employ what is called a transformational leadership style — heavily engaged, motivational, extremely well suited for the emerging, less hierarchical workplace. Indeed, when the

Chartered Management Institute in the U.K. looked ahead to 2018, it saw a work world that will be more fluid and more virtual, where the demand for female management skills will be stronger than ever. Women, CMI predicts, will move rapidly up the chain of command, and their emotional-intelligence skills may become ever more essential.

That trend will accelerate with the looming talent shortage. The Employment Policy Foundation estimated that within the next decade there would be a 6 million – person gap between the number of college graduates and the number of college-educated workers needed to cover job growth. And who receives the majority of college and advanced degrees? Women. They also control 83% of all consumer purchases, including consumer electronics, health care and cars. Forward-looking companies understand they need women to figure out how to market to women.

All that — the female management style, education levels, purchasing clout — is already being used, by pioneering women and insightful companies, to create a female-friendly working environment, in which the focus is on results, not on time spent in the office chair. On efficiency, not schmoozing. On getting the job done, however that happens best — in a three-day week, at night after the kids go to bed, from Starbucks.

And here's the real kicker. When a company gives employees freedom, it doesn't just feel good or get shiny, happy workers — productivity goes up. Ask firms like Capitol One, which runs a company without walls or mandatory office time. Or Best Buy, which implemented a system called ROWE — results-only work environment — and found that productivity, in some cases, shot up 40%. Flexibility is no longer a favor to be handed out like candy at a children's birthday party; it's a compelling business strategy.

So we need to get rid of the nutty-crunchy moral component of the work-life balance and make a business case for it. It's easy to do. In fact, a decade from now, companies will understand that hiring lots of women, and letting them work the way they want, will help them Make More Money.

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