LETTER OF THE DAY

Presence alone does not always translate into equal opportunity

On March 8, the world marked International Women's Day. In many organisations there were messages of appreciation, flowers, and speeches celebrating the contribution of women. While these gestures are meaningful, they should also prompt a more honest reflection: what is the real experience of women in our workplaces every day?

Over the years, I have worked with many organisations and interacted with women across different levels of employment from entry-level staff to senior leadership. One thing is clear: women are present in the workplace in significant numbers, and they are contributing immensely to the success of their institutions. Yet presence alone does not always translate into equal opportunity.

In many workplaces, women work extremely hard, deliver results, and often carry heavy responsibilities both at work and at home. However, when it comes to leadership opportunities, recognition, or decision-making influence, the path can sometimes become less clear. It is not always due to deliberate exclusion. Often it is the result of workplace habits and cultures that have never been intentionally examined.

For example, in some organisations, important decisions are still made in informal spaces where women may not always be present.

In others, leadership potential is often associated with visibility and confidence qualities that some workplaces unintentionally encourage more in men than in women. These may seem like small issues, but over time they shape who progresses and who remains on the margins.



Another reality many women face is the expectation to constantly prove themselves. While competence should be the standard for everyone, women in many workplaces still feel that they must work twice as hard to demonstrate the same level of credibility.

Organisations that genuinely want to succeed must begin to look at these realities with honesty. Creating fair workplaces does not require complex theories or lengthy policy statements. Often it begins with simple but deliberate actions.

Leaders, for example, can ask practical questions when making decisions about promotions, assignments, and leadership opportunities: Are we giving capable women the same chances to lead major initiatives? Are we actively identifying and developing female talent within our teams?

Mentorship is another area where organisations can make a real difference. Many successful professionals men and women alike can trace their growth to someone who guided them, encouraged them, and opened doors for them. Organisations should encourage experienced leaders to mentor emerging female professionals and help them navigate their careers.

Workplace culture also matters greatly. Women should feel comfortable expressing their ideas in meetings, challenging perspectives respectfully, and participating fully in discussions. When organisations create environments where different voices are valued, they benefit from richer thinking and better decisions.

It is also important to acknowledge the realities many women manage outside the workplace. In many societies, women still carry a significant share of family and caregiving responsibilities. Supportive workplace practices—such as reasonable flexibility and understanding leadership—can make a significant difference in enabling women to remain productive and engaged at work.

At the same time, women themselves must continue investing in their professional growth. Confidence, continuous learning, and the courage to pursue leadership opportunities are essential. Women bring valuable perspectives to organisations, and their voices should not be held back by doubt or hesitation.

As the reflections around International Women's Day settle, perhaps the most meaningful step organisations can take is to move beyond celebration and examine their everyday practices. Real progress will not be measured by speeches or slogans, but by the opportunities women actually experience in their workplaces throughout the year.

When organisations intentionally create room for women to grow, lead, and contribute fully, they do more than honour a day on the calendar—they strengthen the future of their institutions.

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