



XX FACTOR by Eleanor Beaton

Good girls don't

According to a new report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Halifax women take home 70 cents for every man's dollar, 10 cents less than other working women in Canada.

The causes of pay inequity are complex. There is anecdotal evidence that in some companies, men are still offered higher salaries upon signing, just... 'coz. Taking time out of the working world to stay home and care for kids is a personal choice many women make that may be great for family, but hard on long-term earning power.

There are many excellent organizations working with companies to address gender inequity at an organizational level. Their mantra is usually that addressing pay inequity is not about "fixing women" but about working with employers to identify and rectify gender bias.

School rewards the Good Girl Syndrome. Business overworks and underpays it.

Having seen far too many women attempt to white-knuckle their way to the top within organizations that still consider a weekend fishing trip with the boys to be a great, inclusive, team-building activity, I strongly support the "fix the organization" approach.

But in my work with emerging women leaders, I have noticed other potential causes for the pay problem. Take Jenna.

She's a PR manager for a large company. Her performance reviews are always stellar, and she takes great pride in being a problem solver and team player. Yet, she has been passed over for two promotions and has been unable to successfully negotiate a pay raise. Latent gender bias is possible but unlikely; Jenna's employer is a progressive company that walks its talk with respect to women's empowerment.

So why can't she get ahead?

The Good Girl Syndrome. Jenna has it. Bad. Like many women, Jenna applies the A-plus student mentality (an industrious, heads-down, approval-collecting approach that currently sees girls out-performing boys at school) to the world of work. School rewards the Good Girl Syndrome. Business overworks and underpays it.

Jenna has brilliant ideas for what is possible within her department. But in an effort to keep everyone happy, she fails to

set boundaries, mistakenly believes she needs to do everything she is asked, and watches as month after month, her best ideas wilt on the vine because she has no time to execute them. She has a nagging sense that even though her boss recognizes and appreciates her contribution, she still doesn't think others will respect Jenna as a leader.

Her boss is right.

Witness: moments after Jenna and I diagnose the challenge — a lack of leadership presence, Jenna says, "I think I should go to my boss and ask her what her vision is for my role." Jenna is trying to figure out how to get an A. Habit has instilled the best way to do this is to find out from the "teacher" how to get an A. I counsel Jenna to first understand her boss's objectives and then to create and confidently present *her own vision* for how she can make this happen.

Will she be successful in redefining her role? Perhaps. Will she annoy certain colleagues by saying 'no' in order to focus on important long-term objectives? Probably. Both are OK.

Setting boundaries, creating a vision, mindfully disrupting the status quo, owning your ideas and presenting them with confidence...these are the activities that bestow employees of any gender the credibility that bosses see as worthy of promotions into senior roles...and the accompanying pay raise.

But the Good Girl Syndrome inculcates women to put others first, fear criticism, defer to authority, keep their heads down, overwork and underestimate the importance of being visible. The Good Girl Syndrome can cause brilliant, talented women to fade into the background, and thus be easily overlooked and consistently underpaid.

Research tells us the pay equity problem won't be solved for nearly a century (if the trends continue, add a decade for Halifax). Addressing the Good Girl Syndrome is probably a quicker fix.

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FEEDBACK

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