

BIG IDEA //

Women Will Refuse to Be Treated as Anything Less Than Equal

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What has changed in the culture to allow the issue of gender equality to come to the forefront?

We've finally reached a tipping point to stand up to refuse to allow to be treated as anything less than equal. That's a major change. Women have been galvanized. The fact that *Lean In* sold 4m copies and women are 57 percent of the college grads shows how there have been major changes in terms of how women are perceived in American society. The movement has been building for a long time; now, it's time to see how powerfully women will speak up on their own behalf in politics, entertainment, etc. With any luck, it's a movement that is here to stay.

Has there been a specific tipping point?

It hasn't been one particular thing, and that's what is most interesting about it. A lot of people say it's a combination of the election and the #MeToo movement, but it's been growing for years. This year I was at the Women's Farmer Union in North Dakota and the

She Summit in NYC, and what you see with women across the political and economic spectrum is a growing sense of frustration, facing barriers that they were previously told had been struck down.

It's been 25 years since Anita Hill testified against Clarence Thomas. What's powerful about #MeToo is that so many women have been intentionally silenced. Women have been silenced through settlement agreements. Lots of women were unaware that they were not alone, because of these enforced silences. That all changed with Gretchen Carlson and Fox News.

How can an organization get ahead by not just talking the talk?

There are some really simple and fundamental things that every organization needs to do. First and foremost, every organization needs an outside ombudsman to look at claims, and not rely on human resources to be the ones investigating. Employees don't always see HR as an ally. Companies have to be willing to go out and be public with valid claims, so the perpetrators go on to new jobs. It was the right thing to out Matt

Lauer. Fundamentally, we need to have zero tolerance for people who have unacceptable behavior.

The price of silence has to be greater than the price of transparency. It takes a lot of men stepping up. Allies are huge, and of course we need men. None of this changes if men don't change their behavior. Ultimately men are the deciders. The extent that the paradigm shifts is that men take responsibility for the shift. Until men take a leading role tackling the bias, we're going to continue to face it.

Any organizations “doing it right?”

I don't think there's an answer to that. There are some companies making major strides. Some sectors are taking it more seriously than others. Are there some pockets of hope? Absolutely. But we have a long way to go. Peter Grower of Bloomberg has been rallying people to encourage more board diversity in the US. These are very deep-seeded systemic issues that take a long time to resolve.