

Partnership with M&S

40% of senior positions now filled by high performing women, accelerated by Female Leadership Development Program.

The challenge of female representation at Board level and the progression of women is a well-documented topic. Many businesses are recognizing that encouraging and enabling women to thrive is not just good for individuals themselves, but makes sound business sense. M&S is one of those pioneering organizations.

BACKGROUND

As a company, M&S prioritizes creating connected, engaged workforces. They strive to maintain at least 30% female directors on the Board and have exceeded this: 36% of their Board is female. In their senior management team, female representation also accounts for 40% globally.

M&S is committed to strengthening the pipeline of senior female executives within the business. Working with Talking Talent, they are making progress towards ensuring that there are no barriers to women succeeding in the business, at every level including the highest levels within M&S.

The program began in 2014.

PROGRAMS

The program at M&S is a true coaching program, not a formulaic 'one – size -fits-all' training course. It isn't about 'fixing' women or telling them how to adapt, but rather helping individuals to unlock their strengths and act authentically.

It began with a pilot to assess the value in offering development support specifically targeted at women and the merit of supporting specific female needs. As a result of outstanding feedback, a second cohort was run between July 2015 – Jan 2016 and has continued since.

- The business objectives of the program are to:
- Support women to reach their potential
- Enable women to develop skills that weren't touched by the current development offer
- In the long term, support a move towards gender balance in senior roles
- Encourage managers to think differently
- Feel different to existing M&S programs
- Create change ambassadors

The program is one strand of activity which supports M&S's strategic objective to create a High Performance culture, defined as "driving business results through a high performance culture where everyone is inspired to be the best they can be". The program is made up of four one hour one-to-one and six group coaching sessions over a six month period, and topics include:

- Communication & Coaching Skills
- Beliefs and Confidence
- Political Savvy
- Networking
- Authentic Leadership
- Presence & Gravitas
- Career Planning

Individual goals arising out of the program are tied to career development plans. Additionally, each individual is also tasked with coaching each other in between modules to hone their coaching skills and support the culture they wish to maintain. Engagement and integration of line managers as key stakeholders in the process has ensured that development is robust and sustainable, and has been key to the program's success.

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LATEST RESULTS

The program has helped M&S deliver their strategy of having 40% of senior positions filled by high performing women. This is a significant shift in their data; through focusing on the female talent pipeline their senior leadership population in the UK has moved from 29% female to 43% female over the last 2 years. Additionally all non-executive director long lists in 2014/15 included 50% female candidates. M&S have also been listed in The Times Top 50 Employers for Women 2016 for the 6th consecutive year.

The program has also had an overwhelmingly positive impact on the individuals. It has unlocked a passion, ambition and drive in them that some didn't even know they had. The program learnings have genuinely stuck and been actively used by participants – many said that the program has driven them to make genuine changes at work; more so than any other learning intervention they have experienced. Individuals are more confident and focused on achieving their ambitions, have new tools to give onward support to their own teams and are fired up to get involved and drive organizational change.

Line managers have actively commented on a change in their team members. They have also felt a personal impact; particularly male line managers have remarked that they had no idea of the barriers women face and had no concept of how differently women feel and behave in the workplace.

By raising the debate M&S have increased the focus on female talent and have influenced increased emphasis on reviewing the gender data and active plans for developing senior women.

“Two of my team have been delegates on this program; I’ve been amazed at how their confidence has grown and this has translated into a tangible improvement in their delivery and how they work with others. The program has been integral to our goal to drive a high performance culture where everyone is supported to reach their potential. It has also contributed to increased collaboration across our office population – I’m delighted that this is positively reflected in the numbers of women at the most senior levels of our business”

Sarah Findlater, Head of Organizational Development