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It really is a man's world

06 Jun 2008 | Filed under: Women & Work.

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For most British woman the workplace is still very much a man's world, with eight out of 10 believing promotion is all about jobs for the boys and three quarters claiming to have experienced discrimination at first hand.

The poll by UK law firm Peninsula has also pointed the finger firmly at company managers and bosses for failing to stamp out gender bias or to curb the sort of workplace cultures where such bias is allowed to flourish.

The situation is particularly bad in the UK IT industry where, according to a poll by recruitment firm InterQuest nine out of 10 female IT professionals believe the industry is biased against them.

Its research found one in three said they had experienced sexism in the workplace, yet seven out of 10 of the men interviewed did not believe discrimination was an issue at all.

Peter Done, managing director at Peninsula, said: "Company bosses are the first form of prevention when it comes to preventing sexual discrimination. All workers should be treated equally, whether at the job interview or on the job."

Too often the problem was simply down to the fact that women did not feel able to approach their employer with a complaint for fear of being ridiculed or getting a "black mark" on their record, he argued.

"Employers need to ensure they have an equal opportunities policy in place and that it is communicated to all staff and management. In today's society it is quite difficult to comprehend that such discrimination continues but it seems obvious that it does.

"Tribunal cases for sexual discrimination see record awards being given and it's not just the financial penalties imposed but the reputation of both the employer and the firm in hand," added Done.

"Workers should not be passed over for promotion because they are women, they should be encouraged to seek career prospects where the opportunity arises, their merits should be taken into consideration and whether they are male or female should not determine the outcome of whether they are right for the job," he continued.

Jobs for the boys may be the easiest, most comfortable, hiring route for male managers, but it is also short-sighted and potentially very damaging for a business, the Confederation of British Industry and union body the TUC have argued.

Firms that took steps to improve diversity in the workplace earned real business benefits, the

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two UK organisations argued earlier this week.

Companies that looked beyond the "usual suspects" for staff and employed people on the basis of their abilities and potential, regardless of their sex, race, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion, often reported higher morale and productivity, improved retention rates and lower recruitment costs.

They also had a better understanding of customers' needs, were better equipped to reach untapped markets and were more successful in addressing skills shortages.

Richard Lambert, director-general of the CBI, said: "Employers who take steps to encourage a more diverse workforce notice huge benefits from doing so, whether it is hiring skilled staff, understanding their customers' needs better or more fundamentally through improved morale and productivity.

"It does not have to be hard work or legally complex either - simply making the effort to work out your precise needs, reaching out as widely as you can then hiring, training or promoting the best person on merit," he added.


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