

how to handle women

Personnel Supervision Series



INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS DIVISION
HUGHES AIRCRAFT COMPANY

How to Handle Women



Have you ever wondered what those female employees of yours talk about during the "freshen up" period in the washroom? Well, brother, you'll never know. But you can speculate. And it's quite likely that at least some of their conversation is about you -- and what kind of supervisor you are.

And while on the subject, just what kind of a supervisor of women are you?

WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT:

- To supervise women successfully, you have to --
- • • recognize in what respects they are different from men,
 - • • treat them accordingly,
 - • • and not let them know it.

Important as it is, this formula doesn't give all the answers to the questions about women. If you knew all the answers, where would the enchantment be?

But for that less enchanted and more practical area of living -- the business world -- it suggests some clues on how to maintain peace and efficiency in supervising your women employees.

"LITTLE MEN"?

During World War II, when many women went to work for the first time, a group of learned analysts put out a pamphlet on the female employee. "Women," they said, "are simply little men."

But it just isn't so.

The old phrase, "the opposite sex," is more accurate. Women are different and most of them, including those who won't admit it, want to be treated as such.

They feel the difference in many ways. In spite of the democratic relationship between the sexes today, the role of "achievers" still belongs to men. That's why women in business either take a back seat, or drive themselves hard to "prove themselves."

*Agreed! Just as
silly as saying
"Men are big
women."*

During the war, psychologists used aptitude tests to determine in what skills women excelled men. Some of the findings were:

1. Speed on manual-, finger-, and tweezerdexterity manipulations. This makes women ideal for such jobs as typing, light inspection, packing, small parts assembly, etc., and for work requiring the use of precision tools.

2. Better sight and color sense. Actually, the ratio of color blindness as between men and women is 8 to 1. Women excel in all tests that involve matching off or pairing items by shape or color.

3. Patience. Women adjust to routine work much better than men. The average woman is superior to the average man in doing exacting work. She pays more attention to details.

That's why women do consistently better on repetitive work. It also explains why they do such an efficient job in clerical occupations.

PHYSICAL DIFFERENCE

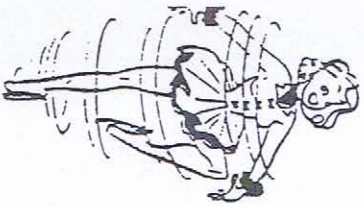
The facts of nature can't be changed --



and while women can take quite a bit of punishment, they do go through the physical and emotional cycles nature designed for them.

They aren't as strong, or as muscular, or as big as men. The average woman's physical strength is about half that of the average man. Even a large woman will not be as powerful as a smaller man. Her muscles are long and slim, while a man's muscles are made for heavier work.

Woman's bone structure is such that her greatest strength is in the thigh and pelvic regions to help her carry out her primary job of bearing children. Her internal structure on the whole is unsuitable for long periods of standing. She can't take extended pressure or long, unbroken periods of constant activity. On the other hand, she's less susceptible to cold and heat.



CRITICIZING WOMEN

Women "take things personally." One psychologist illustrates it by giving this example:

Ask a man, "Where did you buy this steak?"
He'll answer: "At Green's Meat Market."

Ask his wife the same question, and she'll answer, with some emotion: "Why? What's wrong with it?"

In the business world, such reactions are due partly to the fact that women are on the defensive. It's not only the feeling that as a group they have to prove themselves, but even more important, it's that a woman tends to see almost everything in terms of herself.

Important point that explains just about all behavior rules many men.

For example, when you are discussing her work, a woman is more likely to think you are discussing her. It's a rare woman who realizes that you can consider her work separate and apart from her as a person.

Of course, you can't protect your women employees from every slight, real or imaginary. But because they are so sensitive, it's even more important in dealing with them than with men to follow the well-established rules of criticism-and-praise:

- • • Never take a woman for granted. Your failure to comment favorably is likely to be interpreted as disapproval.
- • • Criticism should always be closely linked with encouragement and appreciation.
- • • Women expect praise in greater quantities than do men.

LOGIC AND INTUITION

Women's logic is one of the deeper mysteries of life to the average male. No woman can tell you more about it than Shakespeare did when he had a female character say: "I have no other but a woman's reason: I think him so because I think him so."

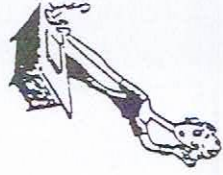


It's a waste of time to tell a woman she's being illogical. The average woman starts off on the premise that the way she feels about something is itself a most compelling argument. No matter how strange and wonderful her conclusion, to her it's "perfectly logical."

If they aren't as logical as men, they are sometimes one jump ahead in their thinking. This may be "women's intuition."

It's not as mysterious as it sometimes seems. The fact is that women are extra-sensitive to other human beings, observe them more carefully than most men do, and "feel" their moods.

The knowledge that comes from this sensitivity is registered and stored away somewhere in the nether regions of a woman's mind. It pushes out when the right set of circumstances calls it forth.



While the average man concentrates on the job at hand, the woman working with him is also interested in how he is affected by the job, and indirectly, how she is affected by him. And so most women can tell "intuitively" from the way a man looks, behaves and speaks, what kind of mood he's in and what kind of day it's going to be. Just ask any secretary about her boss.

The simple truth is that women are more interested in people than in things. Here are some illustrations of this fact that relate to your work as supervisor.

TALKIE-TALK

Most of the women who work for you could give you more information about the other people in the department than a dozen personnel files could hold. Quite a bit about you, too.

Women do gossip -- because they're intensely interested in people. And talking about others is a by-product of that interest. When this love of talk is frustrated because information has not been given to them, you can rest assured of one thing: it won't stop them from talking. Before they'll "die of curiosity," they are sure to start inventing and circulating rumors.



So give heed to the requirements of the female intercom -- or you'll be kept busy chasing down feminine fantasies.

SHOULD YOU SHUSH THEM?

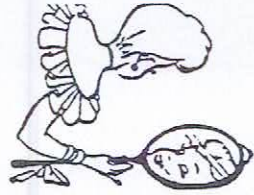
If your type of work allows it, give the women an opportunity to talk together frequently. There is considerable statistical evidence that women work better and produce more if they can socialize.

Don't just take a woman's word for it. Here's the statement of three researchers at Harvard, reporting findings in one company.

"The only way the women felt they could make their factory life interesting and meaningful was through conversation with one another and the development of informal groups."

THE GREAT CONFORMISTS

When women are interested in things, it's generally because people are somehow involved. Clothes? -- it's to attract a man or to show to another woman. Mirrors? -- well, woman is one of the few female animals to whom the most beautiful plumage of the species is given. That's why she nourishes it with loving care -- sometimes during office hours.



Denied the aggressiveness of the male, she long ago developed a more subtle approach in her dealings with people. The use of the mirror is taken up at an early age -- and it's habit-forming.

Men might call it vanity, but actually women do these things only because they're people-minded. They want to enjoy -- in fact, they need -- the good opinion of others if they're going to be happy.

To some extent, all human beings behave as they think others expect them to behave. Women, in particular, usually conform to the general behavior pattern, because most of them are afraid of being considered different -- or peculiar.

Remember the introduction of the "new look" in women's clothes? It was bitterly resented by millions of women -- but they all finally succumbed and let their hems down. Why? Men are encouraged to show initiative and daring; women are expected to go along with the crowd.

That women are conformists is a fact which should be of the utmost importance to anyone who works with women. It can be put to advantage in dealing with women on the job. The first piece of information you want about a group of women employees is: Who among them is the "style-setter"?

Sounded pretty! I thought also interesting. All want "new look" dresses - but want any two who kept to wear same dress.

Once you have that information, you're in a position to influence the group. Whether it's a question of introducing new procedures, setting new standards, improving discipline, etc. -- make sure that you get her support. But be sure to address yourself to everybody in the group as well as the "style-setter." Use her to back you up, but don't forget that all of the women are concerned with your attitude towards them as individuals.

FEMALE TYPES

There are as many different types of women as there are types of men. The most that can be said is that a given woman falls into a general classification only in the roughest sense.

But broad generalizations can be useful -- if you use them right -- as general guides, always remembering the differences in degree. Let's look at several types from the standpoint of the supervisor.

I. The Career-Woman

She's really convinced that she wants to get ahead on her own. She feels she can handle her job as well as -- or better than -- any man. She'd be the first to deny that she needs a man's help.

As a matter of fact, she has a keen competitive streak, which is even more exaggerated when her competitor is a man. Marriage doesn't interest her too much. The job comes first.

Biggest danger in handling her: Taking her at her own evaluation -- she thinks she doesn't want expressions of approval from men.



Most important measures in dealing with her:

1. Don't be deceived by her show of hard-headed independence. She may know how good she is, but your words will give her more pleasure than she's willing to admit.
2. Indicate goals ahead that she is capable of achieving.
3. When she makes errors (which will sometimes happen because she holds back on consulting with others), your corrections should be low-pressure. The "sting" of a rebuke is hard for her to take.

II. The Old-Maid

Not every unmarried woman falls into this

category. But there is a type that takes on this pattern very naturally.

The difference between her and the Career Woman is that the Old Maid would prefer marriage to work. In the absence of the family she wants and needs, this woman compensates by making her job a substitute for the average woman's life-purpose. Her work is paramount in her existence, and she is usually a loyal employee.

You are an important figure in her life. She'll talk about you in her leisure time to her friends. She may exaggerate your virtues, and show you the greatest loyalty; or concentrate on your faults, and be constantly in opposition to you.

Biggest danger in handling her: She may get in the hair of other employees who are not so completely concentrated on their work as she is. This can happen in two ways: she may be very critical of her younger co-workers (which happens more often) or she mothers them and "sacrifices" herself to help them.

Most important measures in dealing with her:

1. Keep an eye on her relations with her

*How Adelle got
her way, why good,
it's worse.....*

follow-employees. Let her know that you're aware of her helpfulness to them when that's the case. If she's really annoying them, call her attention to it gently at first; more firmly if the situation continues.

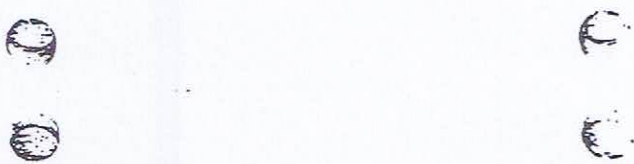
2. Where possible give her extra attention -- special additional assignments, for instance, on the basis that she is more experienced or mature. This is one case where the other women are not likely to be jealous of your relationship with her.

3. You can expect steady performance over long periods of time -- but don't be surprised by sudden fits of depression during which the quality of her work slips. Avoid criticism at this time -- look for possibilities of pointing out her accomplishments; otherwise it may take her longer to bounce back.

III. The Married Woman

The married women referred to here are those who are planning to stay on the job indefinitely either because they have no children or because the family depends on their earnings.

This type of woman is usually a mature person with a real sense of responsibility. And she does a steady, efficient job.





Biggest danger in handling her: As she is holding down two jobs -- at home and at work -- she has her own particular problems. Her other responsibilities may keep her from her work at times.

Most important measures in dealing with her:

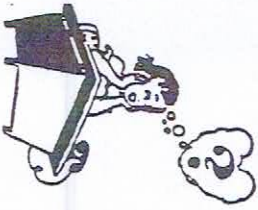
1. In giving orders and instructions, don't overburden her with unnecessary details. She has no small skill in running things.

2. In assigning overtime work, of course, you want to try others before asking the married woman. If it's unavoidable, give her as much notice as possible so she can make arrangements.

3. Encourage her to come up with suggestions. As a married woman with a household to run, she is probably an efficient "management engineer." Her experience can pay off with good ideas.

IV. Waiting for "Mr. Right"

This young girl isn't looking for promotion and, in fact, has few incentives to work really hard. She's waiting for the wedding bells.



Whether she will carry out her duties efficiently depends to a great extent on the kind of supervision she gets -- whether you can stimulate her to seek the respect of the group -- and yourself.

Biggest danger in handling her: She may be completely wrapped up in herself, in which case she won't concentrate on her work for any length of time. The damage, then, may be multiplied by the reaction of her co-workers; they may either imitate her or resent her.

Most important measures in dealing with her:

1. Give her a sense of purpose on the job -- by showing her how her work affects others: fellow-employees, customers, the company.

2. Appeal to her self-esteem. Most people don't want to leave a record of failure behind them.

If all else fails, you have no choice but to use discipline. Actually it's relatively easy to face the issue in her case. Since she considers herself temporary anyway, it's only a question of when she's to be replaced.

*Not so easy:
has years
to work her
one I and*

V. The Teen-Ager

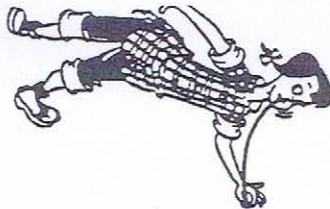
She can be the Nemesis -- or the fair-haired child -- of the office.

In most cases, you'll find that she is responsive to authority, being fresh from exposure to parent and teacher. A lot depends on how recently she went through her adolescence. If she's not yet over it completely, she will still be in rebellion against her parents -- a state of mind that she may carry over to you as the boss.

Biggest danger in handling her: Your patience may be sorely tried on many occasions -- due to her immaturity, her failure to understand business attitudes, or her impertinence.

Most important measures in dealing with her:

1. If she's still the fresh wise-cracking youngster, don't let her "throw" you with her behavior. It may be a few weeks before she simmers down and starts growing up, but you generally spend that much time training your older, quieter workers.
2. Her first few weeks on the job are the most important -- for her and you. Fresh



out of school, with no bad work habits to "unlearn," she should be the ideal trainee and she is likely to accept your pattern as being the standard for all business. Giving her attention at this stage will save you a lot of time later on.

3. Be firm with her. All her life, she's cajoled her father. Don't let her get the impression that she can "soften you up." One caution, though: be firm -- but no firmer than you are with the others.

PROBLEM SITUATIONS

"A woman's fitness comes in fits" -- so wrote the poet. That may be somewhat of an exaggeration. But the fact is, you can't work with them without running into special problems from time to time.

The most frightening experience you're likely to come up against is the flood of tears let loose without any warning. It's devastating to any ordinary male, especially when he can't figure out what started it. All he knows is that in some way he's responsible for it.

Most of the time he isn't. Usually the tears are due to a combination of two kinds of pressures:



... on-the-job problem, which could be anything from an imagined slight to a simple criticism of her work. (When an on-the-job problem by itself is enough to bring tears, there's likely to be a background of overwork or physical fatigue.)

... personal problems. Men are more capable of forgetting private troubles by plunging into work.

By and large, you have to reconcile yourself to the fact that in most cases the causes of a woman's tears are beyond your personal control. Here's the most you can do:

1. Give her an opportunity to recover her self-control. Let her be by herself for a few minutes or with another woman. (Check with the latter at the first opportunity, and ask her, "Is there anything I can do to help?" There won't be -- but it pays to ask.)

Above all, don't dismiss a tearful girl with an off-hand: "Go wash your face; you'll feel better." That may or may not be, but it isn't going to make her feel better toward you.

2. Let her know that you're available to discuss anything she wants to bring up, but don't pry. Generally it's inadvisable to urge her to give you the facts.



3. To the extent that she blames you for her outburst, explain the situation in detail. For example, stress the fact that you are enforcing all rules impartially, not just against her; that you aren't criticizing her, but showing her how her work can be improved; that, in short, the situation is a normal one and needn't upset her.

Finally, keep in mind the fact that some women use tears as a deliberate weapon. Don't yield! Whatever happens, you have to maintain your standards -- undiluted by tears.

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

Women are quicker to suspect favoritism than are men. When a supervisor gives a lot of attention to a girl who needs help with her work, the other women may see very personal motives behind it.

We recently heard from an Associate Member who supervises 18 women. He had spent some time with a newcomer who was having more than the usual difficulty getting started. The other girls resented it. A whispering campaign eventually reached him.

"That did it!" he wrote. "From then on I did my best to give them as little individual attention as possible. There's no other answer when you're working with a group of girls."

Those boys do know but it's up to you



That isn't so, of course. Ignoring people won't keep you out of trouble -- even if they are all women. The most effective action you can take is to show the same friendly willingness to help each one.



THE "OTHER" WOMAN

You men are lucky. Women want to work for you. Pity your fellow-supervisors on the distaff side. They have the problem of winning over both sexes to recognize their leadership.

If you're a male supervisor, women accept your judgment in most cases. They rarely think they can do your job better than you can. They don't resent taking orders from you. Many of them work hard to please you personally.

Ask any group of women whether they would rather work for a man or a woman. You'll have to go some before you find one who prefers a woman. Rightly or wrongly, most women start off with certain convictions about a woman supervisor: they think she will be harder to get along with than a man. They feel she will compete with them and act as a barrier to advancement.

To overcome these attitudes, the woman supervisor has her work cut out for her: she must demonstrate her capacity for leadership -- without "lording" it over her people; prove her technical ability to do the job and help them do theirs; show her capacity for good human relations by building sound personal ties. In short, she has to do everything a male supervisor must -- but double.



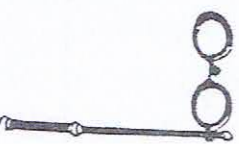
GREETING THE NEWCOMER

Women are inclined to be restrained about welcoming a newcomer into the fold. With a studied appraisal that would do credit to a champion horse-trader, the group looks over the new arrival in its midst.

Men usually go on the assumption that a new employee is probably a "good Joe." Women don't take this approach. If they did, where would the fun be -- the fun of speculating over what she's really like? Of figuring out whether or not she's really going to be a "threat" on some level or other?

The fact that women take longer to establish friendly relations among themselves has its basis in instinct -- and sometimes experience. Since time began, the female of the species has been wary of the threat to her nest, to

Threat to the apple



her home, to her "own." And when the danger turned out to be real, that "threat" usually turned out to be someone cast in the same mold as herself.

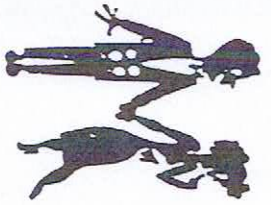
There's little you can do beyond giving the newcomer time in which to be accepted.

GIRL MEETS BOY

Oddly enough, sex isn't a serious distraction on the job in most cases. It's frequently found on the work scene in these forms:

... the love affair. No matter how dream-eyed the kids are, if they're in earnest, he will want to succeed on the job, and she will be just as eager for his success. If this is so, their contribution to the department won't be reduced. In which case, there's no problem for the supervisor.

... the office wolf. If any male employee in your group is so designated, you know that the girls are wise to him and can take care of themselves. You don't have to warn newcomers -- their co-workers will take care of that. Of course, if he is disrupting the work, you have to intervene, and handle him like the male problem-child that he is. But if he's not, chances are Don Juan is more than paying his way in amusement value.



... the off-color joke. If one of the boys comes up with an off-color joke, your temptation may be to crack down. You may have to, but better look the situation over first. Don't be hasty in concluding that the women have been offended. They may resent your assumption that they can't protect their own dignity -- or that they can't take a risque joke. They can probably handle the situation with the right amount of tact and let the offender know he's off-base.

In your own relations with the women in your department, if you show them the deference you give naturally to women in your own social contacts, you're really "tops."

HUMAN BEINGS AFTER ALL

These pages have dealt with the "differentness" of women, with their peculiarly "feminine" attitudes and behavior. No doubt about it, sometimes they move in mysterious ways. They are alternately a joy and a sorrow to the average man, who frequently wishes he could predict which it will be at a given moment.

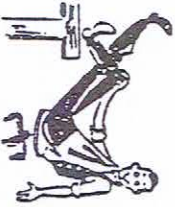
But the average woman is predictable to this extent: if she feels that she is being treated fairly and that you recognize and like her as



And returned

an individual in her own right, her gratitude will show up in her cooperation and real application to the job at hand.

Can you ask for anything more?



Copyright 1952,
Research Institute of America, Inc.
292 Madison Avenue, New York 7, N. Y.
45 Queen Street, Ottawa, Canada
Printed in U.S.A.

A FEW INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT WOMEN WHO WORK

More than 19 million American women work.

Of all women of working age, about one-third work.

Almost one-third of all workers are women.

More than half of all women workers are married.

More than 5 million women workers have children under 18.

The average age of women workers is 37-1/2 years.

Clerical workers are the largest occupational group; operatives, the second; together these account for nearly half of all employed women.

...U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1954

10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100

Handwritten text on a grid background, possibly a signature or code.
