

'Mentoring is important': US female CEO reveals what British women can learn in business from across the pond

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Allyson Stewart-Allen is the chief executive of International Marketing Partners



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i talks to Allyson Stewart-Allen, chief executive of International Marketing Partners to get a view from the other side of the Pond...

Are women sufficiently supported in business?

The best companies provide a **broad range of support** for their female talent including mentoring, coaching and leadership development, and celebrate women as role models within their business. They also have metrics to make sure their senior leadership teams are at least 30 per cent female.

They also have female retention targets and policies to ensure that those taking a career break to raise children come back into better roles than the ones they left before the hiatus. What's most important, however, above all of these, is that their **cultures reward** commercial achievement regardless of gender (and other characteristics). As my MBA professor Dr Peter Drucker is credited with saying: "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

So you might have all these great policies in place in your business, but if your culture doesn't value talent in whatever form it comes, then it's not going to be a **great place to work for women**.

Could women working in the UK take anything useful from those in the US?

Yes! Generally, American women are more upfront and vocal about their achievements, awards and successes as part of the overall culture in a marketplace that's very crowded and noisy. When Lanie Denslow and I wrote the best-selling book *Working with Americans*, we looked at why this is the case.

At its core, it's about the expectation of equality which is made explicit in our Constitution and Bill of Rights.

It doesn't mean unconscious bias doesn't exist in the US or UK, but it does mean American women demonstrate and are generally rewarded for confidence.

American women (and men) also use networks unapologetically to advance professionally, which helps explain why LinkedIn was born in the US.

If you could do one thing to improve women's professional experiences, what would it be?

That's a tough question. It would have to be starting with how girls and women are educated in the UK, as those teachers who dampen their confidence are the ones who are doing lasting damage.

In our daughter's case, she was educated in an all-girls school with a male maths teacher who enjoyed humiliating the girls that got answers wrong during his class. Though I complained (very American!) to the head about his unprofessional behaviour, the school didn't do anything to fix the problem.

Sadly, however, this offender is still working there and no doubt continues to put the girls off this and other STEM subjects. And we wonder why we have a problem with not enough girls in STEM at university level? 