

## Gender Equality in the Workplace Isn't Taken Seriously.

By: Jacquelyn Drust

Have you ever wondered why companies that support gender equality rarely have female executives? I do. While some companies have tried to take the necessary steps in order to change, it obviously hasn't been enough. The PR and advertising industries consist of inspiring professionals looking to make a difference in society, but are hindered by discrimination from their own colleagues and bosses. [Women dominate the PR industry by 67%](#), yet men make a higher salary than women. As of 2016, [70% of female creatives](#) had never worked with a female creative director. When will women have a chance to tackle leadership positions? The PR and advertising industries have a long way to go before we can start to see change. It's up to women to start having this conversation with not only with themselves, but also with men. Between lower salaries, sexual harassment, and lack of females in senior-level positions, companies who say they support gender equality aren't always ethically practicing what they preach.

It's clear that companies like the idea of supporting gender equality but cannot get themselves to implement key changes internally. One example of this is the "Fearless Girl" statue created by McCann New York and commissioned by State Street Global Advisors. State Street wanted to support gender equality for International Women's Day by placing the statue facing the "Charging Bull" statue. However, a [recent audit from the Labor Department](#) showed that State Street lacks diversity within their organization and pays women in top senior-level positions significantly less than men. For a company who would create a statue on Wall Street promoting women empowerment, it's clear that they like the image of gender equality more than the actual well-being of their female employees.

Another example of a company making a visible gesture, without backing it up with real action is Audi with their Super Bowl commercial from 2017. The commercial highlighted a father cheering on his daughter in a kart race. The father is proud of his daughter, but is concerned about her future because of the gender issues in today's society. The end of the commercial states, "[Audi of America is committed to equal pay for equal work](#)". Even though the ad is promoting gender equality within their company, there is still an issue that women only make up 12% of Audi's corporate team. I do think it's important to use PR and advertising platforms to get conversations going about prominent societal issues. However, how can a company endorse a message when they don't take all the necessary steps to address it internally? Companies who say they support gender equality and want to prove themselves to society should be making direct changes to better their employees and become examples for other companies to do the same.

In addition to unequal pay, PR and advertising women professionals face sexual harassment in the workplace. In August 2016, [The 4A's conducted a survey](#) that found that more than half of the women surveyed experienced sexual harassment at least once in their work environment and one-third of respondents believed they had not received a promotion or an assignment based on their gender. As Cindy Gallop, a former executive at Bartle Bogle Hegarty, put it, "[Achieving gender equality and diversity](#) are the buzzwords at the moment but which will never happen as long as sexual harassment is endemic in every industry." Young women, like myself, have a goal and dream to work at an advertising agency one day. However, the thought

of being discriminated against and facing sexual harassment by my colleagues is terrifying. After the Weinstein scandal broke last year, many [advertising agencies kept quiet](#). Industry leaders did not want to acknowledge that there was a problem within their own agencies. Agencies who keep quiet are practicing unethically when addressing these issues. They need to take responsibility in order to start the internal redesign. Sexual harassment will only end if we all work together to create solutions and policies that can benefit everyone and create a safe work environment.

As a young aspiring professional, I want to see a change that will benefit not only me, but generations to come. Women control [85% of purchasing decisions](#), yet 91% feel that marketers don't understand them. Female entrepreneurs are starting to make big strides within the industry. In fact, [19% of women](#) are more likely to be running billion-dollar companies over men with an average growth rate of 10.9% this year. Lindsay Pattison, CEO of Maxus, is one of the only female global CEOs in the advertising industry. She stated that, "greater diversity and equality leads to greater innovation, corporate governance, talent retention, financial growth, and I can personally vouch for the energy and chemistry of a more [balanced approach to decision making](#)." Women need to be given the chance to prove that we can make a change that the industry needs. We can start the change by creating fair work assessments and rewarding job promotions and assignments based on the employee's job performance rather than their gender.

There is still a lot of work to be done within companies but there are strides being made. Interpublic Group is a leader in the advertising industry who tries to make sure all employees feel like they have a voice. Through their [Diversity and Inclusion programs](#), it gives employees the chance to engage in conversations other companies aren't having. Similarly, companies such as Verizon are also pushing for change. Diego Scotti, the chief marketing officer for Verizon, sent out letters to their 11 advertising agencies wanting to hear [how many women and minorities they employed](#) across leadership positions. They want to see how they are working on making a significant change within their own agencies. These necessary internal changes by clients and agencies is the step in the right direction in order to make a real difference. Creating anonymous gender applications for positions can also help with discrimination against future employees that will create a fair chance for everyone. Little steps that are taken internally can go a long way.

Gender equality in PR and advertising is an ongoing ethical issue that is in dire need of attention. While some organizations are taking the right steps, many are still creating a front that consumers and other professionals are starting to see through. To create change, we should give fair opportunities to all future and current employees. Now is the time to work together to not only create equality for all employees to better their careers and lives, but to also acknowledge the problem. Companies need to be transparent and work towards creating real change, rather than putting on a front to keep up a clean, if unreal, reputation.