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## The Secret Ingredient for Career Success...

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A recent study of 500 boardrooms in the US showed that companies with three or more women on their board of directors experienced an 83% higher return on equity, a 73% boost in sales and a 112% higher return on invested capital. Furthermore, numerous global studies, ranging from Goldman Saks to Thompson Reuters show that companies employing large numbers of women outperform their competitors on almost every level of profitability.

Faced with these hard facts, few companies could deny that a diverse workforce is a stronger workforce - so where are all the women at the top table? Many people are quick to blame external factors - like sexism in society - but anecdotal evidence from a number of our members revealed that they would shy away from that next big careers step because of self confidence issues. This isn't restricted solely to the Rail Industry, it's a sentiment echoed across professions. The Institute of Leadership and Management recently surveyed British managers on how confident they feel in their positions. Half of female respondents admitted they had self doubt about their performance and careers, compared to just one third of male respondents. Crucially, the study also found that women with low confidence were less likely to be appointed to management positions, and as a direct result were less likely to achieve their career ambitions.

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But admitting a lack of self confidence is no weakness. Thankfully it's the first step to creating a more empowered and equal workforce as confidence can be rebuilt. Women in Rail is a passionate advocate of helping more women get to the top. We have held several confidence seminars to try and raise self esteem amongst our members. The first step to overcoming self doubt in the workforce is to identify why it exists in the first place.

Society teaches women to be communal, sympathetic and helpful, whilst teaching boys to be assertive, bold and ambitious. It's a generalisation, but given the chance many little boys will choose to pretend to be soldiers or explorers, whilst little girls will choose to play with their dolls. As we grow older these conditioned behaviours remain with us to an extent. None of these traits are negative - but in the working world it's all about striking a balance. Assertive women who exhibit some of the more traditionally male traits can often face double edged feedback, often being described as "formidable" or "hard", whereas men seem to be judged to a different standard. These ambiguous labels can often knock a woman's confidence, making her feel she has to make a choice between being liked and being authoritative.

But it's not just societal attitudes which can hold women back. An in-depth investigation into women's attitudes in the work place revealed many refrain from applying for promotions because they lack self belief. An internal Hewlett Packard study revealed women only felt willing to apply for promotions when they felt they met 100% of the jobs specifications, whereas men felt confident applying when they'd met 60% of the specifications. Many females only applied when they felt over qualified for the role, whereas men recognised their short comings - but still had the confidence to put their names forward.

As much as many of us may like to - you can't eradicate self doubt overnight. But by inspiring confidence and encouraging women to take little steps out of their comfort zone on a regular basis, you can slowly see it melt away. Women in Rail has also found that one the most effective way to overcome self doubt, particularly in a male dominated environment, is by establishing a one on one mentorship scheme.

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For a mentee, the gift of having someone to listen, advise, challenge and nurture your productive thinking is invaluable. For the mentor, the positive feeling of giving something back is equally rewarding. After all confidence breeds confidence, and the benefit of being able to talk to a senior colleague makes them seem more human, in turn making their position at the top seem attainable. I'd advise every woman to ensure they fulfil their potential by seeking out mentors at work; they will be flattered you approached them! Take the risk when the next promotional opportunity comes up; remember you miss every shot you don't take. After all, a diverse workforce is a profitable workforce. You owe it to yourself and your company to put your hat in the ring!

In reality, it's one of the most dynamic and exciting industries in the UK to work in at the moment. At a time when many sectors are struggling, Crossrail and HS2 are experiencing billions of pounds of investment. The Transport Secretary Patrick McLoughlin has just announced a HS2 investment programme in to rail worth an additional £1.3 billion for the British economy - creating more than 14,000 new jobs for workers in Birmingham, with the ripple effect of 2,000 new homes to be built in the area. This is particularly significant as Government figures show that Birmingham has one of the highest unemployment s in the UK. The rail industry will be at the forefront of helping to turn the city's fortunes around.

Opportunity is knocking - but many women are not answering the door to us. But why? Recent research from the train drivers union ASLEF shows that, although our rail networks are transforming, our perception of the sector is not. Their study shows that we still largely associate railways with the historical concept of grimy men in physically demanding jobs. This is something that we find in our day-to-day discussions with women and girls outside the industry. It's not surprising then that Department for Transport studies show that currently fewer than 20% of people working in the rail sector are women. But we're on a mission to change this.

We've created the Women in Rail Group to raise awareness of the vast and diverse range of opportunities available to women in Britain's cutting edge rail sector. From CEO's to train drivers, Treasurers to HR - there are a huge number of roles available for people with the skills to match. Many people overlook the sector as a whole without thinking what goes on behind the scenes day in day out. The industry is crying out for talent in customer support, finance and payroll, engineering and design, PR and marketing.... the list of potential opportunities is almost as long as long as the new tracks we are laying.

# Women in Rail

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As an industry, the rail sector is working hard to change its image - we've broken the glass ceiling and see Women in Rail as a catalyst to help women put their best foot forward in their career. As a society our attitudes are changing too. From the first female train drivers in the 80's who saw men refusing to get on trains when a woman was at the helm, to today, where the Minister for Transport Susan Kramer is part of the team calling the shots for the whole industry.

Like HS2 and Crossrail, we are going full speed ahead in to a time of exhilarating change - both on the train tracks and in our offices. Senior management, both male and female at all major train operators and companies are dedicated to encouraging new blood into the sector. We need to inspire more people to get on board and bring their unique skills and perspectives along, ensuring our industry's structure is as modern as our world class trains. Rail is a sector that can really take you places - women, we invite you to buy a ticket!

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