

IN PURSUIT OF WOMEN

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Most of you men, probably, pursued the woman of your choice quite some time ago.

Think back for a moment. Try to remember those days ... when you wooed, courted ... pursued. When you were in pursuit of your woman.

You probably learned a lot about her --- and about yourself --- in those heady days of early courtship.

You probably learned a few things you had not expected to learn. Several of your preconceptions --- about love, courtship ... and the love of your life --- went right out the window.

It was, if you're like the rest of us, quite an enlightening, and enjoyable experience.

Remember it now?

I'm sure that you do. And I'm sure those of you who were the pursued ... the courted ... also remember it well.

There's a definite connection between courtship --- both from the point of view of the pursued and the pursuer --- and the subject of my address to you today.

I am referring to the pursuit of that other woman in your life --- in all of our lives. The pursuit of the woman purchaser of your goods, services and ideas.

She too, just like that special woman you pursued, has to be courted in a very special way.

She too, just like that first love of your life, represents an as yet unrealized potential.

You've heard someone say: "I never thought there could be a woman like Mary." Or a man like Fred.

Well, you'll be saying something along those lines if you take the time and effort to discover as much about the special needs, wants and expectations of today's woman as you once did about Mary, or Fred.

I say that because I firmly believe that today's working woman represents an enormous --- virtually untapped --- market for fresh new ideas, products and services.

But, to tap that market, you have to understand it. And understand it a great deal better than most modern executives appear to.

It has been said that changes in womens lives are the missing factor in most marketing programs. This missing factor, it has been said, probably results in unrealized potential and lost opportunities.

How many such opportunities will your organization lose this week? This month? Or year?

What criteria is used by your organization to determine what is unrealized potential and what is lost opportunity?

Where does it turn to for advice on tailoring its products or services to meet the special needs and expectations of today's working woman?

Does it, for example, have access to intelligent, appropriate, women to advise it and to challenge it?

To whom does it turn?

Better still, does it recognize the need --- the very real and pressing need --- to acquire this special information and understanding?

I sometimes wonder if most organizations do recognize this changing social phenomenon that is having, and is going to have, an enormous impact on future share of market and profitability.

It is, after all, a fact of modern life that the participation of women in the working world is mushrooming. They are having a dramatic impact on the marketplace. Their own feelings, attitudes and expectations concerning their evolving role in society is a mystery to most business and government decision-makers. And there are positive ways to respond to the dynamics of woman's changing attitudes and value systems.

The question is: What is your organization doing differently today in response to these changes --- than it did, for example, ten or twenty years ago when you were first courting.

It's not just the woman you first courted who has changed. All women have changed. Womankind herself --- in our society anyway --- has gone through an enormous, almost mind-boggling metamorphosis in the last 20 years.

Take this past decade. The number of women in the labour force has increased by more than 66%.

48% of all adult Canadian women now hold jobs.

The majority of them will work a total of 25 years --- minimum.

They will spend more of their adult lives in paid employment than in any other single activity.

It's simply not the working world you thought it was going to be. Things have changed --- dramatically so. Irreversibly so.

Part of this social upheaval in Canada is reflected in such things as the divorce rate and the age to which many modern women wait before having their first child.

Divorce? Increased by 395% between 1967 and 1977. That's 55,000 divorces in 1977 compared to 11,000 in 1967.

The number of women waiting until they are at least 25 before having their first child increased by 99% between 1966 and 1976. And the number of Canadian women waiting until at least age 30 before having a child increased by 62%.

You're surprised! Imagine how sheepish and exposed the social planning forecasters who said this wasn't going to happen must feel. Their projections are all out of whack with today's reality. They totally underestimated the number of women who would join the work force and overestimated the number of women who would remain in the home.

In February of last year, for example, the federal Finance Department predicted that the participation rate of women in the Canadian labour force would rise from 46% of the working-age population in 1976 to 47.4% in 1981. By 1986, the department's forecasters predicted, the participation rate of women would increase to 48.9%. Right to the decimal point.

They were wrong.

We have already reached the participation rate of women forecasted for 1986. Seven years ahead of schedule.

Consider the impact on economic planning of these false projections. The difference between a 47% and a 48.8% participation rate means an unanticipated 161,000 extra women in the Canadian labour force this year.

According to the C. D. Howe Research Institute, there are strong reasons for believing that women will continue to increase their participation in the labour force during the years ahead.

Consider for a moment, some of the forces which have influenced growing numbers of women to join the working world:

- Higher levels of education
- A trend to smaller families
- The increasing movement of people from the rural areas and from other countries to our large urban centres

Think about:

- The manner in which family incomes have lost purchasing power because of the effect of inflation on wage gains
- The increasing desire on the part of women to have a certain degree of financial independence from their husbands, or, for that matter, their fathers.

And then there is the desire on the part of women to find satisfaction and fulfillment outside of the traditional role in the home.

That is why you find women occupying a variety of positions, on many levels, of business, industry and government. I should qualify that. We do not yet have any women miners, trappers or loggers.

The simple fact is this. Women are playing an increasingly significant role and the recognition of --- and planned development of --- the potential of women in the working world will work out to be in the best interest of us all.

Permit me an aside.

This emerging presence of women is making itself felt in many ways. It is, for example, having a dramatic effect on the very language of the working world.

The word "one" or "person" or "individual" is gradually finding favour over the once too prevalent "he".

Foremen are being referred to as supervisors. Businessmen are being referred to as business people.

Language stereotyping women as sex objects, as cute, scatter brained, timorous, or shrewish is slowly sinking into the oblivion it so rightly deserves.

Male executives are finally grasping an understanding of why women dislike being referred to as "the ladies of the office". No matter how well meaning you are or reluctant to give offence, the term "ladies", within that context, is considered derogatory by most women.

Also, if they are 18 or over, women employees do not like being referred to as girls. They are just as offended by your use of the word girl as you would be if they started calling you Dad.

This might sound like nit-picking to you. It isn't. Little things like that can have a tremendous impact on employee work attitudes and productivity.

Let's pause for a moment and think about working women as consumers --- within the context of that unrealized potential to which I referred earlier in my address.

As with all consumers, it is not enough for you to know what they do. In order to tap their full market potential, you need to know how they feel about what they do.

To know that, you're going to have to build a better understanding of social change into your marketing plans.

You are going to have to think about your own attitudes towards women. How did you get them? Why have you kept them? How valid are they in this last year of the seventies? And what about the attitudes of your associates and the influence they have on your marketing strategies? Where did they get some of their ideas about women? I often wonder.

We seem, at times, inundated with the botched-up results of decisions stemming from the apparent inability of decent, intelligent, fair-minded and well-meaning men to comprehend the special needs, expectations and demands of modern women.

So often, it seems, when confronted with challenging information or insights on modern women, a male executive will respond with something like: "That's not right!! My wife doesn't think like that."

Do you think that that executive's wife is an appropriate source of information about the changing attitudes of all women?

I don't think so.

I don't think his wife would have any more valid an understanding of most of today's working women than would a woman doctor, secretary or engineer. Because sisters under the skin they not always are.

Take for example some findings on modern woman as reported in the May-June, 1978, issue of the Harvard Business Review.

The study pinpointed markedly different complexions of self-perceptions and attitudes on the part of career women, women who considered their employment to be "just a job", housewives who planned to go out and work, and the stay at home housewives.

I am offering the study findings, without comment, as an example of available data that might be applied to your merchandising, marketing or other business decisions and procedures.

Career women were found to have the strongest positive self-images. They saw themselves as more broad-minded, dominating, frank, efficient, and independent than the others. They were the only ones of the 4 types of women who described themselves as self-assured and very amicable.

The "just a job" working women were found to be closer to the accepted norm than any of the other 3 groups.

The plan to work housewife, on the other hand, was found to be far different from her stay at home neighbour. She was more likely to view herself as being tense, stubborn and awkward.

Both career women and plan to work housewives were found to be more apt than the others to consider themselves creative and affectionate.

The study found that the stay at home housewife viewed herself as kind, refined and reserved. She was found to be strikingly below the norm in feeling brave, stubborn, dominating or egocentric.

It might interest you to know that all of the women studied, including the supposedly self-assured career types, demonstrated a very low sense of ego when compared with the male population.

Well, the study certainly demonstrates the folly of relying upon the opinion of one woman --- wife, daughter, secretary, lawyer, doctor, architect --- in isolation from other woman-originated opinions about women.

A challenge. When you return to your office, make an effort to find out exactly what your organization is doing in response to the opportunities presented by today's woman.

What knowledge do those who advise you on such things have about the subject? What recommendations have they put forward to ensure that your organization derives the maximum benefits in this changing world? Just what, exactly, is your organization doing about this modern phenomenon?

Are your advisors aware, for example, of the depth of frustration experienced by working women when they find no clerks to serve them at lunch time. Long, interminably long, line-ups at the banks. No service or repair men available for night calls or on Saturdays. Young clerks stocking supermarket shelves on Friday nights and Saturdays while consumers grow increasingly irritated at the check-out counters.

Sure, you say, men feel just as pressed for time. They too feel that everything is too much of a hurdle.

But men are only half of the working world population. What do your advisors know about the special needs and expectations of the other half?

Their answers might surprise you.

To benefit from a reliable, meaningful, woman's viewpoint or perspective in preparation for a merchandising, marketing or other such decision, you

require access to well-researched, broadly-based, current data. Data obtained from research, books, movies, and the editorial pages of women's magazines.

Limited social perspectives must be brought into line with the realities of the 80's. Yes. Next year will be the first year of the 80's.

Give me a "for example" --- you ask --- of this social change.

All right. Consider this.

Research shows that the dramatic increase in the participation of women in the labour force is tied directly to their participation in higher education.

Here's the data.

Of all women in Canada who completed only grade 8, 22% work.

Of all women with some high school, 36% work.

Of all women who completed high school, 50% work.

And, of all women in Canada who hold a university degree, 66% work.

The higher the education, the higher the participation in the labour force.

The dramatic rise in the participation of women in higher education is shown by the following.

In the 6 years between 1972 and 1978, the number of women graduating from Canadian universities increased by 50%. The number of men, on the other hand, increased by slightly less than 4%.

As a result of this changing social phenomenon, of all students graduating from Canadian universities today, 49% are women.

Twenty years ago, when some of you were courting for the first time, only 20% of the students graduating from Canadian universities were women.

In order to fully tap the woman's market --- to benefit from the as yet unrealized potential and avoid lost opportunities --- your organization is simply going to have to factor that sort of social information into its decision-making process.

The data about women that I have reviewed suggests quite strongly that many of our decision-makers are out of step with these changing times.

Consider the degrading stereotypes and offensive humour that is too often employed to persuade women to favour a particular company's product, service or idea.

As the publisher of 2 of Canada's national magazines, I consider it part of my responsibility to advertisers to advise them on what they should --- and should not --- attempt with our readers.

On several occasions, we have been able to steer advertisers off a particularly futile approach.

We have been able to do that because we listen closely to our readers and pay a great deal of attention to what they have to say about themselves in surveys and in letters to the editor. As a result, we pride ourselves on having a rather authoritative understanding of what turns them on --- and off.

That understanding enables me to serve as a bridge between the needs of our readers and of our advertisers. It enables me to identify that which is in their mutual best interest.

Unfortunately, some advertising too often fails to elicit a positive response from modern women. This fact was certainly reflected in a survey on women and advertising conducted for the Ontario Status of Women Council.

The women who participated in the survey minced no words in expressing their objections to the picture of them in society so often reflected in mass media advertising. Television advertising was found to be the most objectionable.

They rejected advertising messages depicting miserable mothers-in-law, dumb blondes, harried housewives, silly secretaries, nagging housewives and other stupid, nasty, careless women who were corrected by the male voice of the product user or promoter.

Portraying women as stupid, incompetent, people unable to make intelligent decisions was described as a totally unacceptable stereotype. And rightly so.

Rene Bartos, a senior vice-president and director of communications development at the J. Walter Thompson Company, said this in the May-June, 1978, issue of the Harvard Business Review:

"Marketing procedures and tools have never been more sophisticated and complex than they are today. Yet there is a curious gap between the realities of social change and the picture of society reflected in most marketing plans and advertising campaigns."

"The potential contribution of these sophisticated marketing tools may be limited by the social perspective of the marketing specialists who use them."

Let me share with you something I found in a 1977 report of the Task Force on Women and Advertising published by the Canadian Advertising Advisory Board.

"Taken as a whole, the data in this study indicate that today's woman is liberated both in her attitudes toward herself and toward other women.

She identifies best with advertising that portrays women as they now are in our society --- working in

the labour force, making their own decisions, encouraging family co-operation in household tasks, and taking increasing pride in their intelligence and capabilities.

But, at the same time, today's woman becomes irritated by advertising that shows women and men in an exaggerated and unrealistic way.

For maximum effectiveness, the advertiser must understand the reality of today's woman and ensure that the portrayals of men and women are genuine (or reflect that reality)."

Perhaps, through having shared with you some of these experiences and observations and through suggesting areas for further exploration and study, I have helped lay a foundation for a bridge of understanding to help us all --- men and women --- enjoy the positive advantages of woman's emerging role in business and in society. I hope so.

I believe that we can rise to the challenge and close the gap between the realities of social change and many of our antiquated merchandising, marketing and other procedures.

We can tap the as yet unrealized opportunities represented by today's evolving woman.

Our successful executives will learn to speak to today's woman as:

An equal. An intelligent, discriminating, decision-maker. One who is easily put off but who is not without humour. One who possesses an equal ability to comprehend. To understand. A human being with her own important sense of self-respect and self-esteem.

Successful executives will ensure that their message or actions conform to her expectations, wants and needs.

But to sieze the unlimited opportunities of tomorrow ---
of the eighties --- they must do their homework now and acquire a better
understanding of the changing social realities of today.

If they do that --- and do it well --- they will enjoy the
profitable pursuit of today's woman.

Thank you all for your generous attention.