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Ushering in a Long-Awaited Transition

As the world tries to make sense of the current social climate around women in the workforce, the push for gender parity at the top, and the explosion of the #MeToo and Time's Up movements, an inventory of the last 40 years provides a few elucidating insights as to how we arrived at this particular moment.

In retrospect, it's clear that the feminist movement of the 1970s brought about the foundation for change, as opposed to the change itself, and the 80s and 90s, in which women entered the workforce in record numbers, were spent gathering the proof points for why that change was justified. Working women spent those years navigating the rough terrain of a male-dominated world—a world that was not built for them and was often very unpleasant and unwelcoming in the form of unequal pay, gender bias, sexual harassment, and an inability to rise in the ranks of power. While many gave up or left the workforce altogether, an intrepid few beat the odds and defiantly rose to the top of their industries, making history as the

first women to command a spaceship, lead a Fortune 500 company, fly in a combat mission, become a fire fighter, and serve as U.S. Secretary of State.

These trailblazers proved once and for all that women could do the same work as men, at the highest levels, and should therefore be judged not by their gender but by their talent and ability. By all accounts, their accomplishments should have paved the way for a smooth transition to a gender-balanced workforce and gender-balanced leadership. But that's obviously not what happened.

Despite multiple studies over the last 15 years that have shown a significant correlation between gender parity at the top and economic performance, progress continues to move at a glacial pace. The percentage of women in C-Suite roles hovers around 19 percent, and a report by McKinsey predicts that it will take over 100 years to reach 50 percent. While a recent Lean In study reported that 78 percent of companies now recognize



gender diversity as a top priority for the CEO—and are committed to solving that challenge—execution is an ongoing struggle.

So how do we navigate this entrenched and challenging issue? MAKERS, a women's leadership platform that spotlights groundbreaking women to inspire and ignite the next generation of female leaders, responds by prompting companies to disrupt the way they think about female leadership. By establishing a network for game-changing women to make connections and providing the tools and inspiration necessary for companies to deliver on their promise of gender-balanced leadership, MAKERS is accelerating progress toward actualizing gender equality across the board.

The research tells us that it won't be easy. There's a substantive amount of work to be done in the areas of unconscious bias training, entrenched work norms that are unfriendly to women, biases in the evaluation process, and the lack of sponsorship for high-potential women. Additionally, we must continue to evangelize the mission-critical role that men play. Role models of both genders matter, and we want to identify and celebrate the men who walk the walk in the fight for equality.

Perhaps the #MeToo and Time's Up movements were inevitable as a new generation of women entered the workforce with expectations of equal treatment and a much stronger sense of entitlement than prior generations.

Or, perhaps they were simply another layer of a deep-seeded disparity. Regardless of their source, bringing these issues to light and taking appropriate action is the only way to finally redefine a more inclusive workplace that has the potential velocity to pave the way for a more gender-equal world.

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