



Who'd Make a Better Boss: Barack Obama or Mitt Romney?



Why the Gap Between Rich & Poor Is Widening



11 Odd Jobs with High Salaries



8 Ways to Keep Your Job in a Tough Economy



The Executive Presence Blog:

## 5 Keys to Winning the Battle of the Sexes

An "Adapt & Adopt" Approach to Bridging the Gap at Work Between Men & Women

By [Harrison Monarth](#), Salary.com contributing writer.

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### Mars, Venus & All That Jazz

Men and women are different. This hardly counts as a revelation, but new research in neuroscience hints at the scope and complexity of these differences, and helps to explain some of the social differences, too.

Men, we've learned, are apt to practice an agentic style of leadership, marked by assertiveness; and in the extreme, a "take no prisoners" attitude. Research shows that male leaders are more likely to clarify the roles and responsibilities of subordinates, and to weed out those who don't measure up. Women, on the other hand, tend toward a communal style, more focused on consensus, and marked by a more sensitive, (relatively) humane approach. Female leaders, for example, favor collaboration and liberal sharing of information. Because of these qualities, they often foster an environment rife with opportunities for improvement.





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### Don't Judge a Book By It's Cover

These ideas about gender behavior are related to real, measurable elements -- the physiology of the brain. Still, they are generalities. Taken as gospel, they can lead to prejudices and self-fulfilling prophesies. People easily internalize gender norms, and may come to automatically expect or require assertiveness in male leaders, and nurturing behavior in female leaders. When these expectations are upended or otherwise contradicted -- in the form of an assertive female leader, for example -- negative reactions, strained relations, and real impediments to success may result.

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### Whoever Adapts First Wins!

There is a basic way to counter the pitfalls of gender stereotyping: Adapt and Adopt. If, from the outset, we recognize that taking charge and taking care are both positive attributes, and that each is required for effective leadership, it's possible we can consistently (if not completely) avoid the negative consequences of male versus female.

Here are some key ideas for effectively using insights on different gender styles of work and leadership:

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### 1. Forget "One Size Fits All"

Think of the agentic and communal styles less as masculine -- or feminine -- only, but simply as distinct toolkits, each with its own set of behaviors. (Given different organizational cultures, "one size fits all" is never the right prescription -- both styles have their place and time.)

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### 2. Our Behaviors Are Learned

Realize leadership skills are just that: skills.

Assertiveness, verbal dexterity, and problem-solving are not, in fact, exclusively encoded in our genes, but are behaviors which can be learned. How we use our attributes varies, but there's no reason to believe men are born leaders and women are primarily nurturers (not leaders).