

# The memo every woman keeps in her desk

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



### Case Analysis: The Memo Every Woman Keeps in Her Desk Introduction

In this case study, Liz Ames has come up against an all too common problem in business today: gender bias. Effectively managing racial, ethnic and gender diversity is not just a human resources issue; it is a serious business issue.

**Background** The recent departure of several senior-level women at Vision Software has significantly elevated Liz's concern for gender bias at the company. She has arrived at a point where she feels compelled to communicate her frustration to their CEO, John Clark.

She has experienced some uncertainty on whether or not she should send him a memo, and has asked for advice from a colleague whom she trusts.

**Problem Statement** Liz's male colleague seems to be considering only whether or not he should advise Liz to send or not send the memo. The issue here is not whether Liz should communicate her message to Clark, but how and when she should communicate that message. As her colleague examines his options for counseling and supporting her, he should carefully consider how best he can help communicate the importance of addressing gender diversity at Vision Software.

**Analysis and Issues** When the senior-level women at Vision resigned, it seems from the information in Liz's memo that people assumed that they were choosing family over a career and therefore, management believed there was nothing that the company could have done to retain these women. However, these women may have left for better opportunities, potentially with competitors. Vision's obvious costs of losing these employees include the loss of investment made in recruiting and training them as well as the cost of recruiting and training their replacements.

Yet, the hidden cost of employee turnover is possibly even more devastating. These hidden costs include the loss of intellectual capital and the potential for the former employee to become a competitor; potential disruption in the continuity of Vision's customer service and the associated dissatisfaction and potential loss of market share; and the negative impact on the morale, motivation and productivity of the remaining employees. If Clark is just starting to recognize the high cost of losing these seasoned employees, he should be receptive to Liz's message and wide open to strategies for resolving the issue.

However, it would most likely be a mistake for Liz to communicate the message in a memo that she alone has authored. The one-way communication channel afforded by a memo does not provide Liz with the ability to tweak her message on the fly as she receives feedback from Clark. Recommendations Liz absolutely needs to communicate the important points of her memo to Clark, but this is far too important and complex of a subject to effectively address in a memo. A subject of this level of importance and involvement is much better suited for interactive communication.

Liz's colleague should advise her to work with him and other like-minded co-workers to develop a strong business case for gender diversity that will effectively persuade Clark, convincing him that Vision will lose out on the best executives, senior-level talent and potentially new business and customers if it continues to operate in an environment of exclusionism. Then, taking it a step further, they need to convince Clark that Vision will be able to

capitalize on diversity by integrating it into their business strategy and company culture. Clark needs to be able to relate to their cause and adopt it as his own.

They should be sure that Clark understands that women are a rapidly growing and highly educated group from which Vision will need to recruit and develop its future leadership. Vision's high cost of failing to address gender diversity issues will be significant, including the cost of turnover and the inability to attract and advance talented managers. In an environment of exclusionism, talented leaders of both genders will depart for better opportunities in more open and progressive companies. In order to bolster her argument for gender diversity, Liz needs to remove all of the conjecture from her message.

She needs to replace any statement that begins with "I believe" and replace it with facts. She could talk with the women who resigned to find out the true reasons for their departures rather than guessing and putting words into their mouths. For example, Susan French did not receive the esteem and authority that her male predecessors enjoyed. This disparity in authority caused Susan frustration that ultimately led to her resignation. Liz needs to cite this and other specific incidents that can be corroborated. She must choose her examples carefully, selecting only those that really strengthen her case.

Stories of a man commending his wife and a male coworker going home to play mom are not firm examples of gender bias, thus weaken her argument. Stories of women being closed out of meetings and purposely excluded from

conversations serve well to strengthen her case. In her memo, Liz has adopted a negative and accusatory tone that could serve to alienate Clark, leading him to dismiss the message as too extreme. If Vision truly does have an atmosphere that slowly erodes a woman's sense of worth and place, why has she continued to work there for ten years?

Once Liz crafts her message to remove the negative tone and accusation, it will be much more persuasive to Clark. Over dramatizing this situation will not serve the goal of effective and persuasive communication.

Conclusion/Summary Liz's message of the importance of gender diversity is a critical one which needs to be communicated in an effective and compelling manner. Liz's male colleague should provide her with coaching, support and corroboration to build a solid business case for developing an atmosphere of gender diversity at Vision Software.

Vision's need to develop senior-level women is a critical business management issue. Those companies that learn to manage gender diversity are able to recruit and retain the most talented managers, reduce turnover costs, respond to the changing marketplace, and, ultimately, make better business decisions. Vision will reap benefits within the company such as increased employee retention, loyalty and morale, as well as the potential for increased customer satisfaction and market share. The approach to the communication with Clark needs to be well planned and effectively crafted. Liz needs to take a number of steps to strengthen and fortify her message, build cohesive strength in numbers with her co-workers, and then communicate the message to Clark in a positive, proactive and supportive manner. Sexist

or exclusionary practices are not good for anyone in a business. Liz has taken on the task of communicating the message to senior management so she now has a responsibility to craft a message that has the best opportunity to be heard, understood and well-received by the CEO and others in management at Vision.