

College of Business Book review by Lorrie Willey

Title: "Why Women Mean Business: Understanding the emergence of our next economic revolution"

Author: Avivah Wittenberg-Cox and Alison Maitland

Publisher: Jossey-Bass

Length: 316 pages

Price: \$25.00

Reading time: 9 hours

Reading rating: 8 (1 = very difficult; 10 = very easy)

Overall rating: 4 (1 = average; 4 = outstanding)

There is a revolution in progress and one that will compel changes in how businesses do business. This revolution has been slowly evolving but the 21st century will see increased demand for changes in businesses operations. What are those demands? To adapt business to an enormous resource that will increase productivity, increase profits and increase sustainability. And what is this powerful and readily available resource? Women.

Economic growth in this century will be driven by women in what the authors of this book call "Womenomics." This concept goes beyond the standard mantra that women control the purse strings and determine family spending. While that is true, women, and the insights and unique qualities they bring to business, are not only consumers, but are the workforce that will have "far reaching effects" on business. While the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the increase of women in the workplace, "the 21st century will witness the economic, political and social consequences" of this movement. These consequences will have a positive impact on business. A Fortune 500 study demonstrated that "companies with the highest proportion of women in their senior teams significantly outperformed those with the lowest proportion..."

Through studies by international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, American and European universities, and interviews with international business leaders, the authors identify the benefits that womenomics will bring to business and the means by which business can harness this economic force. To that end, the elimination of gender inequality will address some of the major issues facing business today, workforce maintenance and the fierce global competition for talented and skilled workers.

No longer can business, or society, cubby hole the issue of women's equality as a "women's issue," for it is a *business* issue. If business works to address the obstacles that block women from reaching their full potential in the workforce, it will reap the benefits. To do this, business will have to rethink its current belief that it has already created equality in the workplace. Treating men and women equally is often consists of establishing male attitudes and standards as the norm and then expecting women to meet them. Rather, this revolution requires

businesses to become “gender bilingual,” to note the true differences between the genders, and to establish standards for excellence that speak to both.

The womenomics revolution will require business to eliminate what the authors refer to as “positive discrimination” toward male performance in business. It is not a matter of trying to “fix women” but to dismantle outmoded corporate attitudes. These attitudes, many of which are subtle, alienate women from the corporate culture. Office politics, the aggressive language of business, the lack of networks for women and their exclusion from the traditional male networks, coupled with inadequate informal feedback are some of the less obvious behaviors in the corporate culture that turn off talented women.

This book does provide guidance to businesses ready to take on the challenge of eliminating barriers that hold women back and to implement policies and practices that recognize the rich potential of both genders. In the 21st century, women do mean business.

Lorrie Willey is an Assistant Professor of Business Law in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. For previously reviewed books, visit our Web site at [www.wcu.edu/cob](http://www.wcu.edu/cob).