Gender parity: the role of male allies

General Features



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To achieve true gender parity we need both men and women to be on this journey. How do we get male allies on board in the tax profession to help achieve gender parity?

The position that women hold across the world of work has been a matter of contention for decades. Although we would like to think that the tax profession has tackled these issues, we still have some way to go. (See **The finances: facts and figures** for some interesting details.) Many businesses have been making significant efforts on this front but it is becoming increasingly apparent that women cannot do it alone – and nor should they. Men in tax must play their part toward achieving equality, and the role of male allies is a great way of building the support network that is necessary.

To mark International Women's Day, the CIOT and ATT held a Zoom webinar on Male Allies, programmed and hosted by Tasneem Kadiri, chair of Women in Tax and UK & Ireland Tax Director for L'Oréal. She was joined by Simon Gallow, an advocate and HeForShe Lead for UN Women UK; Jeremy Coker, a past ATT President and Council member of the ATT; Lee Holloway, a Corporate Tax Partner at Grant

Thornton; Toyim Oyeneyin, the chair of CIOT and ATT's new tax professional committee; and Susan Ball, the upcoming President of CIOT. Three of the women featured in last year's *Tax Adviser* article on Women in Tax – Joanne Clarke, Dilpreet Dhanoa and Belema Obuoforibo – also spoke.

As Tasneem said, when introducing the event: 'We still unfortunately do not have proportionate female representation at partner and director level in the tax profession and that begs the question as to why we haven't achieved that parity yet. I strongly believe that the only way to get true gender parity in the tax profession is for more men to stand up as male allies.'

The HeForShe campaign has been developed by UN Women UK to directly address these issues by encouraging men to take a more active role in developing gender equality.

Simon Gallow explained the motivation behind the campaign. 'I was sick and tired of gender equality being framed as a women's issue – to be discussed by women, solved by women and fought for by women – when most of the issues that women face are because of men. Until we get men to be part of the conversation and solution, we will not actually have a genuine long term change in the workplace and beyond.' He also shared his belief that equality for women is 'progress for all'.

Image

THE FINANCES: FACTS AND FIGURES

In October 2021, the Office for National Statistics released 'Gender pay gap in the UK', its latest survey of average male and female earnings. It found that in April 2021, the gender pay gap across full time employees was 7.9%. Although this was a slight increase on the year before, the pandemic will have had an impact on these figures. There has been an improvement on the 9.0% pay gap recorded in April 2019.

It may come as a surprise, however, that the tax profession shows a much more significant pay gap than the average. In the category that the ONS labels 'Taxation experts' (an encouragingly specific breakdown), women are shown to earn 13.4% less than men. Women earn on average £23.19 per hour (equating to £36,176 a year for a 30 hour week, without any bonus or additional payments). Men earn on average £26.79 per hour (or £41,792 a year on the same measure). (The average median pay across all full time employees is £15.59.)

Given the efforts that many firms have been making to address these issues, this pay gap could be considered unexpected. However, higher earners experience a much larger difference in hourly pay between the sexes than lower-paid earners. Disappointingly, there also remains a large difference in the gender pay gap between employees aged 40 years and over and those aged below 40 years – and as tax advisers commonly remain in the profession until retirement, this will also be a factor.

The gender pay gap among professional occupations at large (which includes business and administration professionals, including finance professionals) remains fairly static at 9.2%. However, the largest fall in the pay gap since before the pandemic is among managers, directors and senior officials, from 16.3% in 2019 to 10.2% in 2021, reflecting some signs of more women holding higher-paid managerial roles. For a number of reasons, women may want to consider putting themselves forward that promotion!

Some basic principles

Men can act as advocates, allies and champions in the workplace and beyond. In his presentation, Simon set out some basic principles that can be adopted by CEOs, senior directors and managers to shift our behaviours and practices in the workplace:

- **Educate yourself:** Ask each other what our experiences are, and how we can support each other. If you show positivity and respect to others, you will get a positive response.
- **Accept feedback:** We don't always get things right. We should not see that feedback as something offensive – it's a continuous learning process.
- **Listen to all people:** People aren't one homogenous group. We need to listen to the voices of all women, including women of diverse sexualities, ethnicities, abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, co-parents, single mothers and others.

- **Amplify voices:** We are not speaking *for* women, we are amplifying the voices *of* those women.
- **See something, say something:** It’s very easy to stand back and not say anything. No matter how small, as an ally you should stand forward and say it.
- **Reverse mentor:** If you are senior in the business, ask someone younger or more junior to share their experiences with you.
- **We cannot do it alone:** We need to work together to build a community of advocates so we don’t tackle these issues alone.

Male allies

As this shows, there are many ways in which men can contribute to gender equality. Men can do more to highlight talent in the workplace, making sure that we publicly celebrate accomplishments, both formally and informally.

Male allyship may take the form of coaching and mentoring, where men in the business work with women to promote and support talent. This can include offering advice and time, sharing opportunities, and helping women take on a more active role on high-profile projects and in management opportunities.

Remember that this is a two way process, and that men can learn from this relationship too. As Lee Holloway, who is mentoring two women at Grant Thornton, said: ‘It adds to my working life as well.’ But if businesses need any further encouragement to take part in such activities, he pointed out that there are also benefits to the business: ‘It’s massively important to ensure equality, but it’s also about attracting and retaining talent. We’re in a talent war and want to make sure that we’re leading the way as a profession. The commercial aspect is important, as well as the social benefits.’

Dilpreet Dhanoa also spoke about the broader benefits to the business. ‘Women shouldn’t be counted for the sake of statistics, but rather for their expertise and ability to bring a truly different perspective. The tax profession is good at bringing intellectually diverse people together – accountants, lawyers, economists, policy makers – and that diverse approach means that very often traditional labels can be set to one side.

‘As women, we do face challenges in the workplace. But tax gives us a platform to say that what’s really critical is an organisational framework that is set up to create an enabling culture – and that says, we are proactively looking to develop true

diversity and bring together people from different walks of life.’

Two-way representation

Not all elements of male allying require men to do more, though. Sometimes, men should take a step back and allow women to share the opportunities. The principle that women should be included on all panels and in all group discussions is an established one, but they still often consist of a disproportionate number of male participants. And once included, we need to make sure that women are treated with the same respect as their male counterparts and that their voice is heard. Have the awareness to pass on questions in meetings to the women round the table who may have more expertise in the area in question. Make sure that women take on an equal role in large, visible projects in your company.

The corollary of this, though, is that we should remember to include men in workplace events about gender equality and gender bias. Men may feel that they are encroaching on women’s space and politely stay away. They may feel insecure or afraid to step forwards. Inviting men to events such as these will help them to learn about the issues, realise that they are also part of the narrative and find solutions.

Developing broader programmes within the business can also support women with issues such as maternity leave, return to work and parenting responsibilities, enabling them to play a vital part in the business and to develop their careers. Sometimes, taking a more flexible approach to time management and our working lives can make all the difference in the world.

And, of course, we should remember that these flexibilities do not benefit women alone. Improving paternity leave and flexible working for fathers will have a direct impact on the working lives of both men and women – provided men take up these opportunities.

Jeremy Coker summed the whole message up beautifully: ‘If we continue to focus on women as the solution, we are not solving the root problem. Men need to take responsibility. And whatever we do has to have long-term sustainability.’

Image


AVERAGE SALARIES
IN TAXATION
Women
£23.19 per
hour
Men
£26.79 per
hour
Source: ONS

Image


FTSE 350 CEOS
Of top 350 companies listed on the FTSE stock exchange:
16
are
women
2
are women
of colour
Source: UN Women UK

Image


VENTURE CAPITAL
Of all venture capital worldwide:
2%
goes to women
entrepreneurs
Source: UN Women UK

Image

SUSAN BALL: HOW THIS IMPACTS US



Susan Ball is currently the Deputy President of the CIOT and will take on the role of President in May. She is a Fellow of CIOT and a member of ATT. Susan is a partner in the employer solutions team at RSM with over 30 years' experience in the employment tax, investigations and reward field. She spoke at the webinar on Male Allies.

No workplace is perfect, and the best workplaces are environments where learning and growth are encouraged. Women in leading roles have an opportunity to influence the advancement of others within their field. We should all be role models. I strongly believe that you have to step up, and when you do you have to lift others as well. It reminds me of the famous quote by Madeleine Albright: 'There's a special place in hell for women who don't help each other.' But how do we do this?

We need to take action. I'm really grateful for the male sponsors and allies I've had during the course of my career. Perhaps the most recent example is actually stepping up to become the president of the CIOT from May. I didn't do that without actually having a number of men push me to do it. It's really interesting that I will only be the fourth woman to have held that role in 80-odd years, and it required men to encourage me. Like a lot of women, I didn't think I was 100% suitable for the role. And we hear that often. Sometimes, you need to push yourself forward.

In the context of the CIOT (and as Jeremy said, in relation to the ATT), we're in a great position now where 62% of the senior management team are female, and 67% of staff. We launched a mentor programme for speakers so we would have more female speakers, and now about 50% of our speakers are female.

If you can see it, you can be it. I encourage people to do what they can. Be bold, be brave and raise awareness.