



WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: ANECDOTES BASED ON THEIR HIRING PREFERENCES

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Overview of Problem/Issue

Last year, GUWLI hosted a reception for all women interested in the 2010 Gender in the Workplace Research Initiative. During the discussion, at my table, I asked if women entrepreneurs are more likely to hire other women or men. While the answer at the table (those that spoke) said women, my reaction was different. I exclaimed, “based on my experience, I think I would hire a man. I need someone to get things done, I would have limited resources and I need someone who can get things done with less chat and less handholding ...” I said that and I own up to my words, even though it wasn’t until I conducted more interviews that I started to hear and understand what I said.

Research Design

My research methodology consisted of two components: (a) qualitative in-depth phone/live interviews with female entrepreneurs and (b) online posting/discussion feedback within female entrepreneurship groups.

My research findings are anecdotal and, at best, thought provoking. In conducting 8 phone/live interviews and 2 LinkedIn message exchanges, my questions always started with a broad introduction: “I am an MBA student - a future entrepreneur – and I am curious about the hiring practices of women entrepreneurs. Can you tell me more about your hiring experiences and/or preferences?”

Some women responded that gender does not play a role, but only job/position qualifications do. A few women indicated that they actively seek out women, and two of these women specifically said that there is some dimension of gender bias, but they would not be surprised if they heard most women entrepreneurs give the politically correct answer.

Findings/Further Questions

The interviews were interesting and intriguing. While no hard conclusions can be made, the main question that rose from the interviews is based on the fact that one way, or another, the women entrepreneurs seemed to have thought about gender at one point or another. An interview stated that there seem to be only 2 types of women, each at an extreme, while for men it’s 1000 shades of gray. This fact indirectly implied that this woman had internalized or drew conclusions about other women in the work environment. Another respondent indicated that start-ups have a greater challenge attracting diverse candidates because the big companies generally have programs in place that focus on diversity and better incentivize top talent to go there. The implication here seemed to be that there is limited talent pool of women, which was surprising at a time that more women graduate from college than men.

Whether men may or may not think about this issue may be irrelevant. What seems to be apparent, however, is that women appear to have thought about the gender role in hiring and about interaction with other women at the workplace.