

Women CEOs changing the way U.S. does business

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Want to see what the future could look like for working mothers? Look inside a company run by one.

Go ahead, point out that Marissa Mayer, the CEO of Yahoo, hasn't made life easier for the working mothers at her company when she banned telecommuting. But if you look past Mayer, at the more than 8 million companies owned or led by women, you will find leaders at the helm who are creating workplaces where I'd want to work.

Many of these women bosses are leading their companies much differently than men. They are socially conscious, interested in mentoring, willing to grant flexibility and making an effort to pay fairly. They are using a style of leadership that's attractive not only to women but to men, too.

And guess what? Their companies make money.

Sure, there are great male leaders. Ask a room full of people whether they would have wanted to work for Steve Jobs and most hands would shoot way up without hesitation. Not mine.

I would rather work for Christine Day, the CEO of Lululemon Athletica, a mother of three who wears exercise apparel to corporate meetings. Day is considered one of the most successful female chief executives of a public company and has tapped into what women want, not just in the work-out products they buy, but

also in the place where they work.

After a 20-year journey through the ranks of Starbucks, Day now uses a collaborative style of leadership to empower her employees and build a company that can grow fast while remaining nimble.

Today, 50 percent of Lululemon's board and 80 percent of the senior leadership team are women. Day gave a pay increase to all employees making less than \$85,000. She initiated a flexible return-to-work program for all new mothers in the headquarters and stores. And, she encourages her employees to exercise, participating alongside them in in-store fitness classes whenever possible.

"We've developed a very high-performing company," Day recently told Katie Couric.

"There are things I've done that change the way we work."

We've all heard the claims, the theories and the speculation about the ways leadership styles vary between women and men. Men are considered more strategic. Women are more nurturing, natural problem solvers, good at developing others and building relationships. Researchers say those traits are helping women build companies that can positively impact families and communities.

It's not just how women lead that's inspiring to me.

Many female CEOs are better about giving flex-

ibility, providing on-site child care, allowing pets at work and offering training and opportunities to advance. That trend will be increasingly important with women-led businesses expected to generate one-third of new U.S. jobs by 2018.

Most important, women leaders see value in mentoring. In Florida, a new study by The Commonwealth Institute South Florida shows women-led organizations are flourishing and carefully finding employees who fit the culture. Although worried about growing and maintaining profitability, women leaders still consider mentoring others to be valuable to their organizations. More than three quarters of the women said they spend time informally developing other women for leadership in their organization.

Of course, I realize there are women who rise up to become leaders or "queen bees," only to hold other women back. But I'd like to think we're going in the other direction. I'd like to believe the future for working families will improve as more women take the helm and use their unique strengths. Leadership coach and author Debora McLaughlin believes we're on that path: "Women think of ways to build community in the company. When you are working from a shared vision, performance increases and profitability happens."

