blink

By Linda Wagener, Ph.D.

Workplace Culture: Gender Equity at Blink

Featured in photo from left to right: Linda Wagener Ph.D., chief culture officer; Nickelle Sletteland, California general manager; and Karen Clark Cole, CEO and co-founder at Blink's San Diego studio.

It is true that Blink's first generation of leadership, co-founders Karen Clark Cole and Kelly Franznick, constituted a perfect gender balance. This also extended into the next generation, keeping a 50-50 ratio with the addition of employees John Dirks and Heidi Adkisson. Through the generations, that perfect ratio has swung slightly in one direction or another, but Blink continues to be a gender-inclusive workplace. Currently, 56% of our full-time regular employees identify as women, and 44% identify as men. According to our internal 2020 Culture survey, employees' enthusiastic endorsement of Blink as a good place to work does not differ by gender.

Blink is a bit of a rarity in the tech industry by virtue of its long history of commitment to gender equity. By comparison, a 2017 study by Deloitte found that women occupied only 24% of technology positions. A 2020 GAFAM report (an acronym for five popular U.S. tech stocks: Google (Alphabet), Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft) of women in tech shows little improvement among these largest tech employers.

How did this come about?

Because Blink has a long history of gender equality, thinking that it "just happened" might be

tempting. To the contrary, our inclusive culture and gender balance have evolved together. Historically, Blink leadership and employees have worked very hard to build an inclusive culture that provides equal opportunity for people of all genders to advance in their careers. As one example, we have ensured that managers use objective criteria to assess employees' levels and readiness for promotion, thus mitigating the impact of unconscious bias.

"Those of us who have been hiring managers at Blink are committed to developing a progressive workplace that includes a healthy gender diversity. Fortunately, the UX design and research disciplines are among the most balanced in tech from a gender standpoint, so we have had great candidates to select from over the years," Chief Research Officer John Dirks says. "The secret after hiring is creating the culture and conditions within each department of the company to ensure that every employee, regardless of gender, is treated fairly and equally, and I think we have done a good job with that thus far. My hope is that in the future we can tell a similar 'good news' story about racial diversity at Blink."

Why does gender diversity matter to business?

Research supports the calls for gender equity. A study by Harvard Kennedy School's Women and Public Policy Program shows that in cultural contexts that support gender equality, mixed-gender teams are more generous and egalitarian, and teams with a larger percentage of women perform better by building meaningful relationships and creating successful work processes. Research by Gallup and many other studies examining the role of gender diversity in business outcomes, such as profitability and productivity have found similar support for the positive influence of gender diversity. Research from a variety of other sources, cited in Forbes, also supports the positive influence of having a woman CEO on any number of business outcomes.

References for further reading

- Gender Diversity, Business-Unit Engagement, and Performance. Sangeeta Badal, James K. Harter, Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, September 2013
- Why Women-Led Companies Are Better for Employees (Forbes)
- The Impact of Gender Diversity on the Performance of Business Teams: Evidence from a Field Experiment (Harvard)