

# Gender equality: time for action

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**Women in PR should remain authentic and be true to themselves but exhortations to speak up and network more should be accompanied by equal pay and equal opportunities.**

## Blog



Some of the most talented and brightest minds in PR gathered at the Dream Hotel in New York City yesterday to celebrate excellence in communications.

Oh, and by the way, most of them were women, as the gathering was a celebration of PRWeek's second annual [Hall of Femme honorees and Champions of PR](#) next generation leaders.

This year's honorees are Kathy Bloomgarden, Kimberley Goode, Catherine Hernandez-Blades, Margery Kraus, Marian Salzman, Barby Siegel, Pam Wickham, Renee Wilson, and Melissa Waggener Zorkin, and seven of these inspirational PR pros were able to join us on the day.

There was an [insightful panel discussion](#) involving members of the PR Council's SheQuality Project, designed to help women risk up the ranks in the PR profession. Chaired by Council president Wilson, other contributors included Siegel, 2016 Hall of Femmes Gail Heimann and Barri Rafferty, Dale Bornstein, and Maureen Lippe.

In response to feedback from last year that men need to be involved in this discussion too if real change is to be achieved, a [keynote from Johnson & Johnson's Michael Sneed](#) and a [panel comprising Richard Edelman, John Brockelman, Jim Weiss, and Tony Wells](#) rounded out the event.

Panelist Maureen Lippe, CEO of Lippe Taylor, noted a survey by *The Wall Street Journal* published yesterday that said female CEOs in the S&P 500 are actually earning more money than their male counterparts, though Weber Shandwick's Heimann did point out that only 5% of the 500 are women, so there's still a long way to go before we can even think of gender parity at the top of business.

[PRWeek's annual Salary Survey](#) continually shows a significant disparity between the compensation of men and women in PR, an average deficit of a stunning \$36,000 in this year's survey. This data tallies with macro figures from the National Partnership for Women and Families that show women make about 77 cents for every dollar a man earns.



Ketchum's Rafferty and Weber's Heimann, representing two of the top five agencies in the world, said [the income gap had been fixed at their companies](#), so if this is true there must be other players that are lagging.

Heimann acknowledged the next step is to look at "opportunity parity," to ensure women are being offered similar roles or assignments to men whether or not they have families or go out and ask for them.

There is still a feeling that women tend to be doers who get on with focusing on the job, rather than prioritizing networking or self-advocating like their male peers. They are also more likely to advocate for people on their teams rather than themselves.

But there was also general agreement that women should be authentic and not try to "become men" in the way they act in the workplace. In fact, Rafferty pointed out that female leadership traits are becoming much more aligned with the modern concept of good leadership.

Richard Edelman advised women to "[speak up](#)" more in the face of "macho" environments and he would then "hammer the guys," but Hall of Femme honoree Pam Wickham from Raytheon was more trenchant in her remarks and said the time had come for action - the days of talking are over.

"We don't need to speak up, we need to be heard," she said. "We don't need stretch opportunities, we need equal opportunities. We don't need to network more - we need to get paid more. We don't need men to advise us, we need women who did it to tell us how they did it."

That passionate acceptance speech summed up the beauty and strength of the Hall of Femme for me. Judging by the enthusiastic reaction in the room, many agreed with Wickham and that frustration with a lack of progress and latent anger about the issue of gender equality in the workplace is something that should be noted by all PR leaders.

