

How families can help close the gender gap. How can business families help ensure that the family business benefits from the talents of female as well as male relatives? In *The Family Business Policies & Procedures Handbook*, family business advisers Leslie Dashew, Jane Hilburt-Davis, Bonnie Brown Hartley, Cathy Sunshine and Kay Wakefield Abramowitz offer some suggestions:

1. **Raise children to pursue all types of opportunities.** Parents play a crucial role in preparing their children for future success, but they often fail to recognize the subtle messages they convey. Parents must recognize that from an early age youngsters are observing parental behavior and heeding messages about gender roles.
2. **Establish a family council as a place for family members to learn about opportunities and consider careers.** A family council can be a forum for conversations about the family, creation of employment guidelines, education about the business and decision making about the future of the company. This venue encourages youngsters to connect to the family and the business.
3. **Create opportunities for women to participate in family and business governance.** So often, we hear that Mom was an "informal" counsel to Dad or the "power behind the throne." This sends a message to young girls that women cannot have a position "out front" in the family business. Providing legitimate roles for women in family organizations is key to demonstrating gender neutrality.
4. **Encourage female relatives to network with other family business women.** Participation in forums and programs for women business owners provides educational and networking opportunities.