

GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN THE EMPLOYMENT OF SECRETARIES IN THE NIGERIAN LABOUR MARKET

by

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Introduction

There are different types of secretaries whether male or female. Personal Secretary usually abbreviated as PA is a personal secretary by academic or year of service and qualifications which might not include office technology experience. His own work is just to advise the boss and at the same time need the assistant of professional secretary to bring his/her work to perfection. Therefore, professional secretary is inevitable in the Nigerian labour market.

It is generally believed that secretaryship is the work that belong to female gender but it is obvious that some men are also involved in the work as a Secretaries. The question now is that, can we categorically say that secretarial work is for female gender, male gender or both?. We want to answer this question in this writing. As a worker in OAUTHC Ile-Ife and being a Secretary, this writer has seen many female secretaries and some male secretaries as well but I can not categorically say as at this time that a particular gender dominates the secretarial practice.

There are possible situations that could be encountered. There could be a woman secretary working for a man boss, the woman Secretary working for a woman boss, a man secretary working with a man boss, also there is a man secretary working with a woman boss. Each of these situations has its own particular advantages and disadvantages which will be highlighted in this paper.

What is Gender? According to Longman Dictionary, it is the fact of being male or female. There are different ways for classifying gender. Gender difference /distinction indicates the difference between man and woman. Discrimination can be define as treating one person or group differently from another in an unfair way. When we are talking of discrimination, it might be widespread discrimination to older people, university graduate to polytechnic graduate, race, sex. etc. When we are talking of discrimination, it can be reverse or positive discrimination. It can be viewed in line of ability to recognize the difference between two or more things especially in the difference in their quality, or shape discrimination.

Causes of Gender Discrimination

1. Attitude
2. Belief
3. Type of work
4. Religion
5. Politics
6. Government
7. Environment/Area

Attitude of a female secretary/male secretary to work may cause a boss to stick on the person of his or her sex mate or choose to work with opposite sex. Assuming a female secretary is attached to a male boss as it is generally believed that secretary is the hob/horn of the office, secretary works with his boss to the late hour of the day until they achieve their focus of the day, the indisciplined male boss may like to use that forum to show interest in love affairs with the woman especially if they are almost of the same age. If he does not achieve his/her aim such a boss may develop dissatisfaction of the product of the secretary and start complaint, Hatred will follow and it might lead the boss to ask for a change of secretary, lodging the complaint that the present one is not competent enough for the office tasks until he will get the one that will agree with his needs.

While Male Boss Prefers Male Secretary

Some male bosses prefer to work with male secretaries backed with some points of belief or individual differences. Some believe that female secretary as a woman is not strong enough to face the rigour of the office task when the work is becoming tedious especially at the sensitive office where interview or any tedious work usually occurs. It is believed that woman does not always have time to attend to office tasks though she might be competent. There are some things that can occupy female secretary besides office work i.e. domestic work which male secretary is free from all these complaints. There will be man to man work while makes them to understand each other. A female secretary does not like to work to late hour but it is easy for male secretary to adapt to this situation.

Some male bosses do not find it easy to control a female secretary. Even if there is any mistake, he would not be able to correct her sharply as he would do to male secretary all in the name that he is seeing the female secretary as another man's wife. It could be religious bias.

Some bosses believe that male secretary is more competent than female secretary though it is not always true. A male secretary will not take maternity leave as female secretary can do though the paternity leave has been given in some states now e.g. Lagos State which will not take longer time as female secretary's own. If the male secretary is working with male boss, there will be gender imbalance, there will be no

incessant permission taking as female secretary can do in the name that her children is in the school she will go and take them or taking children to school in the morning which can delay her from being punctual in the office.

Why Male Boss Prefers Female Secretary

A male boss can prefer to work with female secretary if the boss views it in the area of neatness, tidiness and so on. A female secretary as a mother in the house can always use the motherly traits applying at home in the office because the traits are there. A female secretary is prolific. She knows how to organize, control, tidy every nooks and crannies of the environment by controlling the cleaners to know where to clean, sweep and every step they can take to let the environment and office clean unlike men that do not even take note of environment whether neat or dirty so far the area in the office where he will work is clean. A female secretary is a role model for another staff in coming to work neatly and her neatness and her moderate and responsible dressing makes other staff emulate her.

Female secretary being a mother is always good as a receptionist; she will be able to apply the motherly traits in her to attend to her boss, staff and callers. With her motherly inbuilt, she gives good advice to those who come to her for advice. A professional woman secretary can be a good adviser for her boss.

Why Female Boss Prefers Male Secretary.

A female boss might prefer male secretary if she believes that male secretary is the one that can handle tedious work that will take longer time before it can be finish which she knows that such work is what they always handle in that office. She can prefer male secretary because he will have more stamina to face the rigour of the work and at times domestic work will not take priority in office work for the male secretary unlike the female secretary. Male secretaries are always present in the office than female secretaries. There is some work that need to call Secretary for on some week ends, and male secretary may always be available more than female secretary at the weekends.

At times, there may be need for the boss to attend a meeting and if she is busy in the office or another task hinders her from attending the meeting, she might tell the male secretary to attend the meeting. Even if there is no official car to convey the male secretary there, it is easier for him to find his way to the meeting rather than the woman that will be waiting for official car to convey her to the venue. Also if she thinks that male secretary can be delayed till late hour but there is limitation on delay when working with female secretary, by thinking of domestic affairs she needs to do at home. If male secretary is working with female boss, this situation usually gives no room for envy since male dresses are different from female dresses.

Why Female Boss Prefers Female Secretary

This another situation we often come across in many establishments. A female boss and a female secretary often put each other into confidence. They discuss about things that is not possible to discuss with opposite sex if the secretary is male. In many occasion, this interaction often moves the establishment forward. There has been the situation where female boss and female secretary put trust in each other. She can even ask her secretary to take care of her home i.e. children when she and her husband travel for six months to abroad and the boss does not have regret over her action.

Female secretary can interact better with the visitor. She is a good manager, good coordinator, good decorator and they are of the same sex which makes her female boss free to send her any errand. In the area of entertainment, female Secretary is fantastic.

Effects

1. It may bring low employment rate among unpreferred sex (Ishola, 2008; Akintoyese, 2008).
2. It promotes employment among the preferred sex.

In general both sexes are encouraged to study secretaryship course because if one sex is preferred in one case, the other sexes will be preferred in other cases. Government should not limit Secretarial line certificate to HND alone. There should be room for the secretaries to further their education to university level to have their B. Sc in Secretarial Administration. Even if they like it may reach Ph.D level, to reduce discrimination and encourage standard. People of more competency will spring up and when attached to the bosses of different profession, they will be able to recognize and respect our profession.

Conclusion

We as the professional secretaries need to rise up to the task and strive to attain higher levels that will propel our competency the more. We need to have good command of English language, be bold and be ourselves in this job. In this age of globalization and best practices, high level of secretarial proficiency and dexterity become imperative. Much may not depend on gender sentiments but performance and expertise.

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