

Gender Equality: A Jew's Guide to Having More Impact Without Doing More Work

By: Ilana Broad

From a young age, I was taught that the Jewish people's designation as "chosen" was more a responsibility than a lionization; we are charged with remembering the history of our oppression and survival, and relying on it to inform our work of tikkun olam. Until recently, my efforts to leave this world a better place than when I found it included philanthropy, volunteering, and voting; to be frank, until recently, I thought that was a complete list of social justice work available to me, absent overturning my entire career and working for an organization I believe shares my values.

I think that's a pretty solid list - philanthropy, volunteering, and voting - of community contribution that Schechter, in part, helped to teach me. As a practicing attorney, making time for all of that work was difficult, but it was important to me and it made me feel hopeful for our future. I knew that I could probably be better about who I gave my money to outside of philanthropy, but I also knew how much work it took for me to build and maintain my personal list of trusted philanthropic organizations, and I'm not going to do all of that research every single time I'm in the grocery store or hate-browsing Amazon's deals of the day, yet again.

I've never trusted brand-communicated values, because I was taught to look at the incentives of the people behind that messaging. I'm of the generation that watched the words "green" and "clean" lose all meaning in advertising. The only values-oriented information I trusted were third-party-verified health and sustainability-focused certification marks - the little stamps on the back of product packaging that show that someone outside of the company reviewed the product to see if it's truly organic, or if it hasn't been tested on animals. This is unsurprising for a person that was raised to understand the distinctions between different hechshers (fun fact: one of the first certification marks, signed by a rabbinical court, was issued in the 11th century for a cheese manufacturer¹) - my relationship to certification marks was limited to product or manufacturing-related information.

A few years ago, a friend of mine approached me and asked if I'd heard of any labor-focused certification marks. At the time, she had been graduated by an incredible university and working for a few years, and was really dissatisfied with the lack of diversity she saw in impactful positions across her workplaces. I had been feeling similarly dissatisfied, and was resigned to work as hard as I could to break certain glass ceilings myself, which I assumed was the only way to create a more equitable economy for future generations. Meantime, I was reading all these statistics on the gender biases that impact women's abilities to get promoted, earn equitably, or start their own business, and I was seeing the results of those biases first hand in my social network.

This friend of mine wanted to create a stamp or a list that would indicate if a company exhibited gender equity in certain positions, so she could prioritize those values when spending, and choose products that contribute to building the world she wishes to see for our future. There previously *was not* an easy way to verify that the companies getting your hard-earned dollars employed and promoted with gender equity, or even a centralized list of gender-equitably owned companies, which I found surprising. In the last decade, consumers have begun prioritizing their spending with companies that meet their values, as well as talking about those companies with their communities at increasing rates. We call these consumers "belief-driven buyers," and while they

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cairo_Geniza

represented 50% of consumers globally in 2017, that number has been quickly rising: to 66% in 2018², and almost 80% in 2020³.

It doesn't surprise me at all that people are feeling more empowered in the economy than elsewhere. The last few years have been divisive, and more than half of Americans believe brands can do more to build a better world than governments⁴. But we're also all working hard in an economy that increasingly cannot support a single-income household, spending more time trying to earn money and feeling less productive, and being inundated with untrustworthy information more than ever before (and across more media than ever before). Now is the time to expand our repertoire of tikkun olam efforts to include more labor-oriented certification marks.

It likely won't surprise you to read, now, that this Jew (alongside their very innovative friend) co-founded a market-based solution to this problem; we have built an easy-to-spot, simple-to-understand set of stamps indicating gender equity across different levels of impact of a workplace, as well as a database that will collect all this information and make it available to you for free, at any time, with a user-friendly interface. With an eye towards building a more gender equitable economy, and an understanding of and respect for all the different ways that people of all genders can lead, my friend and I recently launched the SHE Marks™ - a collection of certification marks indicating gender equity in leadership/management ([SHEruns™](#)), creative/innovative roles ([SHEmakes™](#)), and ownership ([SHEowns™](#)).

More than anything else, I'm excited to offer a way for us all to add to our social justice work, without the *work*. I am so grateful for the values with which Schechter helped to rear me, and for the opportunity to share this information with the Schechter community. I know that you all share my passion for tikkun olam, and I'm sure that you all do as much as you can to be the change you wish to see in the world. And what a better world it would be for everyone if we had greater economic gender equality: studies show that we can do more to increase economic growth by building towards a gender equal labor force participation than we could by focusing on equality in education or politics⁵. Gender equal labor initiatives also decrease wage and wealth inequality, growing the middle class and contributing to greater economic prosperity.

The economic case for gender equality is significant, but the ethical, moral, and religious case is greater: we *must* build a greater world for everyone, as we have been chosen for this purpose. It is time for us, as Jews and as human beings generally, to build a more conscious capitalism that serves us all. If you'd like to add the SHE Marks to your suite of tikkun olam efforts, or if your business would like to share its values with consumers, or if you work for a business that you think might benefit from marketing their values, you can learn more at www.theSHEmark.com, and follow the movement @theSHEmark on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

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² <https://www.edelman.com/news-awards/two-thirds-consumers-worldwide-now-buy-beliefs>

³ <https://www.instantoffices.com/blog/business-growth/belief-driven-buying/>

⁴ <https://www.edelman.com/earned-brand>

⁵ <https://www.idrc.ca/en/news/new-research-highlights-how-gender-equality-impacts-economy>; <http://www.levyinstitute.org/research/gender-equality-and-the-economy>; <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/economic-and-financial-affairs/economic-benefits-gender-equality>; <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/10/why-gender-and-income-inequality-are-linked/>