

On the basis of sex...

“**S**he’s just too emotional.” It’s a phrase that continues to follow women in the workplace — like an invisible leash, tugging us back whenever we dare to show how deeply we care. But let’s pause for a moment and ask: What do we really mean when we say that? And is being emotional the same as being unprofessional?

One emotion seems widely accepted — sometimes even rewarded: anger at least, when men express it.

During a conversation on inclusion, a man spoke to me in a way that was not only dismissive of women but also discriminatory. As I stood my ground and called it out, he interrupted with a smug smile and said, “Don’t be that angry woman again.”

“**That angry woman.**” That phrase made me feel even angrier — but not in the shouting, name-calling kind of way, because that’s never okay, for anyone. Anger, when weaponised to intimidate, is not leadership. But this anger was different. It came from a place of injustice, from enduring microaggressions, from the exhaustion of always having to stay calm, composed, and likeable.

Another woman I spoke to — let’s call her Anita — shared a similar experience.

“I was angry,” she told me. “More senior people ignored me and failed to deliver the advice the client needed. It went against my values, and I got angry.” She was passionate as she recounted it. “But when I spoke up, he looked at me like I was out of control. I wasn’t. I was clear. I was frustrated. But the second a woman changes her tone, or even raises her eyebrows, we’re suddenly ‘emotional.’”

Emotions are not the problem The way we judge them is. When I spoke to a Chief Human Resource Of-

ficer in India and asked her about the myth that women are too emotional for leadership, she scoffed: “Pfff. You should see the boys in the boardroom,” she said. “When they don’t get their way, they slam fists on the table. They shout. Can you imagine the consequences if I did that?”

Why is anger acceptable — almost expected — when it’s a man expressing it, but frowned upon when a woman expresses it, even calmly and in pursuit of fairness? The truth is, emotions are data. They’re signals from our inner world, trying to tell us something. The real question isn’t whether we show emotion, but how we show it. If emotion inspires others, drives clarity, and demands fairness, then it’s not weakness. It’s leadership. Let’s not forget the emotions that build workplace culture: pride, gratitude, compassion, and joy.

I’ll be speaking soon to a group of 500 people about the power of gratitude. Countless studies show that a simple, heartfelt “thank you” is one of the most effective

ways to boost employee engagement. Not performance reviews. Not bonuses. Just a genuine, daily acknowledgement that someone’s effort mattered.

Yet these positive emotions — more often expressed by women — are undervalued in many corporate cultures. That needs to change.

So the question isn’t: Should women temper their emotions in meetings? The better question is: What might our workplaces look like if we stopped policing emotion — and started embracing it? Wisely. Respectfully. With humanity.

DEI: Evolution or revolution? “We’re making great progress,” the CEO said in a meeting with his top leadership team.

I looked around the room — one other woman besides me, and every-one else had fair or quite fair skin.

Mette Johansson explores how emotional bias and gendered expectations continue to hinder women in the workplace, highlighting the need to recognise emotional intelligence and unpaid DEI work as essential components of effective leadership



“Progress,” I thought, “can be very subjective.”

What followed was predictable: “We do have diversity of thought — look at all the different degrees in the room! Engineering, chemistry, business.” He listed the various nationalities and socio-economic backgrounds represented. But to me, “diversity of thought” in a room full of men is an alarm bell.

Let’s be honest: real conversations, the ones that matter, still happen

on the golf course, over beers, or in WhatsApp groups that don’t include women. The networks remain tight and male. The boys still invite their protégés. The rest of us? We’re still trying to break through the golf course ceiling. If that’s progress, we need to aim higher.

Meanwhile, women are leading the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work — corporate committees, employee resource groups. All unpaid. I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve

heard companies ask, “How do we get men involved in our diversity and inclusion committees?” Some even suggest, “Maybe we should pay them to join.” Pay men to do the work women have been doing unpaid for years? It would be funny — if it weren’t so insulting.

Women are already project managers of the unpaid labour at home: childcare, elder care, emotional calendars, and life admin. Now, in the workplace, we’re expected to carry

the unpaid burden of diversity, too? Equity cannot be built on top of inequality.

So, evolution or revolution? History shows that sometimes, a single bold act changes everything. Rosa Parks, a 42-year-old seamstress, refused to give up her seat to a white man on a cold winter day in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955. Her defiance sparked a seismic shift in the civil rights movement. It was nothing short of a revolution. It looked small at the time, but it echoed loudly through history.

But for every Rosa Parks, we need thousands of people taking evolutionary steps — small, daily actions that push boundaries. Like speaking up when someone is dismissed for being the “wrong profile”: too dark-skinned, too outspoken, too working-class, too female.

We need bold moves — and steady ones. And let’s not underestimate what happens when we set targets and stick to them.

In 2016, BHP — an Australian mining company — set a bold goal: 40% of its hires would be women by 2025. At the time, only 17% of its workforce were women. In April 2025, BHP reached 40 per cent female representation in their global employee workforce. This is a world-first for a global listed mining company in one of the world’s most male-dominated industries. Because what gets measured gets done. It always has. The same was true when Ireland, a deeply Catholic country, voted to legalise same sex marriage on May 22, 2015 and it came into effect in November 2016. That revolutionary moment was built on years of quiet evolution: activism, conversations, awareness.

That one bold decision didn’t just legalise marriage — it opened hearts, shifted norms, and normalised equality. So no, we don’t have to wait for the perfect revolution. But we do need bold leadership — and the courage to act.

So no, we don’t have to wait for the perfect revolution. But we do need bold leadership — and the courage to act. Evolution often places the responsibility on the individual: You must be more inclusive. You speak up. But without systemic change and top-down commitment, we’re still asking the already overburdened to carry the load for everyone else.

Maybe the real revolution is this: To stop calling equity “radical” — And to start calling it what it truly is: Necessary.

(Mette Johansson is a leadership coach, author, and gender equity advocate, helping organisations cultivate inclusive and authentic leadership.)

Aneimudi, the highest peak south of the Himalayas, offers breathtaking views and a challenging climb through mist-shrouded wilderness, writes George Netto

Few visitors to Munnar fail to notice the towering, mist-capped mountain that looms like a colossus behind the hill resort. However, not all are aware that this is Aneimudi, an 8,841-foot giant regarded as the highest peak in South India, south of the Himalayas — a distinction that has been officially and unquestionably established for many years. Known as “the Everest of the South,” Aneimudi’s close contender is the Dodabetta Peak in Ootacamund.

The name “Aneimudi” is derived from the Tamil words for “elephant’s brow,” which aptly describes the shape of its summit. The peak is often shrouded in mist — a feature that enhances its mystique, sparking imaginations about the secrets it may be hiding.

In earlier centuries, before modern navigational aids were available, Aneimudi was used as a reliable landmark for ships approaching the Kochi port. On clear, sunny days, the Arabian Sea can be seen shimmering in the distance, some 80 kilometres away as the crow flies.

Aneimudi has long had historical ties with Munnar’s flourishing tea plantations. In the shadow of the peak, tea estates have thrived for over 148 years, ever since British pioneer A Y Sharpe planted the



At an elevation of 2,695 metres (8,841ft), Aneimudi is the highest peak in the Western Ghats and South India. The name Aneimudi literally translates to “elephant’s brow,” a reference to the resemblance of the mountain to an elephant’s head. WIKIPEDIA



Tea plantations around the Eravikulam National Park in Munnar.



A peak view of Munnar near Aneimudi. IMAGES COURTESY WIKIPEDIA



Aneimudi is nestled among the Nilgiri mountain range. PHOTO BY AUTHOR



The landscape around Aneimudi.

seasoned climbers like them, the ascent would have been a walk in the park. However, for novices, the climb can be gruelling. In the mid-1980s, the Idukki District Mountaineering Association, headquartered in Munnar, brought a Sherpa from Darjeeling’s Himalayan

Mountaineering Institute to train aspiring climbers on the lower slopes of Aneimudi. The climb from the base to the summit takes at least three hours. The initial ascent is gradual, winding through expansive grasslands. As you near the peak, however, the incline becomes nearly vertical, and climbers must crawl up on all fours, gripping the grass for dear life, praying it won’t give way and send them tumbling hundreds of feet. Reaching the top, surrounded by dense fog that reduces visibility to near zero, is an eerie experience. It’s easy to imagine walking off the edge if you’re not careful, as we learned in 1978.

Our ascent was interrupted by a frightening moment when someone in our group cried, “Karadi! Karadi!” (meaning bear). One of us had spotted what appeared to be a bear climbing ahead of us in the thick fog. Panic gripped us, but moments later, the mist cleared to reveal our guide — a robust figure, scrambling up the slope like a bear himself! Climbers often encounter wildlife on their journey, as Aneimudi lies within the sprawling 97 square-kilometre Eravikulam National Park. This park shelters endangered species, such as elephants, Nilgiri tahr, tigers, leopards, sloth bears, gaur, sambars, and barking deer. As such, climbing Aneimudi requires clearance from the

Kerala Forest Department. Back in 1978, during our climb, we flashed mirrors from the summit to signal our success to friends below in Munnar, who acknowledged with signals of their own. As if in reward for our perseverance, the fog lifted briefly, unveiling a breathtaking 360-degree view. The vista from the peak was nothing short of stupendous. Towering mountain ranges surrounded us, and far below, we saw the Munnar-Coimbatore road, with tiny vehicles crawling along it. Munnar town shimmered in the distance, and we could see the plains of Tamil Nadu, the Anamalai hills, tea factories, Thekaddy and Peermade, and even the plains of Coimbatore. Aneimudi truly lives up to its name, never failing to reward those who venture to climb it. In April 1997, I flew over Aneimudi in a helicopter during a reconnaissance trip for Ratan Tata’s aerial survey of his company’s tea plantations in Munnar. The view from the chopper was awe-inspiring. I could even spot landmarks from my earlier laborious climb to the summit. It’s also on record that on March 11, 1972, a group of adventurers from Munnar became the first to camp overnight on Aneimudi’s summit, braving icy winds and wildlife threats. They returned safely the next day, their tales as grand as the peak itself.