

# Felix, Felicia, and Equal Pay for Women

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Felix the frog had a sister named Felicia. After he found himself safely ensconced in a big pond with lots of lily pads he sent for his sister who immediately came to join him.

Not long after Felicia arrived, Alice, the woman who made the deal with Felix that led to the creation of his pond behind Alice's headquarters, came down to the pond to sit on the folding chair she carried with her, and ponder the issues facing her division. As she set up her chair and sat down she noticed there were two frogs, not one.

"Who is this?" asked Alice of Felix, nodding in the direction of the second frog.

Felix and Felicia looked at one another. Felix nodded and Felicia answered, "My name is Felicia and I am Felix' sister."

Alice was more than a little taken aback. Now she faced two talking frogs, not just one.

"Excuse me if I seem a little startled," said Alice, "but I rather imagined that Felix was the only one of his kind and now I see there are two frogs that can talk."

"That's okay," said Felicia, "we know how rare we are."

"May I ask you something?" inquired Alice.

"Yes," answered Felicia.

"How did you and Felix learn to talk?"

"We didn't learn," interjected Felix, "we were born this way."

At that, Alice shook her head and said, "I don't get it."

Felicia began to explain. "Have you ever heard of the prince who was turned into a frog and then turned back into a prince when a princess kissed him?"

"Yes," answered Alice.

"Well," continued Felicia, "as a frog he could still talk. That's how he explained to the princess what had happened to him and how her kissing him would lift the spell."

"I know," responded Alice.

"Well," said Felicia, "what you don't know is that while he was a frog he had an affair with a real frog and their offspring were capable of speech. We are the descendants of that union. For generations now, we have possessed the power of speech."

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“And the thinking that goes along with it,” added Felix.

“Wow!” exclaimed Alice, “That’s rather amazing. So why have you and your ancestors remained hidden from view for so long? You are quite remarkable, you know.”

Felix replied, “Because of people like Clarence. They don’t see us as who we are but are always trying to make something out of us that we are not. You, Alice, are the first person to accept me as I am and to put my natural talents to good use.”

Alice blushed a little and said, “Why thank you, Felix.”

Felicia sat up on her lily pad and with a noticeable tone of bitterness in her voice said, “And it’s been particularly trying for us girl frogs.”

Alice nodded and said, “I know what you mean.”

Felix hopped off his lily pad and sat in front of Alice. She looked down at him and seeing that there was obviously something on his mind, asked, “What is it, Felix?”

Squirming a little, Felix replied, “I know that things aren’t fair out there. They should be but they aren’t. And they’ll never get that way on their own. It takes work to get rid of wrongs. Even though you turned around your division. . .”

“With your help,” interrupted Alice.

Blushing a bit, Felix continued, “You are still not being paid as much as your male counterparts and neither are any of the other women at your company.”

“I know, I know,” sighed Alice.

“That’s why I asked Felicia to come join me. We want to help you work on that,” said Felix.

Sitting back in her chair and quietly thinking for a moment, Alice sat up and asked, “How do you propose we proceed?”

Felix opened his mouth to answer but Felicia hopped off her pad, sat next to him and said, “I’ve got this, Felix.”

Felix smiled and said, “Go ahead, Sis.”

Felicia looked at Alice and said, “It’s a matter of control, and the fact of the matter is that neither you nor any other individual controls the pay of every man and woman in this company. Instead, the disparity between pay for men and women is the outcome of dozens and hundreds

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of decisions made by dozens and hundreds of individuals. Some are made in the course of hiring and setting starting salaries. Others are made in the course of conducting annual performance reviews. Some are made on the spot as part of paying a bonus or a spot raise. In short, the differences in pay owe to a myriad of factors.”

Alice interrupted and asked, “What does that have to do with control?”

Felicia smiled in a way that only a frog can manage and answered, “I’m about to explain that.” She then asked Alice, “Do you know how control works in a technical sense?”

Frowning, Alice, replied, “I think so but why don’t you tell me?”

Felicia replied, “Control is always against some standard, a reference, a target value. Control relies on feedback, on information about the actual value of the variable you are trying to control. That information can then be compared against the reference or target value for that variable. Consider the temperature in your office. It is controlled as a result of the actual room temperature being compared against the thermostat setting. If the room temperature is too low, the furnace kicks in. Too high, and the furnace shuts off.”

“I see what you mean,” said Alice.

“If the variable you are trying to control is the difference between pay for men and women then you need to know the amount of that difference on an ongoing basis,” continued Felicia. “And,” she added, “everyone who makes decisions and takes actions that affect that variable has to be aware of its value on an ongoing basis. This means the difference in pay has to be publicly visible at all times.”

“Wait a minute,” said Alice. “Are you suggesting that I post the pay differential where everyone can see it?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying,” replied Felicia. “Posting the amount of differential where everyone can see it is a way of providing feedback to everyone who can affect it. No one of them can make a big dent on their own but, collectively, all of them control it and control it they will if closing it is a goal they are committed to achieving. Bit by bit, raise by raise, they will close the gap in pay.”

“And all I have to do is post the differential,” mused Alice.

“And make clear your commitment to closing it and work with others to enlist their commitment to do the same,” added Felicia.

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“I’ll give this some thought,” announced Alice, and with that she folded up her chair and headed back to her office.

A few weeks later, Alice directed HR and Finance to track the pay differential between men and women in her division and to post it in prominent places throughout the division. Department level numbers would be provided each department director. Alice made it clear to her direct reports that she was committed to closing that gap and she hoped they were, too. They got the message and had similar talks with their direct reports.

About three years later, the CEO of Alice’s company announced his impending retirement and that Alice had been selected to succeed him. One day not long afterward, Alice, folding chair in hand, went down to the pond to say good-bye to Felix and Felicia. Setting up her chair and sitting down, she looked at Felix and Felicia for a long time without saying a word. Then she said, “I’m leaving. I’ve been selected to be the new CEO. I’ve come to say good-bye.”

If a frog can be said to slump, Felix slumped. Felicia jumped from her lily pad to his and sat next to him. Looking at Alice, Felicia asked, “What about us? What about this pond?” “



My successor will see to that,” replied Alice. “He knows about you two and I have promised to introduce you before I leave. He is a good person and you needn’t fear about your future. He also knows about the role you two played in changing that pay differential number and he’s looking forward to you helping him as much as you’ve helped me.”

“Where does the pay differential stand, now?” asked Felicia.

Alice chuckled and answered, “Well, as you know, we’ve been whacking away at it. After three years we have cut it almost in half. It is far from closed but it is closing and in another three years there should be little or no differential at all. Your control idea worked.”

“Good,” replied, Felicia, “I thought it would.” Looking at Felix who was still slumped down, she nudged him and said, “Say good-bye to Alice.”

Felix looked up at Alice and said, “I will miss you.”

“And I will miss you, Felix. Thanks for all the help, advice and counsel you have given me. And thanks to you, too, Felicia. Your control idea was a good one and I see other applications for it.”

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With that, Alice folded her chair and headed back to her office, glad that Felix and Felicia couldn't see the tears streaming down her face.

Back at the pond, Felicia put her arm around Felix and they watched Alice walk out of sight.