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Spring 2013

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What Are the Best Practices to Promote High-Ranking Female Employees Within Organizations?

Abstract

Companies still have a long way to go to ensure gender diversity especially in leadership positions. Recent research indicated that although entry-level men and women are hired at an increasingly equal rate, women often times reach a mid-career “the glass ceiling”. Our research investigated the best practices and drew insights on how to tackle the gender diversity challenge.

Keywords

human resources, gender and work, best practices, female employees, gender, high ranking female employees

Comments

Suggested Citation

Cao, J. & Xue, W. (2013). *What are the best practices to promote high-ranking female employees within organizations?* Retrieved [insert date] from Cornell University, ILR School site: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/student/19/>

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Executive Summary

Question:

What are the best practices to promote high-ranking female employees within organizations?

Introduction:

Companies still have a long way to go to ensure gender diversity especially in leadership positions. Recent research indicated that although entry-level men and women are hired at an increasingly equal rate, women often times reach a mid-career “the glass ceiling”.¹ Our research investigated the best practices and drew insights on how to tackle the gender diversity challenge.

Best Practices:

Deloitte and Touche embarked on a journey to shatter the glass ceiling two decades ago and has since created a transformational change. With over 1000 female partners, principals, and directors (P/P/D), Deloitte has received numerous recognitions from organizations such as Fortune, Working Mother and Catalyst.¹ Today this all-out effort continues with three key ingredients:

Women’s Initiative (WIN): WIN is an initiative to retain, develop and advance women leaders with diverse development programs targeting female talents across the organization from entry level to P/P/D. Each year over 400 events including courses, workshops, projects, networking, and coaching are hosted by WIN (see Appendix A for detailed description). For instance, Leading Edge is a five-day course focusing on leadership development, negotiation skills, and preparation for senior positions. Recently, career sponsorship, which goes beyond the responsibilities of mentoring and coaching, has been identified as a key success factor.²

Mass Career Customization (MCC): MCC is a program that transforms the traditional corporate ladder into corporate lattice, and addresses flexibility and career-life fit. Through a flatter, often matrixed structure and broad information access, MCC enables a defined process to personalize multidirectional career paths for individuals to fit work into life as priorities change over time. For example, Personal Pursuit allows employees to leave the workforce up to five years while staying connected to the company.

Vigorous Measurement: The leaders in each business function and enabling service are accountable for progress on career sponsorship, client deployment, and leadership succession. Goals and actions for specific strategic areas are measured through metrics.

Schlumberger realized the need to address gender diversity in its male-dominated environment in the early 1990s. Today this leading oilfield service firm takes pride with one of the highest sex ratios in the industry, and was named ‘Top 50 places where women want to work’ by The Times for three consecutive years. Recruitment of female engineers has risen from 15% to 31%, and three women are heading geo-markets.³ The most prominent features of the initiative include: (1) It is driven by the top management and forms a core part of its business strategy. The steering committee comprises of senior managers, 10 female and 6 male. (2) Policies and procedures are crafted to adapt to maternity, life-style, dual career couples and continuity. The company also promotes a genuine meritocracy and a dynamic, supportive environment in which female talents can thrive.⁴ (3) Schlumberger goes to great lengths to encourage women to pursue education and careers in engineering. It collaborates with world’s leading universities to offer scholarship programs combining classroom education, internships training, and individual mentoring. Its non-profit entity Schlumberger Foundation funds a flagship program Faculty for the Future to support women in science and technology. (4) Leaders recognize the importance of achieving female

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“critical mass” at management level for the change to take on its own life. Success stories and role models are widely celebrated through different channels such as the web network Connect Women.⁵

PricewaterhouseCoopers’ (PwC) three-point strategic approach to developing and advancing women has been frequently recognized such as Aurora’s ‘Where Women Want to Work’. The three-point framework aims to raise awareness, to monitor performance and to support progress. PwC launched a bias awareness training program to help understand the nature of bias and demonstrate techniques to control personal bias in the workplace when, for example, assessing colleagues for promotion or performance. It also developed an actuarial model to uncover underlying patterns, blockages, and trends in the way women are promoted. Meanwhile the data provides insight to support individuals and groups through gender diversity initiatives.⁶ For instance, by offering childcare voucher for the first year after return to work, the number of women returning from maternity leave from 40% to 93% in the UK firm. Other programs include “Full Circle” program in the US which allows employees who have decided to separate from the firm to stay connected, and “Women’s Survival” course in Europe which focuses on conflict management, influencing skills, and understanding stereotypes.⁷

P&G weaves diversity and inclusion into its corporate fabric to meet the demands from its diverse consumer base. It rolled out a vigorous gender diversity program a decade ago and has since appointed 5 women to the board (5 out of 10), with each one of them been on Fortune’s Most Powerful Women List.⁸ P&G’s first step was to set robust goal and metrics. It has designed a thorough analysis process to measure and track performance metrics for female retention, promotion and leadership development improvements, with clear personal and team accountabilities. And it commits to including a target number of female candidates for leadership appointment. In addition, the metrics are also linked to the determination of managers’ performance and compensation. P&G also helps female talents to gain visibility and impact through high touch activities through a systematic review of activity and role assignment. In addition, it closes the gender gap by bridging a pathway to power: hiring enough women at entry levels; conducting leadership and mentoring programs to develop female leaders; creating “critical mass” which requires several female leaders with high visibility working together to create an inductive culture for change.⁹

Conclusion:

Gender diversity in itself is not an end, and there are no “cookie cutter” solutions. However our research into successful gender diversity initiatives do reveal similar patterns and key enablers. Well-crafted gender initiatives require a holistic approach that looks into full-cycles including recruiting, developing, promoting, and retaining. Critical elements and programs include targeted recruiting, diversity training, leadership development, mentoring and coaching, sponsoring, women’s networks, role model campaign, high-impact and stretching assignments, progress tracking through metrics, diversity targets for managers, and career design with greater flexibility. To sum up, in order to foster an environment conducive to change and to create change with long lasting effects, it is crucial to create personal and workplace awareness on gender issues, to recognize the problem by fact-based health check and establish accountability through quantifiable goals, and to create an effective career planning process and institutionalize it into daily business practices.

Appendix A: Deloitte’s WIN Initiatives

Development Programs	Description			Entry Level/ Senior	Managers	Senior Managers	Partners, Principals, Directors (P/P/D)
	Time	Goal	Content				
Career Sponsorship and Coaching	Various	Help rising leaders navigate career pathways	Leadership skills, effective networks, right assignments	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Client Deployment	Periodic review	Gain exposure to key assignments and clients	Equitable staff including women and minority professionals on top accounts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Ellen Gabriel Fellows	5-month project immersion	Increase business understanding for high-performing women and men senior managers	Business strategies, operations, and cultures; Top level decision-making; Client service and leadership skills			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Leading Edge	5-day course	Build women leader pipeline	Leadership capabilities, negotiating and networking skills, preparation of senior leadership positions				<input type="checkbox"/>
Leading to WIN	18-month course	Address the needs of women P/P/D	Leadership Action Plan, monthly executive coaching, career sponsorship, shadowing, international visits				<input type="checkbox"/>
WIN Blog	Real-time	Create virtual communities to connect people	Conversations about life, work, and everything in between	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
WINning Career Strategies	Year-long program	Advance high-talent professionals	Career management, relationship building and networking		<input type="checkbox"/>		
WINning New Business	Year-long program	Empower and equip high-potential senior managers	Relationship building, powerful negotiation, personal branding			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Women as Buyers	Half-day workshop	Understand women executives' decision making pattern	Sell to women executives, understand female colleagues				<input type="checkbox"/>
Women's Initiative Senior Manager Advisory Council	Yearly special project	Advance WIN's priorities and strategy	Leadership skills, relationship building; i.e. Projects on connecting Gen Y to WIN, redesigning WIN intranet			<input type="checkbox"/>	

Appendix B: Sample Metric of Deloitte

Key Indicators	Base FY08	FY09 P11 YTD Actual	Yr 1 Year End Goal	Yr 2 Year End Goal	Yr 3 Year End Goal	Yr 1 Result	Action Items	Status
Percentage of women in leadership roles							Implement onboarding & deployment Bold Plays	
Percentage of minorities in leadership roles							Implement career sponsor/owner programs	
Increase in number of women P/P/Ds							Develop plan to engage middle ranks of P/P/D leadership	
Increase in number of minority P/P/Ds							Identify leadership succession opportunities for diverse P/P/Ds	
Increase in number of experienced women hires							Monitor direct admit pipeline	
Increase in hiring in target segments							Improve recruiting of women and minority candidates	
Decrease turnover of women							Identify P/P/Ds who are doing an exemplary job with MCC or Inclusion	
Decrease turnover of minorities							Monitor realignment process	
Experienced women hires							Action Items Overall:	
Yr 1 evaluated as of 12/31/2009								Overall Result:

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Useful Links:

Websites (Catalyst)

Check List for Change: PwC report

List of recognized organizations

Cited References

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Abstract: The Women's Initiative (WIN) of Deloitte LLP has helped to create a more inclusive environment, build the intellectual capital required to serve clients, develop people and grow business, and it has evolved into a powerful engine for innovation.

2. Hewlett, S. A., Peraino, K., Sherbin, L., Sumberg, K. (Jan 12, 2011). The sponsor effect: breaking through the last glass ceiling. HBR Research Materials, 90 pages

Abstract: This study suggested that the absence of male advocacy keeps women under the glass ceiling. Women underestimate the role sponsorship plays in their advancement. And those who do grasp its importance fail to cultivate it. Many feel that getting ahead based on "connections" is a dirty tactic and that hard work alone is their ticket to the top. But companies that foster sponsorship of their standout women will gain a competitive advantage in talent markets.

3. Schlumberger. (October 2003). Waking up to the need for women in science and technology, Women in Industrial Research Conference, retrieved on 03/06/2013 at http://www.slb.com/~media/Files/about/brochures/speech_womenscitech.pdf

Abstract: Former CEO Andrew Gould made the case and accounted for the continued initiatives to promote female leaders in Schlumberger at the keynote session of Women in Industrial Research Conference in Berlin.

4. Schlumberger foundation receives \$50 million donation for flagship faculty for the Future Program - funds advanced science and technology education for women from developing nations. (28 June 2011). Business Wire Regulatory Disclosure, retrieved on 03/03/2013 from Factiva

5. Maitland, A., 20 April 2008, Women take the driving seat: male-dominated industries are working hard to recruit more executives, but some attitudes still need to change. Financial Times, page 14, retrieved on 03/03/2013 from Factiva

6. Churchman, S., & Thompson, C. (2008). Delivering gender diversity: beyond the business case. Strategic HR Review, 7(5), 17-22.

Abstract: This case study examines the issue of gender equality at director and partnership level in a limited liability partnership environment. It provides practical insights and examples on the development and implementation of activities to address and advance gender diversity issues.

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7. The leaking female pipeline: Where are our female leaders. (March 2008). PwC Global Human Capital, 29 pages, retrieved on 03/06/2013 at https://www.pwc.com/en_GX/gx/women-at-pwc/assets/leaking_pipeline.pdf

Abstract: The report contains stories and comments from the interview pool, and recommendations and guidance to existing leadership on how to challenge the status quo, as well as suggestions to women in the professional services pipeline who aspire to remain in this sector and achieve successful careers and leadership roles.

8. Proctor & gamble manager pay linked to diversity goals. (2008). Personnel Today, 4-4.
9. Adapted from interview with former P&G CHRO Moheet Nagrath on 02/26/2013

Additional Suggested Readings

Major reasons

1. Ibarra, H., & Obodaru, O. (2009), Women and the Vision Thing, Harvard Business Review, 87(1), 62-70

Abstract: The analysis showed that women tend to outshine men in all areas but one: vision. Unfortunately, that exception is a big one. Insead professor Ibarra and doctoral candidate Obodaru developed three possible explanations. First, women may do just as much as men to shape the future but go about it in a different way; a leader who is less directive, includes more people, and shares credit might not fit people's mental model of a visionary. Second, women may believe they have less license to go out on a limb. Those who have built careers on detail-focused, shoulder-to-the-wheel execution may hesitate to stray from facts into unprovable assertions about the future. Third, women may choose not to cultivate reputations as big visionaries.

2. Barsh, J., & Yee, L. (2011). Changing companies' minds about women. McKinsey Quarterly, (4), 48-59.

Abstract: The article discusses career development of women executives and means by which corporations can assist women employees and executives in reaching senior management levels. A disparity is noted between the commitment made to diversity in the workplace at corporations and policies aimed at promoting career development of women employees and the relatively small percentage of women who have become senior executives, chief executive officers and directors of corporations. The role of psychological and social attitudes within corporate cultures which contribute to that disparity is examined. The need for leadership from senior executives to effectively address the status of women executives is noted.

Theoretical Guideline

1. ELY, R. J., IBARRA, H., & KOLB, D. M. (2011). Taking Gender Into Account: Theory and Design for Women's Leadership Development Programs. Academy Of Management Learning & Education, 10(3), 474-493

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Abstract: We revisit traditional approaches to standard leadership topics, as well as currently developmental tools; reinterpret them through the lens of women's experiences; and revise them to meet the particular challenges women face when transitioning into senior leadership. By framing leadership development as identity work, we offer a theoretical rationale for teaching leadership in women-only groups, and suggest design and delivery principles to increase the likelihood that women's leadership programs will help women advance into more senior leadership roles.

2. Terry Morehead Dworkin, Virginia Maurer, Cindy A. Schipani, Career mentoring for women: New horizons/Expanded methods, *Business Horizons*, Volume 55, Issue 4, July–August 2012, Pages 363-372, ISSN 0007-6813, 10.1016/j.bushor.2012.03.001.
(<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681312000390>)

Abstract: The number of women who hold senior management positions continues to be disproportionately low. Herein, we demonstrate that the use of strong mentoring programs holds great promise as a way to increase the number of women in senior management roles. An extensive study supports the mentoring program recommendation, as do examples of foreign firms which far more readily employ women in executive positions than do U.S. firms.

3. Dent, F., & Holton, V. (2012). How women can navigate to become global leaders. *Global Focus: The EFMD Business Magazine*, 6(2), 40-43. Abstract:

Abstract: The article offers the authors' insights on how businesses and organizations can help women to be business leaders. They say that the conflicts in a woman's parenthood and organizational life may lead to frustration and restrictions in her career. They suggest various measures companies may take to help women staff such as assigning women at various management levels, executive development schemes, and leading key projects.

4. John Beeson, Anna Marie Valerio, The executive leadership imperative: A new perspective on how companies and executives can accelerate the development of women leaders, *Business Horizons*, Volume 55, Issue 5, September–October 2012, Pages 417-425, ISSN 0007-6813, 10.1016/j.bushor.2012.05.002.
(<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0007681312000675>)

Abstract: In light of today's leadership shortage, companies face challenges in trying to identify and develop new leaders to fill the key roles. This feat can only be accomplished by tapping all sources of future leadership talent—especially women. The development of future leaders is handicapped by the fact that promotional decisions to the C-Suite level are based on a set of unstated criteria for advancement. The lack of clarity presents special challenges for aspiring women executives. Effectively addressing these obstacles requires a new mindset toward talent development within organizations. We recommend actions on two fronts: (1) specific practices that companies can make part of their succession planning and career development processes in the interest of creating a level playing field for executive advancement, and (2) actions that women can proactively employ to take the initiative in their own development as leaders.

5.

Additional Practices and Initiatives

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1. Closing the gender gap. (2012). *Chemistry & Industry*, 76(2), 26-29. doi:10.1002/cind.7602_8.x

Abstract: The article suggested that more women chemists will be recruited to combat a shortage of executive talent because of the increased percentage of women studying and excelling in chemistry and chemical engineering. An overview of attempts to increase the presence of women in chemical industry management is presented, including appointments by BASF, the Bayer Group, and Merck.

2. Molina, V. (2005). changing the face of consulting: the women's initiative at deloitte. *Regional Review*, 14(3), 42-43.

Abstract: Presents information on an initiative imposed at Deloitte & Touche USA for women to succeed at the company. Findings of a survey conducted by Catalyst, regarding the reasons of women for resigning at Deloitte; Implication of the result to the senior management of the company; Factors considered in changing employment practices at Deloitte; Advantage of the move to the company.

3. Sullivan, N. (2011). CLOSED CIRCUIT. *Employee Benefits*, 48-52.

Abstract: The article features Cisco Systems Inc. as it has its own technology, a shadowing program that delivers employee fringe benefits, especially among women. It has been the aim among various departments at Cisco to provide its growing customer base with the competitive advantage as its market has gone out beyond information technology, thus its sales and technical people have to deal with a new population. Moreover, Cisco refers to the growing talent among women in the corporate sector as its base.

4. Banas, M. (2013). NiSource: Women in the Leadership Pipeline. *Electric Perspectives*, 38(1), 48-50.

Abstract: The article discusses the aim of NiSource Inc. to build women leaders in the electric utility industry in the U.S. through its Building the NextGen: Women in Leadership program. The three components of the program are company-wide and regional summits, a women's affinity group and a mentoring program. NiSource Inc. held its second Women in Leadership Summit held in Chicago, Illinois on November 13-14, 2012.

5. *The Coca-Cola Company--Global women's initiative: women as the real drivers of the 21st Century*, 2012 Catalyst Award Winner, Retrieved Date: Jan. 24, 2013 <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/coca-cola-company%E2%80%94global-womens-initiative-women-real-drivers-21st-century>

Abstract: The Coca-Cola Company's Global Women's Initiative: Women as the Real Drivers of the 21st Century seeks to advance women internally and economically empower women externally

6. *Alcoa Inc.—Building Opportunities for Women in a “Hard Hat” Company*, 2012 Catalyst Award Winner, Retrieved Date: Jan. 24, 2013 <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/alcoa-inc%E2%80%94building-opportunities-women-hard-hat-company>

Abstract: Alcoa's initiative Building Opportunities for Women in a “Hard Hat” Company is increasing women's representation in leadership roles and promoting gender inclusion in a male-dominated industry

1. Altman, Y., & Shortland, S. (2008). Women and international assignments: Taking stock—a 25-year review. *Human Resource Management*, 47(2), 199-216.
2. Beeson, J., & Valerio, A. M. (2012). The executive leadership imperative: A new perspective on how companies and executives can accelerate the development of women leaders doi: 10.1016/j.bushor.2012.05.002
3. Bloom, N., Kretschmer, T., & Van Reenen, J. (2011). Are family-friendly workplace practices a valuable firm resource? *Strategic Management Journal*, 32(4), 343-367. doi: 10.1002/smj.879
4. Closing the gender gap. (2012). *Chemistry & Industry*, 76(2), 26-29. doi: 10.1002/cind.7602_8.x
5. Dworkin, T. M., Maurer, V., & Schipani, C. A. (2012). Career mentoring for women: New horizons/Expanded methods. *Business Horizons*, 55(4), 363-372. doi: 10.1016/j.bushor.2012.03.001
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7. Fishman, H. S. (2007). The female factor: Best practices for recruiting women. *National Underwriter / Life & Health Financial Services*, 111(28), 16-19.
8. Galagan, P. (2012). Is work flexibility the final frontier for women execs? *T+d*, 66(9), 29-31.
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10. Helgesen, S., & Johnson, J. (2010). *The female vision: Women's real power at work* Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
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12. Jay, J. K., & Barnes, A. (2013). Rising above the glass ceiling. *T+d*, 67(1), 52-55.

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13. Reynolds, M. (2011). Preventing the female brain drain. *Employment Relations Today*, 37(4), 1-9.
14. Valerio, A. M. (2009). *Developing women leaders: A guide for men and women in organizations* John Wiley & Sons (US).