

Women In Management

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PHILLIPS, LERNER & LAUZON, L.L.P.

March is National Women in History month, and when it comes to the workplace, women increasingly seem to be becoming shining stars.

According to the Employment Policy Foundation (EPF), a non-profit research and educational foundation, women have seen a considerable increase in earnings the past decade. The EPF finds no evidence that discrimination dictates occupational choices to any significant degree today. Instead, women often choose certain occupations because they offer flexibility to balance work and family life.

More women are making it, but some still have to struggle more than their male counterparts. HR Wire interviewed women executives to find out how they feel they are being treated and what they had to do to get to the top.

PARTNER AT AN EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRM

Kathy Maloney, partner at executive search firm Ray & Berndtson, has seen a definite change in attitude toward women since the 1970s, when International Business Machines (IBM) wouldn't hire female sales representatives. She now places females in top executive roles.

"As a female professional, I believe I have always been treated equitably, given the same "shot" at a job with the same objectives," she says. "The CEOs I have worked for do not differentiate between me and my male colleagues -- they want results."

"If I were to put a female VP of sales and a male against each other, I would bet on the woman. They handle more things, work harder, are more focused, and more resourceful. As long as there is not a "good old boy" network, they will do well if they have the talent and personality for the position."

"I am hard pressed to find a situation where a woman is not treated equally with a man, with the emphasis on talent rather than gender. The only exception to this is in certain international positions, where the economic climate is less inviting for a woman."

VIRTUAL ACCOUNTING BUSINESS OWNER

Jennifer McCabe, is the owner of a small virtual accounting business, and functions as the HR/CFO/Controller. She started out in the business world during the 1980s, a time when she felt the need to de-emphasize her femininity in order to be perceived as intelligent.

"I left corporate America after learning invaluable lessons and skills," she says. "I felt that, as a woman, I could make more money being self-employed. Now I own my own accounting business, and work with men who often defer to me."

"I work hard at being a good boss. I try not to lose my woman's touch in terms of being understanding and empathetic. However, I sometimes get taken advantage by employees and clients if I'm too yielding."

"My male clients treat me as an equal, but there are still differences: Often the women business owners don't price themselves as aggressively as men, and women employees get smaller raises because they don't ASK for the same amount, or ask as often, as men employees. It's easier to lay off a woman because they usually are very understanding and considerate of the difficult decision making a lay-off includes."

"The real sign that I've achieved my goals is that other women who I think are pretty far along in their own careers have told me that I'm their role model."

CEO OF A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

Susie Franklin, MSW, served as CEO of a major non-profit organization, Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times, the largest cancer camp in the country. Based in Los Angeles, California, she is now the founder of The Nonprofit Brain Trust, a consulting group that works with nonprofits.

"I worked my way up to an executive position doing various other jobs along the way," she explains. "There were times I had to turn to the 'guy on the board' for clout. Women need to use whatever they have -- while it may be irksome to have a guy make a phone call for you, you sometimes have to eat your pride."

"As a woman executive, I've had to prove myself a little extra, but once I did, I had credibility. Now, male executives call for advice and want to be my client."

"I've found there is less of a glass ceiling in the non-profit sector, and women have more room to be respected as professionals. It's a field that is an exciting place for a woman."

VICE-PRESIDENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY

Carol Corcoran is the vice-president of health and safety for ManagedComp, Inc., a Boston-based workers' compensation specialty company. She feels that she has been treated as a valued leader first and as a woman second. Her current CEO is a female.

"Opportunity for women in workers' compensation leadership positions has increased over the years but remains lacking in some areas," she says. "Workers' compensation insurance has traditionally been a male-dominated industry. Today, there are women executives in all areas - claims management, prevention services, case management, provider network management, human resources, but less in sales, underwriting, finance and information technology. In these areas, there are increasing numbers of middle management opportunities, but I haven't seen a significant number of executive leadership positions filled by women."

"I believe individuals have the power and personal and professional responsibility to build their own future from a career development perspective, including negotiating fair and equitable compensation packages. It doesn't come to you; you need to create it, sustain it everyday and model it for others."

Corcoran advises HR professionals who deal with women executives to listen and seek out conversations and advice. "Many women executives are very open and therefore very connected to the 'real' situations within the business," she says. "Appreciate the style differences among male and female executives - it keeps organizations honest, connected and forward thinking."

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Elizabeth Lampert is the Executive Vice President of Levick Strategic Communications, LLC., a media relations company for law firms.

"When I originally came on board four years ago, I was hired by an executive committee consisting of three males," she says. "I personally told the president of my aspirations to become part of the executive committee, and he sat down and mapped out what need to be done and the time frame in which to do it."

"Since our company rewards people based on day to day hard work, I moved rapidly based on merits. I met my goals, and then went out on maternity leave. Three weeks before I was scheduled to return from leave, I was called and notified that I was being promoted to vice president. I was allowed to have a flexible schedule and work from home part time."

"HR professionals should seek out women who are being looked at for promotion and work with them to make sure they understand the requirements to move ahead," she advises. "People should know what they are striving for and the timeframe in which to do it. Clearly defined objective criteria will prevent discrimination lawsuits."

OWNER OF LAW FIRM

California-based attorney Stacy D. Phillips started working when law was a field dominated by men, and her age and appearance sometimes caused resentment and remarks from some of the long-entrenched male courtroom figures. Now she owns her own law firm, Phillips, Lerner, and Lauzon, LLP.

"I went out on my own because I no longer wanted to clean up other people's messes, and because I wanted more control over my own life and spend more time with my children," she says. "I found that as a woman, I needed to be twice as good as a man. To succeed, it's most important to figure out where your strengths are and what skills you have, and find a way to capitalize on them. If you utilize the three 'As' -- ability, availability, and affability -- you can succeed."

SIDEBAR, SOME FACTS ABOUT WOMEN'S CHANGING ROLE IN THE WORKFORCE:

Here are some statistics from the Employment Policy Foundation (EPF), a non-profit, non-partisan research and educational foundation providing economic analysis and commentary on U.S. employment policies, on women's role in the workplace.

Married women with children under age 5 increased their work hours by 129 percent between 1969 and 1996

Dual-earner married couples account for 70 percent of all married couples

In 23 percent of dual-earner families, the wife earns more than the husband

Women are not working out of necessity - in dual-earner families, there has been a 20 percent real increase in median income

The labor force participation rate for women with children has risen to over 70 percent (from 28 percent in 1960)

Research shows that women and men are paid the same for equal jobs: women age 35 to 44 with psychology degrees working as social scientists earn 101 percent as much as their male equivalents, and women in this age group with engineering degrees working as engineers earn 95 percent as much as their male counterparts

FACTORS THAT ACCOUNT FOR THE PAY "GAP" INCLUDE:

Hours of work (men work an average of over 200 more hours per year than women)

Work experience and tenure (women spend an average of 14.7 potential years away from work, whereas men only spend 1.6 years out of the workforce)

Marital status (married women work fewer hours than singles, reflecting their family responsibilities)

Education (men tend to have higher average levels of education than women)

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