

## Barriers to Advancement Facing Women in Business

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Women continue to enter the workforce in record numbers. In fact, almost 47% of the workforce is comprised of women. Yet, despite this fact, very few women hold the top slots.

Take one stroll past the executive suite in your organization and there will probably be a noticeable lack of women to be found, particularly if you exclude the support staff. Perhaps you never took the time to consider this or to even ask the question, but given the number of women in the workforce, does it seem rather odd that there aren't more women ensconced in the executive suites in business? I think so.

I've talked with many women leaders to try to identify the barriers that preclude more women from reaching the corner office. Here's what I've learned.

First, life-balance and family tradeoffs continue to plague women who want to build successful careers. As has long been the case, the bulk of family and household responsibilities still fall on women's shoulders. How each woman, her family, and her place of employment choose to manage and negotiate around this issue will clearly have an impact on a woman's ability to take advantage of those business opportunities that lead to long-term personal and professional success.

Another surprising deterrent is the perception that women lack key business credentials. As a woman with an MBA under her belt and an MA on the way, this one makes me chafe a little. However, having the right business credentials means more than having the right degree. Rather, it means being able to demonstrate in measurable ways a clear understanding of those business practices and the financial aspects that are important for an organizations success. This is what is commonly referred to as business acumen. Women don't lack key business credentials, they just need to do a better job of getting the credit and recognition for using them.

Finally, women continue to lack representation at senior levels simply because they just don't have visible positions. Many women typically follow career paths that lead them into the more traditional female roles such as marketing or operations. The lack of coveted profit and loss responsibility will often preclude them from consideration when the top jobs do become available.

Corporations need to make the case for developing women leaders within their organizations. They must stop overlooking the fact that women have good instincts about business and that they are good managers, delegators, collaborators, and team players. Since most businesses are built on relationships, these are crucial assets to an organizations long-term success.

While there are other reasons why organizations should focus on developing more women leaders, the primary reason, simply put, is that it just makes good business sense. Those organizations that want to reap the kind of financial returns so critical to their long-term success, should begin seeking out and supporting executive women leaders. Over the long haul, that's something that we can all bank on. Don't you agree?

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