Career Development Issues Facing Women

by Freddie Silver

Despite the major advancements women have made in becoming a significant part of the workforce, they are still facing important career development issues. Although many women achieve lower and middle management positions, they seem to hit the "glass ceiling" in many organizations and are denied the most senior levels of upper management. The reasons are multi-dimensional; some women lack the confidence to apply for senior positions; some lack the necessary education or training; and others find themselves excluded from the top positions because of systemic gender bias that exists in some companies.

Family Life Issues

According to the Denver Women's Commission, even though most women work outside the home, they are still the primary caregivers for their young children as well as elderly or infirm relatives. Consequently, many women can only pursue their careers on a part-time basis, resulting in fewer promotion opportunities. Unlike their male colleagues, women consider the ages of their children and the amount of time they have available before they decide to pursue a career path.

Harder Work, Less Pay

On average, women earn significantly less than men. In fact, the Denver Women's Commission reports that women earn only 72 cents to every dollar that men earn. Women also tend to work harder because many of them believe they need to prove their dedication. Women often are not reimbursed for the overtime hours they put in out of a strong sense of obligation and commitment.
Education and Training Issues

Some women find themselves passed over for promotion because they lack the educational background required for advancement. Older women in the workforce are less likely than their younger counterparts and than men to have a university degree. Women with family responsibilities find it particularly difficult to take courses in the evenings or other job training opportunities that might be offered in locations too far away from home.

Social and Systemic Issues

Some organizations, especially those that may be male-dominated, still subscribe to the mentality of the "old boys network." In such organizations, women might find that their opinions are not solicited, or respected. Barbara Annis, a world renowned expert on gender issues in the workplace, claims that women often feel ignored during business meetings, which might lead to lowered self-esteem and decreased chances for career advancement. Men frequently take advantage of men-only social opportunities outside of work that exclude their female peers and capitalize on the opportunity to network with future bosses. Workplaces that tolerate off-color, sexist humor further contribute to women's sense of disenfranchisement.

Solutions

More progressive organizations offer flexible work schedules to help accommodate the needs of working women who struggle to balance their careers with family responsibilities. They offer mentoring programs designed to increase career development for women and may have affirmative action policies aimed at eliminating gender discrimination. They offer training on site during the workday to accommodate women who could not otherwise participate. They have females in upper management who serve as role models for the rest of the staff.
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About the Author
Freddie Silver started writing newsletters for the Toronto District School Board in 1997. Her areas of expertise include staff management and professional development. She holds a master's degree in psychology from the University of Toronto and is currently pursuing her PhD at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, focusing on emotions and professional relationships.

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