

Time to Face the Numbers; Utilize Talent and Innovation to Move Beyond the Glass Ceiling!

On the cover of the April 2008 issue of Condé Nast Portfolio Magazine, is a picture of a women's ruby red high heel pitted against and unmistakably underneath the toe of a man's business shoe. The feature article is titled: **"POWER WHO HAS IT. WHO DOESN'T? *The surprising news about gender in the office*"**

This article, written by Harriet Rubin, was such a surprise to me. After all it appears that women have made so much progress. I was beginning to believe that my writing about breaking the glass ceiling was old news. Or am I right on target with this subject?

To me, in my gut, something in the last few years just didn't feel right. Everyone was trying to tell me "oh no, it's not a problem anymore, look at all these women in PINK magazine!" Still the issues continue to creep into my conscience mind. I continue to speak to anyone; anywhere I can about women facing the barrier of career success, facing the challenges of breaking the glass ceiling. I continue to write articles discussing that very subtle gender curtain.

Then, vindication! Condé Nast Portfolio Magazine features an article and substantiated evidence that supports what my gut is telling me.

When compared to their male counterparts, women are statistically in worse condition financially than they were in 2005. (*The Bureau of Labor Statistics; Catalyst and Condé Nast Portfolio research*) In 2006 women earned 78.7 cents for every dollar earned by men which represents a decline from the 79.4 cents on the dollar earned in 2005 and marking only a 5-cent increase since 1991.

Women in the board room have not fared that well either. From 1995 to 2005 there was a steady increase in board membership for women, but in the last three years the numbers are flat. Women only represent 14.8% of corporate board seats in the Fortune 500. Within the same Fortune 500, 234 companies were represented by 3 or more female officers in 2006 and only 64 companies did not have a single female officer. The 2007 stats show an alarming 31 companies dropping below three female officers, down to 203, while 10 companies were added to the list of companies with zero female officers. Female CEOs across the board have also lost ground with 29% representing their companies in 2006 and only 27.2% in 2007.

Since the inception of The U.S. Department of Labor Glass Ceiling Commission in 1991 significant progress in these areas occurred and appeared to be gaining momentum. Since the '90s the major news catching awareness of this issue appears to have died down, leaving most to believe that the issue has disappeared. This may be the actual reason for the slow down in progress. Less publicity leads to less awareness. When we look at the feature players such as Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi, on the political front, and the CEOs of Avon, EBay and Xerox on the corporate front, everyone in Middle America begins to believe that the issue has disappeared. What remains are men and women in the day to day trenches who face a lack of true leadership. The system is void of the ability to assist both men and women as they attempt to improve their interactions, improve productivity and respect, work in an environment void of the sexism and void of the gender curtain in their path.

Today, I believe that it is a grass roots effort that will solve problems and create progress. It's what we do in the corporations inside and outside of the Fortune 500, to improve the working relationships, policies and paradigms of all management levels, which will change the landscape over the next ten years. If we continue on the current path, progress will be slow and as our Condé Nast author Harriet Rubin laments, 2081 will be the year that true parity will be achieved.

I for one do not want to wait that long. I believe there are mentors with tools to move us forward today. "A Woman's Ladder To Success is Paved with Broken Glass Ceilings" is one of those tools. Men and Women can discover the underlying causes for that subtle gender curtain to exist. Once you are aware, then the challenge is to apply this wisdom to your personal career and your company's future success.

It's time for an awakening. Women cannot rely on the old school rules to solve the crisis of stagnation. Women need to utilize actual talent and innovation to step away from the crowd and create awareness of their true potential. In the March/April 2008 issue of PINK Magazine, the editors found 15 female innovators within Corporate America. The article is enlightening, pointing to the innovative ideas of the likes of Irene Britt, VP and General Manager for Campbell Soup Co. who took the V-8 product from weak in 2005 to V-8 Fusion in 2007. It's innovation of this caliber that sets these 15 women apart from the rest of the corporate crowd.

Read PINK Magazine this month, read "A Woman's Ladder To Success" and combine your talents with your innovative skills and presence and create a new level of success in your career.

If you are ready to dig deeper into the root causes for gender bias, visit www.businesswomenspeak.com. If you are looking for more information, please feel free to contact me at ddutton@businesswomenspeak.com.