

Fostering Advancement For Women and Minorities

ICMA members responding to a survey report that being a woman and/or a minority has affected their career advancement, both positively and negatively. The ICMA survey targeted its minority and female corporate and non-corporate members (excluding students) and asked about their career history, career goals, and views on ICMA. One-third responded; though not a statistically valid sample, the responses provide an interesting perspective.

“Being an African-American has had a positive influence on my career because I have witnessed and been able to actively participate in influencing the changes taking place in the workforce,” said one member. “I am one of several African-Americans fortunate enough to say that I am and have been a city manager. The private sector glass ceiling concept translates in the public sector as a ‘glass bubble.’ The inability to penetrate the bubble in many communities across the country limits career development potential.”

Another responded, “Being an African-American manager in public management has been very rewarding for me. Job opportunities, however, seem to be centered in urban communities and therefore, minorities are always in competition with other minorities because public acceptance of a black manager is not standard in traditional communities, especially rural areas.”

Glass Ceiling Hinders Advancement

Over the last 20 years, research has found that in many

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**Joy Pierson
Cunningham**
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organizations, women and minorities can only succeed to a certain level in the corporate hierarchy beyond which a glass ceiling blocked further advancement. Many studies have been conducted to determine where these limitations exist, what may be causing them, and how to eliminate inequities for minorities and women in the public and private sectors. Conclusions have not been reached, as all organizations have different cultures, management practices, and personnel needs. All organizations, however, should be aware of their possible shortcomings and work to achieve truly equal opportunities for all employees.

"I try to focus on being a competent person first; however, I have always held jobs that were traditionally held by males," said one female respondent. "I try to take it in stride and not make an issue of it. I think that male colleagues are less threatened by me because they perceive me as having less power as a woman."

Another said, "As an African-American female, in the early years of my career I had a lot of resistance from white males, both due to my race and gender. There is still some resistance. I believe that being a minority and a female gives you a different perspective on organizations and a whole different set of management tools that white males do not have."

ICMA members have learned to use their skills to their advantage in a variety of positions. In 1990, the research organization Catalyst studied women in corporate management and found that senior executives perceived a risk in offering women line positions—yet they named line experience as a necessary step for advancement.¹ Line positions would be defined as those in such direct service delivery departments as police or public works. Over the last two years, Catalyst has interviewed managers and human resource professionals of Fortune 500 and Service 500 companies to determine why

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women are not given these opportunities for advancement. What they found is that women run into a "glass wall" that restricts lateral mobility and prevents them from obtaining experience in core areas of business; without this experience, they can not reach the glass ceiling for further advancement.²

These findings are consistent with other research concluding that women and minorities are being steered into less critical areas of operations. A recent *Business Week* article noted that "some black middle managers feel they are being shunted into human resources and public relations—jobs that often spell 'dead end' in the corporation."³

Specific Barriers Limit Opportunity

Both a recent Department of Labor study (refer to information on page 25) and the Catalyst research cite several barriers that limit the opportunities that minorities and women have

for advancement. Among the Department of Labor attitudinal and organizational barriers identified were recruitment practices involving reliance on word-of-mouth and employee referral networking; the use of executive search and referral firms in which affirmative action/equal employment opportunity requirements were not made known; lack of access to developmental practices and credential-building experiences, including advanced education and such career-enhancing assignments as corporation committees, task forces, and special projects; and senior-level executives and corporate decision makers not having accountability for equal employment opportunity responsibilities.⁴

The Catalyst study also identified these intangible barriers: discomfort men feel in relating to women as colleagues which produces anxiety and lower productivity for women; exclusion of women from informal communication networks; the depth and extent of stereotypes held by colleagues and customers; ineffective methods of performance appraisals; a lack of access to networks and mentors; assumptions and attitudes about balancing career and family; and expectations and requirements of relocation.⁵

"Being an African-American male has positively influenced my career because I know that I could very well be a model to other African-American males and I should not view that assumption lightly," responded one ICMA member. "As one of few African-American managers in my organization, there are those within and outside the organization who perceive my position as one of clout and influence. I must be aware and not abuse and/or overstate my influence or clout."

Another said, "As a female I feel I am more sensitive to people's feelings than the average male. The only negative is other people's perceptions of what they expect from a fe-

male and certain resentment from traditional males—that I am a “Girl” doing a man’s job. How can I cope with ... in spite of Anita Hill and others ... a telephone call from a newly elected councilmember when he said, ‘We’re going to have a great two years—sex, salary, satisfaction—get my drift?’”

“Undoubtedly, gender and race impact the ability of a female city manager,” said another survey respondent. “However, we must take stock of ourselves and be tough when the situation warrants, be flexible when compromise warrants, and perceive ourselves as professionals first and females second. I believe we must be better at our jobs than our male counterparts. That is the only way we will or can survive. We can not dwell on our differences or professionally we will isolate ourselves.”

What Managers Can Do to Foster Advancement

In local government management, progress in the advancement of minorities and women has been slow. ICMA’s annual surveys show that the percentage of women in chief administrative officer/manager positions has increased significantly from 5.2 percent in 1979 to 13.2 percent in 1991 for cities, and 15.0 percent in 1985 to 18.6 percent in 1991 for counties. The percentage of women in assistant manager positions also has increased from 27.4 percent in 1985 to 34.0 percent in 1991 for cities. The percentage of nonwhite male assistants in cities has increased from 7.2 percent in 1985 to 11.6 percent in 1991.⁶ While managers may be working to recruit, hire, train, and promote women and minorities in local government, councils have the influence over the chief administrative officer position. Managers must work with elected officials to help educate them and encourage them to consider all candidates equally for jobs.

“I have not been aware of any impact on my career from being Asian. I am proud of my heritage but neither blame it nor give it credit for advancing me in public administration. However, being a female has its disadvantages in this field. There is a network that is predominantly male which is sometimes difficult to break into as an outsider. I find that there is a level of comfort between men that is not natural to women. I do not believe being a female has impacted my personal career at this point, but it may affect my ability to secure a city manager position. I believe that as a whole, city managers and civil service systems have become sensitive to training men and women equally; however, it may not be true of city councils.”

Many local governments have worked to foster advancement for women and minorities in many ways. Some organizations use internship programs to attract, retain, and train a diverse work force; others use rotational assignments to provide professional development opportunities and exposure to the larger organization. Local government managers can hold executive staff accountable for the advancement of qualified women and minorities by tying merit pay increases to attainment of goals. Teams of department staff and human resource professionals have been untapped resources for creating new recruitment efforts and improving the hiring process. Such communication media as cable access channels and employee newsletters, also have been used to highlight minorities’ and women’s success in the organization.

“At the time that I finished my graduate program, many cities were just beginning to consider hiring women. I was part of an affirmative action hiring program—and benefited as a result. I believe that being a woman has not negatively impacted my career. I always sought career advances in places that wanted to make

use of my talents and believe that I have not been hindered in any way.”

Improving Work Environments

Dr. Miquela Rivera has counseled many organizations and individuals on ways to improve their work environments. In *The Minority Career Book*, she gives advice for all managers working with diverse workforces:

- Ask yourself whether you have a genuine commitment to working effectively with a diverse workforce to recognize any internal resistance;
- Be positive in your interactions with a changing workforce;
- Stay focused on your need to interact successfully with minority employees;
- Be familiar with your work and communication styles and theirs;
- Find out what you have in common and focus on similarities;
- Don’t judge another person before you get to know them;
- Approach each minority employee as a person who will grant you a new opportunity to teach you something about yourself; and
- Envision getting what you want accomplished in better ways.⁷

How Can Individuals Foster Their Own Advancement?

Yale University researcher Rosabeth Moss Kanter has studied minority-group dynamics and investigated opportunity and power as ways of achieving success if you are “an only” or “different.” She has observed the following:

- An opportunity can largely be a state of mind or an outlook. Aim high. Envision the position you have and the one you want. Consider the alternatives in a situation and become a creative problem solver.
- Jobs that prompt autonomy and in-

THE CORVALLIS COMMITMENT

The Corvallis, Oregon, staff would like to share its insights and experiences in fostering a diverse workforce and cracking the glass ceiling. While our accomplishments have been significant, we still have much to do.

What is a glass ceiling? Quite simply it is a roadblock. The term glass ceiling typically refers to barriers that prevent women and minorities from obtaining executive-level positions. Some may ask, how can there be invisible barriers? After all, we have affirmative action, civil rights acts, Title IX, EEOC, definitions of hostile environments, cultural diversity training, conferences, and policies galore. The implementation of policies and programs required doors literally to be forced open, often via judicial intervention. An inherent assumption of many efforts, to date, was that attitudes would change. Change, however, was and continues to be threatening to a great number of people.

Invisible but nonetheless real, glass ceilings result in a higher turnover of minorities and women. Ceilings in such traditionally white-male-dominated areas as public works, engineering, police, fire, development, and parks cause them to remain that way. Ceilings are evident in perceptions that women come to the workforce as less than full participants due to family commitments and physical weaknesses. In reality, all of us juggle professional and personal commitments.

A Staff Commitment

What has the city of Corvallis done as an organization? The staff commits to encouraging real diversity, not just ratios that reflect commu-

nity demographics. We demonstrate, by our actions, commitment from the top down. We talk to one another and challenge one another. We try to admit our biases and fight our defensive tendencies. The only way we know to erase barriers to the executive level is to eliminate barriers at all levels.

For example, to hire a diverse and open-minded workforce, we tap into a variety of networks to attract people to Corvallis. Not only do we place advertisements in focused publications and network with professional, social, and civic organizations, we make direct contact and access the talented people we need to continue our pursuit of excellence. In interviewing, we challenge candidates with rigorous processes to simulate a real work day. We include women and minorities on interview panels, even when they are not tied to the hiring authority, to test candidates' ability to work within a diverse organization.

Networking and mentoring are key to retaining people. Showing new hires the ropes and the idiosyncrasies of the organization coupled with sharing experiences and successful solutions are essential. The city's orientation process for new employees reflects diversity by including role models and cultural diversity training. Initiatives to break barriers and foster diversity are measured in department director performance evaluations. Not only do senior staff mentor subordinates, they teach people how to mentor others, remembering it is an art.

We still have a lot to learn. Two examples of new initiatives the staff is pursuing are lobbying to allow continuing education credits

to count toward professional certification (aimed at making sure engineers temporarily out of the workforce do not lose ground), and establishing varied schedules for the city-owned child care center (we will not penalize parents who work past 5 p.m.). More important than any single initiative, Corvallis makes a conscious, concerted effort to ensure the organization is open, fair, and committed to excellence. This requires learning from our mistakes.

Clearly State Expectations

How do we affect the mind-sets that perpetuate glass ceilings? Here's an example of a discussion that took place at a recent staff meeting. Playing the role of devil's advocate, one director emphasized that the key to any hiring in his department was to find people who share the values of the work unit. That statement in and of itself is not bad, yet it implies a resistance to diversity resulting in sameness and inbreeding. His challenge forced us to reexamine and recommit to welcoming women and minorities into our organization; to make sure that we are not sending coded messages. If we seek employees committed to the pursuit of excellence, committed to working smarter and committed to making a difference rather than speaking of vague values, we must simply and clearly state our expectations.

Tough decisions require tough minds. We are guided by the words of Daniel Webster, "That which is right is not always popular, that which is popular is not always right."

—Marianne Shank
Assistant City Manager
Corvallis, Oregon

novation are more resilient in times of financial hardship. Be committed, yet versatile. Do your work differently and more efficiently, and everybody wins.

- Professionals must avoid “low-ceiling” or dead-end jobs. Many women, especially minorities, have traditionally held lower-paying, short-ladder positions. Go the unknown route for greater advancement potential.
- It’s important to be familiar with the routes into and out of positions where you work. People may dead-end at a position because their education or experience is too limited for more advancement. Ask someone in a position you would like to hold what it took to get there and what options exist. Then choose your route carefully and work at it every day.
- Power is essential for maintaining a position of advantage once you achieve it. Self-confidence is the most convincing advertising technique. If you truly believe you have the power to do something, others will also believe it.
- Play office politics effectively. Learn the formal and informal power structure, and respect it. Choose a mentor and build positive relationships with coworkers. These are crucial to support your professional development.
- Keep the corporate “big picture” in mind. Information about the company’s overall plan can help you decide where your ideas best fit. It also makes the rest of the job more meaningful.
- When possible, do work that is crucial to the corporation and do it visibly. If you are the one who solved the 10-year-old problem, take credit for it. If you do not take the credit, someone else will. Be counted as a team player who can also succeed independently.
- Choose your subordinates carefully. Select those who compensate for your weaknesses, have similar

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attitudes and a similar set of values, and are committed to success. They will be important in building a successful professional team.⁸

Ideas for Training

The National Capital Association Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) convened a task force of women from all levels of government to discuss ways in which women can break through the glass ceiling in the public sector.

They offer this advice in seeking training opportunities that are applicable for all professionals:

- Establish a career plan with short-term and long-term goals;
- Focus on the basic skills and knowledge you need to be effective in your current job and the one you want next;
- Know yourself: What do you like to do? What is important to you? Assess your current skills and abilities in terms of what it takes to be successful in your organization;
- Don’t limit your concept of training to the classroom; consider participation on task forces, attendance at professional conferences, and temporary developmental assignments;
- Look for opportunities to take on such new assignments as temporary rotational assignments to other offices or organizations and short-term projects away from your own office;
- Be proactive in meeting your own training needs;
- Develop a network or support group;
- Find out what is required to be selected for training; and
- Look for such training opportunities that do not require agency support as community college courses, adult education courses, and programs offered by professional associations, volunteering and reading.⁹

Ideas for Mentoring and Networking

The ASPA study also offers tips for utilizing mentors and networking skills for career advancement:

- Know what to expect from a mentor: insights, new skills, understanding of the organization’s culture, and tips on how to succeed;
- Find a mentor you respect and who shares your values;

- You may have one or several mentors for different perspectives;
- Mentors can come from inside or outside your organization;
- Consider using (or creating) a formal mentoring system;
- Your mentor need not be a woman or minority;
- Give your network continual attention;
- Learn how to turn a new contact into part of your network;
- Recognize that networking involves taking risks; and
- Professional associations can provide valuable networking opportunities.¹⁰ **PM**

¹*On the Line: Women's Career Advancement, Executive Summary*, p. 1. New York: Catalyst, 1992.

²Ibid, p. 2.

³*Business Week*, "Race in the Workplace: Does Affirmative Action Work?" pp. 51-62, July 8, 1991.

⁴*A Report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative*, pp. 4-5. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1991.

⁵*On the Line: Women's Career Advancement, Executive Summary*, pp. 3-4.

⁶*The 1980 Municipal Yearbook*, p. 240; *The 1986 Municipal Yearbook*, pp. 263, 302; *The 1992 Municipal Yearbook*, pp. 201, 285. Washington, D.C.: ICMA, 1980, 1986, 1992.

⁷Rivera, Dr. Miquela. *The Minority Career Book*, pp. 235-238. Holbrook, Massachusetts: Bob Adams, Inc., 1991.

⁸Ibid, pp. 92-94.

⁹*Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling: A Career Guide for Women in Government*, pp. 21-27. Washington, D.C.: National Capital Area Chapter, American Society for Public Administration, 1991.

¹⁰Ibid, pp. 29-35.

Additional Reading. Morrison, Ann M., Ellen Van Velsor, and Randall P. White. *Breaking the Glass Ceiling*. Reading, Mississippi: Addison-Wesley, Inc., 1987.

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Advancement in the Private Sector

In 1990, the U.S. Department of Labor undertook a study of nine anonymous Fortune 500 corporations, all of which had government contracts to determine the success women and minorities have in achieving success in upper management. The pilot project revealed several findings that applied to all nine companies, despite the vast differences that existed between them in terms of organizational structure, corporate culture, business sector, and personnel policies.

- All of the companies reviewed had a level beyond which few minorities and women had either advanced or been recruited, and minorities tended to be found at lower levels of management than women.
- Monitoring for equal access and opportunity, especially as managers move up the corporate ladder to senior management levels where important decisions are made, was almost never considered a corporate responsibility.
- Almost none of the companies reviewed compiled centralized records on their employees with regard to internal and external training and development or participation on task forces, committees, special projects, and assignments. As a result, there was no formal system of tracking or monitoring developmental opportunities and credential-building experiences with high-level exposure to ensure all qualified employees were given consideration for training and development opportunities.
- Appraisal and total compensation systems that determine salary, bonuses, incentives, and perquisites for employees were not monitored. Some companies used a formal evaluation system, some had several formal systems that took place at different times of the year, and others did not have a formal system of rating performance. None of the corporations in the pilot study reviewed their total compensation packages to ensure nondiscrimination.
- Placement patterns were consistent with research data that find that minorities and women are less likely to obtain positions in line functions—such as sales and production—which most directly affect the corporation's bottom line and are considered the fast track to the executive suite. Instead, many minorities and women find it easier to obtain work in or are steered into such staff positions as human resources, research, or administration.
- Most companies had inadequate records regarding equal employment opportunity/affirmative action responsibilities concerning recruitment, employment, and developmental activities for management positions.¹

¹*A Report on the Glass Ceiling Initiative*, pp. 4-5. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Labor, 1991.