

**BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING: A STUDY OF TEN CORPORATE WOMEN**

**BY**

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**A MASTER'S RESEARCH PROJECT IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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**has been approved  
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## ABSTRACT

Various articles and books were reviewed concerning the issue of The Glass Ceiling, the artificial barrier keeping women from rising above a certain level in their place of employment. This problem needs to be addressed by employers and employees facing this issue. An in depth interview was conducted by the researcher with ten top executive women in Arizona who state that they have broken the glass ceiling in their organization. The purpose of the interview was to outline what attitudes, behaviors and work habits displayed by the participants in the study contributed to their success. The results indicated that there is not a set of rules dictating how women should lead their career in the hopes of breaking the glass ceiling. Instead each participant contributed valuable information detailing various factors to help women break the glass ceiling.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROBLEM

#### Introduction to the study

Women have been steadily making gains in the work force in positions typically occupied by men (Morisson, 1992). Unfortunately, little change has occurred in the executive ranks of most companies in America.

The "glass ceiling" is the artificial barrier keeping women from rising above a certain level in a corporation/place of employment because they are women, not based on their ability to handle a higher level job.

There are various attitudes, behaviors and work patterns that have contributed to a woman's successful breakthrough of the glass ceiling in a corporation. However, one problem that women have is that they are caught between taking on typically male traits and being viewed as overly aggressive or bitchy or taking on typically female traits and being seen as emotionally fragile and weak. Acceptable behaviors for men in the work force are often not seen as acceptable for women. This can potentially cause discrimination in promoting women into the executive ranks as most executives promote someone most like themselves-- male (Kelly, 1991).



All of the literature reviewed suggests that the glass ceiling clearly exists in the work force and at a much lower level than was previously thought (Brown, 1992). Corporations need to concentrate on promoting women to executive positions as they cannot afford to lose talent and expertise because the candidate is a woman.

### **Background of the Study**

The history of the glass ceiling has existed since women first entered the work force. Recently, as more discrimination lawsuits have been won by women, more attention has been paid to this phenomenon.

In 1989, The U.S. Department of Labor introduced The Glass Ceiling Initiative, which began with a study of nine corporations holding government contracts (Brown, 1992). It was hypothesized that women were making steady progress in the lower ranks and the problem was centered in the top executive ranks. The finding was that the glass ceiling was still present within the corporations studied and existed at a much lower level than first thought. These findings were translated into guidelines enforced since 1992 by the OFCCP (Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs). This problem is even more extensive in companies who are not audited by the OFCCP.

### **Statement of the Problem**

At first glance, it may be perceived that many women are succeeding in breaking the glass ceiling, the artificial barrier to advancement for women in climbing the corporate ladder. At a close glance, 97% of senior executives are men (Landler, 1992). Women have made tremendous gains since the early 1970's and though they composed nearly half of the U.S. work force in 1991, they still have not made it to the top of America's largest corporations (Morrison, White and Veslor, 1992). The problem is to determine what attitudes, behaviors and work habits are perceived to have contributed to the success of women who have moved up in the corporate world.

### **Purpose Of The Study**

The purpose of this study is to outline what behaviors, attitudes and work habits ten corporate women perceive to have contributed to their success by propelling them to top positions within their organization.

### **Rationale For This Study**

The rationale for this study is to assess the impact of employment discrimination against women in high level positions. Women need successful and solid information and

guidelines on the reports of forerunners in their efforts to break the glass ceiling.

### **Research Question**

The research question is to determine what attitudes, behaviors and work patterns contribute to the success of women breaking the glass ceiling.

### **Significance Of The Study**

The significance of this study is its impact on the local, state and national level throughout our global economy. The glass ceiling phenomenon has the potential to occur in every type of work force in varying degrees. The problem of employment discrimination is prevalent in most corporations and this study should help to broaden the understanding of the glass ceiling by employers and employees and what they can do to prevent the situation.

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

An assumption of this study is that each woman surveyed knows what the glass ceiling is and knows what behaviors, attitudes and work patterns that she displayed that helped to propel her to the top of her organization. A limitation in this study is its narrow scope in which it is addressing a small sample of women in Phoenix Arizona.

## **Organization Of The Remainder Of The Study**

The second chapter is a literature review that includes current statistics, stereotypes and assumptions, self reported differences, Arizona statistics, common barriers, success factors, tips for women in breaking the glass ceiling and Department of Labor findings.

Chapter three describes the methodology as follows: The sample, the instrumentation and the data collection procedures.

Chapter four describes the results obtained from the ten interviews.

Chapter five discusses the summary, conclusions and recommendations.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The glass ceiling is defined as an invisible barrier that women reach when climbing the corporate ladder. This invisible barrier prevents women from reaching top management positions (Kalish, 1992). The glass ceiling is not based on a specific individual's inability to handle a higher level job, it is geared toward women as a group who are kept from advancing because they are women (Morrison, White, Velsor, 1992).

Since the early 1970's, women have flooded the business world, and in 1991 women composed nearly half of the U.S. work force. The percentage of women holding executive, administrative and managerial positions rose from 19% in 1972 to 40% in 1991 (Morisson, White, Velsor, 1992). The problem lies with senior management. In the early 1970's, 99% of senior management (positions such as CEO, COO and President of an organization) were male. Twenty years later, 97% of senior management is still male (Segal,Zellner, 1992).

## Stereotypes and Assumptions

Rita Mae Kelly states in her book that. . . "barriers impeding women's advances to upper level positions reflect old myths about the appropriate role of women in society."

(1991, 7) These beliefs or myths rest on six Greek tenets:

1. Males and females are opposite in nature,
2. The roles of males and females are opposite and complementary in accord with the design of nature,
3. Nature divides the needs of each society into two spheres: The outdoor, or male sphere, comprising heavy labor, military activity and protection and livelihood of the society, and the indoor or female sphere of love and nurturing,
4. The outdoor nature of man prepares him to engage in the public, political, visible and official activities of society, women's indoor nature relegates her to private, publicly invisible functions,
5. The public sphere is more important and dignified than the private sphere,
6. Men are stronger and superior, women are weaker, irrational and inferior. (Kelly, 1991, 7-8)

In a 1974 Harvard Business review article, male managers said that women needed to become more assertive and independent before they could succeed in business. In a Fortune magazine article in 1990, it was reported that many corporate men view corporate women as being "too hard edged, shrill and aggressive" (Mize, 1992, 60).

A study done by Sue Mize in 1992 sampled subordinates at Citizens Fidelity Bank to determine how female managers were viewed using the Lifestyles Inventory. Female managers ranked significantly higher than male managers on all four of the constructive scales. Subordinates view female

managers more capable than male managers in the following areas:

Managing people and tasks,  
Attaining high quality results on challenging projects,  
Setting and communicating challenging and realistic performance standards,  
Promoting teamwork by seeking input from subordinates,  
Seeking possibilities and opportunities in most situations,  
Respecting the abilities of staff members and allowing unconventional behavior,  
Balancing concern for getting the job done and considering people and their needs. (Mize 1992, 61).

Sue Mize (1992) reports that these findings are consistent with 1980 research done by Hall and Donnell. This study found that female managers were more concerned with growth, autonomy and challenge.

Many people argue that there is a true difference between the abilities and attitudes between male and female managers. It is suspected that the basis for claiming differences is to exclude women from the management ranks. Catalyst, a New York City nonprofit organization, discovered in one 1986 study, more similarities than differences between the sexes. They concluded that "gender differences in managerial style may be mainly in the eye of the beholder" (Morrison, White, Velsor, 1992).

The data bank was searched at The Center for Creative Leadership by Carol Morrison for test scores taken from thousands of managers and professionals participating in



management development programs from 1978-1986. Test scores were chosen for high level women and men of companies of more than 5000 employees. The tests measured personality dimensions, intelligence and behavior in problem solving groups. The only differences that emerged were:

Executive men are more likely than executive women to feel equal to the demands for time and energy encountered in their daily lives,  
Executive men feel more in tune with their surroundings and are more likely than executive women to perceive things as their peers do,  
Executive men are more comfortable than women in an environment where conformity to intellectual authority is desirable and the criteria for excellence are clearly specified (achievement vs. conformance),  
Executive women are more likely than executive men to move to new and original directions,  
Executive women are more likely than executive men to behave as individuals and to personalize their experiences. (Morrison, White, Velsor, 1992, 50)

These differences indicate that women are pioneers who are seen and often regard themselves as outsiders of the corporate environment. Often, these executives are pursuing goals and statuses that violate business tradition and traditional women's roles. They have few models to go by, so they pursue their goals as individuals, made visible by their differences.

There are many strong opinions to various personality dimensions typically characterized of women. Men are supposedly more focused on competition, winning and domination and are said to take more risks, to be better team players and be more independent, assertive,

opportunistic and impersonal in their work relations.

Women executives are viewed as being better than men in giving information, strengthening interpersonal relationships, being receptive to ideas and encouraging subordinate development and at assuming supportive roles (Kelly, 1991).

Carol Morrison's study showed further that many assumptions and opinions were myths:

Executive women were not more impulsive than men,  
 Executive women were not better able to reduce  
 interpersonal friction,  
 Executive women were not more understanding or  
 humanitarian,  
 Executive women were not more suspicious or touchy,  
 Executive women were not less dominant in leadership  
 than men,  
 Executive women were not less confident or secure,  
 Executive women were not less able to define or attain  
 goals,  
 Executive women were not less able to cope with stress,  
 Executive women were not less self disciplined or  
 rational,  
 Executive women were not less intellectual,  
 Executive women were not less even tempered,  
 Executive women were not less flexible and adaptable.  
 (Morrison, White, Velsor, 1992, 51)

Based on the results indicated above, there seems to be few personality or behavioral differences between executive men and women. Though these findings show few differences, they are perceived quite differently (Morisson, White, Velsor, 1992).

Rita Mae Kelly in her 1990 study further stated that behaviors such as aggressiveness, competitiveness and

dominance receive different reactions depending on the sex of the actor. For example, behavior that is perceived as bitchiness in a woman is often perceived as acceptable aggressiveness in men.

In a 1985 article by Basia Hellwig, it was reported that ... "studies have shown that top executives tend to promote people into leadership positions who are as much like them as possible, because men are more comfortable and seem to gravitate towards people like themselves" (Hellwig, 1985, 148).

### **Self Reported Differences**

Women have been expected to fit into the male model of work. Most bureaucracies have a male orientation and a male bias. It is argued that this bias requires women who become managers and who have stressful careers to become like men (Kelly, 1991).

In a study done by Russo, Kelly and Deacon, senior women managers rated ability and hard work as more important to their own success than did the men (1991). It may be that women do not advance to this level of achievement unless they actually have more ability and work harder than men. Another finding was that professional contacts which received high importance ratings for women and men were correlated with career satisfaction.



## Arizona Statistics

In 1988, only seven of the Fortune 500 companies had their national headquarters in the Phoenix metropolitan area, and at that time none of the chief executive officers were women. Women in Arizona seem to have fared better in the public sector than in the private sector. In 1990, Arizona had females who were governor, Speaker of The House of Representatives, and Whip of the Democratic party.

There are various unique disadvantages to women in Arizona. The state has a large geographic area and low population and density which many feel perpetuates a mentality of macho individualism. This also helps to perpetuate the strong "good-ole-boy" network in Arizona. The transient nature of the Arizona population often makes lasting relationships and networking difficult. Women in isolated rural areas suffer a lack of educational and economic opportunities. Spread out urban areas deprive cities of a sense of community, foster isolation that hinders collective effort and suffers from a lack of public transportation (Kelly, 1991).

Arizona lacks educational opportunities which are concentrated in urban areas. Social welfare, medical and mental health programs are far behind other states: labor law, domestic relations laws, property laws, and their enforcement inadequately support Arizona women.

On the positive side, Arizona's informal and open atmosphere has the potential to foster unique opportunities for women to excel. New ideas are brought to Arizona because of the transient nature and the variety of cultures sensitizes the community to world markets. Arizona is a young, growing state which can offer women the opportunity to participate and effect change (Kelly, 1991).

### **Power**

The best leaders and executives tend to score high on the power motive and be effective in the use of power which has been studied in various tests. It seems that men dominate the power positions in society and women have traditionally been chastised for their fear of power and women are generally perceived less powerful. When studying gender differences in power orientation, there is no significant difference in power salience, drive, anxiety, enjoyment and style (Kelly, 1991; Deutchman, 1986). Gender differences do exist in holding and exercising power; whereas women view power as a means to promote change, men tend to view power as a means of having influence over other people (Kelly, 1991).

Historically, women have been socialized to deal with personal power whereas men were socialized to deal with position power. It is because of this that executive women



are often perceived as unfeminine, bitchy, bossy or pushy when exercising power. When showing anger, it is acceptable for men in the work place, but if women cry in displaying their anger, they are looked down upon (Kelly, 1991).

### **Barriers**

If a woman is employed and has familial responsibilities, she is forced to be a super woman. Regardless of income or marital status, female workers must deal with the home and family in a way that most male workers do not. This imbalance of roles puts a tremendous burden on women. Blank, as reported in "The American Woman", 1988, studied married men and women who spend equal hours in the paid work force. He found that women put in an additional 18 hours per week doing home labor.

Women's options for integrating the mother and career woman role have not been great. They have been expected to fit into the male model of work forcing them to either avoid being a mother, adopt a "father's" approach to child care (hiring someone to care for the children and handling family chores) or seek alternative work hours or forms (Kelly, 1991).

Ninety percent of male executives age 40 and under are fathers and only 35% of female executives are mothers. Many women have chosen to avoid motherhood as it puts a role

strain and overload in rising to the position desired (Kelly, 1991; Wallis, 1989).

Working women on an average, still only earn 74 cents for every dollar a man earns (Fisher, 1992). This puts the burden of affordable day care in perspective. In 1986, the average cost of day care was \$5000 per year. Women who work odd hours, who go to school or have after hour meetings find themselves struggling for additional day care solutions. These additional solutions usually come with a larger price tag (Kelly, 1991).

Women are at a crossroads in corporate America. They are stuck below the level of challenge that will satisfy them and don't know what to do. Something needs to change where everyone will benefit (Morrison, White, Velsor, 1992).

### **Success Factors**

In a study by Morrison, White, Velsor and The Center for Creative Leadership in 1992, top female executives and those who watched or helped their success at Fortune 100 sized companies were interviewed regarding their success factors. They came up with six consistent factors:

1. Help from above--This was the only point that was said to have contributed for each executive woman. The good relationships that the executives had with the top level of their company gave them an edge.

- The top level executives played roles of sponsors, tutors and mentors and the women were also included in special projects, which gave them insight and more exposure in the company,
2. Track record of achievements--The executive women seemed to "stand out" in assignments through technical competence, professionalism, ability to anticipate and head off problems, leadership and whatever else the job required,
  3. Desire to succeed--The women demonstrated determination and personal drive to succeed by working hard, seizing more responsibility, pushing and persisting until the job was done. One person surveyed termed this as "a passion for success,"
  4. Ability to manage subordinates--People involvement skills, open communication and a high morale in their groups were indicated as a success factor. Dealing with problem employees with the combination of sensitivity and goal orientation was also indicated to contribute to success,
  5. Willingness to take career risks--Transitions made by executives from line jobs, finance, HR or whatever they could get were to broaden their business experience. These transitions often required relocation or heavy travel and usually involved a great risk of failure,
  6. Ability to be tough, decisive and demanding--Aggressive and strong witted were often used to describe the women because of their approach to business. This approach also seemed to be connected to how well they performed. (1992, 25-32)

### **Department of Labor Findings**

In the fall of 1989, The Labor Department began a study on the glass ceiling phenomenon. In August of 1991, The Labor Department released a report on its progress entitled "The Glass Ceiling Initiative" in which nine companies were studied (Kalish, 1992).

One finding indicated that the glass ceiling exists at a much lower level than anticipated. Women were held back



from top executive positions as well as lower level directorships and other managerial positions (Brown, 1992).

Another finding indicated that the companies had no specific policy for ensuring that all qualified employees were provided opportunities to develop their careers further or gain credentials.

None of the companies reviewed their appraisal or compensation systems to ascertain the presence of discrimination in employment and promotion. Women have often been slotted in staff positions in which they may have had a more direct impact on the bottom line of the company. None of the companies kept sufficient records of recruitment, employment and developmental activities in which they could determine compliance with EEO responsibilities (Kalish, 1992).

A finding showed that many of the traditional policies and procedures may have built or perpetuated the glass ceiling. These included: informal recruitment practices, failure to make executive recruitment firms aware of affirmative action goals and equal employment opportunity obligations, and failure to sensitize and instruct managers about EEO requirements and concerns (Kalish, 1992).

In November 1991, President Bush signed into law The Civil Rights Act of 1991. In this act, congress provided for the formation of The Glass Ceiling Commission, which

will undertake a comprehensive study to determine the policies and procedures resulting in barriers for advancement for women. Fifteen months after the formation, the commission will review its research and voice its recommendations (Kalish, 1992). This report has been delayed as to the date of release at this time due to the 1993 change in administration.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Description Of The Methodology**

A descriptive methodology was chosen for this study. This was chosen in order to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of ten corporate women who broke the glass ceiling. This study identified the existing phenomena and problems in chapter two. This study did not predict any future events but sought facts about ten women's opinions, attitudes and perceptions about how they reached a top level in their organization.

#### **Design Of The Study**

The design of this study was descriptive and measured a small population of corporate women in Phoenix, Arizona, during one interview session with established criteria.

#### **Sample And Population**

The population studied was ten executive women in Phoenix, Arizona, who were selected in various ways. The researcher was referred to two participants by friends, two participants were recommended by other participants in the study, one participant was a personal friend of the

researcher, two participants were selected by the researcher due to their public exposure and involvement in the community, two participants' names were given to the researcher by Soroptomist International located in Phoenix, and one participant was selected by the researcher from a list of people involved in a Town Hall meeting in 1991 regarding the Glass Ceiling. Each participant was known by the researcher to be a top level corporate woman, which was later verified by each participant. They were contacted by a personal phone call by the researcher during which the study was explained. The established criteria for the women selected to be interviewed were demonstrated by two questions. The first question determined if they knew what the glass ceiling was and the second question determined if they felt that they would be able to contribute significantly to the study. Interviewees who answered Yes, were asked if they would be interested in participating in this study. Those who were, received a personal interview. Seven participants were white, one was black, one was Hispanic and one was Asian.

Each participant in this study was assigned an identifying letter which remained consistent throughout the study in order to provide confidentiality. The letter codes used were:

A. Senior Vice President of a securities firm



- B. Director of a 2.5 million dollar grant funded project
- C. President of a community college
- D. Director of Risk Management for an airline
- E. Vice President for a health care provider
- F. President and CEO of a few automobile franchises
- G. Executive Vice President and Chairman of a banking institution
- H. Vice President of Student Affairs of a university
- I. President of a placement agency
- J. Executive Vice President of a utilities organization

### **Instrumentation**

In order to identify key attitudes, behaviors and work habits that contributed to the success of the women surveyed, fifteen interview questions were asked of the ten participants. The questions were selected from another study done by Morrison, White, Velsor and The Center for Creative Leadership in 1992. These questions were specifically selected to help answer the research question of the current study.

A structured interview was conducted of each participant using the following questions:

1. Briefly tell me about your career
2. How did you catch the eye of important managers in the company?



3. What do you see as critical turning points in your career?
4. How have you changed significantly over the course of your career?
5. When did you first realize that you were considered a candidate for a top job? How did it affect you?
6. What other people played a significant part in your career success?
7. What single thing contributed most to your success in getting to the top?
8. How representative are you of those who make it to the top of your company? How do you differ from the men?
9. Help me understand the road to the top--critical career turning points--events having a significant impact on your growth or advancement.
10. What kind of personal sacrifices have you had to make to get where you are today?
11. What advice would you give to a younger manager about managing her career?
12. What one important thing about your career do you think would have been different if you were a man?
13. Sometimes people invest in developmental activities that they hope will pay off for them; can you think of something you did specifically to help you develop that proved to be particularly valuable? How about something

proved to be particularly valuable? How about something that turned out to be a waste of time?

14. Where do you see your career moving? What's next for you?

15. Is there something I should have asked but didn't?

### **Data Collection**

Each of the participants in this study was involved in a personal structured interview. The interview was taped for precise data collection and accuracy. The same fifteen open-ended questions were asked to each participant.

### **Data Analysis**

The results of the personal interviews were compiled and recorded separately. Each participant's responses are listed separately in Chapter four. These responses were compared and contrasted to determine similarities and differences in the methods that each participant took to break the glass ceiling in their own career.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF DATA

Each question asked to a participant is listed followed by the frequency of answers given. It was found that other valuable comments were given by the participant during the course of the individual question. These comments are listed following the frequency data and do not follow a particular sequence nor is there a comment listed from each participant. At the end of each quote in the "other comments" section, the participant's assigned letter will be listed in order to identify the participant.

Question #1: Briefly tell me about your career?

Comments from the researcher: This particular question was used as a general icebreaker and gave the participant time to become comfortable with the interviewer. This question also gave the interviewer some information on the general career progress and the educational and work history experiences of each participant. Answers are stated in a condensed format.

"I have a degree in Russian and International affairs. I began in an operations management training program for a financial services organization then traveled for the company as a troubleshooter. I left the company due to

burnout and did odd jobs for six months in the securities industry. I came to my current job as supervisor of the trading room, then moved up to manager at the department followed by my position as Assistant Vice President of the company. I doubled my salary after one year with the firm and was then promoted to Vice President. I currently hold the position of Senior Vice President." (A)

"I started in hospital work as a hospital nurse, then went back to school to get a math degree. I worked at a Psychiatry hospital and did research at the school, followed by teaching the gifted. I came to Arizona and worked on a grant with the university with master's level instructors and held the position of assistant director. I then left the state and worked as a professor of research. I came back to Arizona and worked for a local TV station on an instructional program. I left the state again then came back to an organization that I previously worked for and then got laid off. The position I currently hold is Executive Director for a five year grant funded project." (B)

"After I finished college, I got a job as the director of public affairs at a university. I went on to another college district and was promoted. I took a one year assignment to do a study which was followed by another position, was



promoted again to the position of president at a college. This was by age 36. I then came to my current position as President of the community college. I had five promotions in twelve years which was a rapid and non traditional rise. I came to be president of a university at a different route than most. During this time I obtained a master's degree and a doctorate." (C)

"I have a business degree from college, then took a job as an underwriter for five years for a large firm. I then became a broker for a firm and transferred to another firm. At that time, I was doing some work for the airline that I currently work for. The president asked me to work for his company and I became the first in house Risk Management Director this airline ever had." (D)

"After finishing my bachelor degree, I had anticipated going to medical school, but I didn't get in. Instead, I went to graduate school based on the advice of my advisor. I got my degree in the school of public health and consequently saw the bigger picture. I started medical school and went for two years and found that I didn't like the clinical aspect, so I quit. There was an ad for a health planning job in the paper, as if it was written for me. I began to feel that each two to three years I had done everything I could in my

position and I needed to do more significant things, so I left my positions. I have been with my current position for eight years and I have never ran into an organization like this one that understood health planning principles. I started as director of Phoenix and I received consecutive promotions. I have always been with the executive staff, and as the company grows, so do I. I have always been at the top level of decision making, so I have not seen a glass ceiling. I currently hold the position of Vice President." (E)

"My father was an entrepreneur, which really appealed to me. I obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in business and became an accountant, then went back to school for my MBA. I was married with young children when my husband and I had the opportunity to go into business in Scottsdale with a car dealership. At that same time, my husband left me and I decided to take the opportunity myself. A few years later, I added another franchise. When my partner retired, I added a few more franchises and I have four today. With my background in financial analysis and another masters degree that I received in counseling, I now understand people and money." (F)

"I was an English major in college and became a teacher for a year and a half. I was then asked to work with the university on a project, then received consecutive promotions every three years. I now am the Vice President of student affairs and supervise seven hundred and fourteen departments and control millions of dollars in the university budget." (H)

"I started working out of high school as a secretary in a bank. I transferred to consumer lending, which few women did. Next I ran a subsidiary of a bank for ten years and managed 138 people. I was responsible for operations, computer programming and budgeting. I have been with the bank at my current position for twenty years. I am the Executive Vice President over eleven branches, and 198 out of 270 employees report to me." (G)

"I completed college with a degree in education and became a full time wife and mom for fourteen year. During that time I did a lot of volunteer work and my husband didn't want me to go back to work because I didn't need to. I decided to register with a temporary agency because I knew that I had good secretarial skills. I worked as a secretary to the chairman of a board while trying to balance my life. The company stated that they would be flexible so I accepted a



permanent position. I later became office manager and hired fifty people for this organization. I was recruited to a temporary agency for sales, in which I built their division. I became regional Vice President covering eighteen states and eighteen million sales territory. I stayed there for six years and became employee of the year out of 3000 employees. During this whole time, my husband was very supportive. For the last four years, I have owned a personnel agency." (I)

"I obtained a business degree from college which was followed by a seven year job at a public accounting firm. I have my CPA and a finance background. I then became the director of legislative affairs for a large corporation which was a large career switch for me. I then had another career change to corporate communications and was then recruited to my present position as Vice President by the CEO of this organization. I am now Executive Vice President and am responsible for 1450 employees and a budget of 150 million dollars." (J)

Question #2: How did you catch the eye of important managers in the company?

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.



Being technically competent in areas that many do not know a lot about - 3

Learned to look at the big picture - 2

Raised visibility and became known to key players - 2

Knew what the company's needs were - 3

Always has research to back up statements - 1

Learned to work through barriers to reach goal - 1

Willing to do jobs that no one else wanted to do - 1

Hard work and good work - 1

Luck (being at the right place at the right time) - 2

Energy - 1

Flexibility - 1

Other comments included:

"Because of looking at the big picture, I have developed into the key player in one aspect of the business, but can run the other parts." (A)

"By raising my visibility, I became known to key players, which one became my mentor and assisted in moving me from position to position." (C)

"I was always willing to do a job that no one else wanted to do. I knew management wanted this job done and any success

was viewed as positive. It also gave me a direct line to management, while raising my visibility." (G)

"It always goes back to performance through hard work, then luck." (J)

Question #3 - What do you see as critical turning points in your career?

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.

Being at the right place at the right time- 1

Realized that the job was mastered- 1

Obtaining further education- 3

Working in a critical and controversial position- 1

Realized that she could do the next level job- 1

No critical turning points- 1

Career change- 3

Divorce- 1

Recommendation letter by her staff- 1

Took a risk- 2

Was offered her boss's job- 1

## Other comments included:

"I realized that I needed to speak up about what I wanted in life. It's not obvious to others on what you want, you need to ask others for help. I also realized that I did not need to be in agreement with everyone in the organization to be respected by them." (C)

"You have to play the game and get the paper (degree) because your credibility is attached to it." (B)

"People in leadership roles do not have to be all knowing. I learned to solicit information from staff which I believe is a strength, not a weakness. Only a true leader can pull ideas out of their staff." (C)

"I don't think I would have aspired to where I am today without my husband, I used to under value what I did." (E)

"Education opened up my options, gave me more ideas, strength and courage which I believe is the key to success." (F)

"I looked for an industry that allowed women's growth." (I)

"Making career changes when it was uncomfortable broadened me." (J)

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.

Question #4 - How have you changed significantly over the course of your career?

Became more assertive- 1

Learned to state what she contributed to the company- 1

Became more competent and experienced- 3

Became more confident- 2

Had to learn to be comfortable being the only woman in her area of expertise and to not consider self out of place and a token- 1

Learned that it was OK to show emotion and to be close to employees- 1

Obtained more education- 1

Created a balance in her life- 2

Learned how to change hats in a company (the ability to switch roles)- 1

Became able to delegate with comfort and confidence- 1

Learned to set priorities- 1

Learned to be a leader- 1

Became willing to be a pioneer and take all of the risks- 3

Learned to depersonalize work information- 1

Became less intense- 1

Became more patient- 1

Became more deliberate in decision making- 1

Became more cynical- 1

Learned to manipulate people- 1

Does not fight (verbally) as openly and keeps eye on goal as opposed to small battles- 1

Question #5 - When did you realize that you were considered a candidate for a top job?

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.

When she was promoted- 4

When she was included in a senior management group- 1

Consciously decided what she wanted- 3

Given the opportunity by her mentor- 1

Was not given top job, she took it- 1

Never competed for the top job, her job just evolved- 1

When she bought her partner out- 1

While working as a hands on manager- 1



Part two of question #5 - How did it affect you? Other comments are also listed below:

"It just happened by default and I was then asked to take on more responsibility." (A)

"My mentor gave me opportunities and experiences in which I knew what direction they were leading me." (C)

"I have always held myself to a higher standard of excellence than anyone." (E)

"I realized that I would be making all of the decisions and had no one to blame but myself." (F)

"I found that the job really didn't change, because I was doing 80% of the work anyway. I didn't feel a huge responsibility or thrill, I was embarrassed at first. I also learned to be respected for what I did, not the title." (G)

"I have always written my own job description and done what I wanted to do. You don't get it offered to you because the decision is always pre-determined." (B)

"When I felt that I wasn't going to be considered for a top job, I decided to leave." (I)

"When I was considered for a Vice President job, I felt challenged and wondered if I was ready." (J)

Question #6 - What other people played a significant part in your career success?

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.

Mid-level managers within the firm- 1

Female counterparts in other firms- 1

Family- 8

Co-workers- 1

Staff working for her- 2

Partner- 1

Mentors- 3

Women in the community- 1

Bosses- 3

Question #7 - What single thing contributed most to your success in getting to the top?

Nine out of the ten participant felt that there was not one single thing that they could state to answer this question so instead, stated a few answers. One participant did not give an answer to this question, but instead stated, "there is not one single thing contributing to my success."

Being at the right place at the right time- 1

Hard work- 3

Goal setting- 1

Having a vision and pursuing it- 1

Flexibility- 1

Applied self- 1

She and husband supported each other- 1

Education- 1

No single thing- 1

High energy level- 1

Learned to work with all types of people- 1

Quick connector- 1

Looks at bigger picture beyond expertise, while never taking her eye off the job that she was hired to do- 1

Tenacity- 1

Belief in self- 1

Not being afraid- 1

Being bright enough to figure out exactly what was going on- 1

Question #8: How representative are you of those who make it to the top of your organization?

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.

- Those who felt that they were representative- 4
- Those who felt that they were not representative- 6

How do you differ from the men?

- Younger- 2
- Reached this level quicker- 1
- Different educational background- 3
- Different job experience- 2
- Was married and had children- 1
- Different set of values- 1
- More empathetic and nurturing- 2
- Not in "good-ole-boy" network- 3
- More interested in collaborative, participative management- 3
- Stays out of politics- 1
- Does not delegate work- 1
- Better "people skills"- 1
- More team oriented- 3
- First minority in top position- 2
- More soft spoken and quieter in meetings- 1



Makes decisions differently- 1

Doesn't hesitate to ask for help- 1

More honest- 1

Will take risks more- 1

Other comments included:

"I don't get invited to where the decisions are made, for example, tennis courts, clubs, golf courses. The only way to the top is to have your own business." (B)

"I am younger and smarter than the men." (A)

"I believe that I was probably the first person to have a baby while in the position that I am in." (C)

"Women are more concerned with empowerment as opposed to power and hierarchy, more inclusive and nurturing as opposed to males who talk more about the bottom line and structure." (C)

"The "good-ole-boy" network is still very strong. There is a lot of reciprocity between men in this line of work." (C)

"My boss is gender blind and is driven by performance." (E)

"I am the only person at this level in my organization who does not have a formal four year degree. I came up through the ranks." (G)

"I am the first minority in a top position and when I began, I was the first woman in a male dominated university." (H)

Question #9: Help me understand the road to the top; critical career turning points and events having a significant impact on your growth or advancement.

The researcher found that this question was perceived as repetitive by four participants. They stated that this question was previously answered in question #3. The researcher shows below, the answers that were given by the other six participants.

"Personal educational selection will determine where you are to go, and flexibility regarding geographical location, making a career choice that might be out of your range based on your educational background, being willing to try and learn something new and by trying an area that nobody is covering." (A)

"You need advanced degrees. Find out what it is in your industry that is valued and get it! You also need to stay

out of organizational politics, gossip and all negative influences. Don't burn bridges and have as little baggage as possible." (C)

"Come to grips with who you are and know what you want. Every step will make a difference and know what you are willing to settle for. Self esteem, self worth and security with yourself are so important. Careers are not lineal, they are cyclical, so I cannot term it as a career path. People change directions so frequently. A career is what you want out of life and what you will accept."

(B)

"I was willing to take a risk when opportunities came up outside the are of what I was trained and educated to do. I recognized that they were opportunities which in turn gave me a lot of confidence." (I)

"The sale of the company that I was running was a critical turning point and I had to decide if I was to stay with the company in an undefined role, when I had been president and chairman. I took a risk and it took two months for my position to be named." (G)

"I have done extensive reading on many issues, and the pieces just fit together. Being involved in many job related and community activities also helped." (H)

Question #10: What kind of personal sacrifices have you had to make to get where you are today?

Quality time with family- 2

Not too many- 2

None- 1

Never had time to "play"- 1

Social life- 1

Less anonymity- 1

Less personal time- 1

Home life- 1

Other comments included:

"I have always been responsible and often I have to make myself do things with the family. I need to realize that I can still be successful at work and do things with my family." (E)

"We have our own choices on how to spend our time. I chose to spend a lot of time on my career and education, which I believe is the key to success." (F)



"I did what I wanted to and the sacrifices were minimal and the rewards were much greater." (G)

"I love what I am doing and the people that I work with."  
(C)

Question #11: What advice would you give to a younger manager about managing her career?

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.

Frame everything gender neutral- 1

Manage people effectively and be sensitive to their needs- 1

Take credit for what you accomplish- 2

Get the education necessary- 3

Learn management skills through training and reading materials- 2

Study behavior and management style of people in your organization- 1

Study the empowerment paradigm- 1

Know your job well and each job that you are supervising- 1

Know how to discipline employees- 1

Establish priorities and balance in life- 2

Work hard and work smart- 2

Be flexible- 1

Continually establish your goals and assess what you want to do by a personal definition of success- 2

Be observant- 1

Ask for the job that you want- 1

Don't be overly assertive, but don't be naive- 1

Be happy, love what you do and put a lot of passion and energy in your career- 1

Make lateral career moves- 1

Don't get hung up on your own ego- 1

Other comments included:

"Part of good management is instinctual, but a great deal is learned. Don't assume that you can be a good manager unless you can get the training or spend a lot of time reading management material. Learn the empowerment paradigm, which states that you can give away power without losing it. The more that you give, the more you gain." (C)

"You can accomplish your goals by working smarter; this means making judgment calls on which things will really make a difference in your job." (E)

"Don't expect things just because you have a degree or certificate." (H)

"There will be a lot of sacrifices, but you will earn the right to a position. Unfortunately, women pay their dues more than men." (I)

"There will be fewer and fewer slots at the top of an organization due to the current trend of flattening management. Maybe the definition of success is not what you think it is. Maybe it is not just being at the top of an organization. Define your own definition of success." (J)

"Set goals, not too long term, but ones that you can see and figure out how to get there." (F)

Question #12: What one important thing about your career do you think would have been different if you were a man?

Higher pay- 1

Would not be questioned about when she will have children and if she will leave temporarily or permanently- 1

Would be a "good-ole-boy"- 1

Colleagues would relate to her differently- 2

Would be committed to different things- 1

Would not of had to work harder than men to prove self-

5

Would be more successful- 1

Would be less willing to take risks- 1

Would get to the top quicker- 1

Would have more choices- 1

Would feel less prejudice- 1

Other comments included:

"Being a woman has its barriers, but it allows me to be different. I get invited to speak at many places, get interviewed frequently and I get certain kinds of attention because I am not just one of the men." (C)

"Women often are constantly checked on to see if the job is being done properly, whereas a man will not be checked on unless he makes errors on the job." (H)

"I felt that I had to prove myself and in turn, I put in many extra hours. This was a self imposed notion in which I needed to do better and know more." (J)

"I have run into a lot of prejudice which changed my perception on many things. I feel a great deal of anger."

(B)



Question #13: Sometimes people invest in developmental activities that they hope will pay off for them, can you think of something you did specifically to help you develop that proved to be particularly valuable?

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.

Leadership program- 1

Self analysis and evaluation- 1

Volunteer work- 1

Education- 4

Golf- 1

Community involvement- 1

Workshops, seminars and other related training- 3

Writing- 2

Reading- 3

Public speaking- 1

Achieving accreditation in a specific field- 1

How about something that was a waste of time?

Nothing was a waste of time- 5

Unproductive or unorganized committees or boards- 3

Most leadership programs- 1

Doing the things that men do to get to the top, such as

Doing the things that men do to get to the top, such as golf-1

Other comments included:

"Working as a volunteer in assisting with budgeting and allocations, which corresponds with what I do at work, I feel that it is much more rewarding and worthwhile." (A)

"Men can become a college president without a doctorate but you will rarely see a woman president who does not have one." (C)

"Life is a ground for training. It is my job to get something valuable out of where I spend my time." (F)

"Everything I have been involved in has positioned me for my next move." (G)

"Even when I was a homemaker, I read extensively and engaged in conversation to intensify my knowledge of the business world." (I)

"The big trend today is doing all of the things that men do to get to the top. I am not sure that all of the hype is worth it." (J)

"Most of the leadership programs are recycled concepts. I can read the books, which I prefer, in order to get variety. I can come up with most of the concepts myself." (B)

Question #14: Where do you see your career moving and what is next for you?

Each participant stated a few common answers to this question which are listed below. The amount of times that an answer was given is stated numerically.

Mommyhood- 1

Stable at current position- 5

Retirement- 1

Expansion of own business- 2

Aspires to further involvement in the political arena-  
1

Involvement in training- 1

Community involvement- 1

Director of cosmetics organization- 1

Other comments included:

"I don't want any more promotions or responsibilities at this time. Long term, I would like to work for a non-profit agency. This would be more personally satisfying." (A)

"I know what the next level for me would be, but I am young and have a lot of time left. I want to provide stability for my children and I love my current job." (C)

"I feel that the cosmetics organization is the only field that there is no glass ceiling and you get what you put in." (B)

"I will hire and train the person to replace me when I retire." (D)

"I am just beginning to learn to relax. If I moved up to the next level, I would have more time constraints and less choices available to me." (E)

"I want to be involved in training because I love watching people grow." (G)

"There are only a few slots left above. My goal is to have fun, lighten up, loosen up and achieve balance. I have a lot of work to do in my current job and have a lot of room to grow without feeling that I have to go on to the next level." (J)



Question #15: Is there something I should have asked you but didn't?

Question fifteen was unique in which it did not ask a specific question and instead gave the participant an opportunity to make comments on an issue that was not covered in the interview or expand on an issue previously covered. Three participants answered that there was nothing that I should have asked but didn't, and the remaining seven replied with words of advice, their own perception on issues in the work place regarding the glass ceiling and other related issues.

Comments included:

"Men that have wives in the work place are more sensitive to females that are in their own work place." (A)

"You didn't ask me about mistakes that I made along the way." (C)

"A college degree is helpful but there are those who are directed and motivated without a degree and perform. Performance is what is important. Be smart, hardworking, a problem solver and a good communicator." (E)

"My responsibility to mentor women is very important to me. I want to be visible and available to assist others and I want to create an environment that people can come to me with their own career decisions. It is important to me that someone says that I influenced them." (G)

"I cannot be a representative for my whole ethnic group due to the fact that there are so few at this level." (H)

"You didn't ask me about salary being commensurate with the job. I was underpaid in many areas and worked many hours above what was required. Later in life, the pay seemed to be commensurate. I work from motivation, I need to be happy in what I am doing, I need to be affecting change and I love to work. Compensate me for that. Compensation is a measurement of success, but you need to pay your dues. " (I)

"My perspective on why there are so few women at the top is that women did not join the work force in mass until the late 60's and early 70's. It takes an average of fifteen to twenty years to get to a senior level position. Women have not been in the work force long enough and therefore do not have a track record. Another reason is that women have made other choices along the way. Baby boomer women typically want families and don't want to work ten to twelve hours per

day. I don't feel that discrimination is the only reason. There is a lack of aggressive promotion of women; for every middle management position, there are ten men and one women, and for senior spots, there are twenty men and one women."

(J)

"I think that one of the things that is most significant in my early career, what got me the interview and actual job offer was because I was Hispanic and female and the company that was doing the hiring felt that this is what they needed to meet their quota, so I don't think that they were necessarily looking for skills at that time, although I had the credentials on paper. It looked too good, and when I actually performed, that was even nicer! I began a job at the health department in another state, and the fellow who hired me basically stated that I didn't really even have to work. It was really blatant. During this job, I was asked why I was working so hard and doing so much work. At that time I was in my mid twenties and this was in the early 70's. The management had decided that they were going to promote a gentleman to head the department who had been there twenty years to be my boss. I had done all of the work for the health plan. Management came to me and said that they knew that she had done all of the work and the gentleman receiving the promotion needs you, doesn't do all

of this work and doesn't know how, but he has been here for twenty years and that is the way the system works. They offered me five thousand dollars in recognition for all of the work that I had done. I walked away from this job on principle and took a pay cut at my next job of \$12,000 less per year. I felt that I earned it and deserved it and they weren't giving it to me. This is why I feel so strongly about being recognized by performance." (E)



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Summary**

The Glass Ceiling has been proven to be a significant concern for women in the workplace and how to break The Glass Ceiling has been the topic of endless discussion. Ten executive women who felt that they broke The Glass Ceiling were interviewed using fifteen questions for the purpose of determining what behaviors, attitudes and work habits of theirs helped to propel them to the top of their organization.

An extensive amount of information was gathered during this process. Similarities in answers given are presented in the conclusion.

#### **Conclusions**

It must be noted that there were many common answers that were given by the participants within each question. There were also many similarities in answers throughout the fifteen interview questions. This may demonstrate that both common and individual factors play a role in a woman breaking the glass ceiling. Based on the research presented, career paths may not follow the same sequential flow of

events and all women aspiring to break The Glass Ceiling, do not need to follow one set of behaviors.

The conclusions are presented in two separate sections; similarities in answers within each question and similarities in answers throughout the complete interview.

#### Similarities Within Each Question

Question #1: Nine out of ten participants had a four year degree, seven out of ten participants acknowledged that they had a rapid and non-traditional rise to the top of their organization.

Question #2, #3 and #4: There does not seem to be significant similarities in the participants' answers to these questions.

For example, in question #2, regarding how the participant caught the eye of important managers in their company, one participant stated hard and good work, and another stated that she learned to look at the big picture. In question #3, regarding critical turning points in her career, one participant stated that she was at the right place at the right time, and another participant stated that obtaining further education was the turning point. In question #4, regarding how the participant changed over her career, one participant stated that she became more assertive and another participant stated that she learned to depersonalize work information.

Question #5: Four out of ten participants stated that they realized they were a candidate for a top job when they were promoted.

Question #6: Eight out of ten participant's stated that their family played a significant part in their career success.

Question #7: None of the participants indicated that one single thing contributed most to their career success, all indicated that it was a group of things.

Question #8: Six out of ten participants felt that they were not representative of those who make it to the top of their organization. There does not seem to be significant similarities with regard to how they differ from the men.

Question #9: There does not seem to be significant similarities in the participants' answers to this question. This question was perceived to be repetitive by four participants. Only comments were recorded in this question.

Question #10: In all of the questions in this interview, each participant stated numerous answers to each question that was asked with the exception of question #10, regarding personal sacrifices that they made during their career. In question #10, each participant stated one answer to the question, indicating to the researcher that the participants felt that few sacrifices were made and felt comfortable with their choices.



Question #11: There does not seem to be significant similarities in the participants' answers to this question. This question asked the participant to give advice to a younger manager about managing her career. One participant stated that the manager should frame everything as gender neutral as possible and another participant stated that she should know how to discipline employees.

Question #12: Five out of ten participants stated that the one thing that would have been different in their career if they were men, was that they would not have had to work harder than men to prove themselves.

Question #13: Four out of ten participants stated that education was a developmental activity that proved to be valuable in their career. Five out of ten participants stated that all of their developmental activities were valuable.

Question #14: Five out of ten participants stated that they were stable in their current position when asked where they saw their career moving.

Question #15: Seven out of ten participants answered this question with words of advice, their own perception on issues in the workplace regarding The Glass Ceiling and other related issues.



## Similarities Throughout The Interview

Education and training was mentioned by each participant as a very important factor in their career success

8/10 of the participants indicated that they had a smooth path in transitioning to the top of their organization

Only three participants stated that mentors played a significant role in their career success, which differs from previous studies by Morrison, White and Velsor, 1992.

There were three factors that were mentioned consistently in the study pertaining to behaviors having an effect on the participant's career success:

1. Technical competence in areas that many do not know about was mentioned six times
2. Working hard, and working smart was mentioned seven times
3. Taking risks in their career was mentioned seven times.

## Recommendations

### Tips for Women and Employers in Breaking The Glass Ceiling

Men are not shy about promoting themselves but women seem to be more reluctant to engage in self promotion. Women

need to join management clubs, accept job transfers, push for line jobs and fair compensation, work on deficiencies and cultivate relationships through consistent networking. A few of these tips involve risk taking. This does not mean going after the CEO's job, simply reach out a little each day (Perry, 1992). It may take jumping completely out of her element when stepping out and taking risks, but it should be done (Fisher, 1992).

Women need to worry less about the glass ceiling and more about doing the job better than anyone else (Higgs, 1992). If women find that their company doesn't appreciate them, they should find one that does or they should open one of their own. According to The National Association of Women Business Owners, by the end of 1992, women-owned firms will employ more workers than all of the Fortune 500 companies combined (Perry, 1992).

Suggestions for women who want to move up in an organization:

1. Research the position wanted and determine requirements and procedures that it will take.
2. Become a competitor, be seen as a competent rival, not as a woman seeking a man's job.
3. Assess personal attitudes toward male co-workers.

Examine personal feelings about being a woman in a man's world.

4. Actively pursue own career, develop mentors, network within and outside company with women and men. Keep up with the latest trends and technology in the industry employed in.
5. Speak up and let ideas be known in meetings and team sessions.
6. Enlist the help of supervisors.
7. Send resumes to female headhunters who often make an extra effort to place women in executive spots. Women may understand other women's struggles better.
8. Target headhunters specializing in the industry desired.
9. Support female headhunters by recommending to friends and colleagues (Jackson, 1992; Higgs, 1992).

Employers need to take various steps in this process also:

1. Learn from other companies' successes. Adopt the best aspects of executive advancement and recruitment programs from industries that are typically "woman friendly."
2. Include women on a list of candidates for management positions having a fair balance of women and men. If there are not enough qualified internal women,



3. Encourage extra professional activities. Allow flexibility and time off for involvement in associations allowing women and men to work closely together for a common purpose. This promotes networking and establishes a comfort level in working with each other (Fox, 1992).

The best reason for believing that women will be in more high level positions before long is because in this competitive global economy, no company can afford to waste valuable brain power simply because it is wearing a skirt (Fisher, 1992).



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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Debra Ferber was born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 12, 1968. Her secondary education was completed at Shadow Mountain High School in Phoenix, Arizona. In 1986, she entered Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. She was awarded a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Psychology in 1990. In September of 1991, she entered The Graduate Program in Human Resources Management at Ottawa University.