



In a Nutshell > Empowerment

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Women in Management



By Heather Gordon on March 19

Who are Women in Management? What does it mean to be a female manager in the 21st century workplace?

What does it take to smash and break through the infamous glass ceiling that still exists some 35 years since the first British Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act?

While the debate continues as to whether the glass ceiling really exists, it is clear that, despite a raft of legislation to create gender equality work practices, women managers still face challenges if they are to secure promotion to top management and leadership positions, including board directorships, and to the pay received by men in these posts.

Fortunately, as no two female managers are the same, women are using a wide range of approaches to succeed while working out the best route to the next level.

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1. What is the glass ceiling?

The glass ceiling metaphor refers to genuine issues concerning access to certain positions, networks, opportunities, status and resources. It can exist at different levels within an organisation, whether at the top or at the lower levels of progress within the structure. Here are some of the factors that make up the 'glass ceiling':

- Negative stereotypes of women, due to prejudices
- Recruitment practices that hire in the traditional management image
- Recruitment practices for executive positions are not transparent
- The perception that women are not willing to meet the demands of leadership, such as travel, long working hours or living abroad
- Limited opportunities for flexible working at senior and executive levels
- Women have limited access to the networks and support that enhances promotion opportunities into senior positions
- Women are held to different social or professional standards to those of their male counterparts.

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2. What's happening?

This under-representation of women at executive/board level suggests that the perception continues that the leaders at the top should be male. Along with this perception goes the assumption that leadership requires qualities associated with a dominating, competitive, aggressive and demanding behaviour style. Women, on the other hand, are not supposed to be like their male counterparts.

- Out of the FTSE 100 companies, only 22 have a female at board level; the rest of the boards are all male. Similarly, only a small percentage of executive directors are female.

- At the age of 20, males and females tend to be on equal pay, but by the time women reach their 30s, the pay gap starts to develop. It is estimated that women earn less than 20 per cent less than men by the time they're 30.
- Working mothers have stated they can find themselves excluded from critical assignments and opportunities because the business culture doesn't accommodate them.

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3. Key actions for advancement

Savvy managers, those who want to progress their careers, take certain actions in order to make that step up to the next level:

- They have a robust and dynamic plan for where they want to go, as they realise that no one else will do their career planning for them
- They understand their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to the next role they want and take action to increase their confidence in areas in which they are not strong
- They seek to do their own public relations for their achievements, raising the profile for themselves and their team at the same time
- They network inside their organisation and externally in their industry and are willing to extend into other networks to achieve what they want
- They don't rely on their boss noticing if they are ready for promotion.

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4. The business case for women in management

There is a strong business case for increasing the numbers of women in senior and board level positions.

- Women are an untapped and diverse talent pool.
- Women are professionals.
- The female style of leadership supports broader decision-making and collaboration with diverse groups in the workplace.
- Where companies have a large female customer base, those customers are more attracted to organisations that have role models of women holding senior executive positions at the top.
- Diversity is also important for the reputation, profile and perceptions around the corporate responsibility of global brands, in global communities.
- Utilising the talent pool reduces costs and turnover of staff, as people feel challenged, recognised and stretched in ways that develop their skills for the benefit of the business.

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5. Why have a plan?

Something as important as your career advancement is worth giving serious thought to, rather than waiting for someone to plan your career for you.

- Your plan will define exactly where you want your career to be within a certain period of time (usually five years) and how you intend getting there.
- Writing this plan is a critical first step to getting started, as it establishes the future direction of success.
- What is the overall position/role or result that the plan is to achieve?
- Why do you want this outcome/result?
- What strengths, capabilities, experience and qualities do you bring to this role?

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6. Developing your strategy: junior manager

If you have achieved what you set out to do in your current role, this is great; if you still have to make your mark, then the next twelve months will be the time to gain some quick wins.

- Do my current accomplishments prepare me for where I'm planning to go next?
- Do they give me the credibility to convince a recruitment panel that I'm the ideal candidate?
- Be prepared to step out of your comfort zone. You will need to adopt some new strategies, such networking, raising your profile and asking for a mentor, things you may not initially feel comfortable with.

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7. Self-knowledge and skills: junior manager

It is important to understand yourself: as a manager what are your thinking and behavioural styles and how do you impact on situations and the people you work with?

- Really consider your abilities: where have you added value and contributed to the business?
- Can you take steps to consolidate some experience by undertaking short-term roles which could open up new opportunities for you?
- Consider taking on additional responsibilities, such as line managing, leading a team or being involved in managing new projects, which could open up new markets for the company or offer to improve systems or processes in your area.
- Raise your profile through taking an active part in meetings.

- Write about your achievements and those of your team.
- Always be confident and ask for development, attend training, seminars and workshops, and use this growing knowledge as on-going part of your strategy.
- When opportunities for leadership come your way, welcome them, as they are preparing you to secure that next management role.

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8. Supporters: junior manager

Women in management need to identify a variety of approaches that can boost their confidence and keep them buoyant when challenged by setbacks.

- Your own personal network of friends consists of people who you like, so include your family as well as friends who will support you, keep you sane and celebrate your successes with you.
- Professional networking is one of the most powerful tools for women who want to secure high level positions.
- Understanding the dynamics in the organisation is part of any role. Whether we like politics or not, we have to work with a diversity of people who have different ranges of influence, status and authority.
- A mentor can form part of the support system to help you identify what's required at the next level, work out who are the key players and manage the dynamics of new working relationships in your next role.

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9. Developing your strategy: middle manager

At this level, you are established. Your technical know-how and experience are something to feel proud about. So are you being noticed for your work and the results you achieve? Beginning with 'the end in mind', what is the outcome you are planning to achieve?

- Conduct an audit on what you have accomplished, the difference you have made (impact) and what you have learned from those activities. Identify your own strengths and weaknesses.
- Decide what steps you will take to gain essential experience and skills, while raising your profile within the organisation.
- Check recent appraisals for useful feedback; undertake on-line assessments and consider using independent professional support.

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10. Essential groundwork: middle manager

You now need to put in the groundwork required if you are to take that next step up.

- Do you know who the key stakeholders in your organisation and industry are?
- Find opportunities to engage with these people. Offer value to them, so they will seek you out for advice and ask for your expert viewpoint.
- Connect by offering to give presentations to these groups, joining ready-made forums and working groups, attending seminars and conferences, and perhaps sharing the platform with them.
- Take advantage of any learning opportunities on offer.
- Raise your profile by taking an active role in meetings, speaking at events and writing articles.
- Find mentors and make good use of coaches.
- As you begin to network and build relationships with mentors, you will start to get a good idea of the skills that people are utilising in your next role. This will be important as you start to prepare and ensure you are an excellent match for the next post.

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11. Developing your strategy: senior manager

Directorship involves risks and carries broad legal responsibilities. If you are already working in the organisation in which you are seeking a directorship, this has given you an opportunity to establish your credentials, engaging with team members, shareholders and directors. If not, the following tips still apply:

- Planning your strategy will give you a clear focus and keep you on track, though you should remain mindful of other opportunities that can emerge as you build new connections
- Build up a clear picture, showing how you will add value to the strategic work of the organisation and preparing yourself for the questions that will be asked about your suitability
- Draw up a CV, including significant results you have achieved
- If you know what you are known for, admired for and trusted for, that's great; if not, it's worth seeking feedback from people who work with you.

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12. Essential groundwork: senior manager

You now need to treat your end goal as a project and put in the essential groundwork that will ensure you get the result you want.

- If you don't already have a mentor, make finding one a priority and include them in your ongoing planning to achieve your next role.
- Keep in mind that networking to build connections and find your next leadership role will require you to be creative and confident.
- Use your networking activities to help you find board sponsors, mentors and any other resource you may need to keep on track with your plans.
- If you need more experience in certain key skills, such as public speaking, negotiating or corporate governance, now's the time to make sure you create opportunities to improve in those areas.

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