

The new face of Female Leadership

Old rules don't apply!

BY DEBORAH PENTA
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Fortune Magazine's tribute to the "50 Most Powerful Women" hit the newsstands on October 15th and with a celebration of ten years of looking at the highest-paid female executives and how they measure up to their male counterparts, this particular issue extolled something, in my opinion, that is much more important than how women in high-level management positions rank.

Each year, I enjoy reading this issue to see which companies are soaring with high-level female executives at the helm, but when the cover touted "The New Buddy Act—one generation of women grooming the next"—I couldn't help but say, "It's about time."

One of the major thrusts of our newly formed group FLIC (Female Leadership Interest Council) is to help women succeed through the empowering influence of mentoring experiences. And, while our organizational mission is to help develop and foster stronger leadership and mentoring experiences, we are hopeful that through our work, women will work better together in more supportive and progressive roles. I have long believed that this should be the case, in order for women to help each other succeed.

The power of mentorship is a highly rewarding experience for the individual serving the role as mentor and an extremely beneficial one as well for the individual receiving the mentoring. Through FLIC, we are providing a proprietary "match" process connecting women with mentors. We are hopeful this will inspire women to work collaboratively and successfully together to achieve a better position in business and in life.

If there is still a question as to whether or not women have achieved equal footing in business, think again. Out of the fifty most powerful women identified by Fortune Magazine in 2007, fifteen of them are under the age of fifty. Women are achieving top-leadership positions faster than ever before! I

imagine that if a similar list of the fifty most powerful men were developed, there would be a very similar trend of men achieving high-level leadership positions at younger ages as well.

By way of issuing a challenge, I'd like to ask why women are still referred to as a minority. In 2007, I believe that calling women in business a minority is ridiculous. If women want to be recognized and wish to achieve high-level executive leadership positions, equal pay and greater opportunities to hold seats on corporate boards, why do some insist on being considered a minority? This is, in my opinion, an extraordinary contradiction.

According to the United States Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2006, in the category of "management, professional and related occupations," 48.9% are held by men and 51.1% are held by women. Similarly, in the category of "management, business and financial occupations," 57.5% are held by men and 42.5% are held by women. Clearly, women are not in the minority here. So, did we just forget to update our terminology with regards to how women are depicted in the workforce? Clearly, there are some industries that statistically indicate a great disparity between men and women, such as construction.



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Through FLIC, we hope to inspire women to become greater leaders and role models and to live a life in greater harmony both professionally and personally. Through our work, we will perhaps help to shape a different outlook in all facets of their lives.

Perhaps one significant area will be to recognize that women are no longer a minority in the workplace and that we no longer need to see lists like "the 50 most powerful women" but rather "the 100 most powerful people" of which many will include women.

When we get to this point, we have accomplished something truly important for the future, most especially for younger women who are entering the workplace.

Isn't it about time?

We'd like to know your thoughts. Please email me at dpenta@femaleleaders.org.

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