

How to Get More Women to Be C.E.O.s

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4-5 minutes

There are no easy fixes to the overt and subtle barriers I outlined in [my recent article](#) about why more women don't become chief executives. But women who have made it all the way to the top offered some observations and suggestions.

Maggie Wilderotter was the chief executive of Frontier Communications for more than a decade (her sister, Denise Morrison, is the current president and chief executive of Campbell Soup Company). Her advice:

- Seize opportunities to run divisions that produce revenue, moving beyond jobs that women more typically hold in human resources, marketing or administration. "Get out of your comfort zone and get into line jobs. You've got revenue responsibilities, you're leading teams of people that deliver economic value to the company."
- Be willing to move, both within and outside your company, to gain a wide range of experiences. "Women are fiercely loyal. We overstay where we are. Men don't think twice about changing."
- Take responsibility for managing your career — set goals, be explicit about asking what it will take to get promoted and how that will be measured.
- Find multiple mentors or sponsors, because your needs change during a career. "I'd build relationships with people who mattered. I'd pick their brain — I'm thinking about this; how would you go about getting this done?"

Jacqueline Hinman heads CH2M Hill Companies, a Colorado-based engineering company that manages projects including light rail in Toronto and Olympic facilities in London. Although women are scarce in her field, she rose to chief executive, and now women make up 30 percent to 40 percent of her board and are well represented in senior positions.

She also urges women to aim for a wide range of experience. "I lived outside the United States, I worked in every single one of our sectors, from engineering, operations, construction, sales and M. and A.," she said. "I ticked all the boxes."

Her other top recommendations:

- Communicate your accomplishments, both to people inside and outside the company. Take credit for what you achieve.
- Ask directly for specific feedback on measurable accomplishments, and pester supervisors until you get it.
- Call out bias, but in a way that people can hear, such as asking a male supervisor to imagine how he might feel if his daughter had a similar experience.

As a chief executive, she has made it clear to her subordinates that they will be judged on whether they help produce a more diverse work force, including having women and minorities on any final list of candidates for promotions.

Ellen Kullman, the former chief executive of DuPont, now runs [Paradigm for Parity](#), a coalition of business leaders who commit to taking five specific steps to achieve gender equity, including training in unconscious bias; setting clear goals to increase the representation of women at every level, including the senior level, which will be measured and circulated within the company; and basing advancement on results, rather than face time at the office. She advocates measuring specific results such as percentages of men and women hired and promoted, and comparing how long it takes women and men to be promoted.