

Catalyst Study Explodes Myths About Why Women's Careers Lag Men's

NEW YORK (October 13, 2011)—Common wisdom about advancing in the workplace is straightforward: let your boss know you're ready for that challenging assignment. Make your career ambitions and willingness to put in the requisite time and effort clear. Don't just build a relationship with your boss; make sure to build one with your boss' boss as well.

Sounds like good advice. But according to Catalyst's latest report, *The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?*, men benefit from these strategies far more than women.

In fact, this report, which studied high potentials in the executive pipeline, reveals that while "doing all the right things" to get ahead works well for men, being proactive did not provide as great an advantage for women.

"This study busts the myth that 'Women don't ask.' In fact, they do! But it doesn't get them very far. Men, by contrast, don't have to ask. What's wrong with this picture?" said Ilene H. Lang, President & CEO, Catalyst.

According to the report, which studied commonly used career strategies, the strategies adopted by high-potential women had little bearing on the rate at which they advanced to leadership. Conversely, men who applied the most proactive career strategies advanced further than other men.

Regardless of chosen career strategy, the study shows that men outpace women in rate of advancement and compensation growth—starting with a \$4,600 gap in their first post-MBA jobs which widens to \$31,258 mid-career, according to Catalyst's 2008 survey. Key findings include:

- Women seem to be paid for proven performance—women who changed jobs two or more times post-MBA earned \$53,472 *less* than women who rose through the ranks at their first job.
- In contrast, men seem to be paid for potential—men who had moved on from their first post-MBA job earned \$13,743 *more* than those who stayed with their first employer.
- Across all career profiles, men were more likely to reach senior executive/CEO positions than women; in the most proactive category, 21% of men advanced to leadership compared with 11% of women.

The report effectively explodes persistent gender gap myths that continue to hold women back:

- *Women DO "ask," but asking doesn't close the gender pay or position gap.* After their first post-MBA jobs, there were no gender differences in whether or not high potentials negotiated for greater compensation (63% of women vs. 54% of men) or for a higher position when beginning their current job (19% of women vs. 17% of men). Even though these women negotiate for more when they change jobs, our research shows that women's compensation growth was faster when they remained with the same employer, where they had proven performance, than when they started with a new employer, who paid based on potential.
- *Women are not seeking out slower career tracks.* According to the study findings, women are less satisfied than men with their career growth. If women were intentionally seeking slower tracks, we would expect them to be as satisfied as men despite their slower advancement.
- *The same strategies don't work equally well for men and women.* Women must adopt strategies different from their male colleagues' to advance their careers. When women were proactive in making their achievements known, they advanced further, increased their compensation growth, and were more satisfied with their careers. They also advanced further when they proactively networked with influential others. Making their achievements known did not impact men's careers. Rather,

gaining access to influential others also helped men advance, and indicating a willingness to work long hours and conducting external scans for other opportunities helped men increase their salaries.

Catalyst suggests that corporate leaders ask: To what extent are employees in our organizations advanced and compensated based on strategic career tactics versus skills and performance? How are people being coached to get ahead? Are assumptions being made that what worked for men in the past will work for women? And when women and men apply the same career strategies, are they being reacted to and evaluated differently?

According to Ms. Lang, "Just as individuals need to manage their careers effectively or risk lagging behind their peers, organizations must learn how to attract, develop, and retain high-potential women—or risk losing out to their competitors."

Chevron Corporation and Deutsche Bank AG sponsored *The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?* at the Mentor Circle level.

For media inquiries, please contact Susan Nierenberg, (646) 388-7744, snierenberg@catalyst.org or Ariane Tremblay, (514) 861-1330 ext 226, atremblay@girafe-communications.com.

ABOUT CATALYST

Founded in 1962, Catalyst is the leading nonprofit membership organization expanding opportunities for women and business. With offices in the United States, Canada, Europe, and India, and more than 500 preeminent corporations as members, Catalyst is the trusted resource for research, information, and advice about women at work. Catalyst annually honors exemplary organizational initiatives that promote women's advancement with the [Catalyst Award](#).