

The **POWER** Study

Pharmaceutical Company Climate for Women

Groundbreaking research from the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association sheds light on women's prospects for career advancement in the industry.

Women in the pharmaceutical and health care industries are struggling with many of the same "glass ceiling" issues as those encountered by women on Wall Street and in the Fortune 500 corporations, Carly Fiorina notwithstanding. Fiorina, the new CEO at Hewlett-Packard, made headlines precisely because she's the exception.

**By Susan Youdovin,
Helen Eldridge,
Anne Camille Maher,
and Robin Madell**

Susan Youdovin chairs the HBA Public Relations Committee and is a principal at B&Y Communications in Montclair, New Jersey. Helen Eldridge is former HBA research committee chair and director of market research at Ortho Biotech, Inc. Anne Camille Maher is HBA director of association relations and research. Robin Madell is senior editor of *Pharmaceutical Executive* and a member of HBA's advisory board. She will join the board of directors next year.

Although women are represented in the industry in ever-increasing numbers, they are still poorly represented in the leadership ranks and on senior-level operating committees. According to Catalyst, an organization that works with business and the professions to advance women across all industries, 11.2 percent of Fortune 500 corporate officers in 1998 were women—about 1,000 out of 11,000 positions. A survey of the 1998 annual reports of some 40 pharmaceutical companies reveals that fewer than 10 percent of senior managers are female, and 15 of the companies have no women at all in top positions. (See "How Many Women?") Yet nearly half the labor force is female, as are more than half the current college students enrolled in undergraduate and master level programs, 40 percent of law school graduates, and a third of MBA graduates.

SPECIAL REPORT

Why should that be so? The Healthcare Businesswomen's Association (HBA), a not-for-profit organization of more than 1,000 pharmaceutical and health care industry professionals, wanted to find out. As part of its mission to help women develop, advance, and succeed in their careers, HBA commissioned "Perspectives on Workplace Environment Realities: A Study of Career Advancement in the Pharmaceutical Industry," known as the HBA "POWER Study." (See "Study Stats.")

Messages to Management

It is important to view the POWER Study from within the context of the pharmaceutical industry as a whole. The recent growth of the industry has been nothing short of stunning. In the last decade, drivers of that growth have intensified: advances in the technology of drug development, the requirements of regulatory agencies, the advent of managed care, the birth and proliferation of direct-to-consumer advertising, changes in the practice of medicine, the ability to alter disease at the gene level, mergers and acquisitions, and intense competitive pressures.

Intent on finding ways to prosper or at least survive in that environment, many companies have been slow to accommodate the social changes taking place in the world around them. One of the most ob-

vious has been the proliferation of the two-breadwinner family. Another is the surge of women into the marketplace armed with baccalaureate and advanced college degrees who, married or single, have come as prepared as men to perform in the industry.

Faced with these changing dynamics, the POWER Study had several objectives:

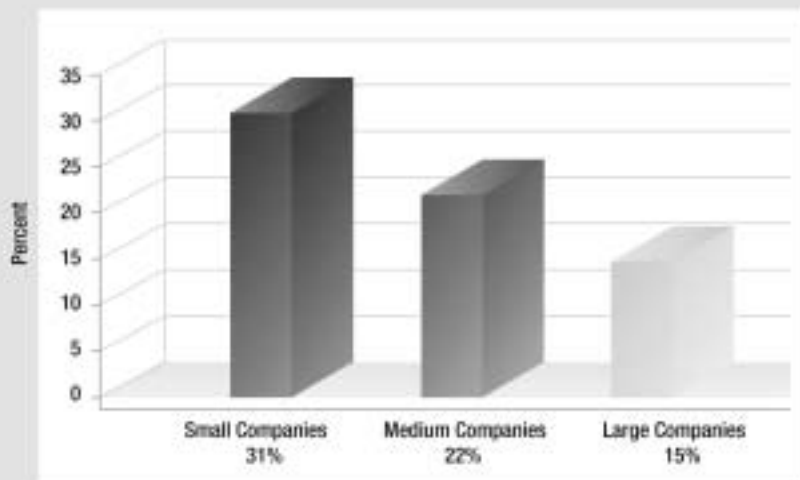
- to provide a look at the place that women and men occupy in the management of the pharmaceutical industry
- to describe the attitudes of companies, as perceived by the women and men who work for them
- to discover the attributes that employees' own experiences have shown to be necessary to advance into senior-level management
- to define what gender parity means, in practical terms
- to look at the adjustments and adaptations people are and are not willing to make in their work and personal worlds
- to explain how those accommodations temper their own desires to reach the top in their organizations.

With this in mind, several key findings emerge from the study:

The "glass ceiling," the invisible barrier that blocks women from top jobs in corporate America, has not been

CHART TOPPERS

Percent of Women in Top Management, by Company size



HBA POWER Study, May 1999.



The Healthcare Businesswomen's Association released the results of the POWER Study at its First Annual Women's Leadership Conference held in Newark in June. Pictured from top to bottom are HBA president Jean Sharp and conference speakers Laura Berman Fortgang, Alyce Halchak, and Sharon Power.

cracked sufficiently. It exists in the pharmaceutical industry, and the factors and attitudes responsible for it are not overt and are often subtle or subconscious.

Most women (77 percent) feel that they have yet to achieve equality with the men in their companies. More than half the men (54 percent) who responded believe women have achieved it. (See "Slicing the Ceiling?") That finding is more common among executives in large companies than in small ones.

How should gender parity manifest itself in the pharmaceutical industry? Three out of four of each gender believe it should include equal pay for equal work (77 percent) and should afford similar opportunities for exposure to top management (74 percent). However, a greater proportion of women (74 percent) than men (59 percent) include equal representation in top management positions. A larger proportion of men (around 60 percent), both senior and middle managers, would include

the more overt signs of privilege: a similar office size or location, similar vacation time, and similar time allowances for active involvement with industry-related organizations, all of which fewer women (around 40 percent) value highly as a manifestation of parity.

The presence of women in the top management of pharmaceutical companies is a mile wide but only an inch deep.

Nearly all the companies represented in the study have had at least one woman at some time among the top 10 percent of their management. At present they average no more than four women.

At the top management level in large companies, the study found that fewer than one person in five is female. Small companies, however, have twice as many women in their top ranks. (See "Chart Toppers.") Three men in five who responded (60 percent) are satisfied with the current situation; only two women in five (38 percent) share that view.

Survey respondents express the view that women have a minority status at the top levels of their companies primarily because of a lack of both training and opportunity to gain line management experience.

Instruction & Inspiration

Robin Madell, senior editor of *PE*, offers the following insights based on nearly a decade of interviewing senior-level women in the industry.

MENTORS

- Have a mentor, and when you're ready, be a mentor to others.
- Find people you admire and learn from them, whether through a formal mentorship program or informal interaction.
- Work to develop your personal style. Actively look for role models and adopt aspects of their style that you admire.

BALANCE

- Work smart, not hard. Avoid workaholicism: strive to maintain a balance of work, family, and outside interests to keep things in perspective.
- Be as true to your real self and your values as you can be.
- Choose your focus and priorities, and then don't obsess about the things you cannot do.

TRAITS

- Have the self-confidence to try anything.
- Have tenacity and perseverance; don't give up. Don't lose faith in yourself. If intuition tells you to go down a certain path, don't let anyone dissuade you.

TIPS

- Look for opportunities to find a piece of the business that you can truly own—get up to your eyeballs in an

area of interest to you.

- Figure out what is important to the company and how what you're doing fits in with its objectives. Do not keep your aspirations a secret.

- You don't have to have all the answers; you have access to people who do.

- Be direct about communicating what you want.

- Do your homework; always deliver on expectations; give 150 percent. Believe in yourself and apply the appropriate work ethic to get there.

- Never underestimate the role that your team plays in your success—good employees can make or break you.

CAREER MOVES

- Be flexible and open to a variety of career moves—there is more than one way to get from A to B. Be willing to take a lateral move to broaden your skill set.

- Talk to people in different functions to understand how connections are made within the organization and to the customer.

- Don't get too comfortable. Be prepared to take risks and step in.

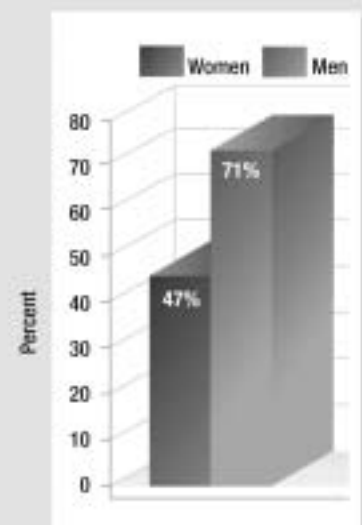
- Never pass up opportunities to sharpen your skills, even if you have to stretch to do it. You don't have to be an expert going into something.

- Think big early. Take time to figure out what you want. Focus on your goals and on making them happen.

- Have a vision of what you want to accomplish in your career. Identify what you would like to do and what you have to do to get there.

SATISFACTION NOT GUARANTEED

Percent of respondents pleased with opportunities for women's advancement in their company.



HBA POWER Study, May 1999.

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rience. (See “Reasons Why.”) Men and women agree on three reasons for this: inadequate employee development programs, lack of line management experience among women, and lack of development time or experience for women.

Additionally, women feel more keenly than men (73 percent versus 48 percent) that a “lack of mentoring for women” is a likely reason for a lower ratio of women to men in top management positions. (See “Gender Gap.”) By a two-to-one margin over men (69 percent versus 31 percent), women respondents believe that their lack of inclusion in informal communication networks also plays a part.

Things are probably not much better anywhere else.

More women than men at both upper (34 percent versus 26 percent) and middle (43 percent versus 18 percent) management levels are inclined to believe that opportunities for women are greater in other companies in the pharmaceutical industry. Upper and middle management men see a clearer path to the future for women right where they are.

Looking farther afield, more women than men believe that women have greater opportunities outside the pharmaceutical industry. A larger percentage of middle management men (38 percent) than upper

management men (23 percent) suggest that women have better chances in other industries.

There is a perception that companies undervalue women.

More than three women in four (78 percent) perceive that companies undervalue women—just as many in upper management as in middle management. (See “Undervalue Chain.”) Surprisingly, half the men (50 percent) agree that women are undervalued at their own companies. How pervasive is it? Perhaps because they are more directly involved, women find it more pervasive at their companies than men do.

Men think the climate for the advancement of women in this industry is quite good. Women disagree.

In both upper and middle management, fewer than half (47 percent) of the women surveyed, but most men (71 percent), are pleased with the opportunities for advancement afforded to women by their companies. (See “Satisfaction Not Guaranteed.”) Women and men who express that the climate for advancement of women is good agree that opportunity is based on experience, hard work, technical expertise, and education. Most of those who are not pleased, especially those few

Study Stats

The Healthcare Businesswomen’s Association (HBA) POWER Study, commissioned and funded entirely by HBA, followed a model of similar surveys conducted by the research organization Catalyst. The study had three goals:

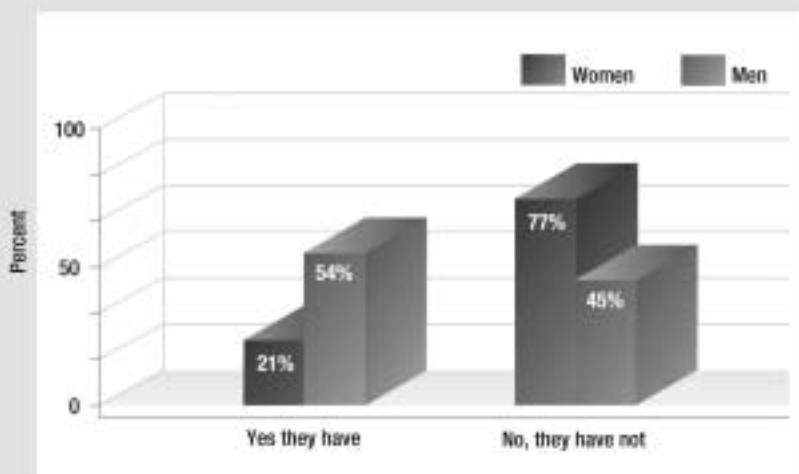
- to determine what happens in the workplace to promote or discourage the advancement of women in the pharmaceutical industry
- to learn from the experiences of women who have successfully achieved parity with their male colleagues in the top ranks
- to gain a better understanding of the pressures women face outside the workplace that challenge their ability to rise to the top.

HBA conducted the study in 1998 under the supervision of the HBA Research Committee, headed by chair Helen Eldridge of Ortho Biotech, Inc., and Anne Camille Maher, HBA Director of Association Relations and Research. Charlene Prounis, former HBA president and a managing partner at Accel Healthcare Communications, initiated the study during the presidency of Sharon Callahan of SCP/Cliggott Communications. Work on the study began during Prounis’s term as president in 1998 and was completed under the leadership of current HBA president Jean Sharp.

Study participants included upper and middle management executives, both male and female, in the pharmaceutical industry. HBA supplemented mail questionnaires with in-depth telephone interviews for a subset of the respondents. Both large and small companies participated, with more than half the responses coming from companies with 1,000 or more employees. Although three-quarters of those who received the survey were male, they constitute only about a third of respondents. Of those who returned the self-administered postal study, 63 percent were upper management and 37 percent were middle management. The average age of respondents was 44; 7 in 10 are married.

SLICING THE CEILING?

The HBA POWER Study asked respondents if women had achieved parity with the men in their companies. Men’s and women’s responses differed dramatically.



HBA POWER Study, May 1999.

in their twenties who responded, feel that opportunities to be recognized are limited.

Many women still believe that to be promoted to senior management, they need to be more successful, skilled, educated, and hard-working than men. In

doing so, they feel they must be aggressive without appearing "pushy." Men do not see themselves under this self-restriction.

Advice to the newly hired woman with high ambitions is practical and addresses

traditional values like conscientiousness and responsibility.

First and foremost, respondents say, work hard, be assertive and seek responsibility (25 percent). Then, perform well and prove competence (15 percent), keep your self-respect (12 percent), and herald your

What HBA Can Offer

Most companies have gained a better understanding of the issues surrounding diversity. Nonetheless, they continue to struggle with identifying practical solutions for developing their executive women's talent. HBA can offer the following assistance:

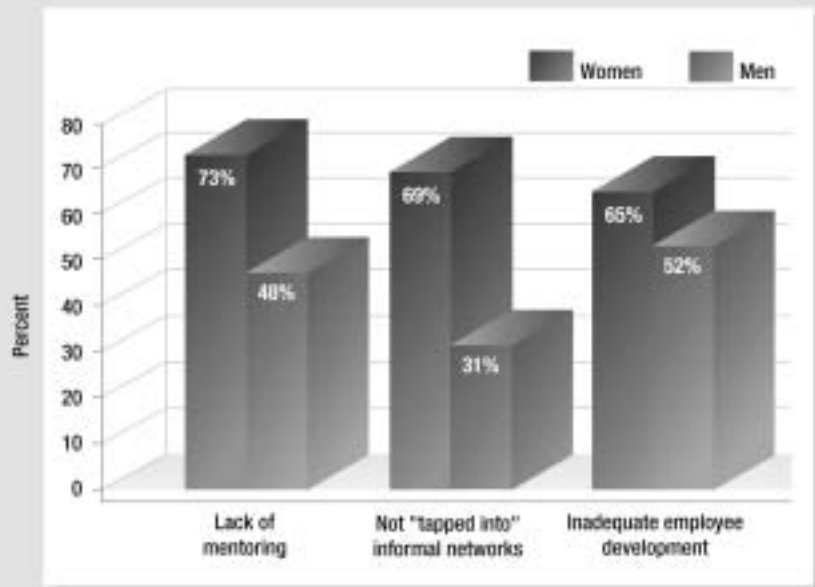
- Teams of senior HBA members will be available to present information on POWER Study research and its implications.
- HBA leadership is prepared to work with companies on understanding the results of this landmark study and the changes that help attract and retain the best people.
- HBA leadership can also provide information on strategies to help reduce attrition of female managers and improve opportunities for women's career development and advancement.

The Healthcare Businesswomen's Association (HBA) is a not-for-profit organization of more than 1,000 pharmaceutical and health care industry professionals dedicated to helping women develop, advance, and succeed in their careers. HBA promotes women's career advancement by conducting research in career issues, recognizing outstanding women in the industry, developing strategies for improving the representation of women in executive positions, and providing programs on industry-related topics, career development and work/life balance issues. In addition to individual members, HBA has 50 corporate members, including major pharmaceutical companies and industry-related firms in advertising, public relations, publishing, law and medical education. The organization is headquartered in Fairfield, New Jersey, with most of its members located in the Northeast. Chapters also are in formation in Chicago and Atlanta.

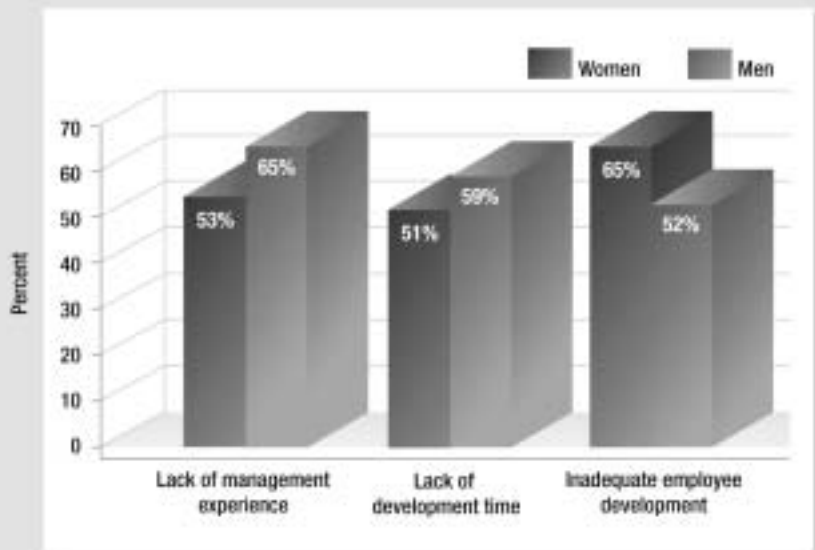
GENDER GAP

Respondents give differing views on why women have a minority status at top levels.

Women's Top Reasons



Men's Top Reasons



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own accomplishments appropriately. Several respondents suggest that many women and some men who do their job well but fail to ask for a variety of assignments or promotions are more likely to be left in place. Management's easiest option is to track along the path of least resistance. (See "Real-World Advice.")

The personal attributes that have contributed to their own advancement are similar for women and men.

More than half of these successful respondents mention their hard work (84 percent), previous experience (67 percent), and/or technical expertise (65 percent). Between one-third and one-half cite their knowledge of the industry, personal flexibility and willingness to compromise, and/or personal management style. Older employees are more likely to mention previous experience, their knowledge of the industry, and their willingness to relocate. Younger ones are more likely to mention maintaining a high visibility.

Phone interviews confirm those views. Nothing, respondents say, substitutes for the personal attributes of knowledge, skill, education, hard work, and a successful track record. First and foremost, skill-based competence must be present in all those who aspire to be senior managers. At the most senior levels, strategic thinking and politics fuse into one skill.

Respondents also mention three important traits generally not attributed to

Reasons Why

	Women	Men
Women not being "tapped into" the informal communication networks	69%	31%
Preservation of status quo	61%	23%
<i>Perception that women are temperamentally unsuited to performing the duties demanded of a top executive</i>	47%	10%
<i>Perception that women will place domestic matters ahead of professional matters when the two conflict</i>	53%	20%
<i>Perception of women as being unable to make hard decisions</i>	43%	10%
Lack of political awareness among women	46%	18%
Lack of high visibility for women within the organization	57%	30%
Lack of mentoring for women	73%	48%
Lack of personal style among women with which men are comfortable	51%	27%
Indifference to gender-specific advancement	59%	40%
Lack of challenging assignments for women within the organization	40%	26%
Inadequate employee development programs	65%	52%
Lack of line management experience among women	53%	65%
Lack of development time or experience for women	51%	59%

The POWER Study reflects that men and women in the pharmaceutical industry have differing perceptions of the reasons behind women's lack of advancement to top management positions. **Boldface items:** Areas of closer agreement are those that focus on lack of training and experience as factors that limit advancement. *Italicized items:* Areas of less agreement are those that focus on attitude and perception. Women respondents believe that negative perceptions are a strong factor in their lack of advancement, while relatively few men believe that they or their male coworkers harbor those perceptions.

Company Contributions

A 1998 Executive Roundtable, cosponsored by HBA and *Pharmaceutical Executive* and attended by high-level pharmaceutical executives, discussed strategies for improving the low representation of women in top industry positions. (See "Taking Charge—Structure & Strategy for Women's Career Advancement in the Pharmaceutical Industry," October 1998 supplement.) Participants concluded that the advancement of women to senior positions is a high priority both for women and for the successful future of the industry itself. They suggested a number of tactics for companies to implement:

- Discuss women's advancement openly; establish it as a primary business issue.

- Evaluate how management rewards competencies and recognize the value of empowerment, collaboration, and negotiation.

- Encourage formal and informal mentoring, including workshops that enable senior women to share strategies for success and network with junior women.

- Explore conducting career pathway workshops at sales force meetings to promote a better understanding of advancement opportunities.

- Encourage women to pursue diverse assignments, a prerequisite for advancement, while seeking ways to minimize relocation.

women: presentation skills, heralding one's own accomplishments, and displaying the ability to assess personal skills and development.

One woman wrote this summary of personal attributes as most important in her advancement: "Not being in a hurry. Being willing to excel in and enjoy each job. A good, healthy balance between long- and short-term thinking. Regular communication with key individuals (my personal 'board of directors'). Asking for the opportunity (and being prepared when it came up). Good preparation (paid for, in many cases, by my company). A few extraordinary managers, mentors, and friends. A supportive family."

Balancing work and home responsibilities is often difficult and sometimes painful for both men and women.

For three people in four, work is not a matter of choice. They report that supporting themselves and their families is a very important reason why they work.

By far, most respondents agree with statements that they should spend more time on themselves or on personal interests (77 percent), or with their families (69

percent), or that they should get home from work at a more reasonable hour (68 percent). Although the desires of their families play some part in their wish to make changes, the great majority wants to effect change to restore balance to their own lives.

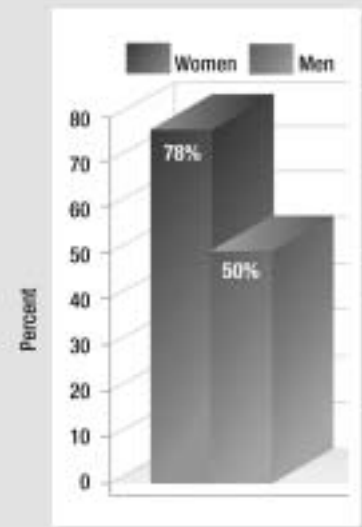
Almost everyone interviewed believes that senior managers should be a model of balanced behavior, should be seen leaving at reasonable hours, should enjoy more of life outside of work to be more productive at work, and thus provide a good example for the rest of the company. In the same breath, most admit they are not leading balanced lives themselves and that peer and management pressure is impossibly high: to be on the road 60 to 80 hours a week is not compatible with family-friendly lives. One respondent noted, "Until more senior managers lead more balanced lives, they will not see the value of it in others' lives throughout the company."

The executive suite has its attraction, but most people set limits on their desire to get or stay there.

Among those who have not yet reached

UNDERVALUE CHAIN

Respondents' belief that companies tend to undervalue women.



HBA POWER Study, May 1999.

top corporate executive status, roughly 7 in 10—80 percent of men and 62 percent of women in middle management—have ambitions to attain these positions. But among all the participants in the postal

Real-World Advice

The HBA POWER Study asked respondents, "What one piece of advice would you offer to an entry-level female employee in your company who wants to rise to the top of the corporate ladder?" The question elicited comments from more people than any other. Men and women at upper- and middle-management levels articulated six principal themes:

Work hard, be assertive, seek responsibility.	25 percent
Prove you are competent, perform well.	15 percent
Remain a person, keep your self-respect.	12 percent
Don't stay here, learn and then leave.	10 percent
Learn practical job skills, educate yourself.	9 percent
Serve the company well.	8 percent

A sampling of individual comments shows both the similarities and diversity of attitudes within and between each group:

Work hard

Women: "You need to be better than the average schmo getting promoted and need to work very, very hard."

Men: "Simply demonstrate initiative, objectivity, and a desire to advance."

Perform well

Women: "Focus on performance. Be outstanding in your field of endeavor and be prepared to sacrifice your personal life."

"Show leadership qualities early. Be so good they can't help but notice you."

"Work hard. Erase the gender issue by staying in control of your emotions and let your actions prove your worth."

Men: "Generate ideas, results that contribute to profitability. Build a reputation for solving hard problems."

"Demonstrate commitment and skill level at least equal to others on the fast track."

Keep your self-respect

Women: "Establish a strong personal network, be a free agent, be well aware of your goals and communicate them assertively and regularly. Do not assume there is a 'plan,' love what you do (and know why), and do not compromise when it comes to your core values or need for balance of personal and family needs."

"Pay attention to how the game is played; use that understanding and your own personality and resources to craft a work style that is effective yet allows you to retain what's important about you."

Men: "Focus on performance. Do not accept any less respect than a male employee receives."

Continued

study, only 5 percent claim they would be willing to sacrifice a great deal of their personal lives to get or stay there. About 4 in 10 (39 percent) would be willing to make some sacrifice, and about 3 in 10 (28 percent) would sacrifice a little. But 1 in 4 (24 percent) would not sacrifice any more of their personal lives for it.

An upper management woman responded: "Until two years ago, I would have answered that I was more ambitious and would willingly sacrifice more of my personal life than I would currently be willing to do. Having hit the 'glass ceiling,' I'm no longer willing to sacrifice this for the company."

An upper management man commented, "Proper balance is key to living longer. Business will take all your time unless you say no. You can be successful and say no. You may not become super rich, but you will not die at 56."

Among those who express a willingness to make some sacrifice of their personal lives to achieve a position in top management, 1 in 4 is not at all open to relocating to achieve a developmental position necessary for their advancement. Another one-quarter is open, with minor restric-

tions, 3 in 10 are open with major restrictions, and roughly 2 in 10 are totally open. Individual circumstances play a major part in willingness to move for the company, including considerations of spouse's or children's situations, close ties to family or friends in the community, or the quality of life where they have settled. And, as one man commented, "There are some places NOBODY should be asked to live!"

Forward-thinking companies should recognize the realities of an employee's life, regardless of gender, both inside and outside the workplace.

Many respondents believe that companies should offer formal training programs and opportunities to mentor and be mentored equally to everyone. When home and family make demands on a woman's time disproportionate to that of a man's, both should be offered flex time and other devices, including working from home, to keep a more reasonable balance between work and home responsibilities.

Interviewees also call on senior management to provide less lip service and more action, and to lead by making deci-

Tips from the Top

HBA "Women of the Year," high-performing women honored each year by the organization, offer the following advice on career advancement:

- Consistently exceed performance expectations
- Have an influential mentor
- Build strong teams that include other high-performing women and men
- Actively manage your career
- Increase your visibility
- Take risks
- Network
- Understand organizational politics
- Communicate effectively
- Balance work and personal life
- Love what you do

sions that offer all employees day care, senior care assistance, European-style vacations, and other mechanisms that can help restore a better balance between office and home life. When companies implement such actions, respondents claim, everyone benefits: women and men, young and old,

Advice *continued*

"Forget personal life and family. Work your ass off and keep your mouth shut."

Don't stay here

Women: "Move to the level acceptable for women, get the experience and move on to a more female-friendly company."

"Go somewhere else, or be willing to fight very hard and be very patient."

Men: "Learn here and go there."

Learn practical skills

Women: "Polish communications skills. Know the dynamics of the industry and learn the art of constructive confrontation."

"Be visible. Don't limit yourself to your specific job responsibilities. Volunteer for team projects and never be afraid to voice your opinion on an issue."

Men: "Try to work for a boss, as senior as possible, who values women."

"You will succeed if you are qualified for advancement opportunities and if you exhibit a good attitude and work ethic in your current position."

Serve the company well

Women: "Do not fear success. Recognize your abilities and do not shy away from accepting greater responsibilities if asked. Be proactive in seeking more responsibilities and be creative in observing how you can further the objectives of the company."

Men: "Learn all you can about the business, seek roles where you are strongly accountable for results and take initiative, champion good ideas—yours and others."

Other comments worth noting

Women: "The perception that people have of you is more important than the work that you actually do."

"If you're young enough today, perhaps by the time you're ready to reach director level the good old boys will have retired and some new blood will have been brought in. If not, don't expect any meaningful change here for decades."

Men: "Use entry level time to learn as much as possible and move on. Make as many contacts in the industry as possible. Network, network, network."

"Gain experience, change jobs and companies for better pay and opportunity. Do the things that matter: work hard, make money, generate profit. Do not use gender as an excuse or a cause."

top management, and those who report to them. As one respondent noted, "Men and women need a balance between time for themselves, family, community, and work. What we do is not what makes us successful in life."

Everyone's Issue

The study comes at a critical time for the industry. Although there are no hard and fast figures, high turnover among senior women is a pressing issue for most companies in today's fiercely competitive environment. No organization can afford a talent drain, especially at the executive level. One of the study's findings is that many qualified senior women have become convinced that they will not be considered for executive management, or they have decided that pursuing such a goal is not worth the cost. Many leave the industry to start their own businesses or go to the vendor side, which some view as more open to women in the senior ranks.

A key finding of the study underscores retention issues—more than three women in four believe that companies undervalue women, whereas only half the men surveyed agree. Although Debra Freire, vice-president, corporate customers, at Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation, did not find this true in her own experience, she stresses the importance of the issue for pharmaceutical companies: "The pharmaceutical industry is becoming increasingly competitive, and the stakes are quite high. People are the basic source of competitive advantage in developing and delivering health care solutions. The ability to attract, develop, and retain key talent is critical." Freire says that addressing the issues raised in the HBA POWER Study will lead to improved business productivity and the ability to effectively meet the challenges of the future.

Al Heller, president and chief operating officer of G.D. Searle, concurs: "HBA has done the pharmaceutical industry a great service. We need to take this opportunity to achieve diversity at the highest level and maximize the talent available to us. This will help us meet the challenges of the next century."

Heller also notes that the POWER Study is the first he's seen that helps pharmaceutical executives understand the vari-

The Language of Success

These excerpts, reproduced with permission from A Woman's Guide to the Language of Success: Communicating with Confidence and Power by Phyllis Mindell (Prentice Hall 1995) reveal some of the subtle ways that women's communication styles can undermine their chances for advancement. For more information, please contact Dr. Phyllis Mindell at (800) 245 0806 or e-mail pmindell@well-read.com.

"Power is often the product of persuasiveness. People who can use linguistic skills to win others over to a point of view and get them to act . . . are likely to achieve power."
—Robin Lakoff

Women in leadership positions are too often imprisoned by their inability to write clearly, logically, and persuasively. If you wish to be an effective leader, if you wish to take your seat at the policy table, you must write well. While you moved up the ladder, often in jobs that tapped technical nonverbal skills, you could camouflage writing weaknesses under other strengths. But the higher the level you attain, the more you communicate, much of the time in writing. Professor Kathleen Reardon wrote a *Harvard Business Review* piece which describes the dilemma of a woman manager who has written a memo to the company's president and can't decide whether to send it or not. The memo details her view of the treatment of women leaders at the firm. The woman, Elizabeth Ames, keeps the memo in her desk and seeks advice on whether or not to send it.

The *Harvard Business Review* editors asked several experts to advise Liz with the question, "Should Liz send the memo?" Only one of them commented on the writing and tone of the memo, which actually are of central importance. Here are the memo and my response to Liz. As you read the memo, note the weak language forms and their consequences.

To: Mr. John Clark, CEO

From: Elizabeth C. Ames, Director of Consumer Marketing

I've been working in the marketing department at Vision Software for more than ten years, where I've had my share of challenges and success. I've enjoyed being part of an interesting and exciting company. Despite my general enthusiasm about the company and my job, however, I was taken aback when I received your memo announcing the resignations of Mariam Blackwell and Susan French, Vision's two most senior women. This is not the first time Vision has lost its highest-ranking women. Just nine months ago, Kathryn Hobbs resigned and a year before that, it was Suzanne LaHaise. The reasons are surprisingly similar: They wanted to "spend more time with their families" or "explore new career directions."

I can't help but detect a disturbing pattern. Why do such capable, conscientious women who have demonstrated intense commitment to their careers suddenly want to change course or spend more time at home? That is a question I've thought long and hard about. Despite Vision's policies to hire and promote women and your own efforts to recognize and reward women's contributions, the overall atmosphere in this company is one that slowly erodes a woman's sense of worth and place. I believe that top-level women are leaving Vision Software not because they are drawn to other pursuits but because they are tired of struggling against a climate of female failure. Little things happen daily—things many men don't even notice and women can't help but notice—that send subtle messages that women are less important, less talented, less likely to make a difference than their male peers.

Let me try to describe what I mean. I'll start with meetings, which are a way of life at Vision and one of the most devaluing experiences for women. Women are often talked over and interrupted; their ideas never seem to be heard. Last week, I attended a meeting with ten men and one other woman. As soon as the woman started her presentation, several side conversations began. Her presentations were excellent, but she couldn't seem to get people's attention. When it was time to take questions, one man said dismissively, "We did something like this a couple of years ago and it didn't work." She explained how her ideas differed, but the explanation fell on deaf ears. When I tried to give her support, by expressing interest, I was interrupted. But it's not just meetings. There are many things that make women feel unwelcome or important. One department holds its biannual retreats at a country . . . *Continued*

ous viewpoints about the role and future of women in the executive suite. "It would be very good for all pharmaceutical companies to have an open-forum discussion between the senior men and women executives in their companies to discuss the results," he says. "Senior pharmaceutical leaders who really understand and act on this study will be able to create the right development process for women senior executives and attract top talent to their organizations."

Bill Sheldon, executive vice-president of Eisai Inc., underscores the need for company action: "You have to change organizational behavior about women, and attitudes will follow. Companies must put programs in place to make sure that women have the right mentors and the right experiences, and management then must remain focused on these important initiatives."

The POWER Study builds on themes articulated by Sheldon and other senior pharmaceutical executives at a roundtable meeting cosponsored in 1998 by HBA and *Pharmaceutical Executive*. (See "Taking Charge—Structure & Strategy for Women's Career Advancement in the Pharmaceutical Industry," October 1998 supplement.) Participants, including senior officers at Ortho-McNeil, Pfizer, Novartis, Solvay, SmithKline Beecham, and Hoechst Marion Roussel, concluded that advancement of women to senior positions must be a high corporate priority for the successful future of the industry. The group agreed that companies must discuss openly the subject of women's advancement as a first step.

Hewlett-Packard, where more than a quarter of the company's managers are women, is proof that action from the top can make a glass-shattering difference. According to a recent *New York Times* story, H-P can attribute this positive climate to the leadership of its chairman Lewis Platt, partly as a result of the insights he gained as a single parent after his wife died, and partly because of his concerns over the turnover among women managers. Platt and other top executives made retention of talented women and flexible workplace strategies a business priority. The results: nearly 30 percent of women reach execu-

The Language *continued*

club with a "men only" bar. At the end of the sessions, the men typically hang around at the bar and talk, while the women quietly disappear. Needless to say, important information is often shared during those casual conversations.

Almost every formal meeting is followed by a series of informal ones behind closed doors. Women are rarely invited. Nor are they privy to the discussions before the formal meetings. As a result, they are often less likely to know what the boss has on his mind and therefore less prepared to react.

My female colleagues and I are also subjected to a daily barrage of seemingly innocent comments that belittle women. A coworker of mine recently boasted about how much he respects women by saying, "My wife is the wind beneath my wings. In fact, some people call me Mr. Karen Snyder." The men chuckled; the women didn't. And just last week, a male colleague stood up at 5:30 and jokingly informed a group of us that he would be leaving early. "I have to play mom tonight." Women play mom every night and it never gets a laugh. In fact, most women try to appear devoid of concern about their families. Any one of these incidents on its own is a small thing. But together and in repetition, they are quite powerful. The women at Vision fight to get their ideas heard and to crack the informal channels of information. Their energy goes into keeping up, not getting ahead, until they just don't have any more to give. I can assure you that my observations are shared by many women in the company. I can only speculate that they were shared by Mariam Blackwell and Susan French. Vision needs men and women if it is to become the preeminent educational software company. We need to send stronger, clearer signals that men are not the only people who matter. That's why I'm writing to you. If I can help, please let me know."

RESPONSE TO MEMO

To: Elizabeth Ames

From: Phyllis Mindell, Ed. D

Subject: *Hold the Memo. Learn the Language of Success.*

Your memo reveals that, despite your rise to director of consumer marketing, you have retained the language of weakness. Whether you decide ultimately to meet with CEO John Clark, to get a group together or to submit the memo, first get rid of women's traditional language of weakness and acquire the language of power. This memo reviews the details that sap the strength of your memo and suggests a procedure you can follow to rewrite your piece so it works.

ELEMENTS OF WEAKNESS

Weak writing results from a critical mass of puny elements. Defects of structure and logic, grammar, and vocabulary strip your memo of its power. Let's examine each of these elements and see how you can transform it from puny to powerful. Strong memos and letters work because they follow the structural conventions of modern business writings. Your piece lacks a keystone structure—a thesis statement—which should appear either at the beginning or the end, or in both places. Although none is stated, an implied thesis is, "The subtle discrimination against women at Vision has cost us six of our highest-ranking women. Our future growth and prosperity require that both company policy and company practice be recast to stop this loss of talent." Still another missing element is a clear call to action at the end; you never tell John precisely what he should do. I suspect you want more than just stronger clearer signals that men are not the only people who matter.

Furthermore, the memo's flavor of meditation or stream of consciousness makes it seem illogical and renders it impotent as a business document. The reader gets a sense that you are adding information as you recall it rather than organizing and grouping the ideas for greatest impact. Your argument will gain energy if you group ideas for greatest impact. Your argument will gain energy if you group ideas and assign them to a hierarchy of importance. For example, the "men only" bar at the resort is offensive and may be illegal. In contrast, some of the small things seem trivial and whiny. For example, the seventh paragraph sounds like one written by an angry child who adds every possible naughty act she can think of to her litany of complaints. An executive whose energy is drained because a man said he was going home early to "play mom" is thin-skinned indeed!

Your piece suffers not only from structural defects but from

... *Continued*

tive positions, and turnover rates equalized. As an added bonus, Platt found that men welcomed the new flexibility as well.

A key finding of the study that reinforces the need for dialogue within companies was the conclusion that the glass ceiling still exists, but not always overtly. In the past, obstacles to the top were more obvious and thus easier to pinpoint and break down. Today, remnants of the glass ceiling are often manifest in more subtle ways, which makes the challenge greater on many levels. Because some of the more visible barriers are gone, many believe that women have gained parity with men at the top levels and have therefore shifted their focus away from the issue. Yet because barriers exist beneath the surface, the subject needs more attention at the corporate level than ever.

Men and women agree that a major reason for low representation of women at executive levels is a lack of training and opportunity to gain line management experience. Many women, however, also cite cultural impediments that are more difficult to detect, such as stereotypical attitudes toward women in management and informal networks from which they tend to be excluded. In addition, the traditional path to advancement is structured to reward those willing to sacrifice family and personal life, a choice fewer women and men are willing to make today. Among study participants across the board, only 5 percent say they would be willing to sacrifice a great deal of their personal lives to reach top executive status.

Implications for the Industry

The real question for pharmaceutical management is what companies can do in light of the findings of the POWER Study to improve the situation for advancement of female employees to senior positions. To help management convert the study findings into practical solutions for developing executive women's talent, HBA is willing to work with companies to present this research and its implications and to provide information on strategies that improve opportunities for women's career development and advancement. (See "What HBA Can Offer.") Additionally, key recommendations that emerged from the 1998 HBA/PE roundtable form a corner-

The Language *continued*

weak grammatical forms as well. You hedge. Hedges are a way of hiding behind language without making assertions. They add length but are devoid of information; they are the hallmark of weak language. Here are a few of the hedges in your memo:

I can't help but . . . I believe . . . Needless to say . . . There are many things that make women feel . . . I can assure you . . . I can only speculate. Although hedges play a role in ordinary spoken discourse and occasionally in writing, masses of them make you look tentative and insecure. Another grammatical issue that dogs you is your tendency to start sentences and phrases with the word "I" (fifteen "I" sentences and phrases), even though you're not the subject you're writing about. "I" sentences draw attention away from the actual subject to the writer instead. For example, your opening carries so long on you that the issue of the two resignations has to wait six lines. Readers are more likely to attend to sentences that begin with actual subjects or issues. You might have started your memo with the words "Your memo announcing the resignations of . . ." and added a verb that told what the memo did (disturbed, concerned, demonstrated, brings to light, points up).

Other dangers of "I" sentences are that they make the writer seem adolescent, and lead to weak verbs rather than strong action verbs (have been, have had, was taken, can't help but, believe, feel, can assure you, can be of help). The ability to discuss subjects and issues without reference to oneself is a sign of maturity and a hint that what you say will be substantial. Substantial writers choose substantial words as well. Mark Twain said, "The right word is to the almost right word as lightning is to the lightning bug." Your word choices tend to be lightning bugs rather than lightning words. They are vague and emotional: general, long and hard, never seem to be, a small thing, quite powerful, was taken aback, devaluing experiences. Like rivulets of water that erode a rock, your weak word choices erode your message and your credibility.

HOW TO RECAST THE MEMO

1. Think about your reader. You've worked with John for a long time. You tell him of his own efforts to recognize and reward women's contributions. The reader believes this, but wonders why you address the memo to him as Mr. while referring to yourself with first and last name only. The better you understand John, the more precisely you can target your memo to convince him.

2. Determine the purpose(s). Written documents aim to do something. What precisely do you want to accomplish in this memo? It can persuade, document, detail, review, suggest action or request a meeting. Your memo fails, because it has no clear purpose, no anticipated outcome.

3. Brainstorm all the details that seem relevant. Jot each down in a few words or a phrase, on a small sticky note. Lay the sticky notes out on a table so you can see them all.

4. Group the details. When you see the details all at once, you may find that they group themselves in ways you hadn't thought of.

5. Order the details within each group.

6. Affix the groups of sticky notes onto large index cards or sheets of paper and give tentative titles to each group.

7. Order the index cards in a way that best support the thesis. Consider the primacy and recency effects: the first and last items are most likely to be remembered.

8. Cast the thesis in its final form

9. Decide how to lead the memo. The lead sets the tone of the piece to follow and engages the reader.

10. Set up the paragraphs and write the topic sentences and transitions. Here's where you build the logic into the memo. Each paragraph must flow from the one before it, and all must support the thesis and lead inexorably to your call to action at the end.

11. Write the memo in the language of success. Avoid weak words, hedges, and vague modifiers. Avoid the touchy-feely language of emotions. Do not inject opinion. Write objectively about issues, facts, events and policies. Use the active voice primarily, but accuse in the passive voice to avoid looking hostile (as you did when you wrote "Women are rarely invited").

12. Write the call to action with special care. John must understand exactly what must be done. Instead of plopping the problem on his desk, suggest specific solutions and actions to be taken.

stone for further development. (See "Company Contributions.")

All companies that wish to remain competitive in recruitment and retention of top talent must consider implementing programs that formalize these recommendations. It is important to put structures in place to help guide women up in their career paths through mentoring, career pathway workshops, and job/functional rotations.

Yet the entire burden cannot lie on company management. Female employees must realize that to reach the upper echelons, they must take an active role in their own advancement. (See "Tips from the Top," and "Instruction & Inspiration.") Those who sit back and wait for corporate structures to guide them or who lack a clear focus of what they want to achieve, what skills they need, and how they intend to reach their goals will likely find themselves disappointed. Study participants identified several strategies that women can use to improve their chances for success. Nearly a quarter of respondents sug-

gest that the most important thing that an entry-level woman can do to further her career is to stretch: work hard, be assertive, and seek responsibility. Other suggestions are proving competence by generating ideas that contribute to profitability and improving practical job skills such as communication. (See "The Language of Success.")

Women must realize that to reach the upper echelons, they must take an active role in their own advancement.

Jean Sharp, president of HBA and vice-president and general manager of Parexel Medical Marketing Services, says that the POWER Study should serve as a "wake-up call," alerting companies to the perceptions of their most talented women re-

garding opportunities for advancement. "Many of those interviewed for the study emphasized that the issue at stake is not only one of gender," Sharp says. "In their view, the lack of all types of diversity at the highest levels will hold companies back from success in the next century."

The challenges remain for companies to make these issues a high-level priority throughout the organization, and for women to use emerging opportunities to take charge of guiding their own careers. Pharmaceutical industry leadership must restructure the path to the executive suite so that the signposts along the way actively encourage the most talented women and men available. ■

For more information, contact the Healthcare Businesswomen's Association (HBA) at 333B Route 46 West, Suite B-201, Fairfield, NJ 07004; +1 (973) 575-0606; fax: +1 (973) 575-1445; hbanet@aol.com. The full study, "Perspectives on Workplace Environment Realities: A Study of Career Advancement in the Pharmaceutical Industry," is available through HBA.

How Many Women?

By Anne Camille Maher

Recent studies have examined the progress, career advancement methods, and work-life balancing issues of the small population of women who have pierced the “glass ceiling” across many industries. Pharmaceutical companies’ own published reports reveal equally valuable information about the number of women in top management.

The pharmaceutical industry as a whole has been very supportive of the Healthcare Businesswomen’s Association (HBA) throughout its 20-plus years, joining the organization as corporate members and often reimbursing employees for the costs of participating as individuals. Several companies regularly donate facilities and refreshments for HBA educational seminars. Yet those activities have yet to result in full achievement of the target of supporting women’s career development to the point where women have equal opportunities to men in the executive suite.

As described in HBA’s POWER Study, the glass ceiling is still very real in this industry, but it is neither overt nor pervasive. Thus, the glass ceiling is very difficult to characterize and challenge. The question remains after that study: “What proportion of senior management positions in pharmaceutical industry are now held by women?” To shed some light in this arena, this article suggests a simple method for examining the number of female names at the top management level in companies’ annual reports.

Moving into a new millennium with a more diverse workforce to attract, motivate, and retain means that now more than ever, companies must offer a visible and complete career track to women, people of color, people with physical disabilities, and other minorities. Companies must creatively and effectively meet new challenges by combining those strengths and experi-

ences of the managers—mainly white men—who have brought the industry so successfully this far with new approaches, insights, and methods that come naturally to managers from different backgrounds.

The objective of analyzing annual reports for a breakdown of male and female names by gender is to benchmark the population of women in the executive suite in the pharmaceutical industry. The intention is to prepare to quantify progress. What gets measured, gets done, daily against thousands of manufacturing, marketing, and sales targets. This study provides a relatively simple method by which annual quantification can assist in achieving the goal of developing a more inclusive senior management team for the pharmaceutical industry. If the industry meets that goal, it will be able to more effectively address many of its future challenges.

Between the Lines

Anyone with access to the World Wide Web can derive these data. Starting with the list of members of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), available at that industry association’s website (www.phrma.org/membership/memlist/html), one can follow links to lists of senior managers in each parent company’s 1998 Annual Report. In May of 1999, there were 44 companies listed as members of PhRMA. Two have merged with each other (AstraZeneca) and another two (Pasteur Merieux Connaught and Rhône-Poulenc

Rorer) are owned by the same parent (Rhône Poulenc S.A.). This study reviewed annual reports from 42 companies, focusing on the standard sections that name “directors” and “senior management.”

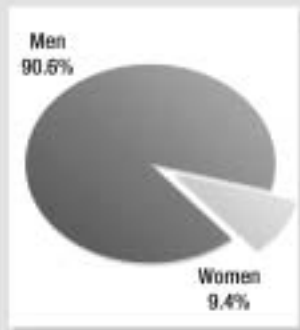
Because of private ownership, some companies, including Roche, Purdue, and Sanofi, have no standard annual report available. For those companies, this study used the pharmaceutical manufacturers’ list at the website of the publisher, Medicom International (www.medicomint.com/resources/manfs.html). An abbreviated list of “senior executives” and “other key executives” for each company from that source may differ from the information that those three companies would include in a standard annual report.

For the 39 companies for which annual reports were available, all had published 1998 reports. When counting the names of members of the board of directors and any lists of senior managers (terminology varies), the study made every effort to exclude nonexecutive directors, as lower-level managers would not run the companies on a day-to-day basis. For all 42 companies included in the analysis, the study tallied all the senior management individuals named, noting which were feminine names. The count included some division heads, senior scientists, and engineers. Where the report used initials or a name common for both genders, study administrators made a guess as to which gender was more likely to be implied. Of 24 names that were not readily seen to be gender-specific, the study identified 9 of these, or 37.5 percent, as names for females.

Be Counted

The overall proportion of managers named as senior management by the pharmaceutical industry in 1998 annual reports was 9.4 percent. (See “Just a Sliver.”) The range is narrow and never reaches above 25 percent. The proportion of females managing these 42 companies ranges from 0 percent at 15 of 42 companies to 25 percent at one

JUST A SLIVER



The gender proportions of senior managers named in the 1998 annual reports of members of the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America.

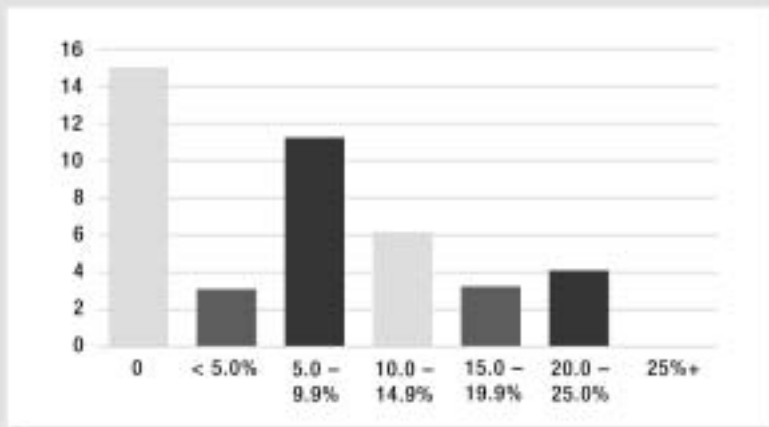
company. (See “Few to None.”) The five companies with the highest percentage of female officers were Roche Laboratories (25 percent), Elan Corp. (23.1 percent), Alza (20.7 percent), Merck (20 percent), and Gilead Sciences (17.5 percent).

How many women in senior management is enough? Given population statistics and a continued preference in many families for women and men to assume traditional roles, something less than 50 percent may well be a reasonable goal. However, given the current statistics for the workforce (nearly half women), students earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees (more than half women), law graduates (40 percent) and MBA recipients (33 percent), something close to one-half seems more than appropriate. There is no easy answer.

Yardsticks

This study provides a relatively simple benchmark of women’s progress into the executive suite of the pharmaceutical industry by 1998. It can readily measure future progress by repeating the method with the publication of each year’s crop of annual reports. Only 1 in 10 people named as senior management in an industry where many of the entry-level positions are “women’s work” (nursing, laboratory testing and, increasingly, sales) may be too few. Less than 10 percent may be too few in an industry where the population is aging,

FEW TO NONE



The distribution of companies in the pharmaceutical industry with proportions of women named as senior managers in each 5-percent range. Of the 42 companies included in the analysis, there are 15 companies with no women named as senior management. No companies have more than a quarter of women on the senior management team named in their annual reports.

women live longer than men, and there is a significant trend for patients to be active and involved in their medical treatment. An industry now challenged to find a way to balance the long-standing deficit of clinical data on the effects on women of its products perhaps should invite more women to have significant influence on its management committee decisions.

An earlier benchmark of 8.2 percent among the pharmaceutical members of the Fortune 500, derived by the research organization Catalyst in its 1997 Census of Women Corporate Officers, indicates that it is likely that the industry is making progress in diversifying its senior management. Listening to corporations’ public statements, it is clear that they want more progress. It appears that this industry, which in many ways appropriately prides itself on professionalism, inclusion, fairness, and providing an excellent working environment for all people, has failed to come as far as many managers believe it has. The total percent of women senior managers named in pharmaceutical companies’ annual reports is lower than the Fortune 500 census proportion reported by Catalyst as 11.2 percent for 1998.

Further analysis of those data is in order. Analysis of the titles published for the

women and men named in annual reports would shed light on what Catalyst calls the “glass wall”—the shortage of women who acquire line management experience and continue to take only staff or supporting roles as their careers progress. That maintains some of the barrier to women’s entry into executive management.

Additional studies would also aid the effort. Annual repetition of this study will produce the yardstick by which the industry can measure its progress. Analysis of the lists collected of nonexecutive directors would illuminate the gender composition of the groups who hire and fire executive management and set policy for pharmaceutical companies.

Studies of the pharmaceutical-allied supplier industry, including advertising agencies, contract research organizations, and publishers, would illuminate anecdotal reports that those are the places to which qualified women flee when they decide to abandon the struggle against the glass walls in the industry itself. Sensible discourse, more broadly inclusive hiring and promotion habits, and continued support of programs put in place will all help to allow this care-giving industry to benefit from the strengths and experience of the women who choose to make their careers in it. ■

NETWORKING SKILL-BUILDING KNOWLEDGE GATHERING



HBA initiatives and recent events

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- Leadership Conference
- Senior-level Women's Breakfast Seminars
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