



WOMEN'S
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Women & Leadership in Omaha

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This study is dedicated to the hard-working women of our community who do their best each and every day to fulfill their responsibilities to family, employer, neighbors and community. It is our hope that by shining a spotlight on the factors that influence their current choices, we will encourage new opportunities for their success in the future.

Thanks to the vision and wisdom of those who conducted the first survey on Women and Leadership in 1996, we are now able to evaluate the progress for women in Omaha over the past decade, better defining the work that remains in order to achieve equity.

We owe a profound debt of gratitude to the members of the Research Committee who have volunteered countless hours to complete this project, and most especially to chairwoman Barbara Weitz for her passionate, inspired and gracious leadership.

April, 2007

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The Purpose of this Study



The Women's Fund of Greater Omaha's board of directors charged the Research Committee with implementing a ten year follow-up to the Women and Leadership Report conducted in 1996. The objectives of the 1996 study were:

- to determine the level of female participation in work force leadership positions in major corporations and organizations in the greater Omaha area.
- to determine the level of female participation in leadership positions in public and private decision-making entities in the greater Omaha area.
- to establish a community baseline of gender representation in work force leadership so that changes in representation could be measured and documented.
- to identify the social and psychological dimensions that contribute to the attainment of leadership roles.
- to describe various paths women have taken to successful leadership.

The 2006 Women and Leadership Research Report was designed to duplicate the methodology of the 1996 study. The shared objectives were to measure current female participation in work force leadership and compare what we found against the baselines established in the 1996 report. This study used a different methodology to explore the last two objectives of the 1996 study. Interviews were conducted with male and female leaders from corporate, health care, education and not-for-profit organizations in the community. The objective was to learn more about views of current leaders on women and leadership in Omaha, their understanding of the nature of leadership and the impact of gender on pathways to leadership.

The findings of this study will be used to establish the agenda for work being done by the Women's Fund to benefit women and girls, educate the community, and to act as a catalyst for change in the number of women in leadership positions.



Introduction

It has been ten years since the Women's Fund first published a ground breaking study that established a local baseline of corporate, political and community leadership. This report replicates much of the quantitative data from 1996 in an effort to measure change and adds a new dimension: 83 individual interviews to delve further into the personal aspects of leadership in Omaha. We believe this is the most comprehensive effort ever undertaken to examine leadership in our community.

So What?

Leadership has many definitions and, in fact, later in this report the essential qualities of a leader are examined. But regardless of definition, what is rarely argued is the importance of leadership. Leaders get things done! Much of the progress documented in our community can be traced back to individuals who stepped up to tackle a problem or seize an opportunity.

So why look at leadership by gender? A pressing economic answer can be summarized in two words: **changing demographics**. Researchers with the Rand Corporation predict "the trend is for a shift toward a more balanced distribution by age, sex and race/ethnicity." Women will continue to be an important source of talent. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, women are projected to account for 51% of the increase in total labor force growth between 2004 and 2014.

National studies also indicate a clear shift in educational trends. During the past ten years women have been seeking to prepare themselves through education in even greater numbers. The New York Times (2006) reported women now make up 58% of the students in two and four-year colleges. Harvard's most recent entering class was 52% female. In fact, for every 50 girls:

- 53 boys are enrolled in elementary school
- 50 boys are enrolled in high school
- 48 boys graduate from high school
- 39 men enroll in college
- 37 men earn a bachelor's degree
- 31 men earn a master's degree



It seems this educational preparation has not transferred into real gains within leadership ranks for women. The General Accounting Office compiled data in 2002 examining the status of women in ten selected industries. The report concluded: "The majority of women managers were worse off, relative to men, in 2000 than they were in 1995."

Experts forecast a labor shortage and increased demand for human capital. Communities and businesses that provide opportunities to all segments of their population will be the most successful. Economist Joseph Cortright predicts "The U.S. is on the verge of a seismic shift in labor markets, and fault lines will emerge to threaten a city's economic future unless it succeeds in understanding and attracting the young, college-educated workers who propel today's knowledge-based economy." As noted above, increasingly those workers will be women. The Economist advises in a headline "The importance of sex - Forget China, India and the internet: economic growth is driven by women." The article goes on to suggest that governments should embrace the potential of women and use the "world's most under-utilized resource" because past GDP growth can be attributed to increases in female employment.

CEOs for Cities, a national non-partisan organization of mayors, corporate CEOs, and academic and civic leaders call educated women "the new mother lode" for cities. Carol Coletta, president and CEO of CEOs for Cities offers the following observation: "Today's 25 - to 34 - year-olds represent the first generation where women are measurably better educated than men. If I'm an urban leader serious about success, I'm going to spend a lot of energy making sure my city signals to women that they can find opportunity here. And I'm going to make sure my city delivers on that promise."

These few facts are part of the national picture. But what's happened locally?

Women in Omaha have made limited progress in the leadership ranks, but barriers that were identified ten years ago still exist today.

In many ways, we've learned what we already knew. Comparing this report to the one conducted in 1996, we observe many common threads that point to slow, if any, progress for women in Omaha.

Leadership in Omaha - The Report Layout

This report examines the statistical picture first by reviewing results of a survey of individual women and their satisfaction in the workplace. The next section examines a survey of the corporate community. Both the individual and corporate surveys closely replicate the 1996 survey tool to allow for comparisons whenever possible. A scan of women participating in elective and appointive office is presented in the third section to complete the quantitative comparative analysis of women and leadership in Omaha between 1996 and 2006.

The last half of the report focuses on qualitative research - the 83 comprehensive interviews of male and female leaders in business, education, health care and the not-for-profit community. Hundreds of hours of data were condensed into six major themes. These themes are:

Leaders share many qualities across gender, but there are still gender differences

Relationships make and break leaders

Becoming a leader does not happen by accident

A women's sense of self is critical to her leadership

Leaders recognize the challenges of balancing work and life

Leaders have concerns about the future

The report concludes with a discussion of findings and recommendations. *Our hope is that this study becomes a launching pad for discussions and - most importantly - change for women within organizations and across the community*

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The Statistical Picture



Have efforts of Omaha companies to recruit, develop and promote women improved in the last decade?



Women's Assessment of the Workplace

The objective of this portion of our research was to explore women's assessment of their own career status and their perceptions of women's status in the workplace in general. Women were asked to report their perceptions of obstacles to their own and other women's advancement.

Methodology

The "Women at Work" survey, originally developed by Deloitte and Touché, was mailed to Omaha women in 1996. One hundred and ninety-five women completed that year's survey. In October of 2005, the same survey was distributed to approximately 750 women attending a Women's Fund luncheon and 406 completed surveys were collected.

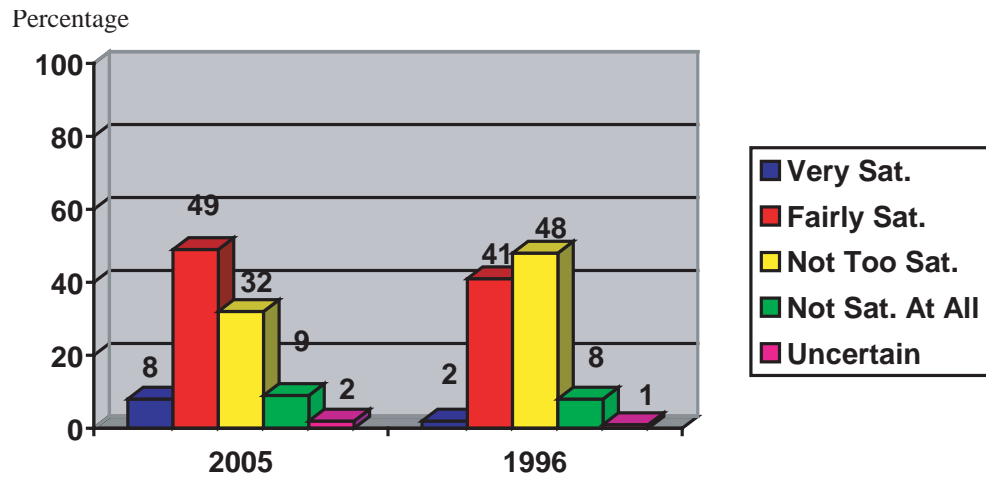


Respondents Profile

Demographics	2005 (n=406)	1996 (n=195)
Average Age	43	42
Average Personal Income	\$78,631	\$50,000
Average Percentage of Household Income Contributed	67%	60%
Marital Status		
Married	68%	71%
Single	13%	8%
Divorced	18%	20%
Widowed	2%	1%
Dependents in Household Under Age 18	46%	48%
Job Status:		
Top Management	28%	25%
Middle Management	50%	75%
Average Number of Hours Each Week Spent Related to Work	55	53

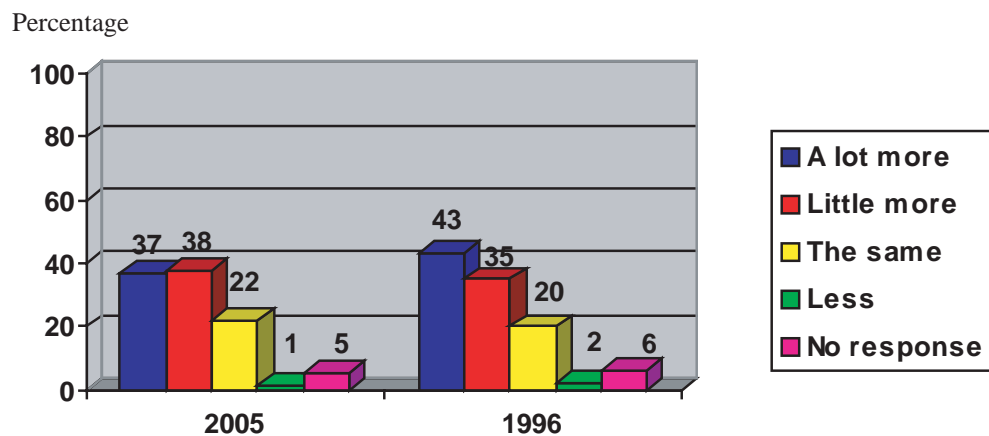
Women's Satisfaction with their Status in the Work Force

While more women in 2005 were either very or fairly satisfied with their overall status in the workplace (combined 57% vs. 43%), there remained a large percentage not satisfied (combined 41%).



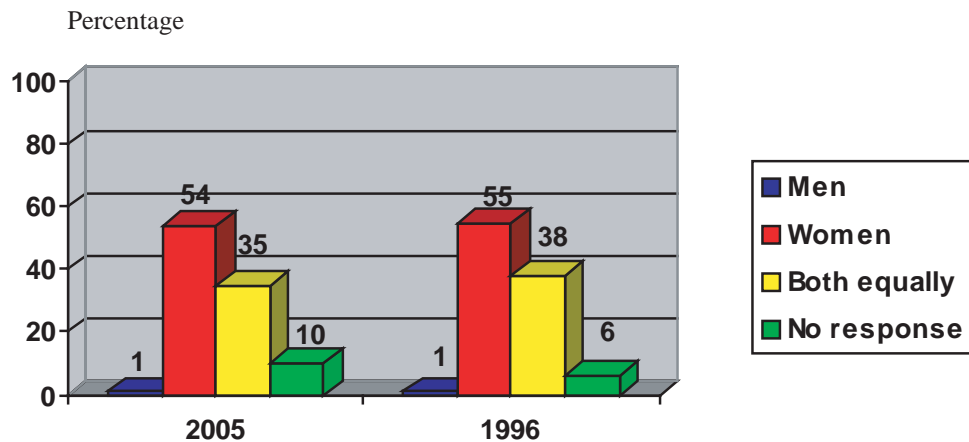
Qualifications Required of Women and Men Applying for the Same Job

In 1996, 78% of women respondents believed women needed to be a little or a lot more qualified than men when applying for the same position. A small improvement was noted ten years later with 75% of women believing this statement to be true.



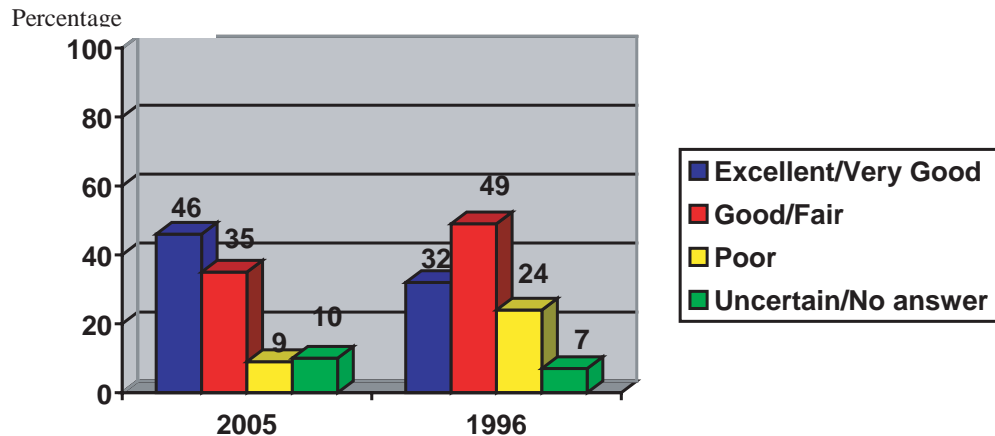
Do Men or Women Work Harder?

In both 1996 and 2005, only one percent of women respondents believed men worked harder than women. Slightly more than half of all females surveyed in those same years believed women worked harder than men, while slightly fewer women in 2005 (35%) compared with 1996 (38%) felt both men and women worked equally hard.



Rating Current Company Efforts to Recruit, Develop, and Promote Women into Senior Management

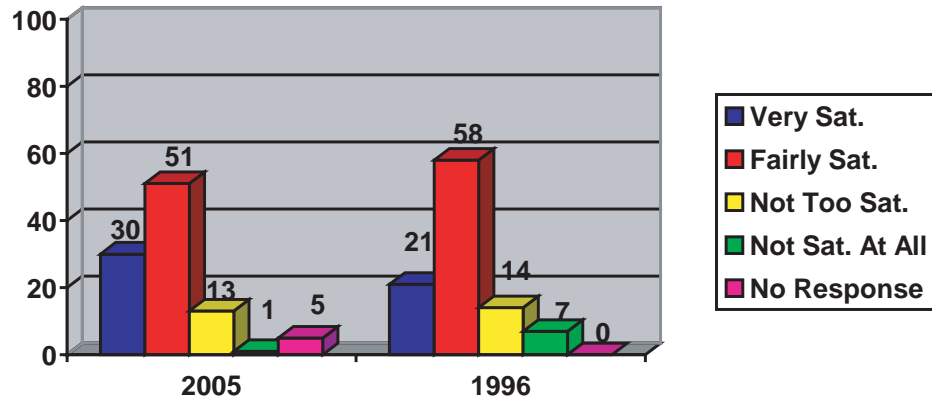
Improvements were noted over 1996 in women's assessment of their companies' efforts to move women into senior management. Forty-six percent of respondents in 2005 vs. 32% in 1996 rated their companies as excellent or very good.



Satisfaction with Current Status of Career

While more women surveyed in 2005 were very satisfied with their current careers than in 1996 (30% and 21% respectively), there was still a disproportionate number of women that are at best "fairly satisfied" (70% in 2005 vs. 79% in 1996).

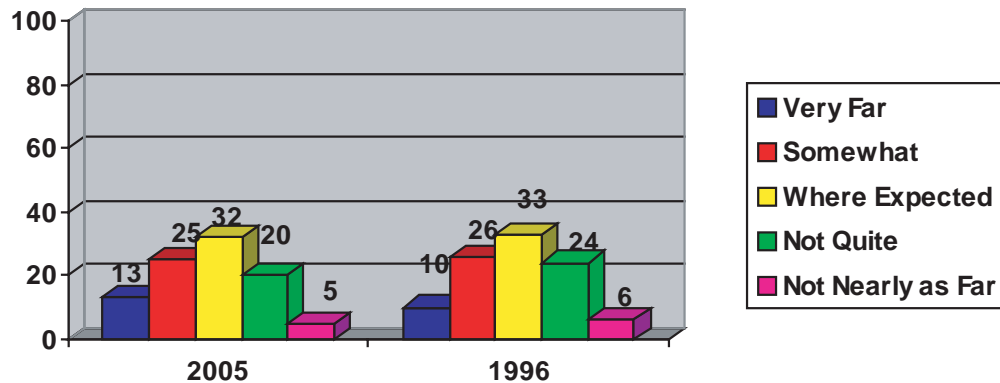
Percentage



Current Professional Status versus Expectations

Only slight advancements have been made in the last decade with regard to women's expectations about their professional status. In 2005, 13% of respondents vs. 10% in 1996 felt they were very far ahead of their expectations.

Percentage



The Impact on Business of Having Women in the Work Force

We asked women to identify the ways in which the presence of women in the work force has had a positive impact on business and the workplace. Comparable to 1996, current results indicate more than three quarters of women believe there is a greater importance placed on family as well as a greater awareness and acceptance of different viewpoints as a result of participation by women.

Table I

Women's Impact	2005	1996
Greater importance on families	79%	76%
Greater awareness and acceptance of different viewpoints	78%	80%
Better communication with colleagues	63%	61%
More team work	65%	48%
More consensus building	54%	43%
Greater emphasis on customer service	55%	57%
Less emphasis on hierarchy	53%	26%

Potential Barriers to Women's Professional Status

What are the things that are potential barriers to the success of women in the workplace? Respondents were given a list of 18 items and asked to identify the top ten in order. There was an increase in one barrier: balancing work and family. More women in 2005 felt this was an issue (73%) than in 1996 (61%).

While the largest barrier to women in both 1996 and 2005 was "a male dominated corporate culture," some strides have been made in these and other areas as shown in Table II.

Table II

Potential Barriers	2005	1996
Male dominated corporate culture	84%	96%
Balancing work and family	73%	61%
Exclusion of women from informal networks of communication	67%	82%
Glass ceiling	65%	88%
Belief of management that women are less career oriented	61%	67%
Few female mentors for women	61%	72%
Equal compensation	56%	72%

Discussion

Have efforts of Omaha companies to recruit, develop and promote women improved in the last decade? In 2005, 14% more women believed those efforts were very good or excellent compared with ten years earlier. However, still less than half (46%) of Omaha's working women believe their companies have a strong commitment to helping them succeed.

Women are reporting an increased sense of satisfaction with the status of women in the workforce (57% in 2005 versus 43% in 1996 were very or fairly satisfied). However, more than 40% of women remain not satisfied with women's status in the work force in 2005. Women continue to report being satisfied with the current state of their career at about the same level as 1996 (79% in 1996 and 81% in 2005).

Eighty-four percent of women remained concerned about Omaha's dominant male corporate culture in 2005. It continues to be perceived as the top potential barrier for women. This is consistent with women's perceptions about qualifications for jobs. When asked about qualifications of men and women for the same job, three fourths of women believe that women need to be more qualified, yet only one percent of women believe men work any harder. In another section of this report, it appears that women are not moving into the highest positions in any greater numbers than ten years ago.

Balancing the demands of work with the needs of family has become an increasingly challenging barrier for women in the last decade (noted by 61% in 1996 and 73% in 2006). It now ranks second as the greatest obstacle to success, and is the only measure that has not improved for women in the past ten years. Our study suggests that while most barriers, including attitudinal, to women's success appear to be trending in a positive direction, personal responsibilities are becoming more of an issue for nearly three fourths of Omaha's working women. If Omaha businesses are to continue to benefit from women's participation in the work force, it appears new ways of dealing with the realities of women's lives must be developed.

Women continue to see their positive impact in the workplace. The top two stated contributions of women (greater importance of family and the increased awareness and acceptance of different viewpoints) remained the same in the two reports. Based on the findings, a case could be made that with an increase of women in leadership positions, organizations tend to move from the traditional pyramid structure to a "flatter" model with more emphasis on project teams and flexibility. This theory matches perceptions articulated in interviews with Omaha leaders about women in general being better listeners and consensus builders than men.

In her 2006 book, "How She Does It: How Women Entrepreneurs Are Changing the Rules of Business Success," author Margaret Heffernan researched the impact of female-run companies. She documents the idea that women are good for business. She studied the companies owned or controlled by women and found:

- Forty-eight percent of all privately held companies are owned or controlled by women.
- Profits in these firms are growing faster than all firms.
- Women-owned or controlled companies are more likely to stay in business and are creating jobs at twice the rate of all other companies.

With increasing concerns about finding qualified workers in the future, it appears to be in the best interest of the Omaha business community to seek ways to capitalize on the talents of women and to find innovative solutions to the traditional barriers to their success.





Women & Leadership in the Workplace

The Women's Fund conducted its first study of women and leadership in the workplace in 1996, shortly after The Glass Ceiling Commission released a national report indicating women held 45.7% of the jobs in the country, yet only 5% of the managers at that time were women.

Our study was undertaken to see if progress in women's work force leadership in Omaha has been made in the decade between 1996 and 2006. The United States Department of Labor reports that women's share of the labor force accounted for 62% of net job growth from 1990-2005 with women comprising 47% of the labor force in 2005. Women are increasing in the work force but are they also increasing in executive ranks? Data suggests much room for improvement. The most recent report by The Institute for Women's Policy Research ranks Nebraska third in the country for women in the work force but 49th out of 51 states and the District of Columbia in women occupying management and professional positions.

Methodology

This section of the study was done to determine the number of women occupying work force leadership roles in Omaha in 2006. A questionnaire used in the 1996 study was mailed to 690 employers with more than 50 employees as identified by the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce. This resulted in a return of 150 (22%). The 1996 study looked at 177 companies with 250 or more employees and had a return of 71 (40%).

The 150 organizations responding to our questionnaire have been in business from four to more than 50 years. They represent industry categories in similar percentages to the 1996 study:

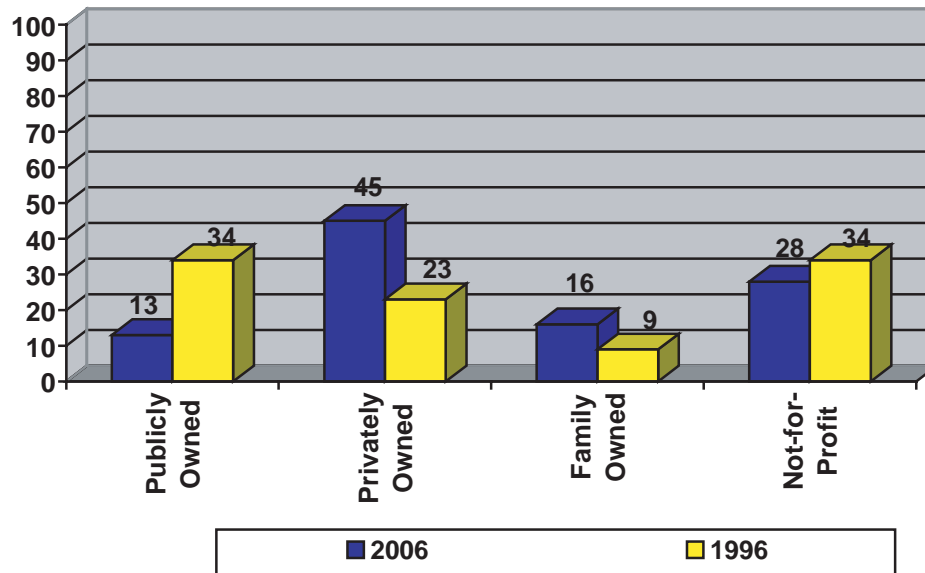
Table I

Company's Primary Business	2006	1996
Health & Human Services	20%	16%
Finance / Insurance / Investments	13%	13%
Wholesale / Retail Trade	11%	7%
Manufacturing	10%	10%
Education	5%	16%
Service Industries	6%	9%
Computers / Data Processing	2%	0%
Construction / Engineering / Architecture	10%	0%
Government	0%	7%
Other	23%	22%

Organizations responding to the questionnaire in 1996 reported 59% of their work force was female compared to 60% in 2006. This is consistent with Nebraska's ranking as a state with the third highest level of women in the labor force.

The ownership of the 2006 responding organizations was different from those in 1996 (Graph I) with more businesses privately owned (45% vs. 23% in 1996) and family owned (16% vs. 9% in 1996).

Graph I



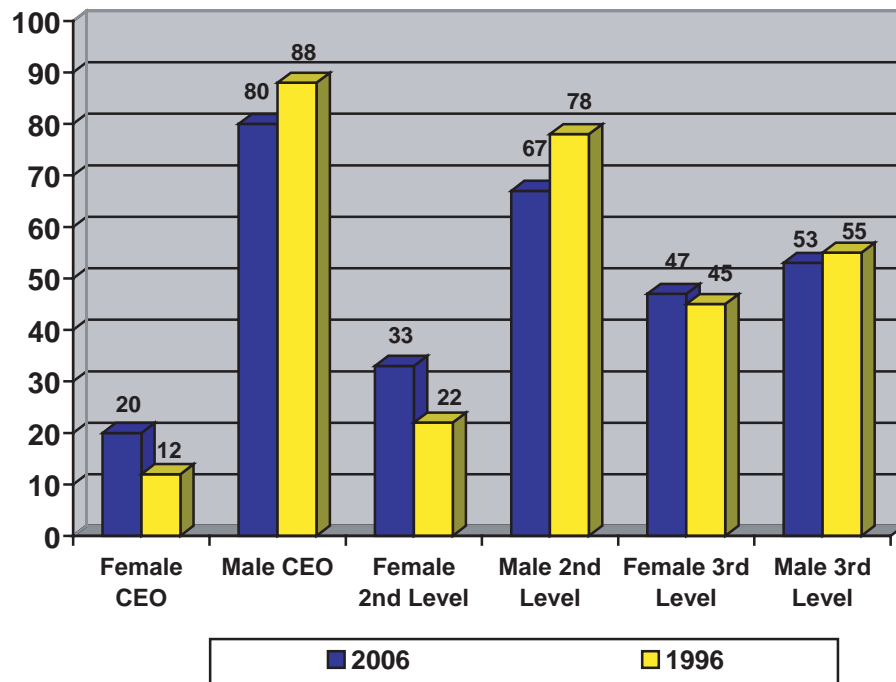
Work Force Leadership

The difficulty of measuring the number of women in management/leadership positions in organizations comes in defining the criteria for this category. For the two studies, the research focused on two indicators: the reporting structure of the organization and compensation. In order to avoid the confusion of varying titles, we used reporting levels in the organization for our criteria of leadership. The top level was defined as CEOs, the second level as executives reporting to the CEO, and the third level as those reporting to someone who reports directly to the CEO. For compensation criteria, we asked organizations to report on their ten highest compensated employees. For each criteria, organizations were asked to report on Omaha-based employees only.

Women's Leadership in the Work Force Based on Management Level

Respondents were asked to report the gender of employees at the CEO, second and third levels of management in their organization

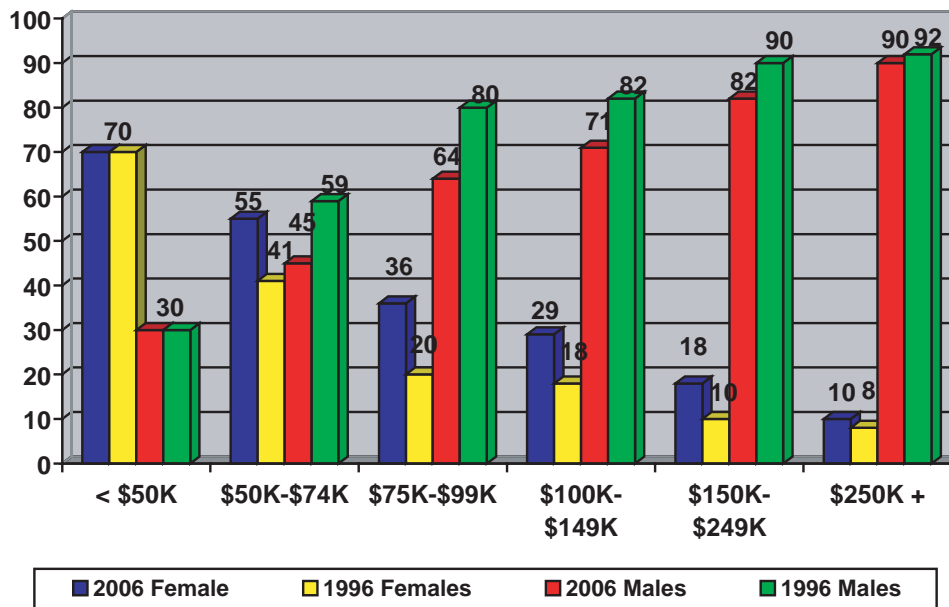
Graph II



Women's Leadership in the Work Force Based on Compensation

Respondents were asked to report the annual income (includes salary and cash bonus) of the executives at each of the three management levels:

Graph III



Organizations also reported on whether their top ten highest paid employees in the Omaha work force were male or female (Table II).

Table II

Ten Highest Compensated	2006	1996
Female	30%	20%
Male	70%	80%

Board membership also represents an important level of leadership in companies. In 2006, we asked about the gender composition of board members for the companies being surveyed. The 150 companies responding reported 82% of their boards were male and 18% were female.

Discussion

Women are moving higher in management levels. The 1996 report viewed women as "in the pipeline" but the flow has been fairly slow to the CEO level. Women's presence there has increased in single digits (8%) but with 80% of all CEOs being male, females remain underrepresented. The news is brightest in the second level of management where there has been an increase from 22% to 33%. Women currently hold 47% of positions at the third or lowest level of management.

While the picture brightens slowly for women seeking management positions, their compensation is not reflecting the same improvement. The number of female executives reported as having compensation over \$250,000 increased by 2.4% from 8% to 10.4%. Women are appearing in higher percentages in the top four salary categories in this study. This would appear to reflect the increased number of women moving into middle management positions. However, there are still more than twice as many women as men (70% vs. 30% respectively) at the lowest salary level reported and this has remained the same since the 1996 study.

In the 1996 study, 15 times as many men as women were in the highest salary category and while there has been some change, there are still 9 times more men in this category ten years later.



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Elected & Appointed Officials & Community Boards

Elected and appointed offices are critical leadership positions in a community. The 1996 study looked at total percentages of women holding these positions in Douglas and Sarpy Counties. For this study, an independent researcher was hired in 2006 to use public records to identify women in a variety of key elected and appointed positions in Omaha and Douglas County, a jurisdiction in which 50.8% of the population is female. Of the 150 elected positions reviewed in Douglas County (see table), we found women holding 43 (29%) compared to 34% reported in 1996. In 2006, women serve in 10 (22.7%) of the 44 city and county council level positions.

Women hold 22 (45%) of the 48 seats on Boards of Education reviewed for this report. While women are occupying a high percentage of positions on the boards of education, it is a different story for elected boards in public higher education. At Metropolitan Community College, women hold two (22%) of the nine board positions. There are no women on the eight member Board of Regents that governs both the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.



Elected Offices: Douglas County

Office	Number of Positions	Number of Women	Percentage of Women
City Council:			
Omaha	7	0	0%
Elkhorn	6	0	0%
Ralston	6	1	17%
Valley	4	3	75%
Bennington	4	1	25%
Board of Trustees:			
Waterloo	5	1	20%
Boys and Girls Town	5	2	40%
Boards of Education:			
NE State Board from Douglas County	3	2	66%
University of Nebraska Regents	3	0	0%
Metropolitan Community College	9	2	22%
Douglas County West	6	2	33%
Elkhorn	6	3	50%
Millard	6	2	33%
Omaha	12	10	83%
Ralston	6	3	50%
Westside	6	2	33%
Bennington	6	0	0%
Nebraska Offices from Douglas County:			
Public Service Commission	2	1	50%
State Legislators	15	1	6%
Papio Missouri Natural Resource District	9	1	11%
Other:			
Ralston Library Board	4	2	50%
Metropolitan Utilities District	7	1	14%
Omaha Public Power District	6	1	17%
Douglas County Board of Commissioners	7	2	29%

Of seven incorporated municipalities in Douglas County, only one, Valley, elected a woman as mayor.

Appointed Boards and Commissions

In judicial positions, women hold seven (17.5%) of the 40 positions in Douglas County courts compared to 13% in 1996. One of the two Nebraska Supreme Court justices from Douglas County is a woman.

Women hold 51 (25.5%) of the 241 appointed positions on the boards and commissions for the city of Omaha. In 1996 the study found women in 16% of major appointed boards and 27% on other boards and commissions.

In spite of being 51% of the population, women have a majority voice on only one of the 39 boards reviewed. Even more disturbing is the fact that women are not present at all on 13 (33%) of these boards and commissions. They have only one member on an additional 14 (35%) of these bodies.

Not-for-Profit Boards

Leadership in the community is also provided and developed by citizens serving on a variety of not-for-profit boards. In 1996, the study broke these down into these categories: human services; hospitals/health services; major civic; public charitable; major arts; and colleges and universities. Boards of human services agencies had the highest percentage (35%) of women serving. Major civic organizations had the lowest percentage (7%).

In 2006, women held 37% (388) of the 1047 positions on all the boards reviewed (see table below). In health organizations, women represent 43% of the board positions, in human services they represent 40% and in art organizations they hold 35% of the board positions. However, major civic organizations have only 21%. When we look closely at key boards of influence in the city, women are only 14% of the Performing Arts Society and the Omaha Symphony Boards; 16% of the Omaha Community Foundation Board; and 10% of the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors.

Appointed Offices

Office	Number of Positions	Number of Women	Percentage of Women
Judicial Positions from Douglas County:			
Judges	12	3	25%
District Court Judges	16	2	13%
Juvenile Court Judges	5	1	20%
Workers' Compensation Court	7	1	14%
Nebraska Supreme Court Justices	2	1	50%
Board & Commission Positions:			
Administrative Appeals	5	1	20%
Air Conditioning / Air Distribution	5	0	0%
Airport Authority	5	1	20%
Appraisers Committee	3	0	0%
Benson Business Improvement	5	1	20%
Building Board Review	7	0	0%
Cable Television Advisory	9	0	0%
Civil Rights Hearing	11	4	36%
DOT Commission	7	1	14%
Downtown Business Improvement	12	4	33%
Dundee Business Improvement	11	3	27%
Electrical Examining Board	6	0	0%
Enterprise Zone	7	3	43%
Convention and Visitors	7	1	14%
Hoisting & Portable Engineers	3	0	0%
Human Rights and Relations	9	4	44%
Landmarks Heritage Preservation	9	1	11%
Land Reutilization	3	1	33%
Library	9	4	44%
Metropolitan Entertainment	5	0	0%
Metropolitan Area Transit	5	1	20%
Omaha Housing Authority	5	3	60%
Oil Burner Examining Board	3	1	33%
Public Building Commission	5	1	20%
Small Business Network	3	0	0%
Parks & Recreation	7	3	43%
Park East Business Improvement	5	1	20%
Pension Board (Civilian)	7	2	29%
Pension Board (Police & Fire)	7	1	14%
Personnel Board	7	3	43%
Planning	7	2	29%
Plumbing	8	0	0%
Public Art	9	3	33%
Sign Examining Board	4	0	0%
South Omaha Business Improvement	5	1	20%
Stationary Engineers	3	0	0%
Steamfitters Examiners	4	0	0%
Street Vacation Damage	3	0	0%
Zoning Board of Appeals	7	1	14%

Not-for-Profit Offices

	Number of Positions	Number of Women	Percentage of Women
Health Organization Boards:			
Alzheimer's Association	16	8	50%
Nebraska AIDS Project	26	8	31%
Multiple Sclerosis Foundation	24	15	63%
Hope Medical Outreach	15	8	53%
Tabitha Health Care Services	13	4	31%
Tabitha Foundation	11	2	18%
Visiting Nurse Association	22	11	50%
Wellness Council of the Midlands	16	5	31%
Human Service Boards:			
American Red Cross	32	10	31%
Boys and Girls Club	29	7	24%
Camp Fire USA	32	15	47%
Catholic Charities	33	11	33%
Chicano Awareness Center	13	3	23%
Domestic Violence Coordinating	25	12	48%
Family Housing Advisory	14	6	43%
Girls Scouts Great Plains	19	16	64%
GOCA	9	2	22%
Habitat for Humanity	20	5	25%
Heartland Family Service	31	11	35%
Holy Name Development	18	7	39%
Lutheran Family Services	16	2	13%
Make a Wish	16	7	47%
McAuley Center	18	5	28%
NCCJ	22	11	50%
Project Extra Mile	22	6	27%
Salvation Army	49	10	20%
Take Flight Farms	14	9	64%
Voices for Children	18	13	72%
Youth Care	11	1	9%
YWCA	31	31	100%
Art Organization Boards:			
Bemis Center	15	4	27%
Omaha Performing Arts Society	7	1	14%
Omaha Symphony Association	14	2	14%
Opera Omaha	52	15	29%
Omaha Children's Museum	41	19	46%
Civic Boards:			
Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce	50	5	10%
Destination Midtown	15	2	13%
Heartland Center for Leadership	13	6	46%
Neighborhood Center	23	8	35%
Omaha Small Business	9	3	33%
Foundation Boards:			
Millard Public Schools Foundation	15	6	40%
Omaha Community Foundation	19	3	16%
Omaha Public Library Foundation	24	13	54%
Peter Kiewit Foundation	5	1	20%
Ronald McDonald Charities	24	6	25%
United Way of the Midlands	56	20	36%
Women's Fund	25	25	100%

Discussion

In a decade in which we have seen the first woman elected as Speaker of the House of Representatives and other gains nationally, women have lost ground in Douglas County. The percentage of women serving in public office has declined since 1996. The one bright spot is the city of Valley with a female mayor and a majority of female city council members. However, in Omaha a woman has yet to be elected to the mayor's office and currently there are no women on the Omaha City Council.

Women are graduating from law schools in nearly equal numbers with men. However, there has been only the slightest increase in total number of female judges since 1996. Women still only hold 17.5% of the judgeships in Douglas County.

The appointment of women to boards and commissions is another area of concern. The 1996 study reported female members held 16% of the positions on major appointed boards and commissions in Omaha. Ten years later, women hold 25.5%. While this represents an increase, women have no voice on 33% of appointed boards and commissions in Omaha and little voice on another 35% of boards/commissions. Where women are present in higher percentages on some civic boards, they reach majority status on only one - the Omaha Housing Authority. Women are increasing their presence on local public school boards (45%) but have not been elected to public higher education boards in similar numbers. In fact, there are no women on the Nebraska Board of Regents, which governs the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

The percentage of women in our sample of not-for-profit boards was 37%, up from 31% in 1996. Women held more board positions for health organizations (43%), human service boards (40%) and arts organization boards (35%). However, major community boards such as the Omaha Chamber of Commerce continue to have the least gender equity.

Clearly, there is much work to be done to increase the number of women in positions of leadership in our community. The number of women running for office must increase in order to increase the number of women being elected. Those in a position to make appointments need to review their process to find ways to ensure women have a voice on more boards and commissions in the city. Organizations with influence in the city need to demonstrate a commitment to women and to role model leadership in gender equity by ensuring a greater presence of women on their boards. Current leaders in the community must make a concerted effort to invite and mentor more women into positions at the table if Omaha hopes to be competitive in attracting and retaining top female talent.

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Reflections on Women & Leadership







Interviews

with Omaha's Leaders



As the research committee began to consider the charge to follow up on the exploratory work of the report done in 1996, new questions arose:

- How best to carry forward the research of ten years ago?
- Could a study be designed to explore the context and environment in which leadership develops?
- What more could be learned about the leadership culture in Omaha?
- Could data be gathered to assist in developing support for action to increase the number of women in leadership positions in the community?

The research committee wanted to talk frankly to female and male leaders at the highest levels to hear their thoughts on leadership; their personal experience and pathways to leadership; the challenges they faced in becoming and being a leader; how they saw gender influencing leadership; and, their concerns about future leadership.

The narrative which follows offers a glimpse of what was learned. We are deeply indebted to the 83 leaders who provided their candid thoughts to our questions. The themes developed reflect these conversations.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted by members of the research committee and two additional Women's Fund board members. Interviewers were trained at a research committee meeting. The same basic set of questions was used for each interview with minor modifications to reflect distinctions specific to the four organizational categories (business, education, health care and not-for-profit). The questions were developed and tested by the research committee using advice from members representing each category. The questions were organized into sections: warm-up; education and skills; networking and mentors; leadership characteristics; personal challenges; the future; and demographic information.

The study used a purposive sample. Committee members reviewed organizations in each of the categories. Selections were made based on seeking a balance of male and female leaders who were at the highest level of management in their respective categories. Approximately thirty people in each category were identified with the hope of obtaining at least twenty interviews per category. They were then contacted by letter and follow-up phone call requesting an interview. Each interview was

conducted in a face-to-face format in the interviewee's office in a one to two hour timeframe. Researchers used notes and tape recordings to create transcripts of the interviews. The transcripts were then used to create documents which aggregated responses by questions for the analysis phase of the research.

Researchers, working in teams of two, used a content analysis approach to analyze the transcripts. Each team received a section of questions to review for each category. Teams were asked to identify key words, phrases, and themes emerging from their questions' responses. The entire research committee would then meet to review the summaries done by each team and develop a list of themes across all questions. This was repeated for each category. When interviews and analysis of category responses were completed, all themes were checked against interview transcripts to confirm their presence. The research committee did a final review of all themes and developed the thematic narrative presented in this report. An independent researcher was asked to review the material for feedback on themes. Interviewees were contacted to validate a sample of the report.

The analysis of interview content identified six major themes. Even though leaders from specific categories (business, education, health care and not-for-profit) were interviewed, these themes appeared in common across all categories of leaders. In some instances, the theme was present with features unique to specific categories, and these are noted in the report. The report cites representative comments from our interviews. These comments will not be attributed to specific leaders as part of an agreement with them to solicit their candor in our discussions. The order of the six themes does not reflect their importance or priority but rather flows from their content.

- **Leaders share many qualities across gender, but there are still gender differences**
- **A woman's sense of self is critical to her leadership**
- **Relationships make and break leaders**
- **Becoming a leader does not happen by accident**
- **Leaders recognize the challenges of balancing work and life**
- **Leaders have concerns about the future**



Theme One

*Leaders Share Many Qualities Across Gender,
But There Are Still Gender Differences*

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*“Self-expression
must pass into
communication
for its
fulfillment.”*

Pearl S. Buck

Leaders Share Many Qualities Across Gender, But There Are Still Gender Differences

Interviewees shared their perspective on the qualities of a good leader. Male and female leaders agreed on a number of qualities they believe essential to leadership including vision, the ability to communicate, passion for the work, a willingness to take risks, and flexibility. The following provides a sample of their thoughts on these qualities:

Vision

Leaders in all four groups talked about the need for a leader to have a sense of vision. Leaders need a vision for themselves as well as for their organization. From a not-for-profit perspective, there is a critical need for the leader to maintain a sense of vision because one must blend business with the vision of service. Leaders talked about it this way:

- "Leaders set their 'internal geography' young; have a vision of who they want to be and try to keep in line with their value system and dreams over time."
- "People need to have a sense of where they are going and how to get there."
- "Leaders need the ability to keep multiple issues in focus and connected to a broader future vision."
- "Vision is one of the pieces that differentiate leading from managing."

The Ability to Communicate

It is not enough to be visionary. A leader needs the ability to articulate the vision. In order to enlist others to achieve their vision, leaders told us communication was critical:

- "Communication, communication, communication. Both men and women need to be able to communicate effectively up and down in an organization. Selling our ideas and gaining support is critical."
- "It is one thing to be competent in your job but as a leader you must be able to communicate with others. To get others to follow, you must be able to articulate how we move from A to B to reach our vision."
- "You can tell a leader by how they enter a room and how they communicate."

“Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be a challenge to others.”

Amelia Earhart

A Passion for the Work

This quality emerged as fundamental in all four groups, but was a particularly powerful theme in the education, health care and not-for-profit sectors where a number of leaders talked about passion being a critical factor in making a difference in organizations where salaries are traditionally low:

- "The essence of leadership is a burning desire to get people on the bus."
- "You must have a passion for what you are doing and you must be willing to encourage people. You cannot force people to follow you ... you must inspire them."
- "Passion and enthusiasm are critical. People are very perceptive. If you don't believe in what you're doing, others are not going to buy in either."

A Willingness to Take Risks

Across all four groups, males and females agreed that leaders must be willing to take risks. The courage to put oneself on the line makes a better leader:

- "Leaders have to be willing to take on risk and make unpopular decisions."
- "Some people are better in support roles - if you want to be a leader, you have to be able to take risks."
- "Some people are highly intelligent and have great skills but cannot take risks."

Flexibility

Leaders in all four groups indicated a key characteristic of a leader was the ability to adapt to demands of organization, environment and family. This concept was underscored in the following responses:

- "Leaders need the ability to be flexible in a changing environment."
- "Leadership is about thinking in unconventional terms."
- "Leaders need a flexible management style to work with and bring out the best in each employee."
- "I was a single parent with three children after a divorce. I realized my children's opportunities depended on how well I did. I knew I needed to change my role."

“It is wonderful how quickly you get used to things, even the most astonishing.”

Edith Nesbitt

*“One never notices
what has been done;
one can only see
what remains to be
done.”*

Marie Curier

Gender Differences:

When asked to discuss qualities or characteristics leaders felt women bring to leadership, some male leaders felt there were no differences. However, a number of the male and female leaders did identify gender differences. They identified those as follows:

A Consensus Building Approach

Many of the leaders reported noticing that women have an ability to create an atmosphere in which all viewpoints are valued and considered:

- "Women do more consensus-building - they sublimate their ego so it doesn't get in the way of getting the job done."
- "Women bring an ability to give and take around needs and goals."
- "Women are genuinely interested in hearing other views, in bringing people out, and they use that ability to bring people to agreement."

Ability to Multi-Task

This was one of the most consistent responses when asked what women bring to leadership:

- "Women tend to get more done because they are so used to balancing their time."
- "Women bring the ability to manage six balls in the air at one time."
- "Women seem to be better at multi-tasking. Men seem to want to do things in order - one at a time - which is not always possible."

Sensitivity to People

Leaders described women as having more empathy, being more compassionate, and bringing a nurturing aspect to their leadership. They commented on how this allowed women to build relationships:

- "Women focus on relationships which makes them good at reaching across boundaries and bringing teams together."
- "If I were to identify anything women bring it would be that they are more attuned to others ... they seem to have a better sense of empathy."
- "One skill that women are better at than men is listening, which is an important part of leadership."

Creativity and Intuition

A number of interviewees commented on the creativity and intuition women use in their leadership roles:

- "Women are more intuitive by nature. Men's and women's brains work differently. This is not opinion - research backs it up."
- "Women tend to be more creative. Given the complexity of health care today, creativity in coming to solutions or problem resolution is very important."

“The only listening that counts is that of the talker who alternately absorbs and expresses ideas.”

Agnes Repplier

Gender Differences:

Place Importance on Communication

Communication was a quality male and female leaders believed essential in leadership. It was identified as coming more naturally to women:

- "Women by nature tend to be good communicators. They understand how important it is to keep stakeholders involved."
- "Women are generally better listeners. Men seem to listen to get 'enough' information to jump to a solution."
- "Women's style of communication is more open to looking at the whole perspective."

Discussion

A number of studies have been done on leadership styles. Some of the studies have focused on gender differences. Caliper, a Princeton-based management consulting firm, conducted a study in 2005 focusing on the personality qualities and motivational factors of leaders to see what might be at the core of gender differences. Their conclusion was "women bring distinct personality and motivational strengths to leadership. They have an open and consensus-building approach to leadership." Omaha leaders confirmed this in their observations of leaders. The strengths women bring to leadership offer a resource to benefit the organizations they serve. Research on female entrepreneurs conducted by Margaret Heffernan in 2006 concludes "the demands of the new economy frequently match well with the strengths of women."

Common Threads

An observation from the 1996 Women's Fund study was having the vision to know what one wants and the courage and confidence to take a stand is fundamental to good leadership. The study further noted that women's emerging style of leadership was inclusive and democratic.



Theme Two

A Woman's Sense of Self is Critical to Leadership

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*“One can never
consent to creep
when one feels an
impulse to soar.”*

Helen Keller

A Woman's Sense of Self is Critical to Leadership

The theme of the sense of self is a powerful one for women leaders. Women leaders were more likely to view leadership as being innate. They often focused on the importance of knowing themselves and on the need for self-confidence.

The Importance of Knowing Yourself

Women leaders were more likely than male leaders to talk about looking inside and taking internal stock of what was occurring:

- "You have to be true to your own personality and not be afraid to be yourself."
- "Understanding that I am growing and needing to check in with myself to see what I need/want to do now and whether what I am doing is rewarding."
- "I wish I had taken more time for self reflection on what I was doing."

Women's Need for Self-Confidence

Women's views of themselves are often related to their own sense of confidence or lack thereof. A striking number of female leaders interviewed talked about how women need to learn to value themselves; about others having confidence in their abilities before they did; and how confidence occurs more frequently in men:

- "Women are still not as confident as they need to be. Women don't give themselves enough credit or value themselves in relation to their worth."
- "My incredible coaches saw ability and ambition in me that I did not recognize in myself."
- "Women wait for others to give them permission to be successful."
- "Men don't tell themselves they can only go so far. They don't analyze where the ceiling is. Women have self-imposed doubt. Men just go for it."
- "I think it takes confidence to take risks, so another aspect of women's preparation for leadership needs to be building confidence."

When asked what skills women who wish to be leaders need to develop, men also frequently focused on self-confidence:

- "I think women don't see themselves as being as capable as they are. Women need self-confidence. They already have the skills."
- "Women shortchange themselves - they need to build their confidence to believe they can do it."

Discussion

One of the strongest themes encountered in our analysis related to the women's sense of self and leadership. Their descriptions of how they came to be leaders often involved the intervention of someone who recognized and talked to them about their potential. Women would describe a need to check in with themselves, believe in themselves, and question themselves about their abilities.

Women leaders were more likely to say leadership is innate as opposed to learned, making an internal search of self critical to their decision-making about pursuing leadership. The female leaders discussed wishing they had more confidence in themselves at an earlier age. Both male and female leaders indicated that women need to work on their own confidence to encourage them to speak out, take more risks, and offer their ideas.

Common Threads

The 1996 Women's Fund study states that leadership has its genesis within the individual, their family and environment; that internal applause is critical, but that it begins externally with being told you can do anything you want to do. It further notes that women who are raised to be nurturing and conciliatory and to avoid risks may find it more difficult to develop the self-confidence required to be successful.



Theme Three

Relationships Make and Break Leaders

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Relationships Make and Break Leaders

We asked leaders how significant relationships shaped their views of leaders and influenced their pathway to leadership. We asked them as they looked back on their personal journey, what key influences led to their current leadership positions.

The Impact of Early Relationships

Leaders often spoke about critical relationships early in their lives with family, teachers, coaches, and others who provided role models and encouraged them to see their own abilities for leadership. We discovered children's entry into leadership is impacted significantly more by adults than peers.

- "My father and mother treated me and my brothers equally when it came to household tasks, education and college. I was also influenced by my aunt who was unmarried and had a very responsible job in L.A. We saw her working as a professional and that was a key model."
- "My parents were farmers and great role models...they had a tireless work ethic...they helped us believe in our own efficacy. They empowered us to make decisions. As children we were taught problem solving with successive challenges and goals."
- "My basketball coach and teacher saw something in me. She encouraged me to consider education and coaching."

“There’s a period of life when we swallow a knowledge of ourselves, and it becomes either good or sour inside.”

Pearl Bailey

*“There are two
ways of spreading
light: to be the
candle or the mirror
that reflects it.”*

Edith Wharton

Mentoring

We asked interviewees a number of questions about mentors and how they were involved in relationships with their own mentors/mentees; if there were gender differences; and their sense of mentoring's contribution to leadership.

Most leaders said mentors were necessary and that they should be chosen carefully. Many female leaders mentioned having benefited from mentors:

- "I think mentoring is a wonderful tool for grooming leaders. I think that if I had gotten involved with a mentor earlier I could have gained insight much more quickly and avoided hitting my head against a brick wall."
- "I had amazing mentors because they were brutally honest with their feedback. Working for a mentor is the very best because you learn through observation."
- "Mentoring to me can be abstract - a combination of things I read and parts of many people."
- "Particularly at the top of the company it can be lonely - lots at stake - so you seek counsel from people you can trust."

Leaders discussed mentors' contributions and how they can accelerate the pace of learning:

- "I think there are two kinds of mentors, those who don't know they are your mentor - people whose skills you admire and try to emulate who act as role models; and, those who are institutionalized as mentors, those who are assigned to teach/coach a newcomer. Both are valuable."
- "A mentor is a safe haven that you can go to get advice on how to manage different challenges that may occur in your professional life."
- "Mentors are used to provide feedback and share ideas. They are honest people who want you to be the best you can be and support your success. They provide you with resources and help you to aspire."
- "My recommendation is not over use them. Try to be specific in your questions, follow through, and then let them know the results."

We asked if male leaders use mentor relationships in a different fashion from female leaders. Many leaders felt that because men have been leaders longer and in larger numbers, they have more opportunities to find and utilize mentors. An "M" or "F" indicates the gender of the responder:

- "I don't see much difference except for venues. I hunt and fish with my mentors in a relaxed, casual atmosphere where we build in time to discuss serious matters. It is hard for women to find time for a mentoring relationship." (M)
- "I think men have more informal mentoring or networking systems. Women tend to be more purposeful about mentoring." (F)
- "Men have networks through Rotary, men's clubs and golf courses." (M)
- "Men are more informal in their mentoring approaches...they do not approach mentoring as systematically as women may." (F)
- "There are more male leaders around so there are more to choose from." (F)

Networks

Leaders told us about how networks enhance leadership. They offer the opportunity to build relationships; gain credibility; see how other people practice leadership; to gain insight, ideas, and practical knowledge from the experience of others. The appendix offers suggestions for networks which are industry specific.

Leaders shared these thoughts on participation in networks:

- "Networking is everything. You have to get out of your silo. It will make or break your career."
- "Networking helps give comfort and assurance from peers that you are okay - it helps remove uncertainty about becoming a leader."
- "In networks you get to know other people in other businesses and have connections. I think it helps to be visible in your community and your industry because it creates opportunity."
- "Men have the inherent network available to them. Women have to work hard to develop the same connections."
- "Leadership is the art of influencing. A network can act as a catalyst for influence with others."

Discussion

Male and female leaders were in agreement that relationships are a critical factor in the development and support of leaders. Often for these leaders, it was someone early in their lives who challenged them, inspired them, and/or believed in their potential as a leader. As their careers developed, many sought mentoring or networking relationships to continue this process. Mentoring relationships at the highest levels of leadership were more often difficult for women because there were fewer women in roles of leadership and less time for them to participate due to issues of work and life. One of the common comments of female leaders was a sense of exclusion from informal male networks. Since male leaders often described their mentoring and networking as a more informal process, this often left women out.

Common Threads

In the 1996 Women's Fund study, 97% of female leaders responded that they felt special to someone while they were growing up and 95% identified a role model(s) that impacted their life during their formative years. 68% reported having mentors in their professional life.



Theme Four

Becoming a Leader Does Not Happen by Accident

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“If society will not admit of women’s free development, then society must be remodeled”

Elizabeth Blackwell

Becoming a Leader Does Not Happen by Accident

Leaders were asked about how they reached their current position. Their responses indicated that in many instances the path to leadership is different for women and men. Men seem able to be more proactive in focusing on career goals, placing less emphasis on family concerns. In many ways, interviewees said, it remains a man's world. Women have to prove themselves more, work harder, and have fewer opportunities to pursue leadership. Often, women need to be invited or encouraged to seek advancement.

Paths to leadership are different

- "I think as a male I didn't have the same family considerations that women face."
- "I feel women still weigh family concerns more heavily than men do when they are confronted with opportunities to advance."
- "Men are allowed to follow their careers and women are expected to follow the man."
- "The issue of relocation seems to be key. Men relocate the family easily. Women either refuse to relocate because of family concerns or do so only with extreme reluctance."
- "These were all active decisions to get education, choose field, seek mentoring, and make the time commitment. I was willing to put up with the stress and the loneliness inherent in leadership."

Women leaders often have to prove themselves more than men

Male and female leaders alike felt women have to prove themselves:

- "I think it is a male-dominated work place, women have to prove themselves more." (F)
- "... I think I took it for granted as a male that certain doors were open to me that may not have been to my colleagues who were female. I just didn't have to think about it." (M)
- "It is still not a level playing field, especially in the higher roles. It's maybe not fair but women need to work harder. They must be hungry and vigilant and have a little chip on their shoulder." (M)
- "The path is easier for men because it has been a men's world. Women still have to break through barriers." (F)
- "Men are already thought of as leaders - a woman has to prove she is interested." (F)

Women have to work harder and have fewer opportunities to pursue leadership

- "Recently, I have become more aware of gender and how it impacts business settings. I always came over prepared. I knew there would be no second chance."
- "Fewer women in these roles due to women's expectations and higher standards for them."
- "I didn't have access to professional development opportunities so I had to make my own. Training doesn't trickle down to you. I believe as a woman I had to do the extras because men don't do that."
- "I think opportunities for women in top leadership positions are not as many as there are for men. I think there is a glass ceiling in the industry."
- "As a small business, a major challenge for me was capital formation. Women have traditionally had an even harder time getting loans."

Often women need to be invited to seek advancement

- "I never sought any of my jobs. I think women often feel the need to be asked."
- "When the previous administrator resigned, I was asked to be interim and a year later was made director."
- "My mentor played a definite part in my accepting my current position...she suggested I take the risk."

“Now we are expected to be as wise as men who have had generations of all the help there is, and we scarcely anything.”

Louisa May Alcott

Discussion

Male leaders told us about the intentionality of their careers. They described having a vision and staying the course to make it happen. Women more often told us about circumstances in their lives (children, divorce, widowhood, etc.) that changed their plans and launched or delayed their careers. Both male and female leaders acknowledged the more difficult work for women to become leaders. Women face a culture which perceives men to be leaders and requires women who want to move up to prove themselves by being better qualified, working harder, and facing expectations that they will be more temporary than men. Our quantitative study confirms the observations of the interviewees. Seventy five percent of the women respondents indicated women needed to be more qualified than a man applying for the same job. More than half of these respondents said women had to work harder than men.

Common Threads

In the 1996 Women's Fund study, respondents stressed the importance of staying focused on career goals by establishing priorities, developing a plan and sticking to it. The study also noted that gender representation in Omaha did not approach parity, and suggested that the reasons were rooted in gender issues such as female role expectations.



Theme Five

*Leaders Recognize the Challenges of
Balancing Work and Personal Lives*

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“Being asked to decide between your passion for work and your passion for children was like being asked by your doctor whether you preferred him to remove your brain or your heart.”

Mary Kay Blakely

Leaders Recognize the Challenges of Balancing Work and Personal Lives

Both men and women make sacrifices

Male and female leaders talked about the need for finding balance between their work and their personal lives, and the difficult choices they often must make:

- "The more responsibility, the more pressure it puts on dividing your family life, work life, and social life." (M)
- "There were choices and they weren't all good. I devoted more time to my business than I did to my family. If leadership is experiential, you have to do it enough to achieve results." (M)
- "Nannies raised my children and I don't get to spend as much time with my family as I would like. I was also raised by nannies." (F)
- "... We were both willing to make economic sacrifices to spend time with our family." (M)
- "I had to make choices that were tough on my family. The issue of family has held back some great potential leaders - particularly when young children are involved. If you wait until the children are older, you're short on the professional development side and can't compete with your peers." (M)
- "I missed taking time to make good women friends while I was in my 30s and 40s. I was a single mom so my priorities were family and job. Now I look around and I don't have the friends that you build history with." (F)

The reality of childbirth limits women's options

Many women must deal with the reality of their biological role in having children and the limitations that care-giving can place on their career. Male and female leaders alike recognize the profound impact on women:

- "The biggest problem women have who are pursuing a career is the interruption of childbirth."
- "I think it is hard for women to balance family life with leadership. If women 'hit the top too soon' during childbearing years it can lead to a crisis. I could never have done my current job if my children were still young and at home. Even now that they are grown, I struggle to have quality time with my husband, children and grandchildren."

- "I think women still are seen as being more conflicted about work and family. The odds that a person will quit, go part-time, etc. seems higher for women than men and that may influence opportunities for leadership positions."
- "Of course, for a woman, it is going to be a balancing issue. What time do you take, how do you involve and explain your commitments to children."
- "I only had one child. I would have liked to have more but couldn't see how it could be with my work."
- "I had to decide if I could lead the company. I had to balance my passion for my company with my passion for my family."
- "The choices are different for men and women. Because of their biological nature, men still stay continuously on a path and that can be an advantage."
- "Family is a huge issue - there's a quiet prejudice against women with small children."
- "I think women are more affected by family status. I see many women choosing to put family/children care as a priority and then coming back to enter leadership positions later. Women end up delaying opportunities for leadership because of their family values."

Cultural expectations limit women's choices

Male and female leaders acknowledge how stereotypes about women's roles influence their careers:

- "In so many ways women have much harder choices based on societal expectations, special roles, personal life expectations are so different." (M)
- "The male leaders I know have spouses that either stay at home or will assume the responsibility of taking care of the home if a situation occurs. It's difficult for most women to divide the work and home environment because of our culture. Women are still considered the primary caretakers. (M)
- "When the children were young I had to take responsibility for managing their lives and my husband would do whatever he could that I asked him to do, but the job of coordinating their lives was always mine." (F)
- "I think it is much harder for women. Cultural expectations for them are different from men. I look at the male executives I know and they have tremendous support from their wives. We don't have wives." (F)
- "It goes to the way Omaha is . . . it is really hard for women. The good old boys only trust each other so it keeps on keeping on. Men don't have a clue what a 7 AM meeting puts women through." (F)
- "I quit my job to stay home and get the kids stable. When I came back to the work force, despite my education and work history, it took me two years to get back into my profession."

“Consider the ‘new’ woman. She’s trying to be Pollyanna Borgia, clearly a conflict of interest. She’s supposed to be a ruthless winner at work and a bundle of nurturing sweetness at home.”

Rita Mae Brown

Discussion

Male and female leaders talked about the difficult decisions required to be leaders. Balancing family life with a demanding leadership position requires sacrifices of time for both genders. Male and female leaders were aware of the impact of decisions about accepting promotions that required relocation. However, both acknowledged that this burden fell more heavily on women. The biological fact of childbearing and the cultural expectations about childrearing all result in interruptions to women's pathways to leadership. Sylvia Ann Hewlett, president of the Center for Work Life Policy, has conducted research into the impact of childbearing on women. Her research has created a descriptive term, "off ramp", for what happens when women leave their positions due to life circumstances and "on ramp" for their re-entry into the work force. Her research, reported in the Harvard Business Review, studied women with graduate degrees at mid-career. She found that 37% had taken extended breaks of an average of 2.2 years. When these women sought to return to their careers only 40% made it back and even short interruptions resulted in heavy financial penalties. Hewlett discovered on average an 11% reduction in salary for less than one year out of the work force and a staggering reduction of 37% for three or more years out. In our interviews, a number of current leaders talked about this phenomenon in their own lives. One professional woman indicated it took her two years to secure a position in her field when she returned from a period of childrearing. Women offer a significant resource to the leadership pool of a community if creative solutions can be developed to keep women connected when they need to off ramp and to increase their success when they attempt to return to the workplace.

Common Threads

In identifying obstacles women faced in 1996, the Women's Fund study found 63% falling into the category of gender issues such as stereotyping, sexism, male power and control and lack of female role models. The second largest category, accounting for 23%, was the difficulty in balancing the demands of family and professional/community obligation.



Theme Six

Leaders Have Concerns About the Future

W

Leaders Have Concerns About the Future

Each leader was asked about the challenges on the horizon facing their organization and its work force. Their responses included the changing environment of their organization, the challenge of balancing work and family life, and the need to prepare the next generation of leaders. For the not-for-profit, education and health care sectors, the challenges of the changing environment involve shrinking resources.



“Time is a dressmaker specializing in alterations.”

Faith Baldwin

The Changing Environment for Organizations

Leaders are concerned about the future size of the work force, the need for leaders to embrace diversity, the shift in corporate ownership and its impact on leadership for the community, and the impact of globalization:

- "The work force challenge is the tremendous brain drain. How are we going to replenish the gap as baby boomers retire?"
- "The biggest challenge in business today is diversity. How to motivate people from different backgrounds and cultures."
- "I see a value in locally owned businesses and fear that when businesses are not locally owned, the leadership is not as invested in the community."
- "We're in a period of dynamic change on most every front: technology, regulatory, global competition, etc. One of the key things to prepare for today's environment is flexibility and adaptability but with a strong platform of values."
- "There has been a huge financial crisis since 9/11. Investment income has been down, insurance costs have risen, salaries are not competitive. Not-for-profits have to do more with less."

The Challenge of Balancing Work and Life

Leaders have noted a change in the next generation in seeking a better balance of work and life:

- "More people, particularly women, want the option to work part-time and do not see a career path."
- "More employees are demanding flexible work schedules."

The Next Generation of Leaders Requires Opportunities to Gain Experience

Throughout the interviews, leaders talked about people and experiences that shaped their view of themselves and their ability to be leaders. A major concern of interviewees from all four sectors was the need to prepare a new generation of leaders. They recommended more be done to give young people the opportunity to practice leadership:

- "I was taught early on what leadership was about. We need to start when children are young developing skills. No one is nurturing the next generation of leaders."
- "Experience is the best teacher. Being a debater in high school taught me to think quickly, to examine something from all sides, and not to take disagreements personally. We need to offer more opportunities for young people."
- "Role models are clearly needed. We don't seem to be doing a good job of mentoring the next generation of leaders. We aren't tapped into what motivates them. They may have it too easy and assume it will always be that way."
- "We are grossly overestimating how effective K-12 education is in workplace training. We also have way too many kids who have no hope - who think they cannot succeed - especially among minority populations."

Discussion

Clearly, the concerns of Omaha's current leaders reflect a growing national awareness of the need to groom the leaders of tomorrow. Many traditional formulas must change to meet the demands of a changing world. The new leadership must reflect the growing diversity of the population. Therefore, opportunities to advance to leadership must become more deliberate and inclusive. In addition to a focus on training and assimilation of minorities and immigrant populations, a new paradigm that takes into account the realities of women's lives and finds innovative ways to allow them to participate more fully will reap rewards. As leaders ponder their concerns over the future work force, they may want to consider research published by Catalyst, a not-for-profit research firm. Its 2002 study of Fortune 500 companies indicated that firms with "a higher percentage of women in top jobs posted a 35 percent higher return on equity and a 34 percent greater return to shareholders than firms with fewer women executives."

Common Threads

In 1996, Women's Fund researchers stressed the importance of positive influences during formative and later years in developing leaders. They noted the need to provide encouragement for girls to aspire to leadership, and opportunities for women to gain experience through elective office and service on community boards.

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Conclusions



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Conclusions

Ten years ago, when our predecessors at the Women's Fund published the first ground-breaking study on women and leadership in Omaha, they concluded their report with the observation that "profound social change comes slowly". Our research now proves that is an understatement. Given the current rate of change, it will be decades before women hold leadership positions approaching equity with their percentage of the work force, their educational attainment, and their share of the city's population. This is unacceptable. If we want to remain competitive - let alone thrive - the time is now for this community to work together on an action plan for change.

Women in Omaha are under-represented in leadership ranks and in policy making positions.

Not only has there been little improvement, in some cases female representation and the opportunity for influence has taken a step backward from a decade ago. This is cause for concern. As the trend of a tightening labor supply progresses, a community that does not foster visibly inclusive leadership will be at a real disadvantage in sustaining growth and prosperity.

There have been some gains locally in female corporate leadership, especially at the second and third tier levels. However, women remain very scarce in the top spots. An 8% increase in female CEOs (20% up from 12%) is good news. However, that increase is tempered by the fact that only 20% of Omaha companies surveyed in 2006 had female CEOs while at the same time our city's female labor force participation is among the very highest in the country. There is near equity between men and women in the lowest management level jobs, but despite some progress there continues to be much disparity at higher levels. Data shows the pipeline has been full of well-educated women for years, but advancement to senior level leadership remains slow.

Women are noticeably under-represented in leadership positions influencing public and civic policies. In fact, they have lost ground in recent years, holding 29% of elected offices compared to 34% in 1996. In spite of being 51% of the population, women have a majority voice on only one of the 39 appointed boards and commissions surveyed and no representation on 13 boards (33%). Compared to many other locations across the country, Omaha continues to lag on this measure of leadership.

Improvements are necessary in Omaha's cultural infrastructure to grow women leaders and to allow them to flourish.

It does not appear that much systemic change has occurred in Omaha during the past ten years. Phrases such as "women have to work harder" and "prove themselves" or a "lack of senior management commitment to diversity" appear in both 1996 and 2006 data.

In 2006, women reported the greatest barrier to their success in the workplace was a male dominated corporate culture. Additional barriers cited included the exclusion of women from informal networks of communication and the belief that women were less career-oriented than men. While these three barriers showed improvement from 1996 levels, it remains a concern that over three-quarters of women still believe they are operating at a distinct disadvantage. This lack of organizational support is apparent in interviews with both male and female leaders. As one male interviewee stated: "It is still not a level playing field, especially in the higher roles. It's maybe not fair but women need to work harder. They must be hungry and vigilant and have a little chip on their shoulder."

The perception of efforts of Omaha companies to recruit, develop and promote women has improved in the ten years since the original study, with 14% more women now believing those efforts to be very good or excellent. On the down side of this measure, less than half of local working women believe their companies have a strong commitment to helping them succeed.

Local companies have much work ahead both in building paths to advancement for women as well as changing perceptions. There do not appear to have been many gains for Omaha women in accessing networking and social opportunities to further their careers, nor have there been many improvements in more formal organizational policies such as mentoring, professional development and on ramp/off ramp options. Nationally, there are many models which show it is easier and less expensive for a company to bring back an "off-ramped" employee looking to re-enter the work force than to hire and train a brand new worker. Companies need to find innovative ways to develop and stay connected to their female employees in order to maximize investment in human capital.



Relationships make or break leaders. Individuals make a significant contribution to a woman's leadership path.

Leaders, when it comes down to it, are made one person at a time. Local data from both 1996 and 2006, as well as numerous national studies, indicate how important it is that "someone believes in your potential." Self-confidence, or a confidence derived from another's demonstrated belief in them, is fundamental to the success of most female leaders. Therefore, It is essential to persuade young women at an early age to take risks and pursue leadership opportunities. It is also vital that managers recognize gender differences in their employees and encourage competent women to take on leadership challenges.

Women themselves must also take personal responsibility for seeking advancement. Leadership traits that were identified as important to either gender - vision, communication, passion, risk taking, flexibility - need to be developed and nurtured. While research has shown women often wait to be invited to assume leadership roles, this is a self-imposed barrier that needs to be recognized and dealt with. Women have to step out of their comfort zone and ask for opportunities. Conversely, it is important that current leaders recognize the importance of encouragement and support in their efforts to grow new leaders.



*“If the shoe
doesn’t fit, must
we change the
foot?”*

Gloria Steinem

A longitudinal perspective: does change really need to take THAT long?

What strikes the researchers - and hopefully the readers - of this study are the common threads between our findings and those of a decade ago. *Not much has changed in Omaha since 1996* in either visible or attitudinal indicators on the status of women.

Interestingly enough, the past ten years have seen transformational change on other fronts in Omaha. Over \$2 billion in private investment has transformed downtown Omaha with much more on the horizon. About 50,000 people have been added to the work force, an estimated 3,600 new businesses were created, the Qwest and Holland Centers have become a reality, and the West Dodge Expressway was designed and built. These are achievements for which the community can be immensely proud.

In the next ten years, we challenge our leaders to make similar improvements in human capital. We want to see that same "can do" attitude applied in an effort to attract and retain top talent for our community.

Women face substantial challenges in integrating the demands of the modern, turbo-charged workplace with the needs of home and family. Increasingly, more men share in these challenges as we continue to move away from the traditional roles of dad at work and mom at home. ***It is time for organizations and institutions to prioritize changes to accommodate the realities of people's lives.*** We call on civic and business leaders with the power to set agendas to guide that process. By working with their constituents to maximize the potential of each individual in a spirit of progressiveness and inclusiveness, we can move toward a more stable, brighter future for all.



Recommendations

The following is a list of general recommendations based on conclusions drawn from this study. They are offered as a starting point for discussion. It is hoped that dialogue within organizations and across the community will ultimately drive change and *increase the breadth and depth of female leadership in Omaha.*

Increase the number of women participating in leadership positions

There are many women capable of filling positions on appointed and community boards. Support is needed both for programs which develop women for these positions and a central source that connects qualified candidates with available opportunities.

Modify organizational cultures to support women, specifically in the areas of recruitment, development, mentoring and work/life integration

Develop and implement resources and mechanisms for sharing best practices tools. Recognize organizations committed to keeping and advancing women in the workforce.

Broaden women's access to the informal settings where leaders often make decisions and form relationships

Ensure women have access to the highest levels of leadership opportunities, networking and mentoring, moving away from the perception of a "good old boys network."

Raise community awareness of women leaders

Provide role models by recognizing women who have achieved leadership positions.

Encourage individual women in their pursuit of leadership

Develop fellowships and scholarships for women wishing to enhance their leadership skills. Support capital formation for female entrepreneurs.

Identify community resources that support leadership for young girls and fill the gaps in service

Research has shown girls begin "opting out" of leadership challenges as young as fifth grade. Opportunities must be provided for young women to develop leadership skills, and appropriate curriculum must be available to assist parents, teachers, etc. in their efforts to support them.

“Today’s 25-to-34 year-olds represent the first generation where women are measurably better educated than men. If I’m an urban leader serious about success, I’m going to spend a lot of energy making sure my city signals to women that they can find opportunity here. And I’m going to make sure my city delivers on that promise.”

Carol Coletta, CEOs for Cities

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Leaders Interviewed



Josie Abboud
Service Executive
Methodist Hospital

Scot Adams
Executive Director
Catholic Charities

Pat Allgeier
Chief Nurse Executive
Boys Town National Research Hospital

Cindy Alloway
CEO
Alegent Lakeside

Deb Bass
President & CEO
Bass & Associates

Nancy Belck
Chancellor
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Jerry Bexten
Principal
Central High School

Ron Blumkin
President
Nebraska Furniture Mart

Del Bomberger
Executive Director
The Stephen Center

Edson (Ted) Bridges III
President & Chief Inv. Officer
Bridges Investment Fund, Inc.

Paul Bryant
Executive Director
Wesley House

Linda Burkle
Executive Director
Salvation Army

Brad Burwell
President
Vintage Financial Group

Pamela Carlson
Director Inpatient Care
Children's Hospital

David Catalan
Executive Director
Nonprofit Association of the Midlands

John Christensen
Vice Chancellor
University of Nebraska at Omaha

Tony Connelly
Principal
Jesuit Middle School

Sr. Norita Cooney
Senior Vice President
Mission Services

Chuck Cooper
CEO
Special Olympics NE, Inc.

Norma Deeb
Principal
Springville Elementary School

Kate Dodge
President
National Equity, Inc.

Rex Fisher
Nebr. State President
Qwest

Glenn Fosdick
COO
Nebraska Medical Center

Renee Franklin
Executive Director
Social Settlement Assoc. of Omaha

John M. Fraser
President
Methodist Hospital

Ruth Freed
VP Patient Care Serv.
Methodist Health System

John Furstenberg
President
Omaha Home for Boys

John Gottschalk
Chairman, President & CEO
Omaha World-Herald

Marcia Harman
Vice President
Harman Appliance Sales, Inc.

Peg Harriott
Executive Director
YWCA

Howard Hawks

CEO
Tenaska

Ruth Henrichs

Executive Director
Lutheran Family Services

Diane Huffer

VP - Product
FDR

Teresa Hunter

Executive Director
Family Housing Advisory Services

Laurie Jasa

Principal
Kiewit Middle School

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Executive Director
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Marian High School

Todd Landry

CEO
Child Savings Institute

Anita Larsen

Director of Nursing
Creighton Univ. Health System

Pat Lenaghan

Nurse Consultant
Nebr. Medical Center

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Methodist Health System

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CEO
Lozier Corporation

Keith Lutz

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Millard Public Schools

John Mackiel

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Omaha Public Schools

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Camp Fire USA

Ron Parks

President
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Dave Peters

Principal
St. Stephen the Martyr School

Kathy Peterson

Principal
Fontenelle Grade School

Bonnie Pryor

Principal
St. Cecilia's Elementary

Lisa Roskens

President & CEO
Burlington Capital Group, LLC

Connie Ryan

President
Streck Laboratories

Barbara Schaefer

Senior VP - HR
Union Pacific Railroad

John Schlegel (Fr)

President
Creighton University

Wayne Sensor

CEO
Alegent Health System

Andrea Skolkin

Executive Director
OneWorld Community Health Centers, Inc.

Maryanne Stevens

President
College of Saint Mary

Karen Sweeney

Director of Nursing
Alegent Lakeside

Mary Kay Thalken

Interim VP, COO
Bergan Mercy Medical Center

Pete Tulipana

Executive Director
Heartland Family Services

Rebecca Valdez

Executive Director
Chicano Awareness Center

Pam Watanabe-Gerdes

Tender Heart Treasures, Inc.

Wally Weitz

President
Weitz & Company

Gail Werner Robertson

President & CEO
GWR Wealth Management

Mike Yanney

Chairman
Burlington Capital Group, LLC

Jim Young

President & COO
Union Pacific Railroad

Tracy Zaiss

President
Zaiss & Co.

Lyn Ziegenbein

Executive Director
Peter Kiewit Foundation



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Appendix





Leaders' Suggestions for Network Participation

In interviews, leaders from each industry sector offered suggestions for women interested in networking.

Business



- "I'd caution women about viewing networking as a gender based activity. Build a broad base of networks and use them as productively as you can."
- "Aksarben-they are very involved in the community. You need to get involved with those that might further your career."
- "I think professional organizations are excellent for building networks, for example Lion's Club or Jaycees."
- "I personally went to male-dominated networks such as the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Omaha, Goodwill and Heartland Family Services. I've served on a number of boards and just got involved. Through these organizations you make contacts, help with their fundraisers. But it takes time and you have to do your part."
- "I belong to a Christian Women's Business network. We are able to share and support each other in our different businesses. This gives me the chance to learn more about their businesses. It is a network that works because we trust one another to maintain confidentiality."
- "Don't seek to meet people to figure out how to use them to your advantage but rather to enrich each other. Decide what things you care about, get involved, and then the networking is on a genuine basis. They are better if they are not in the same industry."
- "Network nationally and network for recruitment."
- Young Presidents Organization

Education

- "Networking with business partnerships, community organizations, and parents are helpful in education leadership."
- "Be on a committee. When you branch outside your profession, you meet people that are as passionate about their professions as you are."
- "I belong to suburban schools' organization, professional organizations and community groups like Rotary, the Chamber of Commerce."
- "I try to go to the National Conference of Secondary Principals when resources (time and money) allow."
- "There are all kinds of organizations, The Women's Fund, The Omaha Network. You want to network within and outside education."
- American Council on Education
- Nebraska Women in Higher Education Leadership
- Nebraska School Board Association.
- American Association of State Colleges and Universities
- "I would suggest getting involved with the Metro Reading Council....GOARC adds a dimension of learning about special needs."
- "It is important to become involved in leadership within networks. As you get to higher levels of leadership, benefits tend to gravitate from discipline-based networks to broader based networks."
- "A person cannot have enough networks."
- "I think it is important for women to join a variety of networks as time allows. I would encourage them to be active within these organizations. They should be involved and offer input to test their leadership."
- "Joining community organizations allow us to be the voice of education on other civic boards, churches, etc."
- "Part of the commitment to a leadership role is to connect with other people in the community. If you are not interested in external networking, you should reconsider your goal."

Health Care

- "CNO Group...networking is invaluable. I couldn't do without it as it is as important as a textbook both internally and externally."
- "Leadership Omaha. This opened a lot of doors to me. Health care can be pretty narrow and Leadership Omaha showed me that other disciplines networked across disciplines."
- "In large organizations, networking is most often accomplished through working on various multidisciplinary committees. They enable you to broaden your responsibility and influence-thus increase your ability to be a change agent within the organization."
- "I think learning from other entities is good, for example Disney for customer service skills. I think it is important for women to get to know other women leaders in any area."
- "Women's networks need to be within and outside of health care. Health care can be rather paternalistic given its history. Women need to have women experts they can tap."
- American College of Health Executives
- "For women it is important to be both involved in women focused groups for support and learning from other professional women but not limited to those."

Not-For-Profit

- "Networks are critical for collaboration and joint grant-writing, advocacy and public policy work, support from other executive directors in the non-profit industry."
- "We need to make time for networks...we need to get out there-attend meetings and learn about the people in the community. We cannot do this job in a vacuum."
- "Critical in our world. I do mine through the Metropolitan Continuum of Care because it meets each month and involves all homeless providers, task forces, and government-related agencies on homelessness."
- CAFCON
- NAM
- United Way

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The Role of Research at the Women's Fund



The Women's Fund of Greater Omaha conducts research to meet several objectives:

- To provide both a quantitative and qualitative overview of issues confronting women and girls in the Omaha area;
- To contribute to decision-making by the Women's Fund board regarding funding for both board-initiated and community-initiated grants and projects;
- To guide the effort of the Women's Fund to reach out to established and grassroots women's organizations for the next phases of its work;
- To expand the Women's Fund credibility as an organization knowledgeable about the issues affecting the lives of local women based on valid, reliable and meaningful data and information about women;
- To aid and support decision-making by the leadership of our area, including corporate leaders, civic policy makers and those who are allocating limited resources by providing a "gender lens" through which to view the important day-to-day issues and critical long-term issues that our community faces, and;
- To provide the philanthropic community with current, reliable data which makes a compelling case to support additional funding for programs targeted at women and girls.



Mission & Vision

MISSION STATEMENT

The Women's Fund of Greater Omaha's mission is to improve the lives of women and girls in the Omaha area by identifying, communicating and funding issues affecting them.

VISION STATEMENT

The Women's Fund of Greater Omaha serves as a respected catalyst for positive change by:

- Identifying and researching major issues impacting the lives of women and girls in the Omaha area
- Educating the public on these issues; and
- Funding initiatives that benefit the women and girls of our community.



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