



  cover story



where are the women?

Utah scores an A+ for its growth of women-owned businesses, but the state is failing when it comes to attracting and retaining women in top-level corporate positions. What barriers exist here? And how can younger women begin to climb the corporate ladder?

By Kathryn Peterson

“There just isn’t a lot of diversity of any fashion in the upper levels of corporate Salt Lake. I think the city needs to do a better job of attracting more minorities and women.”

-Carol Fineagan



Carol Fineagan

cover story

A little over a year ago, Carol Fineagan transported her 13-year-old son and two dogs from Annapolis, Md., to the Avenues in Salt Lake City. She was starting a new life — and a new job, as senior vice president and chief information officer of EnergySolutions.

Fineagan recalls with amusement one of her first corporate events after moving here. “I attended a technical conference and, as I was the only woman in a sea of male executives, was seated at a table with female executive assistants. Someone asked, ‘Where’s your boss?’ I said, ‘I am the boss!’ Many apologies were made and I just laughed.”

Fineagan’s experience makes one wonder just how far Utah has come with respect to shattering the glass ceiling. Despite ranking No. 2 in the nation for its rapid growth of female entrepreneurs, Utah has very few women

in top managerial positions. Catalyst, a New York-based women’s group, placed Utah very last in the nation for its representation of women corporate officers and women board of directors.

While some point fingers at the glass ceiling, culture, lack of women-friendly companies, and excessive focus on entrepreneurship, one thing is certain: By not attracting or retaining more women in top-level positions, Utah companies are losing valuable players, and a valuable force to the economy.

“The natural strengths of female thinking are driving new business models at all levels of corporate life,” states a report by the Future Laboratory, a British think tank. “Intuition, creativity and the ability to collaborate are all associated with female right-brain thinking and are becoming as valued in the business world as the more traditional left-brain rational approach usually associated with men. The way businesses attract and retain women is now seen as a sign of progressiveness and innovation.”

The Glass Ceiling

So why aren’t there more women at the top? Is it the proverbial glass ceiling, a barrier thin enough to be ignored but strong enough to hold hundreds of Utah women back from climbing the corporate ladder? How is this possible, especially when women have made so many strides in equality? Especially, considering the nation could very well have its first female president in office by the end of the year?

Fineagan, who previously worked as director of IT for an accounting firm in Baltimore, doesn’t think the glass ceiling exists. Hard work, personal responsibility and confidence are the ingredients to shattering any barriers, she says. “Don’t think in terms of limits; think in terms of desire. Women can go anywhere and be anything,” she says. “However, it does strike me when I walk into a meeting and there aren’t many women in the room. There just isn’t a lot of diversity of any fashion in the upper levels of corporate Utah. I think the state needs to do a better job of attracting more minorities and women.”

Some, however, say the glass ceiling is alive and well in Utah. “The climate for women entrepreneurs is warm, however we still soundly thump our heads on the glass ceiling in the political arena and in being appointed to publicly held corporate boards and appointments to governmental boards and commissions,” says Mary Mark, president of the National Association of Women Business Owners’ Salt Lake chapter.

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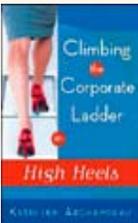
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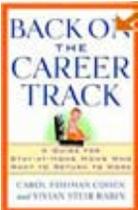
A Few Good Reads



“Off-Ramps and On-Ramps: Keeping Talented Women on the Road to Success,” by Sylvia Ann Hewlett (HBSP, 2007). In order for companies to retain talented women professionals, Hewlett says they must provide flexible work arrangements and reduce the stigma associated with them.



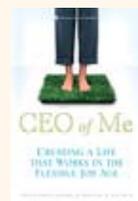
“Climbing the Corporate Ladder in High Heels,” by Kathleen Archambeau (Career Press, 2006). A practical guide to dealing with work-life balance.



“Back on the Career Track,” by Carol Fishman Cohen, Vivian Steir Rabin (Business Plus, 2007). A resource for women who have been out of the work force and are considering re-entry.



“Basic Black: The Essential Guide for Getting Ahead at Work (and in Life),” by Cathie Black (Crown Business, 2007). Media mogul Cathie Black, president of Hearst Magazines, offers insight and advice to businesswomen.



“CEO of Me: Creating a Life that Works in the Flexible Job Age,” by Ellen Kossek, Brenda Lautsch (Wharton School Publishing, 2007). Drs. Kossek and Lautsch help readers identify which of six work-life “patterns” they fit into and how to move toward a pattern that’s more productive and comfortable for them.

Crossing Cultural Chasms

In a study titled “Location, Location, Location,” the Center for Women’s Business Research in Washington, D.C., suggests several reasons why fewer women aren’t found at the helm of Utah corporations. The report found that women in Utah are increasingly deciding to take success into their own hands by starting and growing their own businesses. Additionally, the study found that Utah has fewer corporate managerial or professional jobs (the state only has one Fortune 500 company), and thus women may be less motivated to pursue MBA or other graduate programs.

Nancy Mitchell, a business consultant and former executive director of the Women’s Business Center, says there is a direct correlation between educational attainment and corporate promotions. While Utah women ages 18 to 24 attended college at above average rates in both 1990 and 2000, Utah women ages 25 to 34 earned a college degree at a rate below the national average in 2000, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Many women drop out of college to put their husbands through school or support a family. These women have fewer opportunities to excel in their careers and attain C-level positions,” Mitchell says.

Caryn Beck-Dudley, the first female dean of the College of Business at Utah State University, stepped down from her post in 2006 to become dean of Florida State University’s College of Business. “When I was at USU, I saw a lot of female students dropping out and not finishing their degrees. Most of the time it was because they had gotten married and had to put a spouse through school or raise a family. I’m not sure if that’s a cultural thing, but it clearly impacted their earning and promotional potential.”

Perhaps most dangerous to a woman’s advancement are the preconceived notions of women’s roles that supervisors and peers may hold. Women are more often than not seen as “softer,” “gentler,” and invariably, the weaker of the sexes.

“If a woman says what’s on her mind, most people think that’s bad or feel threatened. If a male counterpart says the same thing, they think that he’s just expressing himself. I think things are changing in Utah, but the stereotype still exists across the board,” Beck-Dudley says.

Catalyst recently released the report “Damned if You Do, Doomed if You Don’t,” which surveyed 1,231 senior executives from the United States and Europe. According to the study, women who focus “on work relationships” and expressing “concern for other people’s perspectives” are considered less competent. But if they act in ways that are seen as more “male” — like “act assertively, focus on work tasks, display ambition” — they are seen as “too tough” and “unfeminine.”

“I saw those stereotypes play out a lot in Utah in the ‘80s and ‘90s, but things are starting to change,” Beck-Dudley say.

Women-friendly Companies

The juggling act of “family life” and “work life” is a concern for both men and women in all walks of life, but the difference in Utah is that there is a lot more “family life” to take care of. Utah has 3.13 kids per household, compared with the national average of 2.3, according to the Census Bureau.

“One-third of Utah’s population is under age 18,” Mitchell says. “Someone has to look after all of those children and it’s usually the women. They have to leave work at 5 p.m., or before the daycare center closes and transport kids to events. They never find time to network or get ahead.”

Charley O’Reilly, professor of organizational behavior at Stanford Graduate School of Business, has focused much of his research on women’s career attainment and the problem of why women are still underrepresented in the top ranks of American corporations.

“If you’re looking at two equally capable people and one works 45 hours and the other works 60, who will you promote? The 60-hour worker who’s most likely male, because he’s typically not the one picking the kids up from school or taking them to appointments. The high ranks of corporate culture don’t permit family life,” O’Reilly says. And that means women opt-out of climbing the ranks, or opt-out of the labor force altogether.

“There’s a growing awareness among senior executives that there’s more to life than working, and few companies are incorporating that mentality into their workplace,” O’Reilly says. Cutting back on extreme workloads, providing the option to work from home, and offering on-site daycare and other perks are just a few ways companies can hope to attract female talent and married families.

If women are getting the job done, then most employers are willing to provide options, or scale back hours. The bigger challenge, says Sanch Datta, chief technology officer at FatPipe Networks Inc., is getting women to speak up about these issues.



Nancy Mitchell

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Woman to Woman

What traits or skills are most essential in making it to the top?

“Women need to learn how to negotiate better. Ask for a good starting wage – that sets your whole career salary.”

**Nancy Mitchell – Former Executive Director,
Women’s Business Center**

“Work hard and take personal responsibility for things.”

Carol Fineagan – Senior Vice President & CIO, EnergySolutions

“Women need to help each other. They need to do more sharing and networking.”

Teri Sundh – CEO, Podfitness

“Be able to articulate your views without being abrasive. This helps persuade and direct decisions.”

Sanch Datta – CTO, FatPipe Networks Inc.

“Always be factual and intelligent in your dealings. And make sure your value proposition is clearly understood.”

Kim Jones – CEO, Vérité

“When you choose to have kids, making a 7:30 a.m. meeting is not something I can always do,” Datta says. “Half of the time I don’t make it, because I made the choice to drop the kids off at school. But if more women speak up, there’s a louder voice to make a change.”

Fineagan has set up her entire IT department at EnergySolutions so that they can work from home. “When you allow employees to accommodate their personal lives, there is a lot more energy and commitment to do the job,” she says.

As a single mom, Fineagan says she’s able to find balance by not distinguishing between work life and family life. “They aren’t boxes. I value relationships at work and at home equally. I don’t bump my child for a work event, and vice versa. As soon as you start limiting yourself, you’re boxing yourself in.”

Choosing to Opt Out

The “opt-out” theory, which suggests there’s an exodus of women leaving the workforce to ensue a more balanced life, is just one of the many theories that explains why there aren’t many women at the helm of Utah companies. In 2006, a report titled “Trends in the Labor Force Participation of Married Mothers of Infants,” by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, found that sometime well before the 2000 recession, wives with infants and toddlers began leaving the work force. And they stayed out even after the economy began to revive.

After 18 years in senior level management, Kathryn Adair left the corporate world in California in search of a healthier work-life balance. The mother of four, ages 15 to 24, now lives in Park City with her husband and works as a consultant.

“It took me five years to decide to leave my executive position. It’s a difficult thing to think about. The last thing a woman wants to do is make the decision more difficult for younger women who want to climb the ladder,” Adair says. “But when you get to a certain point, you begin to ask yourself, ‘What am I competing for? Do I want to compete for the next rung on the ladder or compete for something else?’ For me, it wasn’t about being an executive; it was about leaving the corporate lifestyle. I’m convinced that had I stayed in California or gone east, I would still be in a top executive position. People who want to enjoy their lifestyle and focus on multiple things can do it well in Utah.”

What I gave up was the title, but once I did, I never looked back. The tradeoff was worth it. Now I work just as hard but enjoy a very rich, interesting life and set my own schedule.●



Teri Sundh



Sanch Datta



Kim Jones