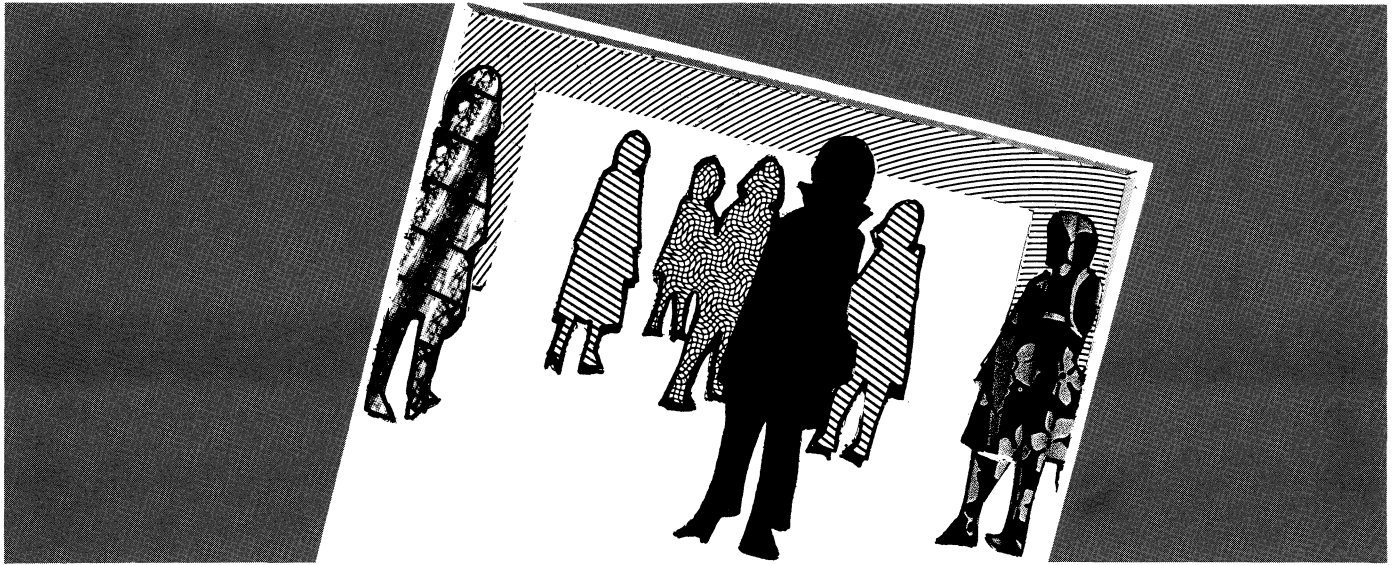


# Using Career Planning to Buffer Sex Discrimination

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Cet article suggère que l'attention portée à la planification des carrières des femmes peut compenser la discrimination sexuelle.

\* get recommendations from them about future action to improve the progression of women in business.

Up to now women who have successfully made it into the managerial ranks of Canadian business have done so despite cultural barriers and organizational bias. They have, to a large extent, progressed in the business world without the support of laws, equal opportunity programs, or the example of other female managers.

In the process, though, these women, now in middle and senior management positions in Canadian companies, have learned a great deal. They understand the power and politics that go to make up corporations. Exposed as they have been to many of the unique problems related to being female in traditionally all-male territory, they know the realities of female management life.

## *Why the Study?*

A study was recently done among a hundred women managers, all of whom have management status and responsibility in Canadian companies. The sample included women of all ages, at various levels, in a variety of management jobs. They are employed by a cross-section of manufacturing, wholesaling, and retailing corporations of all sizes, in consumer, industrial, and service sectors, geographically spread throughout Canada.

The object of the exercise was to get a clearer picture of the corporate climates in which these women have worked and succeeded, so that Canadian women eager to move into higher corporate positions can benefit from their experiences and groom themselves for the future. More specifically, the project was designed to:

- \* get a realistic picture of their views on sex discrimination, based on their personal experiences in the workplace.
- \* find out what factors they consider are at present inhibiting the upward mobility of women in business.

The report that follows is based on this study.

## *Is there Sex Discrimination in the Canadian Workplace?*

Not surprisingly, Canadian women managers confirm that sex discrimination in the workplace is very much a reality. Their replies to four questions put to them about it are shown in Exhibit 1.

EXHIBIT 1			
RESPONSES ON DISCRIMINATION	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE
There is discrimination against women in business	29	57	12
Women are often bypassed for promotion	16	67	17
Women are paid the same salary as men doing the same job	3	22	74
Women who get to the top take longer to get there than a man would	24	61	14

It demonstrates a trend in the opinion of women who have succeeded in Canadian management—that they believe that:

- \* 'there is discrimination against women in business'—a fact that women must accept and learn to cope with.
- \* 'women are often bypassed for promotion'—this is despite their ability which the women interviewed feel is the 'least important factor in the progress of females in corporations'.
- \* 'women are not being paid the same salaries as men doing the same job'—61% of the respondents said, however, that they are earning salaries equal to their male peers. This could imply that the wage gap narrows as women get into the higher corporate levels.
- \* 'women who get to the top take longer to get there than a man would'—a problem women in the survey attributed mostly to discrimination against women, leading to a lack of opportunity and recognition.

*Have Canadian Women Managers Personally Experienced Discrimination?*

Of the 100 women interviewed, 68 said that at some point in their careers they had personally experienced discrimination at work. They described the nature of the discrimination in numerous ways—mainly falling into the four categories listed and described below:

*‘Opportunity’*—mentioned by 50%

A lack of recognition and opportunity to grow and advance was emphasized as a common discriminatory factor they had experienced, often dampening their enthusiasm and impeding their progress in companies.

Some respondents complained of being turned down by management for a job or promotion on the basis of ‘being a woman’, ‘being married’, and ‘having children’.

*‘Physical treatment’*—mentioned by 40%

Examples cited of discriminatory physical treatment centred mainly on some of these women’s being excluded by their male peers and by top management from certain activities. As examples, sales meetings, luncheons, club outings, and conferences were given.

The other example given was having to do traditionally ‘feminine’ jobs like making coffee, pouring tea, and taking notes.

*‘Pay’*—mentioned by 40%

Pay differences between men and women for the same job were mentioned by 40% of the respondents, although they implied that there is an improvement in the situation, particularly at the higher management levels.

*‘Attitudes’*—mentioned by 38%

Emphasis here was given to management’s attitude that the capabilities of their female staff are limited—that they are suited only to certain types of jobs and do not want permanent careers. These firmly held beliefs were said to have resulted in women’s being channelled into less challenging and rewarding positions in corporations.

*Can Sex Discrimination Hold Good Women Down in Corporations?*

Sex discrimination is seen by the respondents as being a significant factor blocking female access to senior positions in companies—70% agreed that it prevents women from getting top level jobs.

Equally significant, though, was that about 50% of the women in the survey believe that ‘women who want to develop their potential have opportunity to do so’ and 70% believe that ‘women who want to get to the top in business usually do’. The general feeling, though, is that this requires extra effort over and above what is expected of the person and over and above what her males peers do.

*Three Ways to Buffer Sex Discrimination in Business*

1. A Change in Male and Female Attitudes

Undoubtedly, if women are to be given equal employment opportunities, traditional attitude-based barriers to their progress will have to disappear. Giving women access to senior positions in Canadian companies will firstly need a change in male attitudes. This is not only a difficult task but it needs a great deal of time and carefully constructed organizational programs within companies.

However, even with supportive programs, women will have to change their attitudes. This point was made clear by the women taking part in the survey, many of whom said that women themselves were legitimate obstacles to their progression in companies. They posed the following as the main areas of the problem needing attention by women if they are to get into, and succeed at management:

- \* the refusal by women to take on responsibility
- \* a lack of conviction on their part about their capabilities
- \* a lack of goal direction by females
- \* the low self-esteem and constant fear of failure women have about themselves.

2. Effective Legislation

Legislation designed to protect women in the areas of hiring, promotion, and conditions of work is another way to attack discrimination. It provides the formal structure within which corporations are forced to work and sets the ground rules for equal employment opportunity.

A legal remedy, though, cannot solve the problem of sex discrimination in business. Firstly, protective legislation is new in Canada and varies from province to province. Then there is the fact that it is based on a system where action is taken only after an affected person sets a complaint in action—a situation which rarely takes place. Then there is the chance that if legislation leads to a ‘quota-type’ system being set up by a company, reverse discrimination can result—of no real benefit to anyone.

For women, protective legislation is not the real answer and women cannot rely on it to ensure their future progress in companies. Although pay discrimination can be avoided to some extent, and although theoretically some provinces prevent companies from refusing to employ a woman on the basis of sex, laws cannot combat the subtler forms of discrimination. Neither can they ensure that once in a job a woman is given the same opportunity for advancement as her male peer.

The response of the hundred women in the survey to two questions put to them, shown below, reinforces this point. By their replies they indicate their uncertainty whether legislation will either attract more competent women into the workforce or move efficient women into more senior job levels.

Question	Responses*		
	Definitely Yes	Perhaps	No,
Do you think laws preventing discrimination against women in business will encourage more highly skilled women to work?	24	53	23
Do you think laws preventing discrimination against women in business will get more highly skilled women in top level jobs?	30	49	19

3. Career Planning and Development

Exhibit 2 illustrates the feelings expressed by the women in the study regarding career planning and management development for women in business. It highlights their view that career planning would not only improve the attitude of women to their jobs but would also improve their chances of getting into management positions in corporations—acting as an effective buffer against sex discrimination. Another interesting

point is that 57% of the respondents claim that women generally regard their employment as jobs rather than careers.

Companies developing climates for change by introducing career-planning and management-development programs would achieve two vital things. Firstly, they would to some extent offset the problem of sex discrimination in their companies by incorporating manpower policies for women into their company creeds, thereby forcing male attitudes to change. Secondly, they would provide formal procedures for female manpower development—the vehicle needed by firms to identify their female talent, train women with managerial potential, and promote these women on the basis of their performance.

EXHIBIT 2  
RESPONSES ON CAREER PLANNING  
AND MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE
Women think of employment as a job rather than a long-term career	9	48	39
With improved career planning for women in business they would get into top positions far quicker than now	10	67	19
With improved career planning for women in business, they would do far better and reach more senior positions	18	65	14
If women were given management training they would be more motivated and willing to take on responsibilities	13	55	28
If women were given management training they would be more committed to the company	9	48	40
If women were given management training they would perform better	18	60	20

Achieving career planning and development for women in business needs more, though, than just the formal mechanism created by corporations. It needs a new attitude of mind on the part of women themselves. Women need to become more career-oriented. They need to reassess their career goals and systematically develop career paths for themselves. Only with their conscious effort and their commitment to serious and long-term careers can women increase their chances of moving up into corporate management and succeeding at it.

### The Future

More and more Canadian women are beginning to think seriously about the possibilities for advancement in business. Management is becoming more conscious of affirmative action, and this, coupled with pressure from government and the growing strength of the women's movement, should help get rid of a great deal of sex discrimination in corporations.

It is important, though, for Canadian women to recognize that it will take a great deal of time to eliminate sex discrimination in the workplace and that legislation can only do so much to eradicate the problem. More, it is important for them to realize that they can reduce the effects of discrimination to a minimum and cope with it by setting career goals for themselves and by using specific strategies to achieve these goals. The challenge is theirs. . . .

\*Note: Figures do not always add up to 100, owing to questions unanswered.

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