

WOMEN RECEIVE LESS COACHING

By Michael Laff

More women are emerging in visible leadership roles in politics and business, but the public gains often overshadow the slow rate of leadership training they receive in the workforce.

According to a recent survey, women continue to lag behind men in the amount of coaching they receive—a crucial element needed to advance on the leadership track.

Novations Group, a Boston-based training and consulting organization, surveyed more than 3,000 United States human resources professionals about the level of coaching their organization makes available to women. While an overwhelming majority of respondents (74.5 percent) said that women receive the same level of coaching as men, nearly one-fifth (19.9 percent) reported that women do not receive the same amount of coaching as their male counterparts.

Deborah Felton, director of consulting at Novations, says that the leadership selection process is not intentionally biased against women. She says that women need to be more assertive in seeking the necessary support from within an organization.

“A lot of women that I coach try to figure out everything on their own,” she says. “They don’t want to be seen as a poor choice for the position or as someone who is not meeting expectations.”

Felton points to the socialization of women as one reason why they may not be on the fast track to leadership positions. The traditional or, as some might say, stereotypical traits of a leader are assertive behavior, competitiveness, and a willingness to take risks. Women need to be coached to understand that it is perfectly acceptable and often ex-

Survey finds that less coaching leads to less leadership advancement.

pected to ask questions when navigating the leadership pipeline.

“Women exhibit different behaviors that can get in the way of being

successful,” Felton said. “Some need help in building confidence, developing a visible track record, and taking risks.”

While the gap between coaching provided to men and women appears to be narrowing, the number of women who are ascending to senior leadership posts remains small.

Novations uses the Four Stages of Contribution, developed by Gene Dalton and Paul Thompson, to examine leadership in an organization. The first two stages call for learning by asking questions and then working independently. The transition from stage two to stage three is the most difficult because it requires a psychological shift along with a change in the way employees do their work. Instead of working independently, stage three employees work through others (coaching, delegating, managing)—thus multiplying their contribution to the organization.

By the third stage, employees begin to contribute through others and build a network. During the fourth and final stage, leaders contribute to the overall strategic direction of an organization. According to Novations, it requires coaching to make a successful transition to stages three and four.

The last two stages are considered senior leadership positions, and Novations’ research indicates that women are still disproportionately represented in those categories. Only 13 percent of women reached stage three, while only 7 percent reached stage four.

Michael Laff is an associate editor for T+D, mlaff@astd.org.

The BIG Number

19.9%

of organizations report that women receive less coaching than men.

>> The Path to Leadership

STAGE 1: employees who need direction

STAGE 2: employees who contribute independently

Stage 3: employees who contribute through others (leadership position)

STAGE 4: employees who contribute strategically (senior leadership position)

Source: Novations Group





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