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ABSTRACT

Women's relatively poor representation in the top and middle levels of business necessitates renewed attention and action. Labor market demands are changing, and two major forces prevail: more women are looking for new fields of employment, and more businesses are seeking "qualified and promotable" women. Cooperative education programs are needed to channel women's interests into these new areas. Attention should also be paid to women already on the payrolls of business firms and "mature women returnees" to the work force through the development of continuing education programs. Women's organizations must also serve an important supportive role to help more women prepare for and share in the expanding opportunities of business and industry. (MW)

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COUNSELING WOMEN FOR CAREERS IN BUSINESS

How can business attract additional "qualified and promotable" women into its ranks? Where can one discover women trained in business, marketing, accounting, or finance? Who are the women with potential for assuming major responsibilities and competing in the business world? These are some of the questions directed at the Women's Bureau as it urges adoption of equal employment opportunity and affirmative action programs.

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"Difficulty of finding qualified women" was the phrase repeated many times by business and industry representatives at several Women's Bureau-sponsored consultations held to discuss laws and concerns relating to women's employment. On questionnaires distributed at the end of the consultations, almost one-fourth of the respondents gave this answer as a major deterrent to improving women's status in their firms.

The significance of this response is underlined by the statistics charting women's progress in business administration. The number of women classified as managers and administrators (nonfarm) by the Bureau of the Census rose from 844,500 to 1,034,300 between 1960 and 1970. This 22 percent increase was far below the 37 percent recorded for all women workers during the 19 year period. It coincided with the very modest gain from 14.8 to 16.6 percent in the proportion of women among all those in managerial work.

Women's relatively poor representation in the top and middle levels of business necessitates renewed attention and action for several reasons. The first relates to changes in labor market demand - - both current and anticipated. Women graduating from college can no longer depend on the teaching field to provide jobs for about three-fifths of their class.

Larger numbers of college women among both new graduates and labor market returnees are starting to look elsewhere for employment. The business field, with its challenge of numerous job openings, variety of assignments, and potential for advancement, presents an obvious area for serious consideration.

Another reason for examining the current status of women in business is the rising interest of businessmen in attracting more women into their field, as noted earlier. Intensifying this interest are employer efforts to implement the legislation and executive order requiring equal employment opportunity.

One indicator of employer concern is the latest annual survey of business corporations by Frank S. Endicott of Northwestern University. Those planning to hire college women expected to increase their number from the class of 1973 by 35 percent over new hires from the class of 1972. In the previous year, only a 15 percent jump had been anticipated.

An upsurge in requests for names of women graduates from schools of business administration led in 1972 to their sponsorship, through the Graduate Business Admissions Council, of a small conference focusing on graduate management education for women. The thrust of the discussions was identification of major problems and deterrents to women's entry into business education and ways to surmount them.

Thus, at a time when overall job opportunities are expanding, two major forces prevail. More women are looking for new fields of employment. And more business officials are seeking to hire "qualified and promotable" women. What then needs doing to unite these forces for constructive action?

One obvious answer is the need to inform young women and girls about the situation. It is generally acknowledged that few women have been encouraged to prepare for business careers, probably because of traditional views about "women's place." Repeated emphasis on women's interests in and qualifications for the "nurturing and helping activities" has propelled the large majority of

college-educated women into the teaching, nursing, social work, and library professions.

This channeling of women's interests and energies is now being seen as a result of a socialization process rather than as a natural division of labor. It seems probable that the range of women's talents and interests can be as wide as men's if they have full access to unbiased job information and freedom of occupational choice.

Many colleges and universities are now undertaking to provide their women students with information about the full range of occupational possibilities and positive counseling about areas of employment outside the traditional fields. Some are also seeking to enrich women's understanding of their options by exposing them to supervised work-study experiences and/or enabling them to participate in cooperative education programs.

A pioneer effort to promote industry-college relations was launched at a "Women in Industry" conference held December 1970 on the campus of Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia. The long-range objective was to help develop interest in and better understanding of business functions on the part of women students and to encourage business to utilize more fully the women's liberal arts college as a source of executive talent.

Following the conference, Mary Baldwin College set up a program of bringing businessmen and businesswomen to campus for formal and informal talks about the business world. In addition, the college arranged for optional participation in business by its students. A January orientation program enables them to be assigned to individual business people as observers or workers. A May intern program provides course credit as well as paychecks to juniors who carry out an approved and supervised project in business.

At another women's school, Cedar Crest College in Allentown, Pennsylvania, an Internship Program permits juniors and seniors to combine academic study in the liberal arts with meaningful work experience in a field of special interest. Cooperating in the program are a local retailer, museum, several health organizations, and departments of the city government. In the retailing internship, students receive an introduction to buying, selling, advertising, accounting, and public relations work. The women students are getting a feel for business in action at the same time that employers can appreciate first-hand their potentialities as future employees.

A management seminar at Simmons College in Boston uses a variation of the case-study technique to introduce their women students to business. At four seminars spread over a semester, a visiting official describes one real-life problem of his company. Following in-depth study and discussion by the students, each businessman returns to the campus to hear and react to the solution developed by the students. It is felt that the interchange stimulates much greater interest and mutual appreciation than does the case-book method without live contacts.

A nation-wide plan for integrating classroom study and practical work experience in business, industry, government, or community services has been developed under the cooperative education program of the Office of Education in the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The part of the

program aimed at those below the baccalaureate level covers almost one-half million students in high schools and community colleges. Business activities attracting the largest number of women and girls, who comprise about half of these cooperative education student-trainees, are distributive education and office occupations.

As the procedures and benefits of cooperative education can be helpful also to students of four-year colleges and universities, Congress in 1968 authorized grants for these institutions to help them establish programs of alternate full-time academic study and full-time private or public employment. Participating college students can receive good orientation to the world of work and opportunities to test their aptitudes and interests in selected employment fields.

Employers too can derive benefits from participating in a cooperative education program. They can gauge the potentialities of their student-trainees and have ready access to a source of trained personnel. Employers also have the advantage of being able to make curriculum suggestions relating to their field and thus share in developing realistic training for entry into the business world.

The cooperative education approach appears especially felicitous for educating young women about business, since it is often felt that outreach programs are needed to counteract the lingering impression that business does not welcome women to skilled and management positions. Personnel officials are in a good position to encourage their business colleagues to develop such arrangements with schools. Those interested in learning more about the cooperative education program and the names of participating colleges and universities may obtain assistance from the National Commission for Cooperative Education (52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, New York 10017).

Graduate schools of business administration are also seeking to enroll more women students. Several have hired specialists for women's recruitment and some have obtained scholarship funds for women.

There is growing realization on the part of many – schools, businesses, and women themselves – that more women should be encouraged to take formal courses in budgeting, purchasing, and marketing as well as business administration. Training in these business functions can be expected to "pay off," not only by stimulating women's interest in business but also by developing their latent talents and thus qualifying them for top administrative positions.

Encouraging women to take business training is realistic in view of the favorable employment forecasts of the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics for many fields strategically important to business. Especially strong demand is anticipated for college trained accountants, needed to record the complexities of business expansion and prepare a variety of financial reports for stockholders and others. Whereas 491,000 professional accountants (of whom one-fifth were women) were employed in 1970, about 31,200 job openings are expected annually in the seventies.

As companies strengthen the formation of their public image, their need for public relations workers who in 1970 totaled 75,000 (with women 1 out of 4), may increase about 4,400 each year. Similarly, market research workers will find job opportunities excellent for collecting and presenting information used by companies in appraising marketing situations and setting policies. With about

23,000 of these workers employed in 1970, about 2,600 annual openings are estimated to 1980.

Rapidly expanding use of electronic data processing systems has made programmers and systems analysts two of the fastest growing occupations in recent years. This situation is expected to continue in the seventies, as more companies install computers and others put them to new uses. In 1970 there were about 200,000 programers (with women 1 out of 4) and 100,000 systems analysts (with women 1 out of 7). Future annual hires are estimated to average 34,700 respectively.

Although the 1,100,000 engineers currently employed include only about 20,000 women, the long-run outlook for this field warrants its more serious consideration by women. About 58,000 openings a year are anticipated. The chances for women to fill a rising percentage of these positions are improving with the decline of male enrollments in engineering schools and the intensified search of employers for women engineers.

Statisticians and mathematicians also have favorable job outlook during the seventies. Their skills will be needed to help in the analysis of business conditions, research and development work, and the solution of a variety of management problems.

Since numerous private companies also express interest in locating women scientists, it is pertinent to note that job prospects are good in virtually all scientific fields. The outlook is particularly favorable for chemists, food scientists, and physicists. However, as with other scientists, those with advanced degrees will find the best opportunities.

For many other occupations important to business, demand will be good but not quite as strong as for the above fields. They include personnel workers as well as economists, hotel managers and assistants, insurance agents and brokers, purchasing agents, salespersons in both wholesale and retail trade, scientific and engineering technicians, and underwriters.

How young women react to the existance of these job opportunities and also to the business orientation programs being developed will continue to be affected by the image business reflects. The welcome accorded women, especially the recent graduates, will be reported over the campus grapevine. The kinds of assignments women receive, their salaries as compared with those of their male counterparts, and the extent of their participation in training programs and company meetings – all will be watched by potential applicants.

The second major source of qualified and promotable women are the women already on the payrolls of business firms. This group, or more precisely the number of women workers in the "private sector" of the economy, now approximates 25 million.

They include almost 2.7 million women in professional and technical positions and about 900,000 women managers and administrators (nonfarm). In addition there are more than 2 million women clerical workers who have education beyond high school. All these women, as well as those at lower skill levels, warrant more consideration as candidates for advancement.

The time has come to have as much faith in the promotional potential of women as has traditionally been placed in men. The relatively few women

benefiting from such confidence in the past have usually been the exceptional women with outstanding talent, initiative, energy, and/or drive. Seldom have others been able to develop their abilities by participating in staff meetings and in-service training, receiving mind-stretching assignments, and attending industry conferences.

Another potential source of women employees not to be overlooked in any recruitment program are the "mature women returnees" to the work force. Mention of their maturity describes their accumulation of life experience and potential for productive contributions to any organization more than to their age, since a few are still in their twenties. Although the size of the returnee group has not been measured lately, an indication can be gleaned from the steady growth in the work force of women 35 years of age and over – from 15 to 17.9 million between 1962 and 1972. At the same time, the laborforce participation rate jumped from 36.3 to 47.6 percent for women 25 to 34 years of age, from 44.1 to 52.0 percent for those 35 to 44 years, and from 50.0 to 53.9 percent for those 45 to 54 years.

Recognizing the requests of mature women as well as their assets as students, many colleges and universities across the country have instituted special programs of continuing education for them. Included in a variety of offerings are some short courses aimed at helping women enter or advance in executive, managerial, and/or supervisory positions. Illustrative of these are programs offered by Cornell University (Albany, New York office), Pennsylvania State University (University Park), Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.), University of Nebraska (Lincoln), Southern Methodist University (Dallas), and the University of California at Los Angeles.

It is evident that women's participation and advancement in the business world can be increased if we abandon the notion that women have potential only in proven areas of activity. Women who have already made their mark in the business world can help in spreading this observation to colleagues. There is no doubt that cooperation among women is essential. What a cruel indictment one woman made of another by declaring, "She's made it and now she's pulling up the ladder."

Various women's groups and business and professional organizations are working ardently to help raise women's status in the business world. Many disseminate information about women's rights and encourage women to work toward their attainment. A few maintain talent banks with names and employment records of potential hires. Some sponsor seminars and conferences to train women for managerial and administrative work. Others raise funds to provide scholarships or aid for women desiring further training but in need of financial assistance.

Further pooling of efforts by various women's organizations might bring advances more quickly and easily. The strength of the common goal should overcome differences of technique or speed. That goal is to help more women prepare for and share in the expanding opportunities of business and industry.

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