

# Women and the Workplace

A SPECIAL REPORT

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## ‘It used to be about fixing the women’

**Rebecca Knight reports on how best practice has switched to trying to ‘fix the environment’**

As more women entered the workforce in the 1970s and 80s, employers introduced practices such as flexible working, job sharing, and on-site childcare, or crèches. The goal was to help women manage the competing pressures of work and home life, but they became a double-edged sword. Women who took advantage of these benefits often found themselves labeled as being on the “mommy track” – a professional path, but one that provides fewer opportunities for advancement.

“None of that stuff worked,” says Claire Gruppo, chief executive of Gruppo, Levey & Co, a New York-based boutique investment bank. “The message to women was – you can be successful, but not in the top job.”

Whether that message has changed is debatable. But in the aftermath of a financial crisis that shone a spotlight on poor governance and the dearth of senior women at big corporations, companies are trying to do better.

According to a survey last month by McKinsey, the consultants, more than 90 per cent of companies have programmes in place that tackle gender diversity. In addition, gender diversity was among the top 10 strategic priorities for more than half the companies surveyed – double the number in 2010, according to McKinsey.

Some companies have already made progress with programmes that target a specific problem, be it attrition in upper-level management, low employee morale, or a lopsided talent review process.

The programmes vary but most involve a combination of mentoring and sponsorship, where a well-placed person in an organisation supports a junior employee by developing them and recommending them for promotions.

“The companies that do the best are the ones that recognise they have gender gaps and don’t just give the stereotypical response of ‘Let’s put in day care for working mothers,’” says Ilene Lang, president and chief executive of Catalyst, the research group that pushes for women’s advancement in the workplace.

“They not only put in place programmes, but they have goals and metrics, and a return on investment analysis to see whether the programmes are working and whether or not they’re providing benefits,” she adds.

“There are a lot of different approaches but, overall, what these companies are trying to do is satisfy their customers through a satisfied and engaged workforce.”

For employers looking to rectify a gender imbalance in senior management, Lucy Marcus, professor of leadership and governance at IE Business School in Madrid, says: “Companies need to ask themselves: do we have the kind of environment that gives women what they need to be successful?”

Of course women need many of the same things as men to achieve: new and stimulating challenges, a collegial and professional atmosphere, for example. But the disproportionate numbers of men at the top suggests companies need to pay special attention to developing women leaders, according to Prof Marcus, who is also chief executive of Marcus Venture Consulting, and a non-executive chair of the Mobius Life Sciences Fund.

Women ought to have ample opportunities to improve basic skills, such as public speaking, writing, negotiation, and networking. They need peer mentors and role models; and they need opportunities for international exposure, she argues.

“We know that to become a chief executive today you need to have done a tour abroad. I spoke to one [male] chief executive who said ‘we don’t like to ask women [to move overseas] because we don’t want to ask them to uproot their families,’” says Prof Marcus. “But that should be her personal choice.”

She says that while companies “can throw money at the problem...the dirty secret is that this doesn’t have to cost a lot of money. It comes down to the attitude of the company and the way it integrates women into senior management.”

American Express, the credit card company, provides an example. In 2009, its senior management noticed that women vice-presidents – about two notches below chief officer levels – were leaving in droves. After conducting surveys and running focus groups, the company found that “women, as they moved up through the organisation, didn’t feel they had



Lucy Marcus: ‘The dirty secret is that it doesn’t have to cost a lot’

Jim Winslet

as broad a network or sense of community”, according to Jennifer Christie, chief diversity officer and vice president of executive recruitment.

Women reported behaviour in the upper echelons of management as “male-dominated” and, as a result, they felt disadvantaged in the promotion process. “They felt that to get to the next level was not so much about raising your hand and volunteering, it was more about getting tapped for certain roles, and they didn’t have advocates putting them forward,” says Ms Christie.

In response, the company introduced programmes to connect talented women with powerful office advocates. It ran seminars to help women develop a more confident boardroom presence and build stronger networks within the company.

enches] more in meetings. People are talking about it more in an overt way,” says Ms Christie.

Ernst & Young, the accountancy firm, offers another example. It recently launched a programme to deal with the problem of “slate sitters” – qualified employees, often women or from ethnic minorities, regularly shortlisted for plum assignments or big promotions, but who are never selected.

“She’s on the slate for the first job, and the second job. She’s on the slate time and time again and the reason she’s not getting picked is because she doesn’t have access to the influential networks and decision-makers,” says Karyn Twaronite, Ernst & Young’s Americas inclusiveness officer.

The firm’s programme gives 30 high-potential female workers a mentor who is a member of the executive board and an executive coach “to give them access to influencers, and accelerate their career paths”, says Ms Twaronite. The programme, which lasts three years, also includes seminars and workshops for participants.

Today, 18 per cent of the partners or principals in the company’s Americas division are female, and women hold 21 per cent of leadership roles. In 2004, women held 15 per cent of leadership roles, and only 6 per cent in 1999.

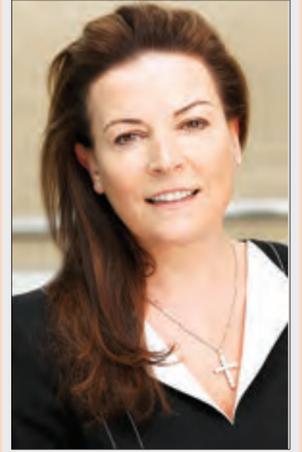
“So many programmes, even five or 10 years ago, were about fixing the women. Now, the focus is on fixing the environment – making sure that assignments are fair and equitable, and making sure the workplace is inclusive and open,” says Ms Twaronite.

IBM, one of the few Fortune 500 companies with a woman chief executive – Virginia Rometty – has several programmes to advance women, including one that focuses on the company’s high-potential female engineers.

The programme began in 2010 with 50 women; 100 more were chosen last year. Participants generally have between eight and 10 years experience, but are not yet top executives.

As with the Ernst & Young programme, participants are given a coach – an IBM engineer, and an executive sponsor to help map out their career development. The programme also includes workshops and networking opportunities. “The immediate benefit is that we are creating a community,” says Sarah Diamond, general manager of IBM Consulting Services.

**Profile** Emer Timmons



**Emer Timmons is president of BT Global Services UK. Dina Medland asked her: How has being a woman made a difference to your career?**

Being a woman has made a difference to my career and I noticed very early on that I was different when surrounded by my male colleagues. But I had to stand out to be noticed as being good as well. I had to be very confident, and I knew that I needed to recognise my strengths but also those areas I needed to develop. A lot of people don’t do that and it is very important – to leverage and capitalise on your strengths.

If you want to make a difference you have to take a negative – being in a minority – and turn it into a positive. As women we need to create a network that men already have.

It’s very important to be confident. I am naturally very competitive, but I had to make sure that if I had to deliver a number it was the biggest number, and I was the fastest to deliver it. If you constantly deliver, then people begin to listen – you shout out in the room and make yourself known.

Women need to challenge themselves. Every time I moved up in my career I asked how I was going to add value and be different.

There are a lot more opportunities now for women than when I started out. I am very fortunate also that I work in the technology business, which has been very good for women, for communication and for social cohesion.

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# Boardroom numbers are only part of the picture

## Measuring progress

**Rebecca Knight goes in search of alternative ways of assessing levels of diversity – and finds statistics already exist**

Women's progress in the corporate world is measured in board seats – and it paints a gloomy picture. In the US, women comprise only 16 per cent of board members in Fortune 500 companies, more than 10 per cent of which have no women on their boards at all.

According to data compiled by Catalyst, corporate boards in the UK, Germany, and France each have about 12 per cent women directors. In China, only 8 per cent of board members are women; in India and Brazil the figure is 5 per cent; and in Japan, below 1 per cent.

But are board seats the best gauge of how far women have come? They are the primary measure because boards sit at the top of the corporate pyramid; and because, quite simply, the data exists and is readily available. Publicly traded companies are obliged to list their board members and their qualifications.

"If you're looking to figure out patterns and trends on women's progress within a company or an industry it's useful to have this database," says James Post, an expert in corporate governance at Boston University School of Management. "It's not perfect, and it doesn't answer a lot of the questions. But it is helpful."

One alternative "is to look at chief executive positions, but there are fewer of those and they're more idiosyncratic", he says. There are 18 women leading Fortune 500 companies today, more than ever before.

A clearer snapshot of where women stand would require many more disclosures by companies. Data on companies' recruitment policies and retention rates would be a good start, along with information on what kind of flexible work arrangements companies offer, and their record on promotions and top assignments.

Statistics on the gender breakdown of employees – for instance, numbers of business unit heads and executives who are women, and information on whether or not women workers are concentrated in certain functional areas and scarce in others – are also key.

"A lot of this data already exists internally," says Prof Post. "Companies need to pull it together so that they can have a clearer idea of the systemic issues."

In the US, the Securities and Exchange Commission has, for the past two years, required companies to release their policy, if one exists, concerning diversity in the selection of board members.

Companies with such policies have to describe how their policy is implemented, and how the board judges its effectiveness.

"These universal targets are welcomed by some, but they are a double-edged sword," says Prof Post.

"Companies are well advised to get ahead on this issue. Don't let the regulators write scripts to what are clearly legitimate social expectations."



Degrees of change: reversal of traditional inequalities in education should help to reduce the persistent wage gap between genders

Corbis

## Future looks bright as flexibility increases

### Opinion

ALISON MAITLAND

At a time of rising unemployment, when men still vastly outnumber women in senior jobs, it might seem odd to be positive about the future for women at work. But there are many reasons for qualified optimism.

One reality to which employers must adapt is the rising proportion of educated females. As higher education has expanded, women have increased their participation more rapidly than men over recent decades. Projections by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development are dramatic: on recent trends, women will account for 78 per cent of graduates in Denmark in 2020, 70 per cent in Germany, and 68 per cent in Mexico. Across the OECD as a whole, 67 per cent of degrees will go to women, up from 58 per cent in 2009.

This reversal of traditional inequalities in education should help to reduce the persistent wage gap – although gender segregation by subject

and occupation remains high, with more women studying education and health, and more men studying engineering and IT.

There are already signs of the pay gap closing among younger managers. Female junior executives are earning slightly more than their male peers for the first time, according to a report from the UK's Chartered Management Institute. The study also shows, however, that equal pay across all seniority levels is a long way off.

At leadership levels, the business case for gender balance is now well established. Quotas and non-mandatory campaigns are driving up the number of women on boards, and things will look very different in a decade if the momentum persists. As board numbers rise, there should also be more women in top executive ranks, helping to shift age-old perceptions of leadership as male.

The future holds promise for women in other ways, as work becomes an activity rather than a place.

With increased virtual and remote working, it should become easier for women – and men – to integrate life

and work and to be more effective at both. Women's rising earning power, and the desire of many younger men to be hands-on parents, is already redressing part of the imbalance in domestic gender roles.

Some companies that are pioneering innovative work styles are explicitly linking this to the business goal of more women in senior leadership.

As Helen Wyatt, a senior human resources executive at Unilever, says in *Future Work*, the recently published book I wrote with Peter Thomson, the ability to work anywhere, including partly at home, will make international assignments more attractive to executives with caring responsibilities. "This type of working helps these roles to become less 'extreme'."

There are potential downsides. The greater freedom and choice of "anywhere working" can also mean isolation, or difficulty switching off. New online business models can offer work to people who would not be able to go to a workplace, but this might come without traditional employment rights.

Nor does breaking free of the old

rules of work happen automatically. In large companies in particular, it often requires a shift in culture and management attitudes. This is another opportunity for women to flourish. As we show in the book, the type of culture likely to favour new ways of working – and to reap the business benefits – is democratic, trusts employees, and rewards outcomes rather than time and attendance.

When we surveyed international managers, we found that women felt more strongly than men about creating an environment in which individuals are free to work in their own way to achieve results.

Research by Insead business school has shown that female leaders score more highly than their male peers on most "critical components" of leadership, including team building, energising, rewarding and feedback, tenacity, and emotional intelligence. These will be qualities essential to leading in the new world of work.

Alison Maitland is an FT contributor and co-author of *Future Work* and of *Why Women Mean Business*

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# Bridging the gaps created by maternity leave

## Parenthood

**Natasha Stidder** looks at how some businesses are helping new mothers to stay in touch with work

**M**otherhood marks a turning point for many working women, with inadequate support during maternity leave being blamed by some for creating barriers to mothers returning to work.

A study by leadership consultancy First100 confirmed that women find returning to work after giving birth is not easy. They can feel “out of the loop” and lack confidence after being away for a length of time. First100 says the first 100 days back at work can be critical.

Organisations that provide a structured framework and flexible attitude to work-life balance should benefit from higher retention rates among females returning to work. But many women who choose to return in part-time roles are forced to take demotions due to a lack of positions in their area, leaving them dissatisfied and unchallenged.

For Jane Kirk, director at search firm Armstrong Craven, the focus should be on ability, not the hours they work: “It isn’t talked about, but real leadership roles are closed to you if you don’t continue to work full-time. The reality after a career break is that you have to take a sideways move or demotion if you want to work part-time.”

She believes returning women need to prove to employers they are experienced enough to manage their workload without being there full-time.

Liz Bramley, head of employee engagement and diversity at the Co-Operative Group, says it has seen a marked increase in retention rates since implementing family-friendly policies and flexible working, with 97 per cent of female managers returning.

She explains it is also the ability to

have open and honest conversations with managers about career aspirations that enables them to provide the right kind of support and career planning.

“If a returner is as ambitious as ever, we have a mainstream mentoring scheme, and succession planning to develop a talent pipeline up to senior management level. We’re also launching ‘Aspire’, where women will be able to do ‘skill swaps’ and coach themselves in their career progression.”

Meanwhile, for those wishing to take a step back, the Co-Op offers flexible working practices – 70 per cent of its part-time employees are female – and is in the process of carrying out pilot schemes around “hot-desking”, in preparation for a move that will affect all employees at its Manchester headquarters.

But despite such positive moves, Chris Parke, chief executive of Talking Talent, a coaching and consulting company, believes the lack of contact throughout maternity leave itself can create problems, leaving some concerned and uncertain about their choices and motivations to return to work.

The key to addressing the problem, he says, is equipping line managers

The programme focuses on training line managers, encouraging conversations and maintaining contact with employees on leave

with the skills and emotional intelligence to understand how to continue engaging with an employee before and throughout their maternity leave.

Too often, he says, line managers are unsure how they should react when a member of their team becomes pregnant, and become so focused on the implications for the team that they fail to deal with the situation effectively.

“I’ve had people say to me ‘I had a really good relationship with my man-



Work calls: Contact during maternity leave keeps employees engaged

dreamstime

ager. But now I’m pregnant, they won’t talk to me.’ Often managers are afraid of saying the wrong thing, and decide it’s better to say nothing at all, which creates anxiety for the employee at being treated differently. They’re only pregnant,” he says.

Mr Parke recommends educating line managers around employment law and unconscious bias. It is also important that they understand the rationales behind schemes such as flexible working – outlining their importance in retention and addressing any preconceptions around productivity are vital to get them “on-board”.

By addressing all these issues, a line manager can ensure an effective hand-over as well as an open conversation about how often the team member would like to be contacted throughout their leave. This is a very personal choice, Mr Parke explains, but is important in keeping an employee engaged and then ready to return.

Recognising these issues, Deloitte began a pilot coaching programme in 2009, focusing on two of its business divisions. The programme focused on training line managers, encouraging open conversation around women’s career aspirations and lifestyle choices, as well as keeping in touch with employees on maternity leave as frequently as they wanted.

In 2010 the business saw retention increase among returning women from 82 to 93 per cent, and the Transitions programme has now been rolled out across the company.

Val Stevenson, human resources director at Deloitte, believes it is important to recognise women’s position in the family unit, as well as the business: “More women are becoming the main breadwinner in the family, so they often have no choice about returning,” she says. “So it’s then about seeing from the woman’s side and the business side how things can work together.”

Anyone embarking on maternity leave up to partner level takes part in the programme, and it has been so successful it has also been extended to men in the company via webinars.

Changing attitudes and support for working mothers should not be taken for granted, however. In Germany, the derogatory term “raven woman” is still used for any mother returning to work. And in the UK, childcare continues to be the most expensive in Europe, so women cannot always afford to return to work without other support mechanisms being available.

While the UK government has recently tried to help reduce these costs, Mr Parke says the country is a long way behind Scandinavia, where parents receive full state support and heavy subsidies.

## Profile Doreen Rigby

**Doreen Rigby is executive vice president of State Street’s global operations, a position she took up last year. She joined the Boston-based investment management company in 1998, and received her MBA at the Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario in 2003. She told Rebecca Knight:**

There are two principles I’ve used throughout my career: the first is that every boss needs to have one person in the group who performs at a very high level. If you are that person it creates an opportunity to get recognised.

The second principle has to do with the balance between readiness and opportunity. Unfortunately, they are not always perfectly in sync. Sometimes you have to be patient for the right opportunity. But on the other hand, sometimes even if you’re not totally ready for the next big promotion, you need to take a risk and go for it.

I did not methodically plot out my career. I just took every opportunity to learn something new. I took any job – even if it was a lateral move – if it meant that I could learn more.

It’s important to understand the organisation in which you are trying to move forward. If you do this, at some

point you’ve amassed a lot of experiences, you know the company well, and you become valuable. The next doors open quite easily.

Recently I became part of a State Street programme called Leading Women [which provides mentoring, training, and sponsorship by the company’s female executive vice presidents to the company’s female senior vice presidents]. It was instrumental in helping me advance. They embraced me, and I could trust the feedback they gave me. They made sure I was addressing the things that needed to be addressed.

I am now on the other side with mentees of my own. I promised myself that I would always mentor young women because when I was coming up in the organisation I didn’t feel I had role models.

There’s an honesty there, and safety in talking to another woman about certain things. If you’re a mother of small children agonising about the next promotion because of the travel and long hours, it’s helpful to talk it through with another woman. I have two grown children.

To be a woman in financial services you have to have tough skin. Things will not always go your way. You have to have a strong belief in yourself. If you have that belief, it’s very difficult for people to unhinge you.

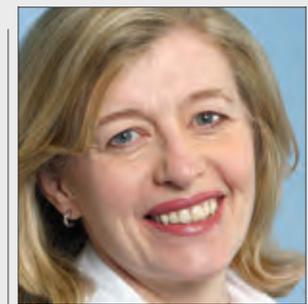
## Profile Avril Martindale

**Avril Martindale is a partner at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer. Dina Medland asked her: How has being a woman made a difference to your career?**

I would have answered that question differently if posed before – rather than after – my children. But one of the biggest differences over the years has been that as a lawyer, as often as not I was the only woman in the room. That tends to mean they remember you. I used to feel incredibly self-conscious but I do think it was an advantage, with the benefit of hindsight – even if it did not feel like it at the time.

If you were able to get through it, you did well. I qualified in the 1980s, the days of big management buy-outs and the work pressure was the same whether male or female.

That has changed, with more women entering the profession, and there are other ways now when being a woman makes a difference. I am often involved in deals that put huge personal pressure on a client, and



sometimes they might have been willing to sit down and talk to me because I was a woman with a sympathetic face. Women tend to be a little more empathetic, and to go about things differently, to seek consensus.

But I didn’t have children until I was a partner, and it has really made me think about the pressures on women to be a mother while having a successful career.

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## Behaviour and motivation

**Dina Medland** asks whether women become more like men when they take on similar roles

**D**o men and women converge in terms of what motivates them as they climb the corporate ladder?

It is a question laden with preconceptions and assumptions – indeed, there is little agreement on whether behavioural differences dictated by gender exist in the first place, or if they do, whether they might be dictated by industry sector.

There is also the complication of cause and effect: do the most successful women start out with more typically male motivations and behavioural traits?

But there is wider agreement on one point: that being part of a small group is going to influence behaviour – being in a minority does make a difference.

For research purposes, Lynda Gratton, a professor at London Business School, defines a minority as “less than 30 per cent”, whether it is by gender, race, or having pink hair. “What we know about group psychology is that the tighter the group gets, the more people have to fit in, and the fewer of them there are, the harder it is to find role models. If anyone is in a minority, there is a huge ‘minority effect’,” she says.

“As an observer of organisations, I am always amazed at the homogeneity of senior groups. When a woman is in a minority – and there is hardly an industry where they are not in a minority – they are on their own. I have no evidence for this, and it is personal observation, but women do seem to be more individual the more senior they are, because they have to

decide who they are very early on in their career,” says Ms Gratton.

Research at London Business School has found little evidence of gender differences at middle management level across industry sectors. But studies of attitudes in and around the financial services sector – where there are very few women at senior levels – proves interesting.

A recent report on Women In Banking by the Institute of Leadership & Management, sponsored by Royal Bank of Scotland, concluded that banking’s male-dominated management culture was the biggest barrier to women reaching the top, and it highlighted the need for major changes of culture and attitude. But it also found that women were far more likely to ask for pay rises and promotions than their male counterparts.

So are the women who are currently successful in this sector the ones who have absorbed and accepted the existing culture?

“There is convergence among people who enter the financial services world in the first place. It sucks you

‘The extent to which women adopt male traits in the workplace should be of great concern to all employers’

in. It has nothing to do with being male or female, and is more about your value systems – anyone going into that environment and being successful ends up a certain way,” says a male former investment banker.

Lorraine Young, a chartered secretary who used to work in the City of London and now runs Lorraine Young Company Secretarial Services in Kent, says: “The culture of the environment is very important in influencing what you want as you progress.”



Convergence: ‘Anyone going into the financial services environment and being successful ends up a certain way’

Alamy

Another woman who left the City after a career of 15 years, says: “Everything you do when working in the City is based on an annual cycle and around what you get paid. You are forbidden to discuss what that amount is, so you display your success by what you buy – watches, handbags, cars – whether you are male or female.”

In 2011, ILM published research on Ambition and Gender At Work, which found that women are less confident in their own abilities compared to men and have lower career expectations, with only 42 per cent of female middle managers expecting to reach senior manager level in 10 years, compared to 70 per cent of men.

But when they do get to “the top” they seem to find it a very lonely place, making it difficult to reach any conclusions on whether their behaviour “converges” with that of men at the same level.

Louise Ashley, a research fellow at Cass Business School who works with professional services firms, speaks regularly with young lawyers at entry level with the largest law firms. She says most men talk about aiming to

become a partner, whereas women tend not to.

A female partner at a large law firm says the ones who do get there “are not going to admit to weakness or a need for internal lines of communication in a male-dominated environment”. In some cases, gender differences can be magnified at senior levels, as women find themselves isolated: “Men can leave their weekend at home or share the anecdotes of ‘what a witch the wife was this weekend’ with other male partners at work or over a game of golf, while a senior woman may have no one to talk to except her female junior associate who mistakenly thinks she has everything,” says the law firm partner.

Being in a minority can mean that, even at the top, there is no natural network. Some law firms, including Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, are working to address this by setting up formal networks at all levels, including the most senior. Freshfields partner Avril Martindale says: “I feel quite passionately about this. I have found as I got more senior that it is very important that I have a network of senior women who face the same

issues as I do.”

Children are another significant determinant of workplace behaviours and attitudes. Women say that at junior levels it is fine to “all go out to the pub and have a drink together” but pressing issues surrounding childcare and bringing up children can form a divide between the sexes at more senior levels.

The extent to which women adopt male traits in the workplace should be of great concern to all employers, according to Charles Elvin, chief executive of ILM. “It would be very bad for any organisation to have the sexes converge in what they want. Cognitive diversity is very important – you don’t want women to become like men or men becoming like women. Both depth and breadth of perception is needed to innovate, change and drive an organisation forward.”

“Large organisations are losing a major portion of their talent as women are filtered out all the way through the career process. But it is not ultimately a ‘woman’s issue’ – we need to be innovative about how to manage the workplace for both men and women,” says Mr Elvin.

## Profile Cece Stewart

**Cece Stewart is president of US consumer and commercial banking at Citi, which she joined in 2011. Before that, she was president of the retail banking group and chief executive of Morgan Stanley Private Bank. She started at Wachovia in 1978, and worked her way up in a variety of regional banking jobs to head of retail and small business. She told** Rebecca Knight:

My first job in financial services was as a file clerk at Wachovia in Raleigh, North Carolina. At the very beginning, I realised I loved this business. I wanted to do more, and expand my responsibility.

My mentor ran the consumer lending department and she sponsored me in the bank’s branch management training programme. On the day I became a branch manager, she took me to lunch and gave me a great piece of advice: “Always hire people who are better than you are.”

She was a great mentor: honest and encouraging. Later in my career, she worked for me. But even then she would coach me.

It’s important to make time to mentor, and to have a mentor. You need someone in your professional world who will tell you things that other people might not.

When I think about the best leaders I’ve known and worked with – men and women – one commonality is that they created an open environment. I try to be accessible and transparent; I want folks to feel comfortable. I want people to feel they can have challenging conversations with me.

The numbers suggest there are not enough women at the top in financial services. The awareness is there and the desire for that to change is there.

Women have got to have the right support mechanisms around them. There are corporate support mechanisms like developmental programmes and coaching, but for women with kids, there needs to be a supportive spouse or sibling, or some other person who will give your kids nurturing loving care when you can’t be there.

You reach a certain level and there are certain demands. I had a wonderful sister who helped me when my kids were very young.

More and more companies are supporting women who want to work, but maybe take a lighter career load for a few years when their kids are little. People have to do what is right for them and that’s different for everybody.

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