WOMEN OF COLOR EXECUTIVES: Their Voices, Their Journeys
ABOUT CATALYST

Catalyst is the nonprofit research and advisory organization working to advance women in business, with offices in New York and Toronto. The leading source of information on women in business for the past four decades, Catalyst has the knowledge and tools that help companies and women maximize their potential. Our solutions-oriented approach—through Research, Advisory Services, Corporate Board Placement, and the Catalyst Award—has earned the confidence of global business leaders. Catalyst is consistently ranked by the American Institute of Philanthropy as the highest rated nonprofit in the US focused on women’s issues.
WOMEN OF COLOR EXECUTIVES:
Their Voices, Their Journeys

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FOREWORD

Catalyst began our groundbreaking research on women of color in corporate America more than five years ago. Our goal was to gather information and disseminate it in order to start a dialogue about opportunities and barriers for women of color and to provide companies with concrete solutions for change. I can proudly say that we accomplished that goal.

But in so doing, we didn’t just reach the HR professionals and senior leadership of corporate America—we also reached individual women of color. Catalyst, and our research on this important issue, became the link for women of color—across industry, race, and geography; as part of panels; and as members of audiences—to share their own stories.

So it is with tremendous pride that I present what is the next installment of Catalyst’s effort to document the experiences of women of color: *Women of Color Executives: Their Voices, Their Journeys*. This report, unlike the first three in our series, focuses in detail on actual career paths and individual experiences of six women. Here we move away from the hard data and look at personal stories, tribulations, and triumphs. Though each story is unique, the six together paint a powerful picture of the workplace realities for women of color. At the end of the report, we offer an analysis of the 35 interviews that were conducted during the original research, tying these stories together.

I hope you will find this effort as rich and insightful as I have.

Sheila W. Wellington
President, Catalyst

Women of Color Executives: Their Voices, Their Journeys
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

This report, Women of Color Executives: Their Voices, Their Journeys, is the latest in Catalyst’s ongoing research on women of color. It builds on the work described in Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers, which was released in July, 1999.

Women of Color in Corporate Management increased corporate America’s awareness of, and attention to, the needs of a very important but under-studied segment of the talent pool. The intended audience for that report was corporate professionals, particularly those in leadership roles and human resources. The study assessed the career status of women of color and offered recommendations to corporations for improving career advancement. However, during a series of subsequent national discussions about the study, women of color pointed out the need for a more individually based account. Catalyst created this publication in response to that need.

While the initial report offered, in broad strokes, a comprehensive overview of career experiences of women of color, the current report takes a more personal look at the day-to-day experiences of women of color in the corporate environment. We include the stories of six successful women of color, in their own words; summarize the major findings from in-depth interviews conducted with 35 senior women of color; and identify common themes and strategies.

KEY FINDINGS FROM

WOMEN OF COLOR IN CORPORATE MANAGEMENT:
OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS

Because knowing how to overcome barriers is essential to success, a starting point for the current report is the set of career barriers identified in the prior study. According to that study, the major barriers to advancement for women of color stem from a lack of connections with influential others in the work environment. The most frequently cited barrier is “lack of a mentor or sponsor,” followed by “lack of networking with influential colleagues,” and “lack of company role models who are members of the same racial/ethnic group.” The first two are directly related to the fourth barrier—“lack of high-visibility assignments.” Another frequently cited barrier, “not fitting behavioral style to what is typical at the company,” reflects the lack of role models and the outsider status felt by many women of color.
These survey findings on career advancement challenges are underscored in another Catalyst study, *Women and the MBA: Gateway to Opportunity* (2000). African-American women are more likely than white women to feel excluded in both business school and business environments, according to this study. Also, African-American women reported being less satisfied than white women with compensation and the availability of mentors.
METHODOLOGY

In *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers*, Catalyst heard from over 2,000 African-American, Hispanic, and Asian-American women managers and professionals through a series of focus groups, interviews, and a mail survey during late 1997. The mail survey included 1,735 respondents representing 30 companies. Catalyst conducted 59 focus groups with over 300 entry- and mid-level women of color in 15 companies and in-depth interviews with 35 senior women of color (those one to three levels below their company's CEO).

This report focuses on the in-depth interviews held with those 35 senior women of color. Each interview lasted from one to two hours and covered each participant’s evaluation of her organization’s culture, her opinions of how diversity was addressed in the organization, and her description of her career path. We identify common themes within each of these areas, as well as a variety of personal and career strategies used by the women.

### PARTICIPANT PROFILE

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Education:</td>
<td>56% hold Master’s degree/MBA</td>
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A number of additional quotes throughout this report are drawn from women of color who participated in panel discussions that were part of a series of Catalyst events for *Women of Color in Corporate Management*, conducted during the summer and fall of 1999 and early 2000. Panel members were high-ranking women of color in Fortune 1000 companies and large firms. Finally, we also include relevant data from the survey of 1,735 women of color in order to frame the interview findings.
REPORT OVERVIEW

Each major chapter of this report tells the story of one of six women of color. In her own words, each woman recounts significant career experiences, and shares her perspective on what it’s like to be a woman of color working at a very senior level in corporate America. For comparison, in each chapter we also include short vignettes from other women of color and/or data from the initial study.

The following questions are addressed:

► What are some examples of career paths followed by successful women of color?
► How have successful women dealt with their ethnic or racial identities at the workplace?
► What personal traits do very successful women of color share?
► How do successful women of color deal with stereotypes in the work environment?

The six women highlighted, and all 35 women interviewed in-depth, represent the spectrum of senior women of color working in corporate America. They work in a range of industries, have very different family situations and personal styles, and represent the three ethnicities in the study: African-American, Asian-American, and Latina. The concluding chapter analyzes the entire group of 35 women, highlighting the diversity of the women’s strategies and perspectives and identifying common themes which include the importance of mentors and sponsors, the ability to manage one’s own career, and the need for emotional resilience in overcoming bias.

As these women tell their stories, a wide range of personality styles and approaches to their careers becomes evident. Catalyst hopes that readers will find aspects of their own lives reflected in these stories and will gain insights that will help them pursue their goals.

Note: We present each woman’s story in her own words. However, we have changed their names, the names of their companies, and a few identifying details in order to maintain confidentiality.
CHAPTER 2: CHERYL HAMILTON

CAREER SUMMARY

Cheryl Hamilton is an African-American and the human resources director for Acme Manufacturing. She has responsibility for all human resources management, which includes labor relations, executive compensation, workforce staffing, and workforce selection. She is three levels in the reporting chain from the CEO of Acme. She manages four direct reports and five indirect reports.

Ms. Hamilton began working with Acme in 1976. She held several positions at Acme, including one in the labor relations area. Ms. Hamilton has relocated a total of five times in her career at Acme. She credits support from women she met early in her career for her success, as well as influential sponsors she had along her career path. She is divorced with one child.

Ms. Hamilton speaks vividly about her experiences with racism in the corporate environment. She describes in depth what it was like for an African-American woman starting a career in corporate America 25 years ago.

MS. HAMILTON’S STORY

Experiencing the Pressure to Assimilate

Significant changes have occurred during the past several decades. I think today’s generation is a little bit different, because they have gone through the process of integration. When I came to Acme people were still dealing with, ‘I don’t want any black people living in my neighborhood.’ So what makes you think that, in the workplace, they were going say, ‘Well I don’t want to live with them in my neighborhood, but I sure want to go out and work with them all day!’

Years ago, there was a lot of pressure to assimilate. From seven in the morning ‘till seven at night we became an extension of white America. Then we’d go home, and depending on where we lived, we’d become black again. Regardless, on Friday night ‘till Sunday night we’d become black again, and then on Monday morning—when that alarm went off—we assumed a different identity.

Today, respecting differences is becoming a business imperative. Women now feel much more comfortable being themselves, rather than simply adopting the style and habits of men.

Being 100 Years From Slavery

There is a historical attitude towards African-Americans in general. African-Americans are just 100 years from slavery. Society still has a lot of little biases and the corporation is a reflection of society.
Many African-Americans still believe historical stereotypes, themselves. My mother remembers lynchings and so she was always very guarded in her relationships with Caucasians. I was fortunate that early in my career, there was a Caucasian male who took an interest in my well-being. But if I had not felt he was genuine I probably would have been very suspicious of a Caucasian sending me signals that he was looking out for my well being.

If you don't know how to read the tea leaves, you'll miss out on signals that people send you—signals that they really want to help you. People don't just come into your office and say, 'I want to mentor you today.' It's a very informal process. Sometimes it's a special project assignment.

The person who assigns you the special project is providing you visibility and the opportunity to demonstrate your abilities. Maybe they know about an upcoming opportunity. And the person who has that opportunity doesn't really know much about you and your performance. So this is an easy way for you to get some visibility and to demonstrate your capabilities to the people who are going to be making the decision.

Moving Beyond the Cleaning Lady, the Nanny, and the Sales Clerk
When you come in as an African-American manager, I don't believe your subordinates call their families, spouses, or friends and say, 'Guess what? They just appointed Cheryl as the Human Resources Director, and wow, she's an African-American woman! I've just been waiting to work for her!' I don't think that happens. They assume your influence can't be as significant as the white male's. Proving the assumption invalid is a wonderful accomplishment.

When the company says, 'We want to advance women,' implicitly they're saying, 'We want to advance women with whom we're comfortable.' A senior manager said to me once, 'Cheryl, all of the managers have had a white female in their life. It was their mother, their sister, or their daughter. And they have had an experience with a white female that inherently enables them to understand that she's a very capable person, even though early on they nurture her differently than they do little boys. We know that she's a capable person and that's my experience with her. My only experience with an African-American woman may have been as the cleaning lady, the nanny, or the sales clerk at the store. I don't have a lot of positive experiences that say inherently, I'm going to put you in charge of minding the store.' Because that's what you're talking about when you appoint me to a leadership role. 'I'm willing to turn over the store to you and in that is my future, your ability to make the right decisions for the well-being of the enterprise.' I may be the first African-American woman that any of these men have dealt with on an equivalent or at a leadership level. White America has not had business experiences with many African-American women.

Corporate America does not recognize that African-American women have been strong leaders throughout their lives and have innate survival and leadership skills. Harriet Tubman, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Rosa Parks have rocked the world.
Allowing People to Prove They Have Racial or Sexual Biases

Most African-American women at Acme are visually acceptable. They have medium complexions and they don't have Afro hairstyles, braids, or beads. The ones that are more successful tend to be physically fit and attractive—not overweight. They dress very conservatively.

Early on, there was an African-American who counseled me and said, 'If you go looking for racism and sexism, if you wear race and sex on your sleeve, you'll find it all day and all night.' So, I allow each person to prove to me that they have racial or sexual biases. I give them every other excuse before I conclude that it's a race or sex issue.

I've had situations where people go around me to the boss. I've been very fortunate that when I've had those situations, I could go to my boss and say, 'You're going to have to make a decision here. If everybody's going to bypass me and go directly to you, and you make the decision, you're undermining me.' They test the system very early on, when I arrive. I watch for how they're going to test the system.

The question of downplaying race/ethnicity

Well, I am overweight. I have brown skin and my hair is short. Now, by the stereotypes, I ought to be a mommy taking care of some white kid. But I am so wild about me, and that comes out very quickly. And if you are wild about you, folks tend to take a look. If you are down on you, folks tend to buy into that, too. Would I have fared better if I were yellow, with straight hair and thin? I don't think so. Because I think what God has given me is an extraordinary persona which is actually what's required to win in this work. So, it doesn't bother me, but I dress to kill all the time and that certainly helps.

—Senior-level African-American woman

Naturally Developing Relationships with Sponsors and Mentors

I met two women very early in my career—back when there were very few women in managerial positions—who have remained part of my psychological support system. And to me, that's what mentors are—they become a psychological support system for you.

I have had sponsors who've made things happen for me from a career advancement standpoint. But I don't think the mentee selects the mentor or the sponsor. It's the sponsor and the mentor who select the mentee. Some individuals lobby others to be their mentor. But generally, I have found when the relationship develops naturally, versus being forced, it is a far more effective relationship. If somebody assigns you as my mentor, and you and I don't have a natural bonding and a relationship to start with, you'll just go through the motions.

Attracting potential mentors or sponsors

Don't be discouraged because you think you don't have the same level of exposure as someone else. You'd be surprised where a mentor will pop up. Focus on doing the job at hand. If you find someone who basically shares some of the same interests and value sets as you, and you see that that something about that person is something that you would want to emulate, then that person can be a mentor to you. And maybe they are not the most popular high-ranking employee, but you can learn a whole lot from that person and that person may grow to care a lot about you and help you develop. So don't be focused on just being in the spotlight.

—Senior-level African-American woman
Difficulty Finding White Male Mentors
It’s very hard to develop those natural mentoring and sponsoring relationships. It’s even more difficult for minorities and women. In the past, white males have not naturally mentored—or for that matter sponsored—minorities and women. When they do it, they’re very visible; they stand out. White males tend to mentor those individuals who they feel are little or no risk to them or are a tremendous asset to them.

The people who are the key decision-makers have always mentored others. That’s how the next generation of leaders come about. With minorities and women, a lot of times, a selected few are chosen; it’s a little bit like being in the country club. The literature talks about that phenomenon. Minorities and women say, ‘If I was in the country club, I too would be able to get ahead.’ At the end of the day it’s never more than one or two who are admitted to the country club.

But as more minorities and women move into leadership roles, they will serve as positive role models and mentors for others in the organization.

Carrying the Race Burden
Everybody was fighting for their candidates for a key high-level position. One manager was able to convince my boss that of all the candidates being considered, I was the candidate that should be selected. Years later, my boss said to me, ‘At the time, it was tough to select you, Cheryl. The easy thing would have been to select another white male. It was tough to select you, because I worried, ‘What if you fail?’ I’m glad I selected you because you were the best candidate and you’ve just brought a new dimension to the leadership team. Working with you has been one of my more rewarding experiences.’

And that’s the whole thing, the burden that African-Americans carry. If you fail, it’s almost as if the whole race has failed. So, ‘What if I fail?’ I won’t be the first manager who didn’t survive. For him, if I had failed, I think he would have taken it personally that he had failed. He wanted to make sure that I was tough enough to do the job. He needed assurance from the other leaders that he couldn’t go wrong selecting me. In a competitive world, it’s survival of the fittest. It’s the person who can advocate and bring to bear the most support. And that’s what the sponsor did.

Promoting Women’s and Minorities’ Issues
I feel very strongly that part of my job is to support other African-Americans. I’m comfortable raising the tough issues. I say, ‘Otherwise I might as well be another Caucasian.’

I advocate policy changes, I speak openly in meetings and raise issues when they’re not raised. I bring my own personal experiences and I talk to others to understand their experiences. When I raise issues, I’m not raising them from a personal perspective but I’m raising them from a knowledge base.
As a leader, you have to have convictions, and commitment to your values and beliefs. I don’t believe I’m going to be fired for pushing the leadership in the company to do what’s best for the business in the long term. I don’t think they promoted me to this level of responsibility to be a potted plant, a wallflower, or to just act like every other white person in this organization. Companies don’t need groupthink—they need diversity of thought and different ideas to make them constantly improve their performance.

Not Defining Self Around Career Success
I have avoided defining myself and my reason for being based solely on my employer or company, my job title, or my economic status. I see myself as a person, first and foremost. I don’t want to define myself around my career success. I want to be able, at the end of the day, to feel like I had some quality to my life that was independent of Acme. I want to be able to feel that I made a difference both for Acme and in the community. I have friends who don’t have any association with Acme, and on weekends I spend time with my family and those friends. Giving back to my family and to the community has always been very important to me.

Leadership Examining Its Own Behavior
There are many extremely competent minorities and women in the organization. It’s ironic, though, that many white men are promoted several levels beyond their level of competency.

Senior leadership must recognize that there are systemic issues and be willing to stand up to those issues. Most corporations now are recruiting minorities and women at about the 30 or 40 percent rate. Fifteen years from now we should expect to have 30 percent minorities and women in the leadership group. If not, the system should be examined regarding the adverse impact on minorities and women.

Often the performance appraisal systems and the selection systems have an adverse impact, but we’re not willing to admit this problem. What we always want to do is put the blame on the individual. We want to make the individual the victim, rather than admitting that there may be something wrong with the system.

The system is run by the leadership, who in turn, need to examine their own behavior and be willing to change. We have to keep the pressure on the leadership and say, ‘If we’re going to fix this problem, it starts with you in making sure that you hold people accountable for developing all people, not just white males. And we’re going to reward you and recognize you based on that ability.’ In the past you could have been a general manager and never had a minority or a woman work for you, or never challenged the organization as to why minorities and women are not in more significant leadership roles.
Making Progress for All

I can’t put my finger on why manufacturing and engineering—where most of the opportunities are—do not readily seek out African-Americans for leadership roles. They always fall back on the excuse that they don’t have the training, skills, or abilities. But my personal observation has been that minorities and women with the skills and abilities end up in roles that don’t give them mainstream opportunities. That’s the systemic piece that I was referring to earlier. The white males are threatened; they feel that the system is forcing them to take an African-American so they take them, and then they engage in the self-fulfilling prophecy. If we can figure out how to address that issue, the rest of us will make progress.

It’s very hard to force the organization to put the minority or the woman—and especially the minority woman—in the leadership job when they’ve been isolated in secondary functions. They keep putting you through ‘just one more test.’

If you can address the systemic issue for African-American women, if you can find a key to that problem, you have found the key for minority men and for non-minority women as well.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Stories like Ms. Hamilton’s help solidify Catalyst’s conclusion in Women Of Color: Opportunities and Barriers that there is a concrete ceiling for women of color in business. Cheryl Hamilton’s experiences and insights illuminate the range of barriers creating a concrete ceiling for women of color, illustrate why these barriers are harder to shatter than glass, and underscore the tenacity needed by individuals to break through.

She talks vividly about racism against African-Americans in corporate environments, the legacy of slavery, and the effort it takes to overcome negative stereotypes and exclusion from powerful networks.

Ms. Hamilton successfully overcame the barrier of lack of connection to influential others. And central to her success overall was attracting and keeping a powerful sponsor. Unlike white men, and to a lesser extent white women, women of color do not perceive that they get many chances for plum assignments. Missing an opportunity early in one’s career may have meant not getting another until quite a few years later. As Ms. Hamilton stated, she was fortunate to get a sponsor who helped her gain access to those plum assignments.
CHAPTER 3: CHRISTINE DELGADO

CAREER SUMMARY

Christine Delgado works for ElectroTec Systems, a large electronics and electrical equipment company. She is the vice president and general manager in charge of the Telecom Switching Systems Group.

Ms. Delgado cites the importance of risk-taking in career advancement, and talks about the importance of strategically creating opportunities for oneself. Her account highlights the experiences of a Latina coping with stereotypes in an exclusionary work culture.

She is married and does not have children.

MS. DELGADO’S STORY

Expanding the Organization
I grew up in Puerto Rico. I went to the University of Puerto Rico to get my engineering degree.

Then I was hired by Telecom to come here to the States to work. I got my Masters degree at Penn State, paid by Telecom. I worked at Telecom until five-and-a-half years ago when I joined ElectroTec Systems.

I came in as a director and was responsible for Switching Equipment Software. That’s when I took ownership for a project that was a next generation product development called Power Station. I worked on that and the organization expanded significantly. I got promoted to vice president about two-and-a-half years ago and then to general manager about a year-and-a-half ago. General manager is the first operational title in which you are responsible for a business.

Clashing with a Conservative Culture
ElectroTec Systems is a large technology company. There are a few values that tie the whole company together. The company is very focused on equipment. They stress integrity and care for people. They encourage you to bring the kids in for summer jobs.

At ElectroTec there’s a tremendous value placed on teamwork. On the other hand, it’s ‘leave me alone, let me run my business.’ But interruptions are the norm.

We’re growing so much, we have a lot of experienced people coming from the outside. There’s a clash between their expectations of what the organization should do and the current culture. They enter the environment, and they may already be good—not only with technical skills but also with maturity. They probably have to be go-getters. These people come in and say, ‘Hey, I’ve been making something happen for the last five years.’ And then they clash with our culture that is slow, conservative, and safe.
**Being Unable to Live in Your Own Framework**

We build the switching equipment. It’s a very large and complex project. I have to work with the marketing folks who are in a separate division—a very conservative, very white male division. One of the things that it is hard for me to deal with is that people are way too conservative. There are serious problems with dealing with women at all levels.

The Latinas here need to put some energy into understanding the culture. We tend to put all our energy into making things happen for the company or for the bottom line, and not enough energy into understanding that people out there are different. They look at things differently, and you cannot live in your own framework of how you think things are.

We have to dress to try to look like a man. We try not to stand out so we wear plain colors. Someone said about a woman who dresses nicely and stylishly, ‘having such a nice body wouldn’t hurt in this organization.’ Her body was noticed, rather than what she was talking about in a meeting. When you go to a meeting, you want to see the individual contribution, you don’t want to see that person’s sex or looks.

Dark skin is always a bigger block. The good thing is that I am already seeing a complete difference in terms of the old school, when the hiring managers give their input about which lower-level people get chosen. We’re hiring some pretty sharp people—dark skinned women and men.

**Questioning My Authority**

There was a time when my authority was questioned. I suspect that it would have happened to someone who wasn’t a strong manager. But I think in this case, it had to do with the fact that I was a woman and Hispanic.

This was seven years ago. We were going through a difficult time. We got into a crisis mode with a customer. And one of my managers bypassed me to go to my boss’s boss to talk about how this was going to be dealt with correctly.

He didn’t come to me. I found out through my information channels. A woman who worked for the manager who heard him called me.

I dealt with the guy, actually. I called my boss’s boss and I told him, ‘Listen, I’m going to do this or you find someone else to run it.’ It took me a while to work it through.

**Dealing with Exclusion**

I am not included sometimes in certain meetings or not consulted. I have to work three times harder and I have to be three times better to be treated well. I don’t feel I’m seen as one of ‘them.’

I understood that that was part of my job. This was a commitment I made a long time ago when I decided I was going to go for my career. Maybe five, seven years ago, I got over the fact that this was going to be part of my life, that I had to deal with the fact that people didn’t like me. I just had to see through that. I had to look at it as their problem and not mine.
Building Key Relationships
Education is important. You have to have the basics, like an engineering degree. Working for Telecom also helped me. At ElectroTec, being connected to the right people is important, but they don't promote people just exclusively by being connected, which is good.

Politics is not such a big thing, because everybody is doing more than they can handle. But once things start to slow down, they put the word out and politics get major. Not paying enough attention to that has hurt me.

My advice is to put a lot of energy into building relationships with people; don’t just do your work. The good side of politics is building key relationships. It helps especially when you get in trouble.

Fighting for It
Nobody ever offered anything to me. That is the biggest lesson to learn that I tell everybody. You go look, you analyze, you find out where you need to give the most effort, and you go for it. You go fight to get it because they don’t want to give it to you.

I spend enough time trying to look at the bigger picture and what I think I can get. I try to understand what is needed in the business, where the holes are, and where the opportunities are. Then once I feel there is a good match between my skills and the opportunity and I feel can make a difference, I sell the idea.

Look for the opportunities from a business angle. Then formulate in that context what the events are that will create the role. It is not like anybody is going to be talking about it. You just create it for yourself.

Dealing with People Who Are Uncomfortable Giving You Feedback
The people I work with on a day-to-day basis are white males. If they really like you as a person, they want to have you as part of the team, but they don’t want to give you some of the important jobs.

I think there are probably issues that are uncomfortable, either giving feedback or being strong with you. But they delay too much. There are some issues that need to be dealt with even if it’s uncomfortable for them to provide feedback.

There may be a customer that is disappointed with something. Because no one is comfortable approaching me, I don’t find out about it. I’m here in the inside; they are in the market. And if they don’t talk about it, I may not understand the urgency of the situation.

It brews for a long time and then finally comes out. I find out from another angle, and I say, ‘Why didn’t you tell me? We could have done something six months ago.’

One of my strengths is my emotion and my passion, my commitment to people, to a project, and to the company. But it is hard for them to deal with me because they don’t know how I’m going to react. I may be emotional. I think in my case it’s cultural.
It gets to the point where your immediate manager protects you because they know that you bring value. They definitely want to keep you around. But they may not want to confront you, so they protect you. But in essence they are isolating you, and the next layer up doesn’t know you.

**Being Stereotyped as ‘Too Emotional’**

I think that once you are in a place for a long time people do start to see you, as long as you try to fit in—like the way you dress—and as long as you try not to be too present.

There are stereotypes with respect to being emotional. As a woman, they always say you are too attached to your people. And as a Hispanic woman, you are more so. You are a mother figure. I think they think that you cannot be objective about the business because you will get tangled up.

I tell all the people who I work with all day, minorities who I work with, that the key is communication and there’s a big difference between language and communication. If you are good at communicating your ideas, that is what matters. So you really can overcome that first block. Someone listens to your accent, that’s a block, but you can always overcome that pretty quickly with some really good communication skills.

So I’ve always advised my folks, learn communication, take classes, focus on it, learn how to give presentations, use the materials—transparencies and charts—to help you break down the stereotypes right away. Be very concise, direct, etc.

**Giving Up Puerto Rican Identity for Survival**

There are some interesting things at the executive level with respect to Hispanics. They have never dealt with someone like me. I’ve had people come and tell me, ‘You are the first Hispanic I’ve talked to and that I deal with.’

I was born in Cuba. Surprisingly, in America, Cubans are seen as wealthy. It’s interesting because I grew up in Puerto Rico where Cubans are like dogs or worse. But I hid my Cuban background in Puerto Rico. Here if I say I’m a Cuban it’s better than if I say I’m a Puerto Rican. Although I feel Puerto Rican, I became Cuban to fit in.

I see myself as Puerto Rican. They see me as Cuban. When I first came to work, if asked, I would say I’m Puerto Rican. But then later on I started saying, ‘Well, I was born in Cuba.’ I gave up Puerto Rico. Survival.

**Needing to Take More Action**

There is a paper somewhere in the files that says, ‘Christine Delgado, high potential.’ So people get identified. Now the issue is how much action upper management really takes with respect to that. I think they do look at it for high levels but when it comes down to making decisions, it is always the manager who is doing the promoting.
Promotions are wild. As long as someone at the level higher than you agrees to it, you can promote anybody. There are no big committees. There is nothing formal that really drives a promotion. HR gets involved and if they are connected, they may influence it. But they usually don’t.

So in reality, we are not making a lot of progress with taking action on those lists and I think we should be.

**Taking More Time to Build Key Relationships**
I’m a big risk taker. That’s why I’ve taken all these jobs. That’s why I’ve made things happen. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be here. So every little mistake I’ve made along the way is being looked at.

I think the thing that is hindering me now is that I did not take enough time to build those key relationships. I’ve had a couple of people who have helped me; they were sponsors. Now I find myself in a situation where I don’t have all the ones that I need in the right places. But I will recover from it.

**Recognizing the Limitations of Managers**
Ask yourself, when you have a woman working for you or a minority of any kind, what are your expectations of that person? Always have high expectations of that person. One of the biggest roadblocks is that everybody always has low expectations of what we can do.

So women and minorities are not asked to do more things, we’re not called on to do things. As a manager, you should ask, what expectations do you have of a person? Just make them ten times higher and give it a try. Because I think the thing that hurts most people here, good people on my level, is that their managers just don’t think they can handle it.

It’s not conscious. I think it’s cultural. It probably got ingrained in your brain when you were born and you grew up and you were always told that these people were not good.

To raise expectations, women of color should do volunteer jobs, step up, and be aware that this is a limitation that the manager has. It’s not personal, but it is their limitation. So, you have to be aware of it and deal with it in order to overcome it.

**Finding Support**
I have a wonderful husband. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for him, because I tend to neglect things like going to the doctor. I’m not doing everything, but I’m managing the household with outside help.

I met my husband at work; he was my peer. He has a complete understanding for what I deal with. He was a supervisor, so he has a complete understanding of managing women. I am lucky that I have the resources and the support in my husband. I have a passion for what I do and the people I work with. That’s what I tell my husband. He completely understands—100 percent—what I am dealing with.

My recommendation to other women is to try to find a support structure. If you don’t have it at home you have to find it with others. Team up with two or three women to help each other, to take care of each others’ kids. Find that support somewhere.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ms. Delgado had a major high-visibility project early in her career at ElectroTec. It made a contribution to the company’s bottom line and she was rewarded with promotions. She credits much of her success to risk-taking, and talks about the importance of taking initiative and strategically creating opportunities.

However, she believes that she faces continual resistance within a conservative corporate culture where she believes that she—as a woman of color—is stereotyped as ‘too emotional.’ She believes that she is not communicated with directly and feels only marginally included. Ms. Delgado cites the importance of sponsors in running interference for her in a difficult culture, and in retrospect believes that she should have built more relationships with potential sponsors.

Ms. Delgado made a conscious career decision to tolerate an unfriendly and exclusionary environment and she is acutely aware of the low expectations for women of color in such a culture. She displays emotional resilience in distancing herself from people’s perceptions of her and counsels other women of color to do the same.

Interestingly, Ms. Delgado, a dark-skinned Latina, reports being excluded and undermined in the corporate work environment. She seems to experience much more of an outsider status than the other Latina profiled in this report, who reports not being immediately identifiable as a Latina.
CHAPTER 4: ANITA YU

CAREER SUMMARY

Anita Yu is the executive vice president of Human Resources for United Wireless. She has held her current position for three years and has been with the company a total of 22 years.

A native of Singapore, she began her career in the Singapore branch of United Wireless. She was appointed head of the Human Resources function in Singapore, then was recruited to head a Human Resources function in the U.S. She then received subsequent promotions within HR to eventually become executive vice president.

Like many other women interviewed, Ms. Yu cites the importance of receiving an early key assignment as critical to her success in United Wireless. She also discusses the challenges of managing work/life balance as part of a dual-career couple with two children.

MS. YU’S STORY

Being a Pioneer
I was the first female manager in our United Wireless facility in Singapore. That was my most important developmental experience. It was an extremely new environment. I was a pioneer. There was a lot of concern in that country about putting a female in a top job. It became very clear that with the work I did that I should have headed that function, but there was some deliberation as to how receptive the male work force would be to a female.

Thank goodness, we were lucky enough to have some senior managers from the United States at that time who really believed in affirmative action and felt that they should make that happen. So I was the youngest head of Human Resources at that time. I mean, even in Asia, they felt that they could give me a responsible position at a very early age, a very early stage of my career.

With that I was pretty much thrown into the fire and had to deal with the gamut of issues of a growth organization, a very multicultural environment. I had to deal with reconciliation of U.S. policy into a local culture. I had to deal with a totally different twist to the Human Resources profession, because Human Resources at that time was more about industrial relations. I had to quickly pick up all the competencies and evolve the function from industrial relations to Human Resources management.

I was thrown into the fire and had to gain the credibility of several thousand people that I could be their leader in Human Resources, that I could bring the programs and initiatives, and lay the foundation of United Wireless’s people culture in a new environment. That was significant learning for me.

As United Wireless’s perspective of global management expanded and more of the senior managers went around and saw the work I had done, there was more acceptance of me as a leader. That helped
me significantly. Even now people still hear my name when they go to that facility, though I left there a long time ago.

**Difficulty Getting Plum Jobs**
The second challenging job that I had was in the American position in strategic Human Resource management. I was probably the first female in Human Resources to move to the U.S. from an international post at that level.

I was dealing with a very new market in Latin America, setting up Human Resources programs there, setting up leadership development programs that were state of the art in United Wireless. I was able to get agreement from several businesses on direction for some very strategic HR programs. That got a lot of visibility.

In Latin America everybody thought I was somebody’s secretary when I first started working the region. I hadn’t shown up before face to face. When people first meet you, it is like, ‘Oh, she is not as important as the guy who is next to her.’ That is something that you have to deal with in some of the different cultures. In order to overcome that, you just have to continue to be clear about what your goals are, what your expectations are for dealing with the other party, and make them understand that you won’t take anything short of that.

So I’ve had to be more aggressive than I would normally have been in order to build my credibility in the first phase. The language, the accent is certainly an inhibitor.

Latin America was a very, very interesting environment to work with because we really had a lot of unknowns—we were in a discovery mode. Women who have been able to excel in new areas are able to get further ahead than they would have in a mature environment.

In the mature environment, it is very difficult for a woman to get some of those plum jobs, the high-visibility jobs. It’s always like, ‘Oh, we don’t think she’s ready.’ In the emerging markets, or in new businesses, they say, ‘What can we try out there?’

**Discovering I Couldn’t Be Myself**
As an Asian woman fitting into the U.S. culture, it was a wait and see attitude. People asked, ‘Why did she come over here? What is the value that she brings to the organization?’ At that time, United Wireless’s international business was not as important as it is today. People were introspective, very tunnel-visioned, had no idea what happened on the other side of the house.

I found that although people were warm, they really didn’t have time for me and rarely took the time, except for one or two people who already knew me. It was pretty much, ‘Get it yourself and find a way yourself.’

The first time you lead a meeting or you are introduced to folks, they think, ‘You’re there because you are a person of color and because we’ve got affirmative action.’ That is somewhat disconcerting.
because you are sensitive to it. It is always like, ‘We’ve got to challenge her a little bit more to see whether she really knows what she is talking about and how far we can push her.’ That is always in the back of my mind.

The first year in the U.S. company I wanted to be myself. But then I very soon discovered that I couldn’t be myself. I had to adapt to expected, critical behaviors of the organization. It meant learning how to work with teams, being a lot more visible, being more open with my thoughts and ideas. It meant taking that extra step to be more aggressive and be recognized more as an individual than as a team member. And obviously it meant learning how to speak like everybody else.

I had a very difficult performance discussion with one of my staff. He clearly was not open to receiving negative feedback from a female, and thought that he could work the system to use the fact that I was a female to build a stereotype: ‘She really can’t lead, she can’t manage, she doesn’t know what she’s talking about.’ He thought he could get further with his issues just because I was a female. That situation certainly would have sent the wrong message to the rest of my organization if I hadn’t dealt with it appropriately.

Avoiding the Mommy Track
I was ready to do whatever it took to be on a level playing field with the males: never having to take extra time off when I delivered my children, being very cautious and sensitive about my family needs when discussing them in the workplace. I didn’t want to be perceived as needing more accommodations than the males.

From a family standpoint, I managed that pretty well. So even when the kids were sick, I gave them a cordless phone and ran in and out between meetings, but never took the time away from work to be with them totally.

I was very sensitive even when I had my babies. I was very careful about how the work was managed in my absence and came back as soon as I could. I did not want to be perceived as being on a mommy track.

My job required a lot of travel. I was always on the plane when I was needed. I managed my family very carefully. My supervisors never had the perception that they had to make any accommodation for me, even though I was sometimes out on extended travel for 50 percent of my time. So it was pretty much managing that piece of my life very carefully and not showing it as much in the workplace.

Not Letting Your Guard Down
In moving up the chain, I had to always make sure that I was absolutely impeccable in detail, in response, so people couldn’t say, ‘She didn’t know what she was talking about.’

The neat thing about being a female is you are a lot more sensitive to what your customers needs are and you are more of a nurturer. You tend to help people and be more supportive. That builds the relationship so they come back to you more often. But eventually, you must deliver to meet expectations.
To maintain credibility we have a stereotype that successful women are always dressed impeccably in crisp business suits and don’t have fluffy, crazy hairdos. It’s okay for a male if he comes in dressed inappropriately because, ‘Oh, he may be a graphic artist!’ But if a female should come in looking that way, it’s like, ‘Hmmm, is she organized?’

I’ve practiced that my entire career. I am always dressed very professionally, very crisp. Even though today is casual day, I don’t really dress down as much because I understand that, first of all, I’m a female. I’m a person of color. I have to make sure that I have that professional image that comes across to people.

You really can’t let your guard down at all. My kids always ask me why I speak like that even at home. It’s because I’m so used to it. When they call me on the phone, they say, ‘Mom, it’s me. It’s me you’re talking to, your kid.’

**Coming in with a Good Education**

A critical factor in getting ahead was having the necessary education. Even in my first job in United Wireless, the fact that I had a graduate degree certainly put me ahead of many of the guys. That helped with credibility.

I feel a lot of empathy for females who come up through the secretarial or administrative support line. I have heard people make comments like, ‘How can she go that far, she was a secretary before.’ That’s one thing that I didn’t have to deal with.

So obviously, coming in with a good education helped considerably. It also helps to be willing to accept change and do whatever it takes to move with the requirements of the business.

**Being Pressured to Answer Quickly**

In maintaining credibility the other piece which I still struggle with is that guys are very quick to jump in with solutions, ideas, thoughts. But some of us tend to be more deliberative; females tend to do a lot more of that. We tend to think long term about what could happen. By the time you raise an idea you already have thought through some of the implications.

I remember one particular meeting that I went to very early in my career, a conference call. A question was asked. I was deliberating, I was thinking about options in my mind. And I heard a snide comment from a white male, ‘I can smell something burning.’ That took me aback. But I said, ‘Well, there are different successful styles, and it is good to know that the deliberative style is becoming more valued in the organization than flip answers.’

So it is a stereotype that you are more ‘with it’ if you can go in and answer quickly. I don’t think that some of us are used to thinking that way. The people with the deliberative style have more problems with getting ahead than the ones who can throw out all kinds of quick ideas.
**Not Letting Small Stature Be a Deterrent**
Whether you like it or not, the fact is that Asian women are pretty small in size. For some reason it is easier to enter the organization and be more visible if you are of a certain stature.

If you were to meet one of the senior male managers here, you would know at once what I mean. He is an outstanding person, but his size helps him enhance that acceptance and credibility in the organization.

One of the Asian females told me that one of our senior managers told her that it would be extremely difficult for her to get ahead and be accepted just because she is small in stature. I have never let that be a deterrent.

**Promoting Women’s Issues**
Women feel at risk in promoting women’s issues, especially in some professions that are still very much white male, or male bastions, like the sciences, patent law, and some very technical functions.

Asian females find that by being so assertive about women’s issues they are perceived as promoting their own cause. Even standing up and being visible is uncomfortable for Asian females because they like to work in a team environment. They feel uncomfortable being singled out, and noticed, and being a strong promoter of a cause. It’s a catch-22 situation.

It also goes back to the Asian female still being somewhat subservient to the male in her own culture. I happen to be an atypical example. But I have observed that the expectation in a primarily Asian relationship is that the male still takes the dominant role.

**Raising Diversity Issues**
Accountability for diversity among middle managers is slim to none. We really don’t hold them accountable at all. Senior management is very comfortable talking about diversity, but middle management still has a lot of discomfort in talking about it.

I bring diversity up in conversations. Even if people don’t like it, I discuss it with them. I’ve told them that I’m going to raise this issue and raise that issue. So if you want to call me obnoxious, that’s fine. I don’t care.

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**Promoting diversity: A societal context**
A lot of people say, 'Well, what do you have to contribute to this society in terms of diversity?' I contributed my two children. What I did with them was I said, 'You have to step out when it comes to people. If you see people are being treated differently, you’re going to have to be a voice. When you see people being made fun of because they’re different or they’re disabled or they’re a different race, you don’t participate in that. Furthermore, you correct the people that are doing it.'

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**Giving Women Opportunities in Mature Businesses**
Recommendations I’d give management to improve career development for women of color include putting them in visible assignments. Also giving them opportunities in mature businesses and not trying to analyze and overanalyze if they’re going to do well. Give them the job, let them take it, and see what they can make out of it.
Mentoring is also very important. I've had several mentors along the way, some more active than others. It is very important to have a mentor. You have to choose someone who you think you can get a lot of added value from and who really is genuinely interested in your development. I was very fortunate that I had quite a few people who were willing to pull for me.

There have not been any female role models. It has only been in the last fifteen years that women have really come up in the organization. When I joined the organization, I really didn't have any females to work with. We are now at the point where we have to be role models for the others, and hopefully, we are being good role models.

But we still have to be careful about the women who we promote in the organization. The guys are very quick to point out a lot of negatives and disaster stories, and not look as much at the successful stories.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ms. Yu illustrates another point along the spectrum, an Asian-American woman raised overseas. She cites overcoming quite a bit of resistance from others. She talks about being challenged, because of the stereotype that she's only there by virtue of being a person of color.

Ms. Yu made many adjustments to fit in, owing to different behavioral styles being valued in her U.S. organization vs. the organization in her home country. Though she started out trying to "be herself," she made many changes: learning how to work with teams; being more visible; being more open with thoughts; and being recognized more as an individual than a team member. In particular, she had to learn how to be more aggressive than she ordinarily would have been.

Like other women interviewed, she carefully cultivated a persona at work. Being politically astute, Ms. Yu avoided being perceived as being on a mommy track. She was careful about how the work was managed in her absence and came back from maternity leave as soon as possible. She makes certain not to show the side of herself that is a mother at work. She never lets her guard down—even when her children call her at work. Another part of her careful image management is always dressing professionally.

A nuance that she identifies is having had a chance to work in a new venture of an established business. As she says, in a mature business environment, it is very difficult for women to get some of the plum jobs, the high-visibility jobs. But, she notes, in emerging markets, where there is not an established power structure, senior leadership feels more comfortable trying out new things—such as having very senior women.
CHAPTER 5: ROSIE GOMEZ

CAREER SUMMARY

Rosie Gomez works for General Telecommunications Systems (G.T.S), a large telecommunications company. Ms. Gomez most recently served as vice president of Contracting. Prior to this, the majority of Ms. Gomez's service at G.T.S was in the corporate legal department.

She will soon transition to a new position as the senior vice president of Worldwide Contracting, requiring a move to Asia. This new position will require developing and launching a new part of the organization.

Ms. Gomez highlights the importance of mentoring—women to women and outside of racial group membership. She believes that lack of access to influential mentors is a challenge at G.T.S. for women of color and is a critical success factor for career advancement.

Ms. Gomez is married and has two grown children.

MS. GOMEZ'S STORY

Getting a Creative Position
I was a G.T.S. attorney prior to my new assignment. I was assigned back to Corporate Legal a year and a half ago and given an assignment there I really didn’t want.

So, after three months, I just accidentally ran across another person that I had started at G.T.S. with. He used to be a lawyer as well, and he’s currently the executive vice president of business development for G.T.S. Global Services in the U.S. He offered me a position and we created the last job I had. I managed about 70 contract negotiators, support professionals, and administrative professionals. I held that position for a couple of years.

From that job I realized that there was tremendous need to do this type of organizational work outside of the U.S., in the global business. I started lending staff members to various geographies to do this kind of work.

It became clear we needed more than just catch as catch can, so I just accepted this position last month as senior vice president of Worldwide Contracting for G.T.S. Global Services. I’m still transitioning.

The new position is going to be very creative in that I have to start the organization, train the people, get everything organized, and start doing some work.
**Having the Tools**

I think education, getting ready for the job for the future, making sure that you have all the tools that you possibly can have, is definitely the most important thing. You’re recognized when you walk in the door and that recognition allows you to grow and perform.

Education is critical. The law department hires pretty much from the good schools and I came from good schools—Wellesley and Yale Law School. Being hired into the law department at G.T.S means, by definition, you start at a pretty high level. You’ve already started way ahead of the curve.

Within the law department there’s a pretty routine way to rise through the ranks. If you’re successful you do that. I would say I was moderately successful; I was in the top third moving through the ranks in the law department. After having achieved that level, and then deciding to move out of law, I was at a level where I was qualified for the higher echelons of the business side if I could find that job.

I established credibility by being a good lawyer. That’s the truth. I really think I always did a good job.

**Being Unlike the Typical Latina**

The only two things that characterize me as Latina are one, my personality: very outgoing, very involved with people, and talkative. Also, my name, which when people see, they know I am Latina. But besides those two things, I don’t think people think about it.

My father was from Venezuela and my mother was from Costa Rica. I don’t look Hispanic at all. Spanish was my first language until I was four and then my parents stopped it altogether, so I don’t even really speak it anymore. It’s important because you’re perceived differently.

I think somebody who is raised in a family that was either Spanish-speaking or bilingual, and who is the first person to go to college and go into the business world, has a totally different experience than someone like me. I happen to have a Spanish name but really didn’t start to relate to being Latina until later.

I am tall and definitely outside of the typical Latina. I don’t think my appearance causes problems. Men can’t deal with me because of my height—not because I’m Latina. It really is power. There’s one particular lawyer that I used to work with a lot. He was about the same height as me and the difference was that when I put on three-inch heels, he didn’t like it. He used to back off from me.

My experiences at G.T.S. center not as much on being Latina, but more on being a woman at the company. I don’t see very many Latinas. That’s the truth. I mean, I’m at a level where there aren’t any other Latinas.
Being Perceived as More Committed to Family
This is a women thing, not a Latina thing: because I decided to have my children earlier, I basically knew that I would be perceived as somebody who wasn’t necessarily committed. It was just more important to me to have a child.

I think it was more in perception than in fact, though, because I obviously did quite well and continued to work. I didn’t actually take any time off, but there is a perception that people have when you make a decision in your late twenties to have a family: ‘Oh, she’s not really serious.’

A lot of peer women executives either had their children very late or don’t have children. I don’t think I suffered too much from it in the long run. Although I know for a fact, that some people thought that I was making a decision not to be committed. I thought, ‘That’s great: here I am back at work and they think that I’m not serious. That’s great!’

Moving 12 Times
I think the fact that the Hispanic family is a cornerstone to one’s existence is very different than people growing up Caucasian. Caucasian women leave home, form a family, move somewhere else, and they don’t think twice about it. I’ve talked to Hispanic women and they’re not interested in moving and relocating for the company because they don’t want to leave their parents behind. These ties are very strong. That’s really hard.

Relocation is a big part of moving forward, especially at this company. When both my parents passed away, having to relocate or stay wasn’t an issue. Other Hispanics really struggle with that, especially Hispanics that are very much into their community. Relocating away from family is outside of the cultural norm—including separating, being very independent—doing all these things.

I’ve moved 12 times in the past 23 years. Right now I’m moving to Japan to become the senior vice president of Worldwide Contracting and leaving my husband here.

I’m coping with a husband who is interested in being in Japan—but only part of the time, a daughter who graduated from college who I probably won’t see very often, and one son who’s a sophomore in college. And mother’s off to Asia.

In the past I’ve been faced with a lot of work/life issues, with two kids and a husband and we have a commuting relationship. I’ve carried the brunt of child rearing, which is fine, because it worked out
for everybody, but it was quite a challenge. It was always a priority for me that my children were well looked after, and so I would do that before I would buy an expensive house or an expensive car. I always had the best live-in help and I also had private schools.

So that’s just how I handled it, but, of course, it was a challenge.

**Men Cloning Each Other**

I don’t feel that I was ever mentored while in the law department. In fact, sometimes I felt like I was doing this all on my own in a lot of ways. But I would suggest that people entering the work force, Latinas in particular, should search around for a mentor or a role model with whom they can get close.

I’m mentoring others. They don’t realize it, because I don’t say, ‘I’m mentoring you,’ but there are two women who have pulled themselves up and along, just by their intellect and are making a great deal of effort to educate themselves. I work hard to make sure that they get recognized and they get opportunities.

It’s worked out well. Men have been mentoring since time began—they clone each other, to put it in a negative way. You’re more comfortable with people like you and you’re at a disadvantage if you’re surrounded by people who are not like you.

I think it’s incumbent upon the senior managers to take a look around and say, ‘Here’s somebody somewhat like me who may be having experiences like I had. So let’s see if we can help.’ I think there’s quite a few women who are starting to do that. Some women I know have made efforts to do that. There are some really great executives out there who I think have made an effort and then there are others who pay no attention to it at all.

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**Obtaining mentors**

How did I get my mentors? Number one, there was mutually perceived trust and credibility. It may have been through someone seeing my work product and saying, ‘you know this woman has brains and things to offer,’ whether that person was a peer or someone senior.

Number two, following up and finding opportunities to have exchanges. Not all of my mentors are people I see frequently. People have moved around in the country and the world and we’ve somehow kept in touch beyond a holiday note.

Number three has a lot to do with the other person. It’s that other person’s mutual interest in following up as well and their receptivity to maintaining a relationship.

—Senior-level Asian-American woman
Dealing with White Men Threatened by Diversity

I would say that based on having read many of the comments about my company’s diversity task forces, there’s still a core minority of white men who are very threatened by discussions surrounding diversity.

As a woman of color, to the extent that you’re overly visible, I would suspect that you take a risk, because they may be making decisions that you’re not even aware of that could be influenced by being a woman of color. Some of the comments were pretty blunt about that not being a criterion.

Men of color have a different story too. They don’t have the benefit of the camaraderie of the typical white male establishment. I actually think it’s harder for men of color than for women of color because women seem to have a women’s network focus. It’s part of who you are. But if you’re a black male, what are you? Or a Hispanic male, what are you in the organization? I think they have it tougher.

Opening Up Succession Planning

I think the hardest barrier that women have, especially at high levels, is that it’s very hard for a senior level white male executive to think about being replaced by a female, and particularly a female of color. They cannot relate to possibly being replaced by a woman of color. To the extent that any individual has the right to choose their replacement, that’s a huge barrier.

One thing that would help a lot is if we opened up some of the executive look-see business to a larger group. Maybe we could bring in an outside consultant who could help weigh qualifications to make sure that people that are really qualified are being considered for these positions.

I think women of color would then have a better shot—not just the guy who plays golf with the boss, who looks like the boss, walks like the boss, and talks like the boss.

I think the very best thing that management could do is to pair up Latinas with successful women in G.T.S., not necessarily Latina women but successful women who have balanced their lives, their careers, their families, and put that all together in a package.

We have continued to recommend formal mentoring as part of the task forces. I think mentoring is an excellent thing to have, especially when the person really knows who you are, where you sit, has discussions with you, gives suggestions, watches what you do, and how you do it. I just wish that there was more of that.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ms. Gomez's story points to the importance of educational credentials, or at least having the best credentials for the job. Her education played a key role in her selection; and her Ivy League education helped put her "ahead of the curve."

Her biggest challenges appeared to be with managing people's impressions of her as someone devoted to her work, in spite of having had children at a relatively young age.

Even though Ms. Gomez is not immediately identifiable as a woman of color, she shows an awareness of conditions in the workplace for women of color. She identifies the business needs for relocation particularly challenging for Hispanic women—given strong ties with family—though she did not experience this given her family circumstances.

In *Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers*, we reported the difficulty that women of color have obtaining mentors and sponsors. In this report, because we go more deeply into personal experiences, we see the context for these barriers. Ms. Gomez identifies an interesting dynamic in succession planning. In her experience, she believes that senior white men do not like to admit that they can be replaced by women of color. In her estimation, white male executives do not accept women of color as peers or equals. She identifies the lack of identification of women of color in high level succession planning as the reflection of white males' desire to hold on to their privileged status. The deeper issue is not necessarily that there is not a succession planning program on the books with numerical goals for women of color.

The deeper issue may be the reason for the lack of inclusion in succession planning: Many white men, as a powerful group, need to feel that only the rare exception can function as well as they can.
CHAPTER 6: AUDREY WANG

CAREER SUMMARY

Audrey Wang is the vice president of Corporate Strategy at DataByte, Inc. At the time of the interview she had been with DataByte for three years, and for the prior year managed a number of strategic projects and was responsible for seeking growth opportunities for DataByte. Prior to joining DataByte, Ms. Wang worked in private banking at a major bank, and before that at a department store chain as a buyer.

Ms. Wang discusses the challenges for outsiders in a large company with a very strong culture. She cites her unique abilities at problem-solving as important to her success, but points out that her skills were showcased by influential mentors and sponsors.

Ms. Wang speaks vividly about the ways in which Asian-American women are stereotyped in corporate environments as passive and quiet “China dolls”—and how she shatters people’s preconceptions of her based on her race. She also gives us her perspectives on the subtly nuanced differences between foreign born and U.S. born Asian-Americans, and the challenges of being part of an interracial marriage.

Ms. Wang is married and has one teenage daughter.

MS. WANG’S STORY

Being Protected by a Strong Mentor

My first job was at a major department store chain and I had two mentors. One taught me the ropes of retailing, I still stay in touch with him.

I was always one of these employees who had breakthrough ideas, which is great as long as someone lets you do them. In one case we were about to fail an audit for the whole corporation and I had an idea how to fix it and he said, ‘Let her try, what else can we lose. We’re going to lose if we don’t do this.’ It turned out to be right. As a result, I gained a lot of credibility.

At my second job, I was a radical. The head of marketing was my mentor even though he was many levels above me. He believed in my ideas and he supported me. He signed the checks for me to implement totally radical ideas that I could have never done unless I had someone at the top that had faith in what I was doing.

At the bank my sponsor was the president. Not that I worked officially for him; it was just that he really liked my work. Whenever something big would happen, no matter where I was, he would call me to help him work on it. People knew that I was representing him.
I was brought in by a very senior person at DataByte which immediately gave me credibility. He was very supportive. He said, ‘You go to these people, tell them I sent you and if anybody gives you any trouble, I will take care of it.’ I came in with a very strong mentor who said, ‘I’m not going to let anybody abuse you.’

Once I started doing some good things, I gained a lot of credibility. I was working with the guys at the top, solving their biggest problems. It makes a big difference. At DataByte, when the chairman announced the key initiatives that were part of the mission, four out of the six that he announced as accomplishments were things I had led.

Fitting the Mold
DataByte is like a nation. It’s got its own language, norms, culture, and history books. It has a lot of dos and don’ts which are not easy to figure out when you first arrive.

For example, people do not talk straight. I’ve been in a lot of companies and it’s less straight than most places I’ve been. There’s this tendency to put a lot of priority on saying stuff so nicely that you can’t even figure out what’s being said. If you’re overly direct, it doesn’t matter what the message is; there’s so much trauma over how it’s delivered that it’s a problem.

I’ve talked to one Asian woman who indirectly worked for me. Before she left I asked her, ‘Tell me the truth, what’s going on?’ She said, ‘This is a white company and it’s very hard to be respected if you don’t fit into the mold.’ I think that is true.

It’s different to bring someone like me from the outside, with a lot of experience with many companies, a lot of medals, and a blanket of respect. It’s much harder when you’re further down in the trenches where you’ve got to slug it out day to day with people who are part of the Old Boys’ Club.

Dealing with Men who Think of You as a Wife
Now increasingly more and more people have working wives, but a very large percentage of the people I work with at DataByte do not.

The men I deal with that do have working wives understand exactly what goes on because they’re going through the same kind of life. Disproportionately to the population at large, there are more management men with non-working wives here than at other places.

The real problem with people who have wives who have never worked is that they don’t think of you as a peer. They think of you as a trophy or ornament. They think of you as a wife. Interestingly enough, when these guys start having daughters with careers it changes their minds about things. They say, ‘Gee my daughter doesn’t get a fair opportunity.’ I say, ‘Duh, that’s how you treated women for years, what do you think?’
Not Having Asian's Issues Recognized
A diversity task force found that Asians tend not to spend as much time grandstanding or trying to get credit. There's the presumption that if you're good you will be recognized for it. You don't have to shout about it. That is very different from the typical employee who believes you've got to market yourself and take credit.

There is the perception by the Asians and others through the company that Asians will work a lot harder. They will go the extra mile. Where there's a problem technically, they will figure it out. When the chips are down, they'll be there and they'll fix it. Asians have tended to have their nose to the grindstone. If someone's here all night, it's an Asian.

Diversity programs historically give attention to Blacks and just women in general. Most of the women are white. Many of the organizations think of diversity as meaning Black. Many people don't think that Asians have any problems. They think Asians should just be happy and grateful.

Responding to Offensive Language
There were some things that happened when I came to DataByte that I thought were very strange. I came in at a very senior level. I went to a meeting. One of the very senior people on the top executive committee meeting was leaving the crowded room. He went past all these people and shook hands with everybody. He couldn't get past me without coming right in front of me. He shook the hand of the person next to me, ignored me, and went to the next person. It's pretty obvious that I wasn't a secretary. I thought it was so odd, almost rude.

I have become increasingly outspoken about things. When people use certain offensive language, I say, 'I take offense to that.' I think I've been more aggressive. At one time I would have just let it slide.

Someone would say, 'Why don't you try Chinese water torture.' That's a typical comment at DataByte. I would say, 'I resent that.' People would say, 'Gee I never thought of that before.' I've always been pretty direct, but over time, the more credibility and seniority I have, the easier it is.

Overcoming Assumptions about Communication Skills
There is the perception that Asians tend to speak less and have less verbal and written communication skills. One thing about being Asian that's different than being Irish is that you don't need to have an accent, you still look Asian. If you don't have an accent and you're Irish, it's not clear that you're Irish. So even if you're fifth generation as an Asian and you speak perfect English, people will still say to you, 'My you speak good English.' Or, 'You speak English, where were you born?' You don't have that in certain other groups.

Language and communication is one thing. The other thing is that attitudes and values are different too. Those who have been born in this country, particularly if you've been here several generations
The advantages of being U.S. born vs. foreign born

There are a few of us that were born in the United States. We have less trouble because from the standpoint of unspoken rules, we are more attuned to this society, corporate society, and we know a little bit better how that system works. We’re also educated in this country and so we were taught from a very early age, to speak what’s on our minds and not be afraid of giving input and we have good communication skills generally speaking, compared to the ones that have emigrated. We’re not afraid of talking.

—Senior-level Asian-American woman

and beyond and you’ve gone to the right schools, you feel you’re entitled to partake in the American Dream on an equal footing. Those who have come from another country are just glad to be in this country and they’re grateful that they have what they do. They will say, ‘Maybe I shouldn’t expect to be CEO. Maybe I shouldn’t push so hard because, boy, this is so much better than where I left.’ It’s a different attitude.

Experiencing the ‘China-doll Syndrome’

One of the problems with being an Asian woman is that there are certain stereotypes associated with being Asian and being a woman. With Asian women, there sometimes is the ‘China-doll syndrome.’ I don’t fit into that image but that’s a problem because people have an expectation of who I am. Then I’m so aggressive or have such a big mouth that it’s like shattering an image even though the image is wrong.

I think people are taken aback when you shatter their illusion of what you should be. That in itself causes problems. There was a presumption in many cases that I would be passive and quiet and I was just so aggressive and outspoken they got upset about it. They felt that being Asian, I would have been quiet.

I had a boss who would say, ‘How do you feel about this? I know you Asians sometimes won’t speak up.’ I was appalled that he would even say that. This was a very senior person in the company, about a year ago. I was just stunned. People expect you to be cute and always polite. They expect you to be good with certain customer types; they say, ‘You’ll do better with women customers.’ Or, ‘You’ll do better with Asian customers.’ But sometimes you do and sometimes you don’t. You don’t always do well with the Japanese because traditionally there’s been a lot of animosity between the Chinese and the Japanese.

There was one clear stereotype where there is a presumption that Asians would not do well with the typical Fortune 500 or U.S. major corporation. That’s one of the reasons why Asians have not been in any of the sales jobs. People have said to Asians, ‘We can’t send you in to a CEO.’ I have actually broken through that. I developed the reputation for being outstanding with CEO types and I met with some quite extensively. But that was really rare. The reason I could do that was because I knew a lot of them already from my private banking experience. So once I gained the credibility that I could do that, people would say, ‘Well you go talk to them because they’ll talk to you.’ But that was very, very unusual.
Getting Leadership Opportunities
I’m an outside hire, but none or maybe only one Asian woman in history has made it up through the ranks into an executive level. I think that was the lowest executive level and then she left the company. Fundamentally, the Asians feel they were stereotyped. They’ve been shut inside only technical jobs. No one becomes CEO from a technical job. There’s a presumption that Asians will always stay in technology and that they’re not interested in management or leadership positions. Women feel that it’s even worse for them, that there’s a double whammy.

There’s a tendency to push Asians toward staff jobs, technical jobs, and support roles as opposed to giving us opportunities for leadership. There’s also a tendency to push Asians toward jobs in China or Taiwan, but without the commensurate rewards that someone else going there might get.

The one prior Asian woman that got up to an executive level left the company because she felt that her advancement would be limited. We found that the few Asians that have gotten to an executive level were at the lowest tier of the executive level and were dead-ended. So even if you got there, you felt like you weren’t going to get anywhere else. It was almost like being in the token tier of executives.

Finding Mentors
It’s easier for white women to find mentors because people tend to feel more comfortable with people who are more like them. It’s human nature. There are no Asians at the top. There are some cultural differences. Sometimes it’s easier for Asian women rather than Asian men to find a mentor because of this ‘China-doll’ stereotype. You’re viewed as perhaps less threatening or people want to take care of you.

I’ve been really rather fortunate. I’ve always had mentors throughout my career. Sometimes they’ve created problems, but overall, the benefits have been great. I’ve learned a great deal and sometimes they’ve provided me with shelter when I really needed it.

Achieving Work/Life Balance
I have made some tradeoffs. There were times when I would not take a job I knew would be a killer because my daughter had just been born. I’m not sure it made a big difference in the grand scheme of things. I have made less tradeoffs for career advancement than I would have thought, actually. It helps to only have one child.

I’m very, very organized, but to be a good mother and the kind of career woman that I am, a lot of times I worked 100 hours a week. That was during a lot of turnarounds, a lot of start-ups. I was able to do it. My daughter is 15 years old now, so I can look at this in retrospect and say that I didn’t miss anything major. I never missed a major play even if I had to go to the rehearsal, if I had to work all night. But it was a killer to do this. The real tradeoff is personal time and taking care of yourself. You just run yourself ragged trying to do it all. Overall, I don’t think it has been bad.
In some cases there are some cultural issues because of our mixed marriage with a white husband. I have a much, much stronger focus on the family than my husband does. I talk to my mother several times a week. He talks to his parents when he has to. I’m very close to my siblings. I’m very close to my cousins. He doesn’t even know his cousins. I have a much stronger family orientation and I put a lot of priority on the family, much more so than my husband does.

It hasn’t been a real conflict. We do our own thing. I get more resentful that he doesn’t spend more time with his family, and he doesn’t care if I spend a lot of time with my family. There are certain things that I value more than he does. I value family reunions and gifts. He doesn’t value those things very much, but our basic values are very similar. Our basic priorities are that our daughter is number one. We are totally devoted to her. The rest of it is sort of scrambling to survive. We try to manage our trips so that we’re not both gone at the same time. It’s always a scramble to figure out who’s going to pick her up and who’s going to drive her where now that she’s a teenager. It sort of works, although there are difficulties at times.

**Giving Back to Society**

I am actually very involved in the community. I have a very strong feeling about giving back to society. I came from a family that was totally impoverished. I am involved in quite a few boards and I really give. I’m just about to set up a foundation to give away some DataByte stock. I contribute a great deal of money as well as time and effort to various causes.

I think my strong sense of giving back is a combination of my heritage and being a woman. A lot is influenced by my mother because even when we didn’t have anything, she always believed in helping others. There has been a strong tradition of giving and sharing from day one. Even to this day she does a lot of volunteer work. All her life she’s done this, no matter if we had money or no money.

I should say, the other thing is that I do think that I’ve just done so well, much more than I would have ever dreamed of. I believe that all along the way there were people who helped me, whether it was a teacher in school or various people who had a tremendous influence in my life and pushed me on and helped me so I feel this is my way of giving back to them.

**Providing Asians with Management Opportunities**

Asians have to be given opportunities to get into management. All of the Asian women are in the technical force, with the exception of me, someone in personnel, and one person in marketing. They feel that they have not been given an opportunity to try other things and to get out into more mainstream parts of the corporation. We have to give them the opportunities for these jobs. We should put them in the hottest areas, like the Internet areas. We have to put more of them on the Executive Resource List which is supposed to be a pipeline for management jobs. We need to get them on those lists, on more than a token basis. You can’t just put them there to say we’re on the list. You have to work at finding them jobs.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Ms. Wang’s story illustrates how barriers facing women of color play out differently by race/ethnicity. As with many women of color surveyed, Ms. Wang agreed that high-visibility assignments are important to success. She observed difficulties Asians had in her company in getting high visibility assignments, due to stereotyping. While some stereotypes of Asians were positive (technical and hard working), other stereotypes (poor communication skills, passivity) limited Asian-Americans’ career growth. Importantly, Ms. Wang also pointed out that Asians felt overlooked by diversity programs.

Ms. Wang faced specific stereotypes around being both Asian and female—being perceived as a China doll who was supposed to be cute and polite (not widely considered leadership characteristics). In spite of actually having the personality characteristics that helped her move ahead and are perceived as valuable for leadership—aggressiveness and the willingness to confront—she faced resistance from people who were upset when she behaved differently from their expectations.

Some 46 percent of women of color surveyed by Catalyst indicated that good communication skills were important to becoming successful. Ms. Wang observed that in her company, others expected Asians to have poor writing and speaking skills. She perceived a reluctance in the company to place Asians in assignments where interacting with high-level executives was required.

As with many of the other senior women of color interviewed, Ms. Wang was able to succeed through a combination of very strong competence and the cultivation of mentors and sponsors who gave her opportunities to showcase her talents in high-visibility assignments.

However, Ms. Wang had a different experience from other senior women of color interviewed, many of whom spent the majority of their careers in one company. Ms. Wang believes that if she had spent her entire career within her current company, she would never have received the experience needed for senior positions. Instead, she gained skill and expertise in other companies before joining her current company. As she said, she developed the reputation for interacting very successfully with CEOs only because she knew them from her prior banking experience—and that was “very, very, unusual.” In her case, job sequencing allowed her to gain key skills and build on them in subsequent assignments, and was a major contributor to her success.
CHAPTER 7: FRAN REDMOND

CAREER SUMMARY

Fran Redmond is an African-American woman who is vice president of Diversity Management at a large consumer packaged goods conglomerate. Ms. Redmond works with the domestic and global operating units who develop and implement Human Resources strategies around diversity. She has held this position for one year and has been with the company for over 20 years.

Ms. Redmond provides insights into how she aggressively managed her own career. She reveals how she successfully navigated an environment that demanded much more effort from women and people of color in creating a comfort level with senior managers. She also sheds light on her experiences as a single woman in creating comfort among her married colleagues.

Ms. Redmond emphasizes hard work, strong communication skills, and having fun. She encourages women of color to establish credibility with strong performance and to ensure recognition by strategically reminding managers of their contributions.

Ms. Redmond is single and does not have children.

MS. REDMOND’S STORY

Starting Out
My background was in program development—doing something with nothing. For example, putting 70 kids on the ski slopes without a budget as a community program. I would write programs. So they knew I had writing skills. Then I would go get the money after the fact, or use the media and the community to support financially what the community action agency wanted to do.

But I actually took a position with an operating company in a plant environment. I took an inventory position because the company said there were opportunities for advancement. I believed them.

Nine months later, upper management looked at my background and said there were openings in employee relations and that I’d be a perfect fit. The operating company was under pressure to create a different employee relations environment where there were communications programs for employees. That was how I moved into the HR area.

From there I developed those programs that were very visible throughout the facility. Corporate came and said, ‘Ooh, look at what she’s doing here. Look at all the neat things that she has developed and done in the plant environment.’

Timing and luck is another part of this. Corporate was building five other facilities. They said, ‘Fran, would you like to come to corporate to do what you did here but in all the new facilities? And help...
direct this employee relations process that seems to be working really well here?’ I happened to luck into the year that the corporate audit team came out and looked at our practices.

**Taking Responsibility**

I’ve always taken responsibility for my career, and I get very bored very easily. After working in employee relations I said, ‘Okay, what are you going to do with me? You like what I do; there’s good stuff out there. But I’m not going to do it for the rest of my life. I’ve built it for the first year. I’ve fine-tuned it for the second year. I’m in the third year. I need to go someplace.’

They moved me into employment, into training. I found that that was a niche that I fit in real well. I was very vocal about how we weren’t doing a good job with management and organizational development. I’d see departments being structured based upon the whim of the department head, versus what the business really needed. I’d see managers who were talented but needed development. We were sending them to a course instead of working out a career path that gave them the exposure that they needed.

**Creating Opportunities**

It was not until I got my Master’s degree that they started taking me seriously—when I started taking business courses. When the opportunity was there, I moved through the HR department. I was always saying, ‘You like what I do? You want me to do more of it? Give me some more challenges. Put me in another area that I can contribute to.’

They struggled with that for a while. It was funny, because they liked me. They knew I was contributing. But they were like, ‘Why are you bringing this up, Fran? Aren’t you happy?’ I said, ‘It’s not about happy. It’s about what I want to do career-wise. I’m not going to be stuck here.’

So they had every senior manager come and visit me and ask, ‘How are you doing?’ They were tippy-toeing around me. I think they were scared that I was going to go off on them. Because I was really saying, ‘I’m not going to do this for the rest of my life. I think I could contribute to other parts of the organization. Give me that opportunity.’

They got pretty confrontational with it. Because after all eight or nine of them came and said, ‘Hi Fran, what is it that you’d like?’ Then the heavy came.

The heavy confrontational guy was in charge of all of the Human Resources planning. He pushed. He said, ‘When your goals and the company goals are not compatible it might be time for you to leave.’ I said, ‘Yes, that’s true.’ I told him, ‘That’s not a problem. Because if you don’t move me, I will leave. It’s as simple as that. I’m not saying I’d quit today. But I’m looking for the right opportunity.’

That was a Friday night. He screamed at me, I screamed at him. It was behind closed doors. I said, ‘This is bullshit. I’m not asking for anything. I’m not asking for you to give me a VP job now. I’m asking for you to give me another opportunity. You like what I did here. Let me do it in another area so I can show what I can do and I don’t get stuck.’
By Monday they had me in another job. We fought until seven-thirty, eight o’clock Friday night. It was really a fight. But he was the kind of guy that liked a fight. I knew he liked to fight. He was very confrontational with everybody. But this was the last straw. I think what they were saying was, push on her a little bit and see if she’s really serious.

**Getting a Stretch Move**

My former company was getting into organizational development, management development, and training. It was a major area. That was probably the one move that I was mentored into. It was a stretch move for me.

My mentor was a senior white male. He’s retired, he still calls me. He says, ‘How come you didn’t call me when you got this last promotion?’ He’s just a nice guy. Very straight. Ex-marine. Integrity up the yin-yang. We used to fight, but then we’d leave the office as friends. He appreciated the push back.

But I also knew who made the decisions. ‘I may not agree with you, but it’s your decision.’ We had a good relationship that way. He trusted me. There was a lot of trust that we built over the years that we worked together. He really took a risk because I had no background in that type of HR work. So he took me to director level, and it was the most significant function in the whole HR division. Then, because I was doing such a good job with it—he took me to the higher-level director position. After that promotion, the parent company came and got me. He was disappointed and said, “You don’t have to go.”

The opportunity he gave me was very significant and he coached me along the way.

**Experiencing Good Timing and Luck**

I don’t know if my strategy would work with everybody. Mainly because it was timing, luck, my track record, and the people I was dealing with. I have run into a couple of individuals who were not about to give me the promotion that I deserved. Fortunately those individuals left.

You’ve got to have your track record. You’ve got to be able to look at where you’ve been in the organization and say, ‘See that stake in the ground? That’s there because of me.’ It’s not about tooting your own horn in front of a group, but when it comes down to your manager, you need to say, ‘Can we talk about my career? If you don’t know, let me point out what I’ve done lately for you.’ I think the only way to establish credibility as a person of color is by doing and accomplishing things. Because they won’t take anybody’s word for it.

Don’t let anybody write your performance review. You write it. You know when your annual review is coming up. You just want to help out your boss. You say, ‘Here’s what I’ve accomplished this year. You might like to use this when you finalize my performance appraisal.’ Every boss I have had has loved that. No boss likes to write performance appraisals. So a month before it was due, I said, ‘Here’s what I’ve done this year. You put the rating on it.’
**Busting through Stereotypes**

The white manager, who has stereotypes about black women or Hispanic women or Asian women—brings his limited comfort zone to the party. You’ve got to bust through that. You’ve got to sit down and take every person at the point they are.

They’re not all able to deal with these issues. You’ve got to do a lot of observing and a lot of culling through the environment that says this is where he may be. Because if he’s never worked with a woman before, or never has gone to school with a woman of color or had any exposure—you’ve got to go, ‘Ooh, I might be the first.’

I think that if you’re not willing to do that, and have patience with that on a case-by-case, individual-by-individual basis, and want to just come based on your credentials, you’re not going to make it. Because no one’s an island in corporate America.

I think it is truer for women of color than white women because you’re working through two barriers. Maybe he’s got a problem because you’re a woman, and maybe he’s got a problem because you’re black. Maybe he doesn’t have a problem because you’re a woman. You’ve got to figure that out. You have to then deal with that individual and work with him, collaborate with him on his discovery. That takes a lot.

I think I had to overcome stereotypes attributed to women to establish credibility, because it was a very male-oriented business. But you add color to that and it gets real bizarre.

Early on I remember doing things like being in meetings with all men and throwing out ideas and not having them listen to them. Then the idea would be picked up by some male, and it was a great idea. I’ve seen that happen and it’s happened to me. I’ve also seen where I have made a certain statement and it’s been challenged. Unless it’s cosigned by somebody it’s not taken as truth.

They don’t want to take the risk on people of color. Everybody’s got too much to do, and everybody’s got pressure to do almost more than what is humanly possible. So they think, ‘I want somebody who I know. I want somebody when I lay there with my wife on Saturday night I can say, he’s on my team, or she’s on my team. I know they’ll go the extra mile for me.’

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The responsibility for creating comfort rests on women of color

For people of color, building relationships is harder and it’s even more important. It is the burden of the person of color to build that relationship. I just had a review with my boss where he says, he doesn’t know me. Well he’s very much an introvert. He’s very painful to talk to. And I’m actually an extrovert. I invited him to a cabaret thing and I knew everybody and all of these people and he said, ‘I was amazed to see you there and you were in your element and you were so comfortable, and why don’t I know you very well?’ He thought that it was my fault that he doesn’t know me as opposed to accepting responsibility for that, as if it’s my challenge to build the relationship with him.

—Senior-level African-American woman

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Women of Color Executives: Their Voices, Their Journeys
Giving Them a Comfort Zone
My most important developmental experience has been the exposure to the senior team. Also being able to develop a relationship in which they’re willing to give me feedback. I’ve always approached them like this: ‘Is there anything on your plate that I can help you with? Is there anything that I’m not doing? Kick my ass.’ I gave them license to do that. ‘If you feel I’m taking a project in the wrong direction, you’re as much responsible as I am. Don’t hesitate.’

And I think giving them license to do that has given them a comfort zone. To be able to go, Redmond, you messed up! Really. But I also want the superlatives when I’m doing something right. Because that’s just as important. So you’ve got to balance that.

Having to ‘Go Off’
I think white managers walk on eggshells around us. They think, ‘She’s going to ‘go off’ on me.’ Sometimes you have to ‘go off.’ Like when you’re right and when you’ve looked at the scenario and you’ve said, this is some bullshit.

The way you ‘go off’ is important. Never in a public arena. Never in front of anybody else. You go right to the person. You close that door. Language-wise you don’t get out of the profession. You just tell him, ‘I don’t agree with you. If you ever do that again—you’re going to have to deal with me.’

I don’t care if it’s a colleague or a subordinate or a manager. But when you’re right I think you gain a lot of credibility by the way you go off.

Their biggest fear with women of color is, ‘She’s going to embarrass me in front of my colleagues or make it look like I’m a racist.’

Experiencing the Corporation as a Plantation
I brought to management’s attention that you can be too Black—too dark-skinned to make it. They were outraged. They claimed, ‘That’s not the case.’ I said, ‘Look around. Look who’s making it.’ I say that the corporation is just like a plantation. We laugh about this, my girlfriends and I, about how it’s a plantation, and it’s a big house.

I’m in the big house. To be in the big house they have to be comfortable with you. But they were outraged when I pointed it out. I came here and I said, look at this. They were saying, well how about this person, and how about that person? I’m going, ‘They aren’t Black. They are not dark-skinned Black people, okay? In fact, let me show you what I mean.’ Then I took my boss and walked the halls.

Afterwards he said, ‘Gee, you might have a point there. But it’s not like we’re doing it consciously.’ I said, ‘Yeah, right. It’s so ingrained and subconscious that it’s done without your even being aware of it.’
Dealing with Being Single in Corporate America

Early on I let them know what I wanted them to know about me. I'm a very private person and what I do outside of work is my business. But I knew that I couldn't keep that distance at my former employer. In a plant environment, particularly in a Midwestern locale, it was very social. I was single and I was a threat to their wives. Therefore I chose a gentleman who would attend things with me.

So there are certain things that I had to expose to be non-threatening in the environment. It was being single and being a Black woman. I saw it at the first event. The wives were like, 'Who is she?' What is she doing traveling with my husband?'

What's funny is, if I had been married I would have been more acceptable. The trade-off I had to make was to always have a male companion at company functions, and I learned that early on. Okay, I'm not married. I am threatening. These women do know that I am traveling with their husbands, or I'm working until eight, nine o'clock in the office.

We need to keep this one in perspective, because imaginations can go wild. That's another thing, I think, from a woman's perspective that men don't have to deal with. Their reputation and their sexuality don't come into play.

Handling Sexual Harassment

Any woman that has made any kind of career has been sexually harassed in her career. How she's dealt with it—whether she's ignored it, or stepped up to it, or laughed it off, or just made sure that she wasn't alone with that individual—is a major role, a major part.

I talk with my friends all the time. I was sexually harassed early in my career. But the way I approached it was, walk in the office, close the door and say, 'If you ever do this again I'm going to kick your ass. If you ever tell anybody that I was going to kick your ass I'll lie through my teeth.' And act like you must be crazy. 'You're married—no, I'm not going to date you. No, I'm not going to—so get a life.'

Creating a Corporate Space

I've had people in my office that have said, 'I ain't gonna do that shit. I'm good at what I do, but I am not going to sit down and have a cup of coffee with them. I am not going to lunch with them. I am not going to chit-chat over what I did over the weekend with them.' And I say, 'If you don't they're going to make up stories.'

So you'd better give them what you want them to have. Because that's the culture—people come in and they chat about what they did last night. Don't look at it as an infringement on your private space. Create your corporate space. You create a corporate space by giving them the image that you want them to have, not necessarily what reality is.
Accepting My African-American Background

Personally, my values—like honesty and integrity—are no different from those of any culture. Culturally, I bring my African-American background to the table. What’s interesting is that it is accepted. I’m not shoving it down anyone’s throat. Here’s who I am, here’s how I dress. Here’s how I react to people.

My style is very different in some cases from my white counterparts. Very, very different. The difference is how I approach my job. If I don’t have fun with it I’m not going to do it. I have to also see progress. I wouldn’t be in this role if the company wasn’t a committed company to work on the issues of diversity. They sought me out at the operating company when I was the director of Organizational Development there. They said, ‘Would you like to do this? Do you really want it done?’ We went from there.

I feel you should work hard, but you should have fun with it. That’s not what I see my other colleagues doing. They’re more stoic and very dry with their people. I feel that we can get things done and still enjoy the process, and the inner workings of the team. And be able to establish business relationships that are pleasant.

Some folks have looked at me in my career and said, ‘She’s not serious enough. She has too much fun. She can’t be getting the work done. I mean, they’re smiling too much over there.’

I surprise them, because of my output. The volume of work that I produce and what I do is outrageous compared to others, in terms of ability to drive to the results. That’s always been a compliment. But they’re surprised that I can do it in a fun way.

Finding the Diamond in the Rough

The recommendation for management is to look into your organization and find the diamond in the rough. Go low. If you have to go to the mail room to find the person of color, then that should be an indication of something to you, okay? And then hold your team accountable for making that change. We’re working a lot on those two issues.

They should do accelerated development, because they stretch other folks. But they hesitate to stretch people of color.
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Like many other women interviewed for this study, Ms. Redmond aggressively managed her own career. Her direct style of communication was effective, in pushing to reach critical next stages in her career plan.

Ms. Redmond’s direct style of communication also helped her get the most out of her relationship with senior managers. She created a sense of comfort among the senior people she was able to work with by actively soliciting their feedback, and inviting them to point out her mistakes.

The senior women Catalyst interviewed display a variety of styles, but all are characterized by a high degree of emotional resilience. In Ms. Redmond’s case, her resilience allowed her the confidence to invite direct feedback, and to be as direct and as strategically confrontational as she was.

Ms. Redmond also provides valuable insight for individual women in urging them to create a corporate “space,” or image that they strategically project.

Finally, as other women of color interviewed for this project, the role of luck and timing is very powerful. In Ms. Redmond’s case, her break came because her company was building new plants just at the moment she had completed a successful new employee relations program in one plant. As with other senior women, she received high visibility at the beginning critical phase of her career.
CHAPTER 8: SUMMARY

Catalyst’s research identifies many factors affecting career movement for women of color. Women and people of color are underrepresented in managerial ranks; there are few women or people of color in influential positions. Lack of similar ‘others’ in high positions leads to a lack of mentorship and sponsorship and lack of inclusion in networks. Consistent with this fact of corporate life, Catalyst’s Women of Color in Corporate Management found that the most frequently cited barrier to career advancement is “lack of a mentor or sponsor,” followed by “lack of networking with influential colleagues,” and “lack of role models who are members of the same racial/ethnic group.” Another frequently cited barrier in the survey, “lack of high-visibility assignments,” is itself related to the lack of connections with influential parties (sponsors, etc.) who make or influence such decisions.

Further, “unspoken rules” about how to act, communicate, etc., in the corporate environment are perpetuated consciously or unconsciously by the senior leadership, which tends to be white and male. It can be difficult for those not used to these norms to adopt them. The Catalyst Women of Color in Corporate Management survey found that the fifth most frequently cited barrier to advancement is “not fitting behavioral style to what is typical at the company.”

Through analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics data and other sources, Catalyst has documented the “double whammy” of race and gender for women of color. For example, while white women’s representation in the managerial workforce (33 percent) is essentially equivalent to their representation in the labor force (35 percent), women of color are underrepresented in the management workforce (5.6 percent) compared to their representation in the labor force (11.5 percent). Looking at the most senior levels of management, women of color are only 1.3 percent of the corporate officer pool (2000 Catalyst Census of Women Corporate Officers and Top Earners, 2000). Catalyst research also shows that women of color perceive positive change as happening more slowly than do white women. More white women (60 percent) than women of color (47 percent) perceive an increase in career opportunities during the previous five years.

As for each specific gender/race group, Catalyst’s prior research cites the lack of acceptance of African-American women as authority figures, their placement in positions of less authority than white women (in spite of holding similar credentials), the existence of negative stereotypes, and their exclusion from networks. In addition, prior research on Hispanic managers indicates that they are less likely than African-Americans to report exclusion from informal networks, but are also subject to negative stereotyping such as being perceived as too emotional. Asians have been stereotyped as, among other things, diligent, intelligent, passive, and reserved; some of these may be positive qualities but not necessarily necessarily “managerial” qualities.

WORK ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR ROLE IN SHAPING BARRIERS

Given the paucity of women of color managers and professionals within corporate environments and the existence of negative stereotypes about women of color, one question we address in this research is how the women experienced their work environments. We analyzed the descriptions provided by the 35 women and identify two frequently mentioned descriptions of work cultures as they related to race/gender climate: exclusionary environments and risk-averse leadership styles.

**Exclusionary Environments**

Exclusionary environments are characterized by informal norms that exclude those who are different from the white male majority. As one African-American woman says in an interview:

_This company has favorites. The field is not level. If you are the 35-year-old, 40-year-old white male, perfect hair, suit, wife and two kids guy, you can connect easily with this gentleman up above you or beside you who looks at you as his son, his father, his friend, whatever . . . Those connections happen and are so—from our view—so blatant it’s amazing. The favoritism is there; it’s clearly there._

In discussing how these environments come to be exclusionary, many women cite white males’ lack of contact with women of color. Cheryl Hamilton in chapter two discusses an insight a white male manager shared with her about white men’s lack of familiarity with highly capable women of color. Another African-American woman shares a similar insight, emphasizing white men’s greater identification with white women:

_You come to the fork in the road, the majority female gets the nod primarily because, one, they try to emulate the majority male in their management and leadership ... and because the majority males have daughters and wives that look like them. And they know how they want their daughters and wives to be treated now that they’re out in the workforce, so they give them the nod._

Barriers that particularly manifest themselves in exclusionary environments are, naturally enough, “exclusion from informal networks,” “lack of a mentor or sponsor,” and “lack of role models of the same race or ethnic group.”

Not fitting typical company behavioral style is another barrier that manifests itself in exclusionary environments. As one African-American woman interviewee says:

_I had lots of leeway to be this different outspoken kind of brash person. It’s more and more risky higher in the organization where the flexibility is less. So clearly ... this is an adjustment in style that would be worthwhile and clearly something that I am doing, that I will do—but there are still certain things that I will not back off on._
Physical appearance—related to behavioral style—is another aspect of compatibility with the dominant white male groups. In chapter seven Fran Redmond asserts that in her company only African-Americans who are light-skinned achieve senior positions in the managerial ranks.

**Risk-Averse Environments**

In environments characterized as having risk-averse leadership, the women we interviewed perceive that people were not willing to step outside of fairly narrow norms to do things differently or innovatively. As one Asian-American woman says:

> The typical manager generally is somebody who doesn't take risks, someone who waits to see what the popular answer is going to be, someone who waits to see what his boss is going to say... They express their boss's opinion pretty well, rather than their own.

The barrier for women of color that is most related to risk-averse environments is "lack of high-visibility assignments." For example, an African-American woman says:

> If they're not comfortable with you, they're not going to give you a job that they perceive would cause undue risk to them. So it's not a job that's pegged for women or a job for a Black person or any of these things, it's just that there may be jobs that may be perceived as less risky to have an unknown quantity in. And so then, we end up in those jobs... Do they give you a job that you know is a real good job, or do they perceive that giving you that job is a bit of a risk?

Risk-averse environments also make it difficult for women of color to obtain powerful mentors or sponsors—again, because it is not within the company’s norms. As Cheryl Hamilton says in chapter two, white males tend to mentor those individuals who are little or no risk to them.

Finally, many work environments are characterized as both exclusionary and as having risk-averse leadership—making the barriers encountered that much more deeply ingrained in the culture and harder to overcome.
SUCCESS FACTORS

In *Women of Color in Corporate Management*, Catalyst asked women of color which success factors they thought were most important to women of their racial/ethnic group in overcoming barriers. We then examined the meanings of each of these success factors within our interviewees’ work environments and experiences. We subsequently identified several professional factors as well as personal traits.

**Professional Factors**

**Forging connections with influential others**

Many survey respondents agree that a mentor or sponsor is critical to success, as is informal networking with influential colleagues. Of all success factors, forging connections with influential others—either peers or potential sponsors and mentors—appears to be the most difficult, multifaceted task facing women of color in corporations. The women report that several steps and strategies are involved.

**Building comfort among managers and colleagues**

As noted earlier in this chapter, most women of color interviewed perceive their work environments as exclusionary and risk averse. In chapter seven Fran Redmond details the effort it takes to connect with a typical white male manager, and asserts its importance in career advancement for women of color.

Another African-American woman shares her strategy for developing relationships with those from backgrounds different from hers:

> I always look for opportunities to break down barriers. Typically, I try to share a little bit of me with that person and sometimes that’s risky, but I guess it really gets at trying to be approachable. It’s making the other person feel like they can let down their guard just a little bit and deal with you on a more human level.

One African-American senior woman points out the critical role of developing interpersonal relationships in organizations, and the difficulty women of color have in doing so:

> There is not a lot of familiarity in my company with a black female who is relatively sharp, who clearly manages a huge piece of the business—it’s just not normal. It’s not ordinary. But most things are not done by presenting the facts and making a decision. Things are done by negotiation, by compromise, by friendliness, and by establishing a comfort level between people. So the things that depend on that, which is everything, require more time.
Modifying personal style

Many women of color surveyed find it necessary to make adjustments to fit within their work environments.

In the United States, assumptions about organizations and successful members dictate that effective business people are logical, reasoned, and rational, with emotions regarded as unwanted influences. More specifically, M.N. Davidson found that corporate cultures of large companies often promote a "lukewarm, reserved, and impersonal" interpersonal bearing among its members, which in many cases is not shared by people of color. For some women of color, modifying behavior entails toning down directness and expressiveness to fit such constrained styles.

For others, particularly Asian-American women, adapting to the American corporate culture means becoming more aggressive and direct with people. This is noted by Anita Yu in chapter four and is echoed by another senior Asian-American woman interviewed:

*I think what I learned from being in America is if you want to really exist and you want to be heard, you've got to be aggressive, you've got to go out there with people who know what you're all about. Why wait for them to come and get to know you. If you've got an opinion, express it. If you don't agree with something, let it be known. Don't let people push you around."

One specific way of modifying personal style is to downplay race and gender. Women of color report feeling pressured to downplay their difference in order to succeed in organizations that tend to reward certain types of people and have a narrow set of acceptable management styles.

Women who report downplaying their race range from those who function adeptly in different subcultures to those who do not necessarily identify strongly with their ethnicity. More women indicate having to downplay their race as opposed to gender, and race appears to pose a greater hindrance to their career advancement.

The senior women interviewed are divided between those who report downplaying their race and gender and those who report maintaining their individual style. Asserting a unique personal style linked to their cultural background is particularly true among African-Americans.

One senior-level African-American woman speaks about being up front about her individual sensibilities, despite clear differences with her colleagues:

*I know people walk into my office and they see Black, African art in my office. Or they see pictures of families that look different than their families. When we talk about what my interests are or where I'm going for vacation I say I'm going to Brooklyn and they say they're going to Martha's Vineyard."

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Women of Color Executives: Their Voices, Their Journeys
As Christine Delgado notes in chapter three, she traded identifying herself as Puerto Rican for identifying herself as Cuban, which she observed was perceived as higher status. Such a tradeoff illustrates the complexities of the status associated with different racial/ethnic backgrounds.

For some of the other Hispanic women interviewed, gender appears to be a more salient issue than race, as some of the women are not immediately identifiable as Hispanic in appearance.

For another Hispanic woman, a major adjustment is focusing on her abilities as a professional engineer over her identity as a woman:

So, I had to make an adjustment to quit thinking of myself as the female engineer and start thinking of myself as the engineer. Once I changed my mindset, I perceived somehow that they also perceived me differently . . . they realized that I can be as good an engineer as a male can be.

Obtaining high-visibility assignments: the roles of mentors, sponsors, and luck
The most frequently cited factor for success in Women of Color in Corporate Management is having high-visibility assignments. In our interviews with senior women of color, such key early assignments—obtained through the women’s qualifications, personal characteristics, and with the support of mentors or sponsors that they were fortunate enough to find—help to strengthen the women’s abilities and broaden their perspectives. These key assignments entail working in different departments to build a well-rounded business background and/or working on visible or stretch assignments which, in turn, help women increase their network of support within the company.

Specific strategies for developing relationships with mentors
It is clear that mentors and sponsors play critical roles in helping women of color obtain important assignments and successfully complete them.

Individuals who act as sponsors for the women are those willing to take risks and demonstrate confidence in women of color by entrusting them with large job assignments or endorsing their project ideas. Finding such mentors appears harder for women of color than for white women, given the exclusionary and risk-averse climates women of color report working in.

Catalyst’s research suggests that before investing great time and energy in developing influential relationships, a self-assessment is an important step. Catalyst recommends that individuals identify specific skills or exposure they need to meet goals, and then pursue relationships with people who will facilitate achieving those goals. Several women we interviewed gave specific suggestions consistent with that framework.
One African-American woman talks about being realistic in looking for a mentor, and not necessarily having to have the highest-level one. Alternatively, another African-American woman discusses the strategy of identifying a senior person as a potential mentor:

Identify with somebody at the very highest of levels. That’s when I have advanced the fastest and the most strategically. When people have not focused on . . . the highest levels, then there seems to be this languishing that occurs.

An Asian-American woman talks about the importance of maintaining the relationship with the mentor, and provides insight on the ongoing roles mentors can play:

Once you find a mentor, hang on to that person as long as you can because that person can not only help you through your professional life, point out to you some of the cultural things within the corporation, help you personally/professionally, but also help you through some tough situations business-wise—that is extremely valuable . . . Never underestimate the power of having that person believing in you.

Luck and timing
From the accounts, luck and timing are also perceived as being important factors. Anita Yu credited her most important developmental experience to not just competence but good timing—the readiness of senior management to trust a woman in a top job. Andrey Wang emphasized that her good ideas were showcased, but only because she was fortunate to have sponsors willing to let her implement the ideas.

Performing over and above expectations: necessary but not sufficient for success
Some 49 percent of survey respondents agree that performing over and above expectations is necessary for women of their ethnic group to succeed. In the in-depth interviews, we find that educational credentials are also seen as helpful in establishing credibility.

While excellent performance is the price of entry for consideration for promotion, the 35 women of color interviewed point out that it is not a sufficient means for women of color to advance. Many senior women of color interviewed cite a double standard of performance for women of color versus others. They often credit the role of luck and timing in having someone recognize and reward their excellent performance.

Many women interviewed cite this double standard as a serious institutional barrier that could not always be overcome by individual effort. As an African-American woman says:

I think there have been many, many instances and I think double standards are fairly pervasive. If a majority person is not successful or is not successful for some period of time, they can be given other opportunities and their career may not be over. I think it’s more difficult for a minority person to have that same second or third chance.
Communication skills
Just over 45 percent of survey respondents indicate that good communication skills are essential to success. The qualitative interviews clarify what types of communication skills are required for senior-level advancement.

Balancing directness with tact
Senior women are consistent in indicating that they must be outspoken and sociable in order to raise comfort among others. They also report that at other times they need to be outspoken in confronting others to dispel negative presumptions about women of color or to address inequitable behavior. As an Asian-American woman states:

\[\text{I can be making a presentation and a white male will interrupt me and sometimes no one else notices that it happened other than me, which kind of says a lot for the culture here. What I've done in cases like that is that I've stopped and said, 'Excuse me, I'd like to finish what I was saying,' to draw attention to the fact that I was interrupted so that this kind of stuff doesn't keep going on unnoticed.}\]

Several women note that such direct communication can be unusual among white male and female colleagues. Thus, the need exists to balance confrontation with a degree of tact. For example, choosing appropriate settings in which to confront others.

Overcoming special challenges for the foreign born
Two-thirds of Asian-American women in the survey sample are foreign born, and most of them did not come to this country until they were adults. Therefore, communication style is more likely to be a stumbling block in their career progress than for those with a longer history in the U.S. This may also explain why Asian-American women surveyed are more likely than other groups to cite lack of informal networking with influential colleagues as a barrier to advancement.

To one Asian-American woman, successful communication denotes:

\[\text{Projecting your voice, feeling comfortable with the eye contact. In the Asian culture, eye contact is very uncomfortable for people. In many cases, looking someone directly in the eye is an insult and in order to be respectful, you don't look someone in the eye.}\]

A Hispanic woman also pointed out how effective communication skills, such as learning how to be concise and direct, can help overcome language barriers including foreign accents.
**Personal Traits**

Senior women we interviewed provided additional insight into their personal characteristics and strategies for achieving success.

**Developing political astuteness**

Many of the senior women interviewed appear to possess a high level of political astuteness as they adjust their behavior to fit the traditional corporate culture and tactfully resolve any job-related conflicts that may include being a target of discrimination. The women describe having to carefully balance immediate interpersonal conflicts with the long-term aspirations for career advancement. As a Latina we interviewed notes:

> You have to know when to pick battles because you can’t take issue with every personal slight . . . You have to resolve things off-line and not try to publicly embarrass someone even though you feel that you’ve been humiliated publicly.

Many women of color observe that they were more often challenged than white men or women when they initially took high-level jobs. They were astute enough to recognize the importance of meeting those challenges, and nipped them in the bud.

Fran Redmond in chapter seven had the impression that her bosses were thinking, at a crucial point in her career, “Push on her a little bit and see if she’s really serious.” She successfully communicated her seriousness by standing up to an aggressive upper-level executive.

Both Fran Redmond and Anita Yu were very astute in how they crafted corporate persona for themselves. For Anita Yu, her de-emphasis on her family commitment was to fit an image she perceived was appropriate. For the single Ms. Redmond, it was creating a corporate “date” to be less threatening to the wives of her male colleagues.

**Managing one’s own career**

In common with others who achieve high status in organizations, across a range of races and gender, the women are extremely goal-oriented, take initiative in managing their own careers, and put in extraordinary work and commitment. This is illustrated by each of the six stories in this report. Another Asian-American woman we interviewed notes:

> I’ve been told I’m very persistent and I cannot stand failure and basically that drives me to achieve more. It’s been interesting because my colleagues have attributed that to my background, to my culture.
Handling work and life involvement
The women interviewed display a whole range of strategies for having both fulfilling personal lives and successful work lives. In order to make such extensive commitment to their career, some women indicate making personal tradeoffs that include delaying having children, limiting the extent of their family involvement, and limiting personal time, particularly in order to make time for work and family. An Asian-American woman notes:

*I traded off having kids at an earlier age. I waited almost 10 years to have kids because I kept on thinking, ‘Well, I want to prove to them that I’m committed. I don’t want them to think that I’m not going to come back.’*

Many women interviewed are very careful about managing their image at work regarding the extent of family involvement, working to minimize the extent to which they appear involved in family roles, such as Anita Yu in chapter four.

Other women indicate that it was important for them to enjoy having children and did so in spite of the norms around their company regarding successful women and families. As Rosie Gomez states in chapter five, a major barrier she had to overcome was colleagues’ assumptions that she was not committed to her career because she had her children at a relatively young age.

Emotional resilience in overcoming bias
Together with being proactive and goal-oriented, many senior women possess a high degree of emotional resilience or “toughness.” This resilience allows women to feel confident taking risks and to achieve outstanding results without internalizing biased attitudes within the work environment that work to exclude them. An African-American woman states:

*So I really learned to shut those things off . . . If you allow people to give you shit they’ll give it to you. They’ll expect you to have a little pile back there and they’ll say, ‘Excuse me, I have some today, could you add it your little pile,’ and I just refuse to have a pile for it. I refuse to take their issues onto me.*

A Latina recounts dealing with gender bias:

*I could tell that along the way males have resented me because I was a woman in a male field . . . It just bounces off of me like ‘you better go get yourself fixed, because I’m here to stay and there are more of us coming.’*

Becoming advocates for other people of color and women
At the same time, a majority of African-Americans indicate that they serve as advocates of other people of color by helping women attain important assignments and gain visibility within their organization. This issue appears to be most salient in the consciousness of African-American women, given the frequency with which they mentioned it. As one African-American woman notes:
My staff is very, very diverse. I probably have one of the most diverse staffs around. I’ve got Black females, white females, Indians, Spanish, so it makes for diverse conversation.

Some Asian-American women and Latinas also spoke about their advocacy, notably Anita Yu in chapter four who discussed it in the context of her job as diversity VP.

Leveraging stereotypes and adverse circumstances
Finally, some women of color demonstrate shrewdness as they leverage stereotypes or what were initially adverse circumstances into positive learning experiences. They sometimes manage to create career opportunities for themselves from adverse circumstances that include instances in which they become victims of biased attitudes. The expectation of low competence on the part of managers occurs for African-American women. However, the women actually gained valuable experience and exposure while overcoming these expectations. As one African-American woman recounts:

I believe a lot of people underestimate me because of who I am and my general appearance...and so I find a lot of people underestimate my capabilities. Which is fine because that becomes a strategic opportunity for me.

An African-American woman recounts her experience in being given a less-than-positive review by a boss who criticized her communication skills. She then overachieved the next year in speech-making and writing for the company newspaper, documented her accomplishments, and then challenged her boss to either give her an appropriately positive review on her communication skills or be reported to the EOC officer.

An Asian-American woman speaks about leveraging stereotypes about women and their ability to smooth out relationships, in order to attain important assignments and win management’s confidence. Another Asian-American woman refers to an event in which she was passed over for a position. And yet, she managed to redefine her existing job position by adding further value to the company business.

An African-American woman reports taking on a very risky assignment:

I’ve been given opportunities to lead that were risky. One company said, ‘We want you to take over this job where the people who were peers of yours, all of them white, and most of them guys, will now be working for you. And by the way, also working for you will be the person who brought you in to the company who was above you.’ Now that is leadership or death.

In another example, an African-American woman describes accepting a staff position to lead a division, in spite of the overwhelming opinion initially expressed by her colleagues that moving out of a line position would diminish her career prospects. But by perceiving business potential in existing resources within the division and redirecting those resources so they became integral to business development, this woman was able to successfully rebuild the division, thus, skillfully advance her own career.
RECOMMENDATIONS TO ORGANIZATIONS

While a good part of the interviews were devoted to individual experiences, we also asked the women what they would recommend to organizations to improve career success for women of color.

Many of those interviewed expressed the belief that making significant change for women of color must come from the leadership of organizations, as there are structural barriers that are extremely difficult for individuals to overcome.

*Improve Inclusiveness of Corporate Environments*

Several participants talked about the importance of ensuring that the organizational culture is one that was inclusive. Cheryl Hamilton in chapter two discusses the importance of approaching diversity management on a systemic level, with particular attention to the role of leadership. Another African-American woman discusses the importance of choosing the right approach given the overall culture:

> When you look at diversity or you look at people issues, it has to be from a holistic perspective. One thing will not be a solution. Some companies chose to delve into diversity training and I say, ‘You can’t do that. You’ve got to look at changing the culture and the environment.’

Many women cite environments in which commitment to diversity did not filter down below senior levels. One African-American woman suggests:

> They need to make sure that people who are first line supervisors reflect the diversity value. We’ve got to start looking at some of those style issues that say, ‘If you’re not like me, if you don’t think like me, and you haven’t had the jobs I’ve had, and you don’t have the values I have, and you don’t play golf on Saturday, and your wife isn’t home with kids, then I’m not going to promote you.’

*Improve Accountability for Diversity at All Managerial Levels*

Several interviewees talk about the importance of holding all parts of the company accountable in order to improve the inclusiveness of corporate environments. As one African-American woman states:

> I don’t think the priority is high enough. The rewards for achieving the goals seem to be too small . . . You need to get it deeper in the organization, beyond the president and the vice president of the individual unit. You need to get down to directors, to managers, to ensure that they will address these issues in a way that is meaningful to the organization, not just window dressing.
Another African-American woman says:

You have to legislate things before they become habitual. You legislate it by maybe putting money with it that says we're looking at the diversity of your work groups—we want it to be here, and you've got an objective for it to be here, and there's money tied to that objective.

Encourage and Support Networking
Many companies where these women work have formal networks for women or people of color, or both. In some, where a formal system of networks was lacking, women cite the importance of leadership support for networks. According to one senior Asian-American woman:

The networks were not fully supported by the leadership. The company needs to... encourage networking. One thing that I've done for the last four years is I've sponsored, twice a year, women's luncheons, in the metropolitan area, to bring all the company women that work for our unit, at a first line supervisor and up level together for lunch, to network. Initially it was very taboo to do that. It was like, 'Why are the women getting together?'

Provide Greater Inclusion of Women of Color in Career Development Programs
Several suggestions include improving career development programs and processes at all phases of the career paths of women of color. Fran Redmond talks about the importance of identifying those at early points in their careers, including finding the "diamond in the rough" at low levels in the organization.

An African-American woman discusses the difficulty of succession planning when there are so few women of color at senior levels. She implies that companies rather than individuals need to address that problem:

You're not necessarily in a building mode. You don't survive. We burn ourselves out and we haven't mentored anybody to move into our place or to move into other places of similar level. So that is an inherent problem. That's a structural problem. Whether it's my company or any other company, there are structural disadvantages which are very difficult to overcome.

Another African-American woman suggests greater attention to identification of high potentials and seeing them through the career succession process:

We make sure we know who they are and what they're doing. How they're being developed. We have a conscious program to say who you're moving along. Who of the five women of color you consider. Who are the three. Who are the two. Who is the one that you consider for every key job. So we make sure we're actually doing something aggressive to make sure we know who they are and that they're being developed.
Provide More High-Visibility Assignments to Women of Color
Greater inclusion of women of color in career planning programs may lead to more high-visibility assignments. Several women explicitly discuss the importance of providing high-visibility and developmental assignments to women of color. Anita Yu emphasizes the importance of providing opportunities for women in mature businesses.

Cheryl Hamilton in chapter two also speaks about the importance of giving meaningful assignments to women of color, to leverage their skills and abilities. She notes that it’s very difficult to put the minority or woman in the leadership job when they’ve been isolated in secondary functions.

Recruit Senior Women of Color to Fill the Pipeline
Many women we interviewed are acutely aware of the low representation of women of their racial/ethnic group at senior levels. In order to increase that representation, one African-American woman suggests recruiting senior women from outside companies, rather than relying solely on promoting from within:

We don’t have enough of a pipeline of African-American women. The pipelines aren’t full enough to get people to senior jobs. We’ve got to go out and hire.

We’re hiring young people right out of college but we need to go out and hire some serious senior professionals that could be positioned to take increased roles really quickly. We’ve got to fill the middle of the pipeline with some experienced hires. High-potential, really exciting, bring-new-ideas-into-the-company hires.
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ALSO FROM CATALYST

Catalyst’s landmark, multiphase study on the impact of racial and ethnic status on opportunities and barriers for women of color in corporate management has resulted in the publication of the following reports:

An analysis of occupational and demographic information for women of color in managerial/administrative jobs as defined by the U.S. Census and as compared with white men, white women, and people of color. This report provides a quantitative framework for subsequent survey analysis by Catalyst.

An exploration of the dynamics behind the current status of women of color in management from the women’s own perspectives, this report includes descriptions of success factors, barriers, advancement opportunities, and the role of affirmative action in the career development of women-of-color managers and professionals.

Women of Color in Corporate Management: Opportunities and Barriers (1999)
This report provides companies with an in-depth overview of the findings from Catalyst’s three-year project. It includes strategies for better recruiting, advancing, and retaining women-of-color managers and professionals.
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