ABC to CEO™

Accelerators & Stallers & Derailers

Understanding accelerators can be beneficial for a successful career trajectory. Unfortunately, if accelerators are not integrated into a career path, the very absence of them can become career stallers — and possibly even career derailers. Some accelerators are embedded in a particular role within an organization while others are within your day-to-day control.

ACCELERATORS EMBEDDED IN A ROLE

P & L Responsibility

Unless you are a business major, many individuals enter the business world without having an understanding of this financial term. P&L is an acronym for Profit & Loss. A very simplistic explanation of it as it pertains to a position having P&L responsible is that such a position drives revenue (money earned through selling a product or service) and manages expenses (money spent to make a product or produce a service). A "Profit" is when revenues are greater than expenses; a "Loss" is when revenues are less than expenses. Of course, the goal of a company is to make a Profit.

A CEO, being at the highest level of a company, is responsible for the overall P&L of an organization. Often times, large companies produce multiple products or services and each of those products/services may have a different person responsible for the P&L for that product/service; in such an organization multiple people will have P&L responsibility over their respective product/service but only the CEO has P&L responsibility for the entire company. Having the experience of being responsible for the P&L of a physical product or a service line is often critical to becoming qualified to assume the role of a CEO. The earlier in your career that you can obtain this experience, the easier it will be to find your way through the maze to CEO. Becoming responsible for P&L does not come easily; most people work a number of years before they are granted this opportunity. However, for anyone considering becoming a CEO as a possibility someday, keep this responsibility in mind as an important component of your career.

Having P&L responsibility in your career is a significant accelerator if you are seeking the CEO position.

Line Versus Staff Roles

Line positions are those that are "on the front line" meaning they have direct contact with the product or the service provided to the customer in carrying out the overall goal of the organization.

A staff role is not directly involved with the product of the company but instead provides support and advice to assist the line roles. Line roles are found in operations, sales and possibly marketing. Some examples of staff roles are those found in the financial, engineering, information technology and human resources functions; depending upon the product produced or the service provided, there will be a variety of many other staff roles.

A CEO typically will have held line roles at some point in their career. Holding only staff roles will not, in most cases, take you to the CEO seat. However, a well-rounded CEO will have held both line and staff roles during their career.

Holding a line position at some point early in your career makes finding your way through the CEO maze much more likely. And the earlier you do it, the better, because employees can become informally "pigeon-holed" as a staff person if they hold those positions too long early in their career. Having line experience is very important to keep the possibility of someday becoming a CEO open to you.

Having held a line role in your career is likely a significant accelerator if you are seeking the CEO position.

Relocations

Although picking up and moving is difficult, most CEOs have experienced the joys and pains of moving. For those individuals who are hired into a corporate headquarters it is very difficult to imagine taking a role at a subsidiary or division operation but such a move is often critical on the path to becoming a CEO. When you're at the head office where many of the highest ranking people in a company are located and where it appears a significant number of final decisions are not made, it is difficult to conceive why leaving this situation is in your best career interest. On the other hand, if you are in a subsidiary or division office, where "all the action happens," you may not want to relocate into what some view as a stuffy, corporate environment. Well, guess what? To increase the possibility of becoming a CEO, you will probably need both of these experiences.

- Most CEO's will tell you that experiences obtained in a corporate and subsidiary environment are both invaluable. Any opportunity you have in your career to experience both will not be wasted. Both will be advantageous to you in understanding how a company functions effectively and efficiently.
- Global Responsibility – As businesses are being conducted on more of a global stage, understanding the cultures and values of those outside of your own environment become increasingly critical in a business setting. An individual who has had experiences beyond their own familiar grounds, holds more insight into the consequences of decisions made and actions taken by an organization when those decisions and actions impact different cultures. A lack of understanding of the global markets can cause a CEO to falter. In today's world, the boundaries between countries for manufacturing and trading purposes are often crossed as businesses continue to expand their international presence. Because of this, boards of directors have more

confidence in appointing an individual to a CEO position if that person has had international experience.

- Taking an international assignment or having responsibilities for global operations or sales markets can be a pivotal point in the path to becoming a CEO. When such opportunities present themselves– take them. Having such experience as part of your career assignments will likely result in you becoming a greater asset to a company. Individuals with global experience will always find themselves with a better understanding of the path to becoming a successful CEO.

In a company with a large international presence, being willing to relocate may be a significant Accelerator if you are seeking the CEO position.

ACCELERATORS CONTROLLED BY YOU

Having Mentors

There is so much value to be said of good mentors that it is difficult to know where to begin. A good mentor will be able to guide you down the right paths of the CEO maze or, at a minimum, keep you from going down a dead-end path. Most individuals have several mentors during their career. The issue in question is not whether or not to seek a mentor but more about how to seek the "right" mentor.

Keep in mind that a good mentor should know the ins-and-outs of the business you are in; be resourceful in making other contacts for you; be willing to teach you what is difficult to learn on your own; and, be honest in providing you advice and feedback. A mentor should also be trustworthy in maintaining any confidences you have shared with them and someone with whom you feel you can connect. Identifying and finding a good mentor can help you through the maze of possibilities in your career.

As a new college graduate in your initial assignment with an organization, it will take some time to evaluate the "players" who might be the right mentor for you. In some organizations, you may be assigned a mentor. However, matches of mentors with the person being mentored are not always perfect. The good news is, as is true with many things in life, mentor assignments do not have to be in place forever. However, if you believe you are not connecting with the mentor assigned to you, you will need to use great tact in changing from one mentor to another. Most organizations only provide mentor assignments to individuals who already have some proven track record with the company; you do not want to alienate someone who may rise in the organization and whom you may someday need as a Supporter/Promoter (see role of Supporter/Promoter).

If you are not automatically assigned a mentor, the best course of action is to study the "playing field" to identify one and ask that person if she/he will be a mentor to you. You will ultimately want to find an individual who is an "up and comer"– this is important because they may be in a position someday to advance your career (see role of Supporter/Promoter below).

Mentors can change as you grow and develop. Even such, always remember and never lose contact with a good mentor.

Developing a Supporter/Promoter

This is an individual who may or may not be a mentor to you. A supporter/promoter is someone who "sits at the senior executive table" and actively participates in discussions concerning succession planning. Having a supporter/promoter is important in order for you to be considered by the company for developmental assignments. This individual is typically a senior person in the organization who knows who you are, what your strengths are, where opportunities lie to develop your skills, your intermediate and long-term careers goals and very importantly, is someone who believes you have the ability to take on assignments with increased responsibilities. This individual is frequently at a level where mentorship is not practical on a regular basis.

How do you develop a Supporter/Promoter? The best path is to become known for your skills and your contributions. At some point, you will be in a meeting with senior executives and this will be your opportunity to shine. If you are making a presentation, practice it many times in front of someone who you trust to give you helpful feedback. If you are not making a presentation but are part of a team present in the room during the presentation, look for an opportunity to add value to the meeting. One valuable comment is all you need to open the door. Hopefully, other similar opportunities will present themselves in the future. Some executives are open to meeting with younger employees who have the courage to ask for a meeting. If you get such an opportunity, keep the meeting short and succinct. Asking about the future direction of the company and how you can be part of it are good starters for a discussion. And periodically sending notes and scheduling follow-up meetings to the potential Supporter/Promoter are also important. But remember, in order to keep this individuals' attention and not be seen as a nuisance, you must be making a real contribution to the organization and become known as an "up and comer" who wants to make a difference.

The presence of a Supporter/Promoter is extremely important in finding your way through the maze of options to obtain the right assignments that can lead to becoming a CEO.

Take a Seat "At the Table"……Literally

When companies hold meetings in conference room, too many times women do not want to appear presumptuous about giving the impression that they believe they are important enough to take a seat "at the table"; this is a huge mistake made by many women. Always remember, sitting at the table and not on the sidelines is an indication of self-confidence; it demonstrates to those around the table that you want to be a participant in the discussion and possible decisions taking place. However, on the other side of this equation it is also important to avoid an awkward and potentially embarrassing situation by sitting in the "wrong" seat at the table.   Having knowledge of sitting in the right and wrong seats allows you to make a good choice of where to sit and not be left

out of the "inner-circle". To understand this, the following paragraphs are a primer in how participants in a meeting are often seated.

By way of background, many meetings are held in a conference room where typically there is a main table and, if there are more people invited to a meeting than there are chairs at the table, additional chairs will be placed away from the table and frequently around the perimeter of the room against the wall. If the conference room table is rectangular, often the highest ranking person at the meeting is seated either at one of the heads of the table or in the center of one side of the table; some leaders like to sit in a position to face the door of the room to view who enters or exits while others like their back to a door as they find it distracting to see people entering and exiting. It is not unusual that the direct reports of the most senior person in the meeting who are also in attendance at the meeting will sit in close proximity to the leader. If the table is round or square, it is common that the highest-ranking person will have established their "favorite" seat; specifically where that seat is depends upon the person. There is no one pattern of seating that is universal from company to company; different leaders at different companies seem to establish their own protocol for this. Furthermore, if there is one primary person making a presentation at the meeting, this person will frequently sit across from the highest-ranking person or, if the person is making a presentation while standing, the person making the presentation will stand at the front of the room, particularly if there is a slide presentation being made. If you are new to a company, it will serve you well to understand if there are established "rules-of-thumb" regarding seating and presentation arrangement before you attend your first several meetings and/or make your first presentation; in some companies, you may find no pre-existing "etiquette" exists.

Once you understand the seating protocol, if any, of where some of the participants will be seated, it is now your turn to take a seat. When you are a participant in the meeting, unless you have been assigned a seat, it is important to take a seat at the conference room table and not a seat against the wall; you want to be front and center regarding any discussions that take place and, by sitting at the table you will more likely be viewed as a "player" in the meeting. Additionally, it is much easier to make any points you want to make if you can look others in the eye and not have someone's back facing you. To get a seat at the table, you need to get to the meeting before all of the seats are taken.

Finally, if the meeting you are attending is in a classroom or theater type setting and chairs are situated to all face the front of the room, do not take a seat in the back. Always sit near the middle to the front of the room (although not the front row); again, it demonstrates your level of interest in the subject being presented and more easily facilitates your participation if the opportunity arises.

Remember, take a sit at the table whenever you can to demonstrate your self-confidence and your desire to be involved in the meeting.

Being an Asset to a Meeting

There are many ways to get noticed as a new person in an organization. Demonstrating high work ethics, producing quality work and being a good team player will always be recognized. But there is one avenue that is often overlooked by individuals and that is being an asset in a meeting. The ultimate goal for an individual attending a meeting is to become an active and thoughtful participant. Listening to and making eye contact with those speaking is important, however, demonstrating your interest in the material being discussed by asking thoughtful questions and making relevant comments makes you a valuable asset to a meeting.

Before attending a meeting, study the subject matter to be discussed and come prepared to ask questions. Remember if you have a specific question, it is likely someone else does, too. Don't hesitate to ask it and let someone else ask your question or questions before you have had a chance to do so. Being a thoughtful and active contributor to a meeting will always be viewed in a positive light; being silent can be viewed as not having an opinion which is not a positive attribute for moving up the ladder of increased responsibilities. Although on the other side of the spectrum, beware that you should never dominate a presentation with your comments/questions. It is important to not be over-bearing, obnoxious, difficult and/or withdrawn in meetings; you want the other participants in the meeting to be glad you are in attendance. This is where good judgment comes into play between striking the fine line between your comments being welcomed and of importance and your teammates wishing you would just stop talking. And sometimes you will say things that might be indicative of you not understanding an issue being presented but don't let this discourage you; it takes a lot of courage to speak up. If you don't understand something, it is likely that others don't either. As you have more experience in this setting, being an active participant becomes easier.

Being an asset to a meeting will result in you being viewed as an important member of the team.

Saying "Yes" to Challenging Assignments

Senior leaders are looking for people who willing to and who can solve complex problems often under tight timelines. People who are more apt to say *yes* to a challenge and then who will do what it takes to succeed (within company policy, legal and regulatory parameters) are more often promoted quickly as they are viewed as "can-do" kind of employees. The best reaction to being asked to do a difficult assignment is to respond in a positive manner even though at that moment you may not know how to solve the problem; a good comment in this situation is to state, "Let me look into that and see what we might be able to do." Your goal is to ensure that management knows you will study possible solutions and either get back to them with a recommendation or, if it is within your purview, you will move forward to implement a solution. Once you say *yes*, you will need to rely on successfully practicing some of the 17 traits to solve a problem and implement a solution. In the end, you want to be the person senior management looks to when they need a problem solved. Being that person is an accelerator to the path of a CEO.

Become known as the "go-to" person early in your career. Being a person who is not afraid of taking on a difficult assignment is an accelerator as opposed to being someone who always finds reasons why something can't be done when asked to take on a challenging assignment; such behavior can become a staller or even a derailer.

Taking on an Unexpected New Role

Sometimes you may be asked to take an unexpected new role that you might believe to be "unimportant" to your career growth and question if it is challenging enough for you. Some individuals do not appreciate that a successful CEO needs to be versed in many aspects of the business. Taking a staff role or multiple staff roles during a career is often a critical component to understanding all of the ins-and-outs of a business. Although line positions are "where it happens", without staff positions, it likely can't happen. CEOs who have only held line roles may not appreciate what is necessary to keep a business running efficiently. Finance, human resources, legal, government & public relations, information technology, engineering and supply chain are some of the staff functions that are all critical to a successful business although do not necessarily directly touch the product or the customer.

If you have a good Supporter/Promoter and Mentor, trust that they are not leading you astray when recommending you take a staff role to round out your career experiences. The path to a CEO is a multitude of unexpected turns.

See a Problem, Have a Solution

As you become more involved in understanding your role in an organization, you will likely encounter many problems in the course of carrying out your responsibilities or, put another way, opportunities to demonstrate your problem solving skills. One of the ways you can stand out from other employees is when presenting a problem to your supervisor, always present it along with a well thought out solution. Seeing problems is easy and many employees actually enjoy taking problems to their manager as a way to show how attentive they were to have discovered the problem. But having a solution to the problem at hand is the hard part. Never go to your manager without having thought through an issue. Presenting a problem with various solutions along with pros and cons will demonstrate that you are a change agent, an important objective of anyone who wants to be considered for increased levels of responsibility.

Presenting a solution with a problem is one of the first steps to making your mark in an organization. Do not be a problem finder without be a problem solver.

Becoming a Good Debater

The business world is a continuum of decision-making. Some of the decisions being made are straightforward while others can be quite complicated. And what may seem straightforward to you may not to everyone else. It is often difficult to stand up for what you believe if you are not practiced in the skills of debating. To be an effective leader you must have the skills to convince others of the course of action you believe needs to be taken when faced with a dilemma. And, as important, understanding an opinion different than your own forces you to re-evaluate your own perspective.

Experience in debating before you enter the business world will serve you well. There are many ways to gain this skill either through high school clubs, college debate teams or other organizations that provide debating experience.

You might question why having good debating skills is important. First, to debate effectively you must have considered all aspects of the problem which means you must know the subject matter thoroughly. To be a good debater you must have a convincing argument while keeping in mind that it is important for you understand the difference between arguing and debating. An effective debater remains calm and collected in order to have their position respected although showing some degree of emotion about an issue does not negate remaining calm. Experience in debating gives you practice in becoming a quick thinker in analyzing difficult situations, presenting your opinion in a logical manner and forcing you to understand the position of those who don't agree with you.

A successful CEO welcomes a debate between team members and often will take an opposing view if she believes "group-think" may be happening. To do this effectively, a CEO must present a position that others may not have considered; having solid debate skills facilitates such a discussion. Being "quick on your feet" with good debate experience will serve you well. There is nothing worse than returning from a meeting where a controversial issue was discussed and you think of a good counter argument after the debate is over. Of course, you can always follow-up on presenting a new position but sometimes the team has moved on and your late argument will not be perceived as relevant.

An effective debater is often viewed as someone who is also a good leader. People are more apt to follow someone who paves a path of success in moving issues forward that they believed in and fought for; such a leader is often perceived as being a "winner". Being quick on your feet is important in the business world and being an accomplished debater enhances this skill.

Surround Yourself with a Support System

Being an individual committed to a successful career is not easy. There will always be unexpected meetings; deadlines and unforeseen problems; colleagues and leaders who are difficult to deal with; and some aspects of your position that you may not always enjoy. Many of these issues will become an interruption to your personal life both in terms of time and your emotional wellbeing. It is not unusual to become over-whelmed with stress and frustration. One of the most common realizations of moving up in an organization is feeling that you have less people in whom to confide. Many CEO's indicate that being a CEO is a "lonely job" in that they have no one left in the organization with whom they can share their thoughts much less their frustrations. A support system of special individuals outside of the organization who are there for you can be the difference between you being able to manage your problems and you giving up on your dream of becoming a CEO.

Having a good relationship with a mentor is part of a support system but sometimes you need individuals beyond a mentor; you need family members, other women in business who understand what you are going through and friends who are good listeners and have a positive aspect on life. These are individuals who will help raise you up when you are feeling overwhelmed, become a sounding board when you are faced with difficult decision or simply be there to hear you vent.

Having a support system becomes particularly important if you choose to have children. Many women indicate that they could not have kept up the fast pace required of someone wanting to continue to take on greater and greater career responsibilities if, after having children, they did not have a support system in place for their children. It is impossible to maintain keeping up with the demands of a growing career while at the same time also taking a major role in raising children; both are huge responsibilities with each requiring a significant commitment of time. This doesn't mean you can't do both, you just can't do both with stellar results <u>at the same time</u> as one or both will likely suffer. There are only so many hours in one day and most women will need to identify a support system if they want to have children while continuing to be on a fast-paced career track. Many female CEO's do have children and had them during very demanding times in their career. However, most had a child support system in place to help them in raising their children typically that being a spouse/partner, a family member or an outside child-care provider.

It is important to remember that the most successful CEO's did not get to the top without a support system; taking the time to develop a network of people who care about you and will support you when you need it will be invaluable to you at any stage of your career and your life.

Fitting into the Culture of the Company

This is an area often either ignored or viewed as immaterial to one's ultimate success but fitting into an organization's culture is critical to upward movement. To increase your opportunities for promotions, you need to evaluate if you are part of an organization where you can be genuine and

not pretend to be someone you are not. You will have the best opportunity for advancement within a company if you mesh with the culture of the company; changing your own values to fit the culture of an organization is not conducive to you achieving success much less promoting your own sense of self-fulfillment.

Ideally, by asking questions during the interview process you will be able to pick up some clues regarding the culture of a company. Reviewing an organizations website and talking to existing or former employees might also give you some insights. As a new employee in an organization you will become aware of the culture within a few months and you will come to understand whether or not you feel comfortable and are a good match to become part of the culture. There are many ways to determine if you fit the culture of a company. For example, observing how employees treat each other; how management treats employees; the values expressed by management; the tone in which management discusses the needs of it's clients/customers; understanding the general work climate - is it collaborative or is it a top-down approach where management makes many of the decisions without a lot of input from employees; listening to the kind of language used by employees and condoned by management; being attentive to whether management "looks the other way" when high-achievers are not good team players; do you enjoy after hour activities in which you are "expected" to participate; does management encourage a competitive environment among employees as a way of meeting goals at the expense of teamwork; is it a "workaholic" environment or one that considers a work-life balance. There is no "right" or "wrong" culture as many successful companies are at opposite ends of the spectrum regarding their culture; you just need to find the culture that is "right" for you.

Cultural fit is important for employees from entry level to new hire executives. There are many examples of executives who are let go by one organization only to become successful at another. Why are they successful at one but not at another? It is not due to them suddenly gaining new skills but is likely due to a better "fit". An organization that is a good "fit" for one person is not necessarily a good "fit" for another. Ultimately finding the culture that feels natural for you will not only allow you to enjoy your job more fully but it will likely lead to more opportunities for you.

Although fitting into an organizations culture may be difficult to understand early in your career, your greatest chance at success will be in becoming part of an organization where you can be genuine and not try to fit into a mold that does not represent who you are naturally.

Developing Presence

Having presence may start with appearance but it doesn't stop there. Individuals with presence are generally viewed as those who give others a feeling of comfort that they are in command of the responsibilities under their span of control but that they also have meaningful insights into issues beyond their immediate purview. This presence is achieved through a track record of having successful outcomes in the assignments managed, demonstrating the confidence (not to be confused with cockiness) that new responsibilities thrown at them can be easily handled and having gained the respect of others with whom they interact. Having presence in a business setting means

that you can handle problems with poise, deal with the inevitable difficult teammate with class and can stand by your position with firmness and grace. Leaders with presence never have a problem with getting others to follow them; others follow from a perspective of "desire" not "requirement".

So, does your appearance make a difference in your presence? Many like to claim that it should not make a difference but the fact of the matter is that "should not" and "does not" are two different things, and consciously or subconsciously appearance often does make a difference. If your initial appearance leads others to question your ability, you are forced into proving your abilities by fighting an uphill battle and when you are looking for every opportunity you can to increase the confidence others have in you, your appearance is an easy win. Your best clue on this issue is to look at how the senior managers at an organization dress. You don't want to be dressed in a fitted jacket and skirt when all of the women on the executive team are wearing casual clothes. Nor do you want to look like you're dressed for attending a college class with your jeans and tee shirt when the successful women in your company are wearing smart, stylish clothes. Yes, some individuals can pull off being a rebel in how they dress and still have an executive presence about them but those are the rare exception not the norm and often they can get by with this due to some off-the-chart ability that they bring to the table. Unless you are one of these individuals, you will increase your chances of being viewed as having an executive presence if your appearance does not fight the norm of the company.

In the end, true presence ultimately comes from within not appearance. Some have it naturally and others have the ability to develop it. Studying the traits in those who have executive presence, getting feedback from your mentor on your own presence and becoming aware of characteristics of great leaders through educational materials are all opportunities to better understand this somewhat mysterious factor that differentiates a manager from a leader and is one of the most difficult stallers to grasp. Most CEOs will have some degree of presence about them.

Being Open to Feedback

Having insight about your impact and being open to feedback about your impact is an accelerator to your career. If you are fortunate, you will receive feedback throughout your career. If it doesn't happen naturally, you will want to seek feedback from your manager and possibly your internal and external clients as well. This can happen in a casual or in a more formal way. If you are serving external clients, you will want to discuss this idea with your manager to confirm that it is appropriate to seek their feedback.

When someone provides you with feedback on a behavior that needs to change, listen carefully and ask clarifying questions. The goal for you, on the receiving end, is to have the other person "paint a picture" of the problem behavior and, ideally, the preferred behavior. This level of granular clarity will help you understand exactly where you are missing the mark and what would be better. You might have a natural tendency to move through the conversation quickly as the discussion might make you uncomfortable. Fight this urge and stick with it long enough to gain as much insight as possible from the person who is taking their time to help you. Your willingness to encourage

someone to describe in great detail your opportunity for improvement (AKA your weakness) is an accelerator, particularly when done in a relaxed and conversational manner.

The greatest obstacle to gaining a complete understanding of your opportunities for improvement is two-fold. The first problem is that most of us simply don't want to hear the negative feedback about ourselves as it doesn't feel good and, secondly, we often have a natural defense mechanism whereby we want to justify and defend our current behavior. What is much more effective is to shift from defensive to appreciative; receiving advice that will help us be more successful is a gift. Meaningful feedback will not only help you learn about what could be a blind spot, but will also send the message that you are serious about your growth and that you are coachable.

Being unwilling to seek and to hear feedback is often the kiss of death for people with potential to move ahead as too often egos get in the way. You don't want to go down a dead end in the maze of becoming a CEO. You can go a long way by exceeding in meeting your goals, but there may be an edge or a pattern of behavior that is problematic enough — even if subtle — that will keep you from going the distance. Remember, every Olympic athlete has a coach who is helping them leverage their strengths and minimize their relative weaknesses. Being open to feedback and being responsive to it will make you a better leader and help you avoid getting lost in the maze.

Practicing The 17 Traits

Becoming aware of and developing the 17 traits associated with successful CEOs is a huge accelerator. However, quite frankly, it would probably be difficult to find many CEOs who were able to demonstrate all of these traits at a highly effective level although an awareness of each of them is critical. If a CEO recognizes a trait that is not a great strength, they will often surround themselves with someone who excels in this trait. Our goal in communicating them to you is for awareness although there is not a downside to having any of these traits. Contrarily, the absence of a number of the traits could be a staller. That is why being open to feedback from great managers, mentors and supporters is often invaluable. You will benefit from working with people who are good at identifying strengths and weaknesses and who are willing to tell you what they see in you.

Having an awareness of the traits found in successful CEO's is important; becoming proficient in the traits will be an accelerator for you. Beware that the absence of a number of the 17 traits can be a significant staller. One of the greatest risks of not finding your way through the maze of becoming a CEO is if you have a blind spot that everyone else can see but you cannot.

Don't Be Afraid to "Be a Woman"

Sexism has held women back for years and there are still male leaders in business who see women as "less capable" than their male counterparts. Some women actually believe they need to be "less feminine" in order to prove that they are capable of being a leader. The fact of the matter is that some people will always hold biases; to be successful, you will need to be able to deal with this

issue. Being petite or wearing pink or wearing high heels does not prevent you from being a successful leader.

It goes without saying that an outright physical encounter or discrimination should immediately be reported to your supervisor or to a representative in the human resource department. However, it is also important for you to be able to know the difference between men who cross that line and those who want to intimidate you because they believe that since you are a woman they can make you feel less powerful than you are.

When faced with intimidation in the workplace, you have a number of options. You can casually have a conversation with the individual to let them know you are aware of what they are trying to do but not let it bother you by keeping a confident and positive attitude. You can confront it head-on with a firm message to the person that you will not tolerate their comments and behavior towards you. Or you can blow it off and completely ignore it and not let it impact your determination to continue to be a high performer.

In the end, the workplace in which you will need to be successful will not always be fair and easy and you will likely confront sexism from some individual during your career. Your goal is preserve despite it and not let it overwhelm you; you must have the confidence to manage your way through it. However, if the organization in which you are working regularly condones sexism and intimidation (yes, they do exist) and it is not just an issue with one difficult co-worker, maybe it is not an organization where you can rise to the top and you will need to find a place where sexism is not the norm.

Being able to manage sexism is a powerful tool for women in the workplace. We may wish it wasn't a reality of life but it is and we cannot pretend it is going away anytime soon. As more women take top positions within organizations, this type of behavior may become a thing of the past as it becomes clear that leadership is a trait that comes from within and not from being a man or a woman.

Derailers

What is a derailer? It is action that keeps an individual from attaining the CEO role and often results in not remaining employed by a company. Depending upon the severity of the action, the individual who committed the action may be permitted to remain in an organization but will likely be placed in a role that will not lead to ever assuming a CEO position. Sometimes the occurrence of these actions may result in the individual being asked to or required to leave the organization.

Some of the actions that become derailers include but are not limited to committing illegal actions (stealing and lying are a few examples), misconduct (sexual harassment, insubordination, bullying and unethical conduct are a few examples), violating company policies, inadequate performance in meeting the goals of a position and being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. Some

individuals who are terminated from an organization for any of these reasons may find it difficult to obtain other opportunities in any organization that could lead to a CEO position.

A derailer can follow an individual for many years. Most organizations do not want an individual on their executive team who has been terminated for any of the above stated reasons. A rule of thumb is that if you don't want others to know of an action you are contemplating, don't do it.