

Breaking the Glass Ceiling, Cracking the Glass Ceiling or Just Polishing it?

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In recent months the phrase "breaking the glass ceiling" has resurfaced, and yes, there really is one. Not only that, but once again, women are made to feel like they have to slouch to fit. In a tight economy and turbulent economic times the "good old boys network" resorts to "circling their wagons" and protecting "their turf." There are some battles that become especially difficult to wage. The Glass ceiling is one of them.

This glass ceiling issue permeates almost every industry. However, inroads have been made in raising the awareness of the problem and a flurry of reports and activities became in vogue about five years ago. Through the efforts of forward thinking women and men who made a commitment to effect change, combating the glass ceiling buzz phrase became a serious challenge. Now that it has resurfaced the question becomes how committed are you?

It's not a matter of stepping up to the plate and saying "I want to see a change." It is a strategy and game plan that makes the difference. It's also a realization that this is something that will require forbearance and possibly take years to overcome.

The solution will come through a variety of factors. First and foremost, it's up to women to accept the challenge, to take a charge of this issue and insist that changes be made. That's not as easy as it sounds. Today everyone's plate is full-overflowing in fact. The question becomes who will make the difference. After 10 years of working full steam in my industry, I can see the light at the end of the tunnel; yet there is still along way to go. Economic uncertainty has retarded the progress.

Are you ready for the challenge and personal commitment for the second generation of ceiling breakers? Is it easier for you to hang around and polish the ceiling while waiting for someone else to crack it, and then another person to actually break it?

Before you get activated you need to ask yourself these questions.

1. Do I really want to break the glass ceiling and why? It needs to be something to which you really want to commit. It should not be a decision arrived upon on a bad day at work or in a fit of pique.
2. What do I hope to accomplish in doing so? Do you have a benchmark to measure your progress? Are there certain initiatives you wish to accomplish?
3. Is this a personal vendetta or a legitimate reason behind your objective? You are going to commit a lot of time and energy to this cause. Make sure there is a legitimate reason behind your commitment not just that you are mad at your boss.
5. Are friends and family in support of this effort? Many times we see husband and wife on different sides of the women at work issue. Make sure your friends and family understand your issues and support your efforts.
6. What tactics will you employ to accomplish your goal? This is where the strategic planning comes in. You can certainly make a stand on a single issue or point, but if you hope to effect a long-range objective you must plan accordingly.
7. Will you be content with not breaking but just bumping? What happens if you give it your best shot and you see no measurable progress? You need to be comfortable that even a small success is important.
8. What alternative strategies to you have planned in case it doesn't work? Have you thought through the fallout that might occur when you buck the system? You could be ostracized by your industry. Ensure that you have planned for negative outcomes.
9. How committed are you? Really? Whether you make a huge impact or experience a minor success, it all counts. The important thing is that you are committed. Half measures are worse than none at all.

If you have decided to take the plunge and make a difference, here are some guidelines to follow.

1. You must work within the system. You can't change years of the way business has been conducted.
2. You have to start at the top. Company policies are a reflection of their most senior executives.

3. Do your homework. Find out what the company policies are both internal and external. Some philosophies just can't be changed. Fortunately, many of the "Old Guard" is retiring. The younger generation seems more in tune with women in the workforce.

4. Workforce demographics are on your side. With over 50% of the workforce women, the bar on awareness of these issues has been raised.

5. Enlist support from everyone. Make sure your family knows and understands about your issues. You cannot fight this battle alone.

6. Make it an issue of awareness and concern. Bring it up in discussions and don't let it be swept under the table.

7. Don't wave the red flag. Work behind the scenes in a positive manner.

8. Fight the battles in small increments. Nothing is going to happen over night. Consider each small victory a success.

9. Keep good records and document your success. The more visibility you have, the more power you will gain. Promote your success.

Following these tips will help you realize that the beauty of the glass ceiling is that it is GLASS. It is not steel. It can be broken and the best way to break it is to realize your potential. Stand tall and start cracking!

