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Heidrick&Struggles survey: “Female YPs - Motivation to become CEO”

The survey had pursued 2 goals:

1. To assess motivation of the current second-line female top managers to become a CEO
2. To uncover the reasons of this motivation and attempt to identify the common (social, economical, personal, political) concerns, as well as career facilitators

The survey was conducted in June - August 2009, in a format of telephone interview with open questions. There were following questions:

1. Do you plan to become GM/CEO/Country manager?
2. If yes:
 - a. In what time?
 - b. What this role means for you?
3. If not, please share what is your reasoning
4. What would facilitate your promotion to CEO role? (corporate, family, social facilitators)
5. Do you have a Role model as female CEO?
6. Do you discuss this potential career step with your peers?

Survey sample:

Heidrick&Struggles has identified 29 current second-line female top managers, working in Marketing, Commercial/Sales and other director roles in various industries, but mostly in FMCG.

Sample break-down:

Function:

Marketing Directors - 14
Sales/Commercial Directors – 9
Finance Director – 2
Supply Chain Director - 2
HR Directors - 2

Age: Total range: 32 to 44; Majority range: 34-39 y.o. range; Median age = 37

Survey findings:

General attitude towards survey:

We met mostly positive attitude, with our respondents mostly considering this topic interesting and worthwhile to discuss

I. Motivation to become GM/CEO/Country manager:

76% of our respondents plan to become GM, normally in 3-5 years.

Breaking down this (positive) result, what was observed by us:

- Commercial/Sales managers are more often oriented on this progression compared to Marketing managers: 78% vs 64%
- Only 42% of those who answered “Yes” see themselves as GMs of their current company
 - About half of those who want to become a GM, see themselves in this role in a small/medium size company in Consumer sector
 - This is an important comment in understanding perception of GM role by female managers
- What becoming a GM means:
 - Achieving personal career ambitions
 - Independence in decision making, being No1 in business
 - Reputation and Influence
 - Financial motivation
 - We think that this set of motives is generic in terms of gender.

II. What makes GM an unattractive role for 24% of our sample:

The findings below are based on replies of those who answered negatively on willingness to become a GM (taken for 100%)

We have identified 4 main reasons:

1. Family reasons
2. Preventive corporate policies
3. Bad social perception
4. GM is not attractive functionally

The first 2 reasons are the most frequently shared concerns (by about a third of each sub-sample), and perhaps they may analytically fall into one group.

- “Family reasons” are connected mostly with appearance of the 2nd child exactly in this age group – which makes a manager e.g. less mobile in terms of travelling and therefore less desired in a GM role
- Preventive corporate policies: meaning career progression policies that are not family-friendly, upon close consideration. E.g., necessity of international assignment in order to move upward – again at time when “family age” makes it most uncomfortable for a woman (1st child enters school, or 2nd child is coming)

The other two are relatively low frequency reasons (2-3 replies).

- Bad social perception means “male style of leadership that is necessary to adapt if go upward”.
- “Functionally unattractive” – some respondents perceive GM role as a very administrative, taking them farther from operational decisions

III. What would facilitate promotion to CEO role? (corporate, family, social facilitators)

In this survey, we have identified 4 types of “career facilitators”:

1. Role Modelling
 - It was acknowledged as an important facilitator by 52%. It seems that the role models give answers to important concerns of female managers, but also they inspire to make this career step
2. Personal coach/Mentor
 - This factor was named by 32% of respondents. The main task of a Mentor is seen in positioning of a mentee in a company in a right “upward moving” light.
 - Only 2 respondents said that they actually have a personal mentor.
3. “Women-friendly” corporate career policies
 - Were mentioned by 36%
 - No one “have seen an actually working women-friendly policy”
 - A comment: “we have equal right officially, but factually only 2 board members out of 14 are females”
 - In connection with “women-unfriendly policies” as mentioned above, women-friendly are mostly determined as taking into account “career life-cycle of a woman”. We did not go into details in this survey, but this particular topic might be developed deeper in a stand-alone research
4. Corporate assignments.
 - This facilitator was formed ad-hoc during our interviews. We have identified 2 major types of corporate assignments commonly mentioned by the respondents as important in their CEO move:
 - Cross-functional assignments, allowing functional leaders to grasp specifics of other functions, including HR, Finance and Strategy
 - Assignments/projects allowing building corporate network and corporate visibility. This was mentioned specifically as something that in “operational functional life” a manager hardly gets to invest into, and needs specifics attention and assistance

The last 2 questions were mostly informative:

- IV. Do you have a Role model as female CEO?
 - 32% of the respondents do have role models, 7 of them are the top female leaders from their own companies globally (e.g. in P&G, Cadbury, Danone, Nestle, Avon)
- V. Do you discuss this potential career step with your peers?
 - Only 20% discuss this topic with their peers

Summary:

The survey demonstrates that there is a strong willingness of the high-potential 2nd line female managers to become a CEO. They see themselves in CEO role in the smaller size companies, which perhaps is connected with easier way upward there, and more opportunity to keep work-family balance.

There are common facilitators identified, the main being Role modelling and certain corporate career policies – which should account for “female career life-cycle” specifics, but otherwise seem to be gender-neutral (question on network building though – females consider themselves less open externally and in need of more help here).

It is clear that creating communication platform around this topic would be highly beneficial for the female high-potentials, and perhaps this platform would be more efficient if will cover more than a company-employer.

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