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## Summary: Women in leadership

**Conclusion:** It is not as simple as breaking the glass ceiling - the key to promoting women in top leadership positions involves a system wide approach to break down several obstacles facing women throughout their careers.

**Reference:** **Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership** by A. Eagly & L. Carli, Harvard Business Review, September 2007. Reprints available from Harvard Business Review, [www.hbr.org](http://www.hbr.org) For more information, contact Kevin Impelman at [kimpelman@batrushollweg.com](mailto:kimpelman@batrushollweg.com)

**Why this Article is Important:** Although women occupy more than 40% of managerial positions in the United States, only 6% of top leadership positions and only 2% of CEOs are women. Studies have highlighted the social and financial benefits of having women in top leadership positions; however organizations are slow to incorporate this practice. The glass ceiling metaphor used to describe the barrier women face to enter the top levels of an organization is misleading. A better description involves women navigating through a labyrinth of obstacles throughout their career. A long history of viewing leadership traits in masculine terms creates a double standard for women in which they must balance assertiveness with affection.

**Major Findings:** The authors list the following management interventions that will address the obstacles women face to reach top leadership positions:

- Increase people's awareness of prejudice towards female leaders in their everyday work
- Promote objective performance evaluations that are free from bias and favoritism
- Use open-recruiting tools, rather than relying on informal social networks to fill positions
- Ensure multiple women are represented in teams and executive positions – it is easy for women to be stereotyped or ignored when they are the sole female in a working environment
- Provide mentors and networks for women to build their visibility and credibility in the organization
- Provide developmental assignments for women that include challenging assignments and line management responsibilities
- Establish family-friendly human resource practices – encourage male participation in these benefits as well
- Welcome women back when they return to the workforce – establish an “alumni” network

### What does it mean to you?

- a. Your current diversity initiatives may not be addressing the many obstacles women face throughout their career.
- b. There are many practical steps that an organization can take to begin eroding the cultural barriers that prevent women from reaching top leadership positions.
- c. Creating an executive suite that represents a diverse perspective, and one closer to that of your customers, can lead to financial success and sustainability.