

WOMEN EXECUTIVES LIST GAINS, SALUTE DIVERSITY

They attribute better decisions, varied strategies to the growth in their numbers.

Publication: [NewsInc](#)

Despite ongoing disparity, female newspaper executives are optimistic about the current -- and future -- status of women in the business, as well as the ways their presence benefits the industry.

The newspaper industry now has more women, people of color and young people working in it, bringing with them broader experiences, different religious, cultural or geographical upbringings, and varied economic backgrounds. This increase in diversity provides "more options to choose from, so better decisions are made," says Carolyn Kelly, president and chief operating officer of the Seattle Times.

"I wouldn't want a paper put out solely by middle-aged white women who love shopping," quips Ardith Hilliard, editor and vice president of the Morning Call in Allentown, Pa.

Diversity in numbers leads to more diversity of thought and style, as well as keeping executives honest by challenging assumptions and beliefs. Kelly notes that women are less likely to bring an "alpha male" attitude to processes, resulting in more room for collaboration and encouragement.

"It is the mix of people, each adding to the stew of thought and discussion," says Hilliard, "which nurtures the effort to chronicle and explain the world each day."

This year, the Media Management Center at Northwestern University released its study on women in newspapers, called "Still Fighting An Uphill Battle." Among its findings:

- * At newspapers with 85,000 circulation or greater, there are 19 women among 137 newspaper presidents, publishers and/or chief executives, an increase from eight percent to 14 percent since 2000.

- * Despite that increase, the number of women in all executive posts slipped from 29 percent to 26 percent -- 302 female executives out of 1145.

- * Women are most likely to be found holding executive posts in personnel, community affairs, communications, finance and legal; the number of female ad executives is increasing. Women are least likely to be found in production and circulation.

- * The number of women executives in personnel and marketing has decreased from 125 in 2000 to 82 in 2002, while the number of men increased from 120 in 2000 to 128 in 2002.

- * While 44 percent of the newspaper work force is female, only 18 percent occupy the

executive suite at assistant vice president level or higher.

* Women executives are most likely to work for Dallas' Belo Corp. (32 percent), Dow Jones & Co. Inc. of South Brunswick, N.J. (27 percent), Community Newspaper Holdings Inc. of Birmingham, Ala. (25 percent), the New York Times Co. (25 percent), San Jose's Knight Ridder (22 percent) and Gannett Co. Inc. of McLean, Va. (21 percent).

* In publisher slots, Sacramento's McClatchy Co. has six women and five men, or 55 percent female; Chicago's Tribune Publishing Co. has three out of 10, or 30 percent; Norfolk, Va.'s Landmark Communications has two out of seven, or 29 percent; Belo has one out of four, or 25 percent (though that one woman, Marcia McQuern of Riverside, Calif., retires later this month and will be succeeded by a man).

Lee Enterprises Inc. of Davenport, Iowa, weighs in with nine out of 37, Gannett at 19 out of 87, Community Newspapers at 21 out of 100, Cox Newspapers of Atlanta at three out of 17 and Knight Ridder at five out of 28.

* There are only three women in top corporate executive posts.

* There are no female "heirs apparent" currently occupying second-in-command slots, and only two in third-in-command slots, which is disheartening since it is commonly held that it takes 15 to 20 years to groom a chief executive.

* In the entire newspaper industry, there are only about 20 women sitting on boards of directors (four of 21 companies surveyed chose not to disclose this information). Among them are three out of eight board members at Gannett (38 percent), one out of three at MediaNews Group of Denver (33 percent), four out of 13 at McClatchy (31 percent), three out of 10 at Pulitzer Inc. of St. Louis (30 percent), three out of 11 at Knight Ridder (27 percent), three out of 15 at the New York Times Co. (20 percent), two out of 10 at Cox (20 percent -- but those two are the sisters who own the company), and one out of five at Landmark (20 percent).

SPECIAL STRENGTHS

Women believe they generally bring special strengths and competencies in areas such as nurturing, coaching and development of staff; practicing discipline in equity issues; providing candid and honest communication in the workplace, and showing an ability to see down the road to generate strategies and plans. (These qualities can also be found in some male execs.)

Marty Petty, executive vice president of Florida's St. Petersburg Times, also believes women encourage creativity and flexibility in work/life balance. That's good for the business. For example, more flexible work schedules may allow a paper to hold on to workers who make important contributions, but who do so part-time.

Carole Leigh Hutton, executive editor of the Detroit Free Press, described an example in which a male boss had rejected a proposed alternative schedule because the paper needed two female reporters to work full-time. Hutton recognized that in the long run, the paper would receive greater benefit by allowing the alternative schedule and holding on to the employees, who continue to make important contributions while working part-time.

Hutton also believes women are more open to different kinds of stories and story-telling, which helps bring other kinds of people onto the pages of the paper.

Among the workplace changes that Elizabeth Sholar has observed is that what are considered acceptable styles has moved, for example, toward more collaborative environments. But women are cautious about tying broad changes to particular classes of executives, says Sholar, chief technology officer of the St. Petersburg Times. "Certainly if there is an increased number of women in the top ranks, it's got to be one of the contributing factors," says Sholar, who believes that "there are many different things driving changes in business culture these days."

Petty notes she's "been privileged to work with men who have these same skills and leadership competencies," but also has worked with women who failed in these areas. Factors as varied as the size of the paper and market, and ownership (independent versus group) can also make a difference in how sophisticated and mature the newspaper organization is with regard to these issues.

Promoting women into executive positions is indicative of an organization's willingness to tap the resources of its entire employee population, based on standards of excellence and not on irrelevant factors such as gender, says Denise Warren, senior vice president for planning at the New York Times.

One thing women tend to agree on is that for one reason or another, having women in executive positions is likely to promote an increasing balance between numbers of men and women in executive positions, as well as in influence in the areas described above.

Barbara Henry, president and publisher of the Indianapolis Star, believes the balance is changing because people tend to promote people like them (although she adds that this is not always a good thing).

Having women in leadership positions not only provides a role model for others within the organization, says Warren, but it gives others inspiration to demonstrate their own leadership. Petty says it is important to have a champion of diversity (female or male) on the top rung in order to keep the laser focused.

Without an environment that fosters and values diversity, women can fall into the same traps as men. For example, without such support, a female originating editor may be just as likely as her male counterpart to sign off on a story whose sources are all men.

But diversity in executive ranks also has effects on external relations. Mimi Feller, senior vice president for public affairs and government relations at Gannett, believes that with women being so important in terms of readership and the purchase of advertisers' products and services, it is crucial that women occupy important roles in newspapers' ranks.

Feller, who is also a member of the Gannett Management Committee, has seen women in top roles throughout her company -- in all divisions, running regional newspaper groups, newspapers and television stations as well as at corporate -- during the 16 years that she has

been there. She notes that women are able to support each other and seek each other's counsel.

Women executives tend to believe that gender discrimination has been a challenge rather than an obstacle in their careers. Detroit's Hutton, who reports being "the first woman" in a number of positions in her career, believes she hasn't faced any obstacles that aren't faced by all journalists.

By contrast, Sholar says she has "run up against almost all of the classic roadblocks. And I won't deny having experienced enormous frustration. But I tried to take them head-on when I thought I could make a change for the better."

Sholar was willing to enlist help from others as needed, and feels that she was usually able to change difficult situations, in part by carefully choosing how to respond -- and recognizing which things could be changed and which couldn't. "We certainly need each other in this world," she says, "but much of one's own destiny is also in one's own hands."

MENTORING

Many successful women in the newspaper business have had men as mentors -- a virtual necessity given the historically small numbers of women in the industry and the length of time required to grow an executive career.

Says Hutton: "I've never actually worked for a woman, reported to a woman, or even had a woman in the chain of command in any newsroom I've worked in."

"Women professors and reporters guided me early in my career journey," says Diane McFarlin, publisher of Florida's Sarasota Herald-Tribune and this year's president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE). "When I became an editor, though, all of my career mentors were men. There simply were no women in top positions at the Herald-Tribune to mentor me."

McFarlin has since counted women as valued mentors, however, particularly in her work at ASNE. She continues to look to them for advice and support.

Women also provide mentorship to male employees. Warren believes this has been the case with her mentor, Janet Robinson, who is a senior vice president at the New York Times Co. and president of the New York Times. In general, women consider their ability to hire and mentor talented leaders to be their most outstanding contribution to the industry.

Warren believes the next generation of professionals "holds the future of our industry in its hands, and it is extremely important to develop their understanding of, and interest in, the business," in much the same way that she feels she was guided.

Likewise, Florida's Petty believes that she has been able to draw from her newsroom experience and passion for "our core purpose to guide the entire organization to a smarter/better long-term result."

Others count as their key contributions the preservation of the craft. Indianapolis' Henry, who

has been in the business for 28 years, believes that her key contributions were being a good reporter, a careful and thoughtful editor, and a good leader as a publisher.

Feller has worked through the Gannett Foundation to encourage other women and young people to join the business, and has also been involved in seeking to ensure that newspapers are treated fairly in the regulatory arena.

Seattle's Kelly has tried to model the valuing of diversity, and to make it clear that she expects the same of others. Sholar has sought to create an environment where people can grow and develop, do their best work and share their successes with others.

Women also value their increasing industry leadership roles as well. For example, Sue Hale, executive editor of The Oklahoman in Oklahoma City, is past president and a member of the founding board of the National Freedom of Information (FOI) Coalition, which is helping state FOI groups educate the public about openness in government. She helped start FOI Oklahoma 12 years ago.

Virginia Fielder, vice president for research at Knight Ridder, has participated in projects for the Research Federation of the Newspaper Association of America plus ASNE and other industry groups.

Through collaborative work, women are affecting corporate cultures. Cathy Coffey, vice president for advertising at Cox Newspapers, helped to establish a best-practices network among Cox's newspapers which, she says, "has grown significant incremental revenue."