Male CEOs Don’t See Barriers To Women’s Success

NOVEMBER 2015

A special report from the Siena College Research Institute and Women@Work, a Times Union Magazine.
Siena College Research Institute conducts regional, statewide and national surveys on business, economic, political, voter, social, academic and historical issues. The surveys include both expert and public opinion polls. The results of SRI surveys have been published in major regional and national newspapers, including The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, as well as in scholarly journals, books and encyclopedias.

Capital Region Women@Work is a network of local business and professional women that hosts events and provides educational opportunities for members. Through the Times Union, Women@Work publishes a bimonthly magazine, that provides strategies and tells stories aimed at helping women navigate business and the workplace.

The Times Union is the leading newspaper in New York’s Capital Region and timesunion.com is Upstate New York’s most innovative news website. The newspaper is widely respected for its focus on local news and watchdog reporting, particularly on state government and politics. It has won numerous state and national awards for its work in print and online, and has repeatedly been named New York’s “Newspaper of Distinction” by the state editors association.
Every year the Siena College Research Institute interviews CEOs across Upstate New York to measure their economic confidence and their attitudes on issues that affect not only the bottom line but all of us working in New York. We asked CEOs to tell whether the women who work for them or in firms like theirs have as much opportunity for success as do men and we asked whether women today face problems in balancing work and family, in receiving equal pay or in facing sexual harassment.

To put the CEOs’ responses in context, we posed the same series of questions to the general public in our annual consumer sentiment survey. Putting these two datasets together provided a picture never seen before. It answered the question of whether CEOs understand the issues facing the women who work for them. The answer, we found, is no.

While overwhelming numbers of not only women but also men in New York see pay equity and sexual harassment as problems for women, less than a third of CEOs agree. On opportunity for women, the general public think women have made strides, while CEOs tend to say women have as much chance to succeed today as do men.

It is rare in public opinion polling to see such a strong and consistent disparity between two segments of the population as we saw here.

Dr. Donald P. Levy
Director, Siena College Research Institute

The issues aren’t new: Pay equality for women, sexual harassment in the workplace, the lack of opportunities for women to earn top positions in business. Still, they continue to be hot-button topics discussed nationally and among our Women@Work membership at meetings and events.

Our partnership with The Siena College Research Institute allowed us to look at these issues as they affect women in New York and share results with our Women@Work network.

None of our members will be surprised that the general population confirmed problems still exist for women in the workplace despite years of awareness and debate. What this comparison of surveys does reveal is the wide gap between public opinion and that of CEOs of the state’s businesses. We hope this information will give local women in business a starting point for a conversation in their own workplaces.

Tracy Ormsbee
Executive Editor, Women@Work

Staff writer Cathleen Crowley wrote this special report based on the research conducted by the Siena College Research Institute. She also developed the charts that accompany the report.

Staff artist Alana Feldman designed the publication.
Siena College Research Institute posed a series of questions about women in the workplace to 524 Upstate CEOs in 2014 and asked the same questions of 804 New Yorkers in a consumer sentiment survey in March 2015.

The gap between the answers of the CEOs and general public is significant on every question, something rarely seen in public opinion polling.

- While 3 percent of male CEOs said equal pay is a very big problem, 37 percent of the general public and 47 percent of women said it was a very big problem. Among female CEOs, 20 percent saw it as a very big problem.
- Only 4 percent of male CEOs recognize that the “glass ceiling” is a big problem for women, while 21 percent of women think it is a very big problem.
- Only 4 percent of all CEOs believe sexual harassment is a big problem for women in the workplace, while a quarter of the general public believes it is a very big problem. Among women age 18 to 40, 41 percent see it as a very big problem.

There is a significant gap in perception between male CEOs and the general public, and women in particular, suggesting that male leaders are either out of touch with their workforce or incapable of recognizing gender bias because they never experienced it personally.

This chasm calls for CEOs to look within themselves and their companies to examine gender bias and create an environment where women can succeed.
Even though hard data exist showing that women are paid less and fail to reach senior leadership positions at the same rate as their male counterparts, male CEOs did not recognize either issue as a significant problem. Women earned 83 cents for every dollar men earned in 2014, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, even when education, job title and experience were considered.\(^1\) Women working full-time for 40 years will make 400,000 less than their male peers over that period, according to the National Women’s Law Center.\(^2\)

Women account for 45 percent of the labor force at S&P 500 Companies, but only 4.3 percent of CEOs of those companies are women, according to Catalyst.\(^3\) Only 19 percent of S&P 500 board members are women and 25 percent of executive level positions are held by women.\(^4\)

However, less than 5 percent of male CEOs identify equal pay or the glass ceiling as a big problem.

### EQUAL PAY

How big a problem do you think receiving equal pay is for women in the workplace?

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**Response**

Very Big Problem | Somewhat A Problem | Not Very Much Of A Problem | Not At All A Problem

\(^1\) Bureau of Labor Statistics, Catalyst earn 82.5 percent of men

\(^2\) National Women’s Law Center, Catalyst, women earn 400,000 less

\(^3\) Catalyst, S&P 500 CEOs

\(^4\) Catalyst, S&P 500 board and executive staff
GLASS CEILING

How big a problem do you think encountering the glass ceiling is for women in the workplace?

Survey respondents often choose “very big problem” for something they experience personally and “somewhat a problem” for something they view as someone else’s problem.”

Donald Levy, PhD., Director of Siena College Research Institute

### Response

- **Very Big Problem**
- **Somewhat A Problem**
- **Not Very Much Of A Problem**
- **Not At All A Problem**
Most female CEOs say it is still “a man’s world.”

Overall, the responses of women CEOs are much more tempered than New York women but still more cognizant of gender bias than male CEOs. On most questions, the responses of women CEOs parallel responses of male New Yorkers.

Perhaps female CEOs believe that because they succeeded, any woman can.

The CEO survey posed one question that did not appear on the general public’s survey and it elicited very different responses from male and female CEOs. Most female CEOs say it is still “a man’s world.”

● A MAN’S WORLD?

The CEOs were asked: Which of the following statements is closer to your view?

“The old days are over, women have as much opportunity as men do, especially when it comes to senior management positions. I really don’t even notice gender anymore when I work with colleagues, clients or vendors.”

OR –

“Things have changed but in so many circumstances it remains a man’s world. Women in leadership remain the exception rather than the norm and let’s face it, it is harder for a woman to succeed than it is for a man.”

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<th>Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>It’s A Man’s World</td>
<td>61%</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Old Days Are Over</td>
<td>38%</td>
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Male CEOs: 23% 75%
Female CEOs: 61% 38%

SPOTLIGHT

DR. JAMES REED
President & CEO
St. Peter’s Health Partners
Albany, N.Y.

Half of the senior executives at St. Peter’s are women.

“We male CEOs, we got here over a 30-year, 40-year career and we never had to face personally gender discrimination, and as a result, we were never sensitized to it the way a female CEO or woman is. I think it is a real danger for us male CEOs. If we didn’t personally face it, we probably won’t see it.

“First, admit that you have a blind spot here, probably because you’ve never faced gender discrimination yourself, and then build policies that look for where it might be going on. Accept the fact that you are not as sensitive to this, that if your organization is large enough, it is probably happening sometime, somewhere in your organization and you need mechanisms to find it and fix it.”

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The public and working-age women think sexual harassment is pervasive.

A stunning number of New Yorkers, men and women, believe that women encounter sexual harassment in the workplace. Sixty-six percent of men and 71 percent of women believe sexual harassment is a very big problem or somewhat a problem. Eighty-four percent of women age 18-40 believe it is a problem.

Only one-third of male CEOs say it is a very big problem or somewhat a problem.

The public and working-age women think sexual harassment is pervasive but 68 percent of male CEOs think it is not very much a problem or not a problem at all.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

How big a problem do you think sexual harassment is for women in the workplace?

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<td>Women</td>
<td>27%</td>
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Response

Very Big Problem
Somewhat A Problem
Not Very Much Of A Problem
Not At All A Problem
RACE

African American/Black and Latino respondents feel gender discrimination more acutely in two areas: equal pay and sexual harassment.

In questions about the glass ceiling, work/life balance and age discrimination, the responses of African American/Black and Latinos are roughly the same as the general public.

While 37 percent of the general public said equal pay for women is a very big problem, 50 percent of African American/Black respondents and 46 percent of Latino respondents said it is a very big problem.

On sexual harassment in the workplace, 84 percent of African American/Black respondents and 71 percent of Latino respondents said it is a very big or somewhat a problem, compared to 69 percent of the general public. While Latinos’ responses appear similar to the general public, a closer look shows that 46 percent of Latinos chose “very big problem,” by far the strongest response across all populations.

**RACE AND EQUAL PAY FOR WOMEN**

How big a problem do you think receiving equal pay is for women in the workplace?

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<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Male CEOs</th>
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**Spotlight**

RUTH MAHONEY
Capital Region Market President
KeyBank
Albany, N.Y.

30 percent of KeyBank’s senior executives are women.

“At Key, we pride ourselves on diversity and inclusion. We have a significant number of women in senior executive positions right from the CEO spot (KeyBank CEO Beth Mooney is the only female CEO of a top 20 bank in the U.S.) all the way down to market presidents and senior executives. I have no reason to think that any of us are not compensated just as equally as our male colleagues.

“We have nine affinity groups within KeyCorp. They are designed so that people can affiliate with people of similar interests. So we have the Key executive women’s network, we have a Hispanic and Latino group, one for veterans, we have one supportive of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, and the list goes on, but it is with the intent that people do feel included here and can bring their authentic selves to work.”
**RACE AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

How big a problem do you think sexual harassment is for women in the workplace?

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Response
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WORK AND FAMILY

Even male CEOs are aware of the struggle.

Overwhelmingly, respondents believe that balancing work and family is a problem for women. Even male CEOs are aware of the struggle: 68% of male CEOs identified it as a very big or somewhat a problem, which is not too far behind the general public (78%) or women (83%).

Awareness, it appears, has stimulated efforts to resolve the problem, which is encouraging. Some companies have implemented strategies to help employees balance work and family: telecommuting, job sharing, flex-time and on-site day care.

CEOs’ responses to this survey question demonstrate their ability to recognize a hurdle women face. The progress made in work/life area suggests that CEOs’ awareness is critical to addressing problems in the workplace and that educating CEOs on the obstacles women encounter is key to making strides in other areas of gender inequity.

WORK/LIFE BALANCE

How big a problem do you think balancing work and family is for women in the workplace?

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

There is a discrepancy between the perceptions of male CEOs and women.

The surveys asked CEOs and the general public about the opportunity for women to succeed in the workplace, though the structure of the questions was different for each group.

Once again, there is a discrepancy between the perceptions of male CEOs and women, and even the general public.

The CEO poll asked business leaders about specific roles within their industry. Male and female CEOs agreed that women have the same or more opportunity as men to succeed in marketing, public relations, human resources and clerical roles. But their responses diverged on opportunities for women in senior management, ownership and line staff supervision. About 20 percent of male CEOs said women have less opportunity in those leadership roles, while one-third of the female CEOs said women have less opportunity.

The general public was asked more broadly whether women have as much opportunity as men to be successful in the workplace. More than one-third of the general public said women have less opportunity to be successful, and half of the women interviewed said they have less opportunity to succeed.
CONCLUSION

It is clear that male CEOs do not see barriers to women’s success.

This unique research project compared responses of CEOs and the general public on issues of gender inequities and consistently saw a dramatic gulf between male CEOs and nearly everyone else. It is clear that male CEOs do not see barriers to women’s success while women, and even average New York men, do see it.

The survey is not able to explain why male CEOs have such different views.

Regardless, CEOs both male and female need to look past their perceptions and seek real data and feedback within their own companies. Are women paid less for the same work in their companies? Do female employees feel like they can succeed? Are women well-represented in senior leadership roles? Is there unreported sexual harassment – large or small – in their offices?

If the CEO of a company is unaware of gender inequities, whether they are real or perceived, then it is unlikely the situation will improve. CEOs should be distressed that a large portion of their workforce believes there are barriers to their success and should take steps to evaluate, discuss and implement strategies to break down those obstacles.

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This Siena College Study is drawn from polling conducted March 2-26, 2015 by telephone calls conducted in English to 804 New York State residents and interviews with Upstate New York CEO’s conducted from October 22, 2014 - January 7, 2015. Respondent sampling in March was initiated by asking for the youngest male in the household. It has an overall margin of error of + 4.0 percentage points including the design effects resulting from weighting. Sampling was conducted via a stratified dual frame probability sample provided by Survey Sampling International of landline and cell phone telephone numbers from within New York State weighted to reflect known population patterns. Data was statistically adjusted by age, region, race/ethnicity and gender to ensure representativeness. CEO sampling was conducted by telephone, mail and internet interviews with 524 Business Leaders from the Albany, Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse MSA’s. The Siena College Research Institute, directed by Donald Levy, Ph.D., conducts political, economic, social and cultural research primarily in NYS. SRI, an independent, non-partisan research institute, subscribes to the American Association of Public Opinion Research Code of Professional Ethics and Practices.