



FWI Women At The Top (WATT)

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Women at the Top is a series of studies conducted by the FWI Foundation, in conjunction with the school of business at William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The study researches the status of women working in the financial services industry and focuses on commercial banks and credit unions.

During the spring trimester of 2005, the MBA Marketing Management class of William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, collected data from the top U.S. commercial banks and credit unions. The top commercial banks were determined using the Moneylink website (March 29, 2005). This website ranked banks based on total assets. The credit unions with the largest portfolios of loans and leases were determined using the rankings of American Banker, 10/29/2004, Vol. 169, Issue 209.

Results from the 2004 survey show that in the 50 largest commercial banks (March 2005):

- Women held 12.6% of executive positions. This figure is down from 16% in the 2002 survey.
- Seven commercial banks had a female CFO, compared to eight in 2002.
- Only one commercial bank had a woman CEO, while there were two banks with female CEOs in 2002.

In the 100 largest credit unions:

- Twenty-five percent of the executive positions were held by women. That figure is down from 35% in 2002.
- Fourteen credit unions had women CFOs, down from 21 in 2002.
- Eight credit unions had a female CEO, down from nine in 2002.

With women representing 75 percent of the workforce in the financial services industry, the executives of the FWI Foundation wondered why women are not progressing in executive management positions at the same representation rate. Several factors were posed as possible contributors to the low numbers of women in the executive ranks. These included:

- Women are more likely to work in part time positions and/or take time off to care for family members.
- Women at the senior levels are most often in positions that are historically female – for example, Marketing and Human Resources. These positions don't have the profit and loss (P&L) or revenue generating component of sales or lending positions. When organizations look to fill executive positions, women are overlooked because they haven't had P&L responsibilities.
- Women need to do a better job of self promoting and positioning themselves for executive positions.



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In order to validate what its women executives saw as the possible reasons for low representation, and to gain words of wisdom, the FWI Foundation surveyed the 25 Most Powerful Women in Banking for 2005, as identified by USBanker Magazine, gathering this information:

- A. At some time during my banking career, I have:
- Worked part time.
 - Taken time off to rear children or to care for a family member
- B. To what do you attribute your success in the banking industry?
- My education
 - Working longer hours than my male co-workers
 - The career path I chose – for example, finance rather than marketing
 - A male mentor who championed my advancement
 - My ability to negotiate for resources, promotions, and wage increases
- C. Labor statistics show that women make up 75% of the workers in the banking industry, with only 12.8% of them in executive positions. In your opinion, women are under-represented in the top ranks because:
- They are not assertive enough about what they want
 - They lack the skills to be a good leader at the highest management levels
 - They take positions that are not visible (marketing, HR, etc.)
- D. In your opinion, what does it take for women to be recognized for the coveted position of CEO?
- Choosing positions with profit and loss responsibility
 - Becoming better at asking for what they want and negotiating to get it
- E. What advice do you have for women in the financial services industry who wish to be promoted to the top positions?

Of the eight responses received, these are the findings:

With the exception of three women taking only the customary time for maternity leave, only one woman had taken time off to rear children or care for a family member. One respondent stated that she believes corporate America to be unforgiving of women who leave the work place for extended periods.



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In addition to the options listed under B above, these women attributed their success to:

- Having global banking experience – both wholesale and retail.
- Being in the right place at the right time.
- Working hard and seizing opportunities.
- Being competent.
- Being able to relate to both co-workers and customers.
- Selecting the right company, working hard, and doing credible work.
- Focusing on the quality of the product and never being afraid to take on new responsibilities.
- Creating strategic alliances in and out side the organization.

In response to C above, two women felt that taking positions that are not visible is a detriment. Other responses included:

- Lacking mentors or champions and not being in the inner circle network. Mentors help to push things along.
- Not having a clear career path.
- Senior management's failure to consciously focus on including women.
- Women must be willing to persevere and ask for what they want.
- While most women say they want leadership positions and more responsibility, there is often a disconnect in what they say versus what they do.
- If women choose to have children, they are forced to balance their choices and often ease up on the fast career track. Having a supportive, stay-at-home husband allows women to continue to work full time.
- The good old boy network. In a recent poll conducted by Red Ladder, Inc., more that 80 percent of the women who responded stated that due to good old boy networks in their organizations, they are excluded from the most lucrative accounts, promotions, and comparable pay.

Asked what it takes for a woman to be considered for the CEO title, respondents agreed with the two statements in D above and had these additional comments:

- A broad range of experience.
- Building and demonstrating leadership
- Finding champions to help pave the way.
- Understanding what they want. Most women don't spend enough time defining success for themselves.
- Being a decisive leader and being willing to take more risk than many women are comfortable with.
- High-quality execution.
- Achieving success regardless of the position held.



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Finally, the advice given for women who wish to be promoted to the top positions can be summed up in these "Ten Golden Rules":

- Embrace change.
- Use the glass ceiling as a motivator rather than an excuse not to succeed.
- Seek strong mentor/champion relationships.
- Excel in your current job.
- Strategically choose a company that offers opportunity and fits who you are.
- Be clear about what drives you and find a career that provides it.
- Be realistic about your own strengths and weaknesses and surround yourself with people who are strong where you are weak.
- Be courageous and take risks.
- Take charge of your own personal development.
- Take ownership of results – both good and bad.

The FWI Foundation will complete the Woman at the Top study for 2005 and results will be announced at FWI's 84th International Annual Conference - September 16 – 19, 2006 - in Henderson, NV. In addition, representatives from the 25 Most Powerful Women in Banking will participate on a panel at the Annual Conference to discuss the risks they have taken to overcome barriers in today's financial services industry. These powerful leaders will share how they have accomplished their goals and achieved their dreams, both professionally and personally.

For additional information about the survey and the International Conference, please contact us at info@fwifoundation.org or 651-487-7632.