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# n Practice

## Five Strategies for Climbing the Corporate Ladder

Lester B. Korn doesn't agree with the doomsayers who believe that too many managers are chasing too few jobs—that the corridors of power are clogged. Says Korn, chairman and CEO of New York and Los Angeles executive search firm, Korn/Ferry International, "These dire predictions are ridiculous and presuppose that American industry has finished its technological growth.

"There is room at the top for dedicated people."

Speaking before alumni of the Wharton and Columbia Business Schools recently at their "Distinguished Speakers Series" forum, Korn not only disagreed with doomsday demographers, but also offered a strategy for executives contemplating their next move up the corporate ladder.

Korn said, "While I don't believe in any pat prescriptions or easy recipes for success, there are strategies that can be used, especially if you feel blocked in your present job or company, or even if you are totally satisfied with your present company, but want to move up the ladder."

Korn suggested that those interested in "upward mobility, take charge of their careers and plan for their advancement." He offered five strategies for executives en route to the top. They include:

- Get profit-center responsibility.
- Know how and when to take risks.
- Internationalize your career.
- Learn to communicate effectively.
- Use mobility, but use it selectively.

Korn recommended that executives try, as early as possible in their career, to get profit-center responsibility. He said, "Anyone interested in advancement, and especially rapid advancement, should assess a staff position very carefully." Korn added, "Line management or operational control can enable you to prove yourself as both a specialist with particular expertise and a generalist who can exercise leadership, authority and inspire enthusiasm among colleagues and subordinates."

Knowing when to take risks is vitally important to those moving up the ladder. Korn said "Bidding for a precarious assignment such as division turnaround can propel you to the top." But, he cautioned, such a move can also be "suicidal." He said, "If you look at American industry, some of the greatest success stories started out in 'Chapter 11.'"

"The third strategy is to broaden your base of knowledge with an international assignment, provided your company has a proven U.S. re-entry program." Korn added, "In an overseas management position, a competent executive can achieve dramatic gains and impressive results, perhaps more quickly and spectacularly than he can in the U.S."

Whatever route one takes, Korn said it's "critical to learn how to communicate. You must be able to get your points across clearly and persuasively. I'm not sure rising executives take communications seriously enough."

The fifth strategy is mobility. "Because of the great wave of mergers and acquisitions and restructurings going on in corporate America today, we find more and more clients asking for candidates who have worked for two or three different companies to assure a breadth of experience and flexibility." Korn cautioned, however, that too much job hopping will ultimately be detrimental. He said, "an executive should never jump ship in a panic; never move unless you will be getting a sizeable increase in growth opportunities and responsibility, or for less than a 30 percent salary increase." He added, "You are taking a bigger risk by not staying put—and, if you can't negotiate a higher recognition level in a new position, then your chances for success are diminished."

Korn said, "In any really successful career, there is at least one turning point, a point where opportunity presents itself and gives you a chance to break out, to break away from the pack." Referring to recent studies of senior executives conducted by Korn/Ferry, Mr. Korn said, "One crucial finding that emerges in every survey is

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that there is a consensus among top managers that midway between the ages of 30 and 40, each one faced a moment of opportunity and challenge, then grasped it, and pursued it. Positioning yourself for that moment is of the utmost importance."



## Packaging Products: Do the Japanese Do That Better, Too?

Japan has the edge over the U.S. in recent sales success. In 1984, Japan exported \$44.4 billion more products than it imported, while the United States imported \$107.9 billion more products than it exported, according to the International Trade Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce. However, Japan's sales success does not necessarily reflect superior packaging expertise and resources, say two faculty members at Rochester Institute of Technology.

"The United States is superior to Japan in designing packages for mass merchandising," says Dr. Robert Johnston, dean of RIT's College of Fine and Applied Arts.

"The Japanese create more elegant designs," says Johnston, "but they hire Americans to design packages for many products distributed internationally, such as Japanese watches and automobiles.

"American packaging designers better address consumer needs because they create designs that appeal to particular groups. For example, when they design packages for pharmaceutical products, they keep in mind the medical professionals who will be ordering or distributing the products."

Americans, with better forest resources, also create superior packaging materials, according to Dr. David L. Olsson, chairman of RIT's Department of Packaging Science. "American

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packagers use yellow pine trees from the southern states to create long, strong fibers for the paper in corrugated paperboard packages," says Olsson. "Japan has lower quality forest resources, so they use weaker paper for their packages."

An area of packaging in which Japan is superior to the United States is quality control, says Olsson. "Japan's quality control results in superior printing on cosmetic packages, folding cartons and paperboards. They maintain excellent color control, register, and ink coverage."

The Japanese also write superior specifications for packages. Says Olsson, "Their documents tell you exactly what they want—from the types of materials, to the thickness, and kinds of paper coatings. This careful attention to detail results in better packages."

He adds, "American packagers are less precise than the Japanese. It is common for an American employee to

order packages by taking an old sample to a supplier and asking for 'more of these.' This leaves American companies open to mistakes by allowing suppliers to interpret what they want."

## Leadership and Women

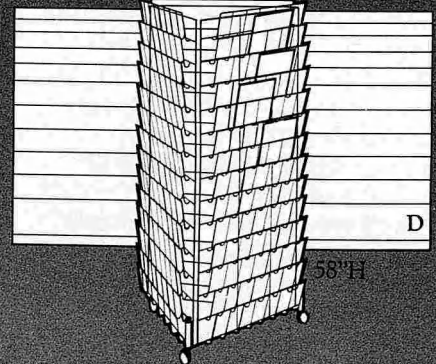
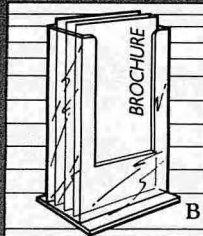
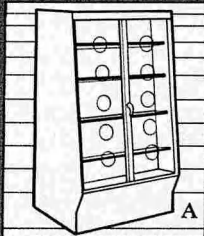
The notion that women can be both influential and leaders is not a popular one. People equate leadership with men. But antidotes to these notions were presented at the first Influential Women International Conference held last October in Nyborg, Denmark. Twenty-four women from government, private industry, academia, and the media representing six countries, met to discuss: What is leadership? Do women contribute anything special to leadership? What responsibilities do women have as leadership? Do women from different cultures view leadership differently?

What contributions do women make to leadership? Solutions to business problems for women are a product of how well the relationship needs are attended to by all parties. Conference attendees agreed that women listen, hear, and emphasize compromises; they include others often in order not to hurt feelings. They are concerned about the greater good of all. All of the women leaders at the conference had a strong need to be supported. They believe women frequently build networks to strengthen rather than tear down human connections. These women believe they bring a special blend of intellect and feeling, not normally found in their male counterparts, to the challenge of leadership. They positively believe they are strong and that competition is an intentional choice, not the only mode of behaving.

If women contribute these things to leadership, then what responsibilities do they have? Overwhelmingly, the responses echoed the belief that

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women are unique: "If we act like men, then there's no reason to be in leadership positions, for we owe the world a choice. We stand with one foot in a man's world and one in the world of women . . . and we have the awareness to know which foot to stand on when." "We need to engage other women, use our power and influence to point out admirable examples of women leaders and get positive media coverage." "We need to have time to ourselves and live a private life as well as a public one."

Plans are well underway for a second such conference in 1987. For information contact Bonnie Kasten, Influential Women International, 132 S. 17th St., Philadelphia, PA 19103; 215/557-9279.

## Getting Senior Management to Buy-in

*Submitted by Rebecca L. Morgan, owner of Morgan Seminar Group, Sunnyvale, California.*

One of the biggest complaints from participants in my seminars is "My manager won't accept it if I try this new idea." Their concern is real: without commitment from key managers, there is little motivation for the staff to change.

This is what I tell senior managers to get them involved in training:

Your participation and involvement in this project is crucial. The more involved you get, the more effective the outcome. Just your presence at the training session is a strong message of your support for this project. But your willingness to roll up your sleeves and work along with your staff speaks even louder and clearer: they are convinced more by your actions than by your words.

There is a risk, however, as you know: To participate is to make yourself vulnerable. Some managers feel they must appear perfect and flawless to their staff; if they show shortcomings, they will lose their staff's respect.

We often equate vulnerability with weakness. But vulnerability is weakness only when coupled with passivity—vulnerability plus strength equals power. It takes a big person to admit areas of him or herself that need improvement. Your staff will be inspired by your candor and will be more open

to making changes themselves. If distrust, suspicion, and backstabbing are rampant in your organization, you may be hesitant to take this risk, but it could be an initial step in changing the destructive atmosphere. We are usually disillusioned by people who project "I know it all" and are impressed by those who admit "I'm still learning, too."

Then, you need to act on what you learn and have committed to in the program. If they hear you say one thing in the classroom and another back on the job, you may lose your credibility and their respect.

You may be thinking: "What is the payoff for all this effort?" With your involvement in this project, your people will be more productive, and you will gain ideas and respect with your staff. Without your involvement, skills won't be integrated into the organization, no matter what anyone else says or does. The training would be a waste of time.

Are you willing to do what it takes to make this organization thrive?

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