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Lack of Sponsorship Keeps Women from Breaking Through the Glass Ceiling Finds New Study

New York, NY; January 12, 2011—High performing women fail to acquire the backing they need to attain leadership positions, finds a new *Harvard Business Review Research Report*. The study findings were announced today at American Express headquarters in New York City with remarks by American Express Chairman and CEO Kenneth Chenault, among others.

Despite enormous progress at the lower and middle rungs of the corporate ladder, few women are moving into the C-Suite. The Sponsor Effect study uncovers the prime cause: the vast majority of highly qualified women don't have political allies to propel, inspire and protect them through the perilous straits of upper management. They lack, in a word, sponsorship.

Sponsors advocate and facilitate critical career moves. Just as President Obama did for Elena Kagan, and John McCain for Sarah Palin, sponsors go out on a limb for their protégées, providing stretch opportunities, forming critical connections, and promoting visibility. Without sponsorship it is nearly impossible to climb the last slippery slopes of the career ladder—where competition is at its most intense.

Study Key Findings:

- Women underestimate the power of the sponsor effect. Sponsorship confers a statistical benefit of up to 30 percent in terms of more stretch assignments, promotions, and pay raises.
- Most women believe that hard work alone will succeed in turning heads and netting rewards. Fully 77 percent insist that hard work and long hours, not connections, account for their advancement.
- Valuable professional relationships between an older, more powerful male and a younger female are avoided for fear of speculation of an affair. Most senior men (64 percent) avoid sponsoring junior women for this reason.
- Men can cultivate more sponsors than women because they're less constrained by family and domestic responsibilities. Sixty percent of working women do at least 75 percent of the housework; 56 percent still shoulder at least 75 percent of the childcare.
- Women benefit from, but rarely get, sponsor guidance on how to adjust their style, clothing, and executive presence to look the part of a leader—feedback men readily give to other men.
- Finding, retaining, and providing sponsorship has proven more difficult since the economic downturn.

In addition to identifying the sponsorship shortfall, the study also reveals how some of today's largest Fortune 500 companies are addressing it with innovative solutions.

Companies like American Express, Cisco, Citi, Deloitte, Intel, Morgan Stanley and Time Warner are creating comprehensive approaches to building and leveraging sponsor networks. The study describes end-to-end solutions that incorporate senior leader support, enrichment and education for women, and a structured approach to ensure that sponsorship grows as a function of proactive talent management.

Programs promulgating sponsorship include:

American Express: *Women in the Pipeline & at the Top*

Cisco: *Inclusive Advocacy Program*

Citi: *Women Leading Citi*

Deloitte: *Leading to WIN*

Intel: *Extending Our Research Program*

Morgan Stanley: *Leadership Program for Newly Promoted Women Managing Directors*

Time Warner: *Breakthrough Leadership*

At the event to launch the study, remarks were to be made by:

Kenneth Chenault, Chairman and CEO, American Express

Barbara Adachi, National Managing Director, Human Capital, Deloitte Consulting

Edward Gadsden, Chief Diversity Officer, Pfizer

Sylvia Ann Hewlett, President, Center for Work-Life Policy

Rosalind Hudnell, Chief Diversity Officer and Global Director of Education and External Relations, Intel

Melinda Merino, Executive Editor, Harvard Business Review Press

Kerrie Peraino, Chief Diversity Officer, American Express

Priya Trauber, Executive Director, Head of Women's Initiatives, Morgan Stanley

Methodology:

Spearheaded by American Express, Deloitte, Intel and Morgan Stanley, and the Hidden Brain Drain Task Force, research for the study comprised seven virtual strategy sessions, eleven focus groups, numerous one-on-one interviews, and two surveys (2,952 U.S. women and men in January and February 2010, and 1,085 respondents in June and July 2010) conducted by Knowledge Networks under the auspices of the Center for Work-Life Policy, a nonprofit research organization.

The Hidden Brain Drain Task Force

Established in 2004 by Sylvia Ann Hewlett (Center for Work-Life Policy and Columbia University), Carolyn Buck Luce (Ernst & Young) and Cornel West (Princeton University), this private sector task force aims to identify, develop, and promote a second generation of corporate policies and practices that support the ambition, work, and life needs of highly qualified women and minorities. Uniting its 60 global member firms, which represent four million employees operating in 190 countries around the world, is the understanding that full utilization of the talent pool is at the heart of competitive advantage and economic success.

About the Authors

Sylvia Ann Hewlett, is the founding President of the Center for Work-Life Policy (CWLP), a Manhattan-based think tank where she chairs the “Hidden Brain Drain,” a task force of 60 global companies committed to global talent innovation.

Kerrie Peraino is the chief diversity officer at American Express, a position she assumed in September 2008. She is responsible for developing the company’s global diversity and inclusion strategy for nearly 60,000 employees in more than 100 markets.

Laura Sherbin, vice president and the director of research at the Center for Work-Life Policy, heads up data collection and analytics. An economist specializing in labor force and gender issues, Sherbin is also an adjunct Professor at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University where she teaches “Women and Globalization.”

Karen Sumberg, vice president and director of projects and communications at the Center for Work-Life Policy, heads up the demographic and generations research. Over the last five years she has led key research projects including *Bookend Generations* and *Sin Fronteras*.

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