

Marian N. Ruderman

Patricia J. Ohlott



Standing at the Crossroads Next Steps for High-Achieving Women

CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP
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High-Achieving Women

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Center for
Creative Leadership

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To Rachel and Joshua,
may you approach the
crossroads of your life with
wisdom, joy, and peace;

To my sister Barbra and
to the memory of my mother, Kathy,
the first two high-achieving women in my life;

To Lew and Tom, love and thanks
for always being there for us.

Preface

In the course of writing this book, we have merged our personal passions with our professional work. As professionals in the field of leadership development, we realized in the mid-1990s that significant changes were occurring for women managers. We began to have a series of conversations with our colleague Carole Leland, coauthor of *Women of Influence*, *Women of Vision* and manager of The Women's Leadership Program (TWLP) offered by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), and with other leadership development professionals working in the program. They were in frequent contact with high-level women managers from all over the United States, and they shared their observation that women then attending the program were raising issues substantially different from the ones voiced by women in the 1980s.

In the 1980s women attending the leadership program were focused on fitting in and breaking through obvious barriers. They tried hard to be accepted by men and dealt with very blatant acts of discrimination, such as being demoted after maternity leave and being excluded from work-related social functions. These women were organizational pioneers. They were among the first to gain admission to previously male managerial levels, and they were among the first to depart from traditional roles for women in American corporations. Their conversations during the program focused

on how to succeed in a man's world, ways to overcome its obstacles, and strategies for breaking the "glass ceiling."

Two things have happened over time. First, although the number of women at the top has stayed relatively low, the number in midlevel management positions has grown significantly. Second, the issues of most concern to managerial women have changed. Women now spend less time on fitting into a man's world and more on the lifestyle choices they confront—choices about *how* to be a woman leader. Choices about whether or not a particular assignment is the right opportunity at the right time. Choices about how much to alter their own leadership style to meet organizational requirements for advancement. Choices about how to keep the costs associated with a managerial life under control. Unfortunately, the existing wisdom on career development provides little specific advice on these issues.

Thus, the women managers who attended TWLP during the 1990s began asking staff at CCL to go beyond existing knowledge and look at the personal and professional choices women face and the approaches they have been taking to address the new realities of their managerial lives. This book is our response to their need.

We endeavored to learn more about the crucial choices managerial women face, with the hope that by studying their inner and outer journeys, we could clarify the experience for others as well as provide some guidance. We wanted to create something that the next wave of women managers could use to understand, validate, and enhance their own experiences. We also sought to help organizations foster the growth and effectiveness of their women managers in this changing environment.

Our Personal Journeys

Growing up as teenagers in the 1970s, we marveled at the burgeoning opportunities for women. We wondered how it would all play out. Would women be able to do it all? This was a time of fem-

inist consciousness-raising and a time of significant social change. All-male institutions like Yale, Princeton, and West Point opened their doors to women. Women started studying law, medicine, and business in large numbers. We were told, Go ahead, you can have a career in any field you choose and can aspire to a position with decision-making authority. From our homes in suburban New Jersey, we watched male executives commute into Manhattan and wondered what that life would be like for a woman executive—and looked forward to a chance to try it one day. Later, each of us moved away from that plan and chose to go to graduate school, one in psychology and one in organizational behavior.

As we began our professional careers, we saw many firsts for women. Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court, in 1981. In 1983 we saw Sally Ride become the first woman in space. In 1984 we saw Geraldine Ferraro nominated for vice president and heard the women students cheer for her at our university campuses. We also became aware that there were costs associated with the advancement of women as we saw the vicious attacks on Geraldine Ferraro and also on Mary Cunningham when she advanced rapidly at Bendix and was accused of using her feminine wiles to smooth her way. In general, though, we realized that the impossible was becoming possible. But the question of how to handle the choices created by these possibilities never went away. Independently, we each had our own inner dialogue as to what we really wanted out of life: what choices would we make regarding the opportunities available to us?

As leadership development specialists, we tried to find answers in the research literature—for ourselves as well as for our clients. But what we found was a supposedly generic literature on career development based on the experience of white males. We wanted something deeper that went beyond career choices and traditional paths for men. We did find a rich literature on women managers that, although fascinating, emphasized career obstacles, strategies for advancement, and work-family conflict. We also noted that

both the popular press and the leadership literature had started featuring articles about women leaders. Despite the many contributions of this literature, none of it answered our need to understand the inner life of women managers. Existing research did not address the goals, opinions, feelings, or doubts of women operating in organizations designed and led by men.

In this book we develop a synthesis of the forces influencing the inner and outer lives of women managers, and we look at how they have addressed the issues these influences raise. It is our hope that the patterns in the needs and life decisions of these high-achievers will enhance understanding in ways that are useful to the decision making of all women in management and those who work with them.

Greensboro, North Carolina
March 2002

Marian N. Ruderman
Patricia J. Ohlott

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we are especially grateful to the sixty-one women who repeatedly gave us their time to share their stories with us: Your contributions are anonymous but we appreciate the effort and care each one of you individually gave to us in the interviews. Your stories were rich and moving and we appreciate your willingness to trust us with them.

Although only our names appear on the cover of this book, many others at the Center for Creative Leadership contributed to the success of our work. Without them, there would be no book. Most important, we'd like to thank the women who worked on the research team with us. Debbie Nelson, our administrative coordinator, was the glue that kept this project together. She tracked all the interviews, supervised the transcription process, developed all materials, and generally stayed on top of every detail. Kate Panzer read and summarized every interview. Her agile mind helped us to see patterns in the data and organize our thoughts. Sara King, program manager for The Women's Leadership Program for several years, helped us see the research process and the data from the participants' point of view and provided a wealth of insights with regard to applying the findings. Although she joined us late in the process, Julia Biederman Brandon brought to our team a wonderful understanding of the dynamics associated with age and goal setting that greatly enriched our thinking. Sharon

Rogolsky joined us in the last year of our work to share with us her brilliance as a data analyst and editor. Sharon helped us to identify and attend to the flaws in our thinking. She did a wonderful job of helping us to express the subtleties of the data.

Clara Richichi and Carole Sumner also made important contributions to the project by helping us to manage our data and handle administrative details. Interviewing sixty-one women involved a number of individuals; in addition to those women already mentioned, we'd also like to thank Kelly Hannum, Martha Hughes-James, and Davida Sharpe for lending us their interviewing skills.

Many of our colleagues offered us support and advice. Carole Leland persuaded us to undertake the study, and her encouragement gave us the momentum necessary to commit to such a large undertaking. Kathy Kram of Boston University, working with us as an adviser, helped us to clarify our understanding of the data. Talula Cartwright, Wendy Hoelscher, Ellie Johnson, Ancella Livers, Brenda McManigle, Barbara Briggs Popejoy, Sonya Prestridge, and Joan Tavares encouraged us to continue with this work. As the managers and faculty of TWLP, they shared with us their ideas and insights. It was an honor to work with them.

Working on this project was a privilege. We thank John Alexander, Maxine Dalton, Cindy McCauley, Walt Tornow, and Ellen Van Velsor, who gave us the organizational space and resources at CCL to do this. We would also like to thank the many people at CCL who provided logistical support necessary for completion of this project: the research administrative coordinators, the staff of the information center, the assessment services group, the information technology group, and the program coordinators for TWLP. Without all of you this book would not have been possible.

We are also grateful to our editorial team, Marcia Horowitz and Martin Wilcox of CCL, and Cedric Crocker, Kathe Sweeney, Susan Williams, Byron Schneider, Mary Garrett, and Hilary Powers of Jossey-Bass, all of whom provided support and encouragement throughout the process of writing and producing

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Carol Keck deserves special mention as a colleague and friend to both of us, always confident that we could do this. Personally, we each have many people to thank. Many supported us as we worked on this book.

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The Authors

Marian N. Ruderman is a research scientist at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina. Her research focuses on the career development of women and the impact of diversity on management development processes. Over the years, Marian has written widely on these topics in CCL reports, book chapters, professional journals, and popular magazines. She is coeditor of *Diversity in Work Teams: Research Paradigms for a Changing Workplace*. Marian has also coauthored CCL's feedback instrument, the Job Challenge Profile. Her published work has been cited widely in the press and has been integrated into leadership programs offered by CCL. In addition, Marian speaks frequently to corporate and academic audiences about issues relating to the career development of women.

Marian is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Academy of Management, and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology. She holds an A.B. from Cornell University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in organizational psychology from the University of Michigan.

Originally from New Jersey, Marian now lives in Greensboro with her husband and two children.

Patricia J. Ohlott is a research associate at the Center for Creative Leadership. Her interest in women's career development began

when she was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to work with Rosabeth Moss Kanter while completing her senior thesis at Yale. Patty's current research interests include the career development of women managers and issues relating to the management of diversity in organizations. She was coauthor of a study that looked at gender differences in the management promotion process. She has authored a chapter on developmental job assignments in the Center for Creative Leadership's *Handbook of Leadership Development* and has published extensively in professional journals. Findings from her research are applied in The Women's Leadership Program offered by CCL. She has also coauthored the Job Challenge Profile and contributed to the development of SKILL-SCOPE®, both CCL feedback instruments.

Patty has a B.A. in psychology from Yale University and has done graduate work in business administration, with a concentration in organizational behavior, at Duke University's Fuqua School of Business. She is a member of the American Psychological Association, the Academy of Management, and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology.

Also originally from New Jersey, Patty now resides in Burlington, North Carolina, with her husband and their "child," Molly the Labrador Retriever. Patty is an active volunteer with the American Cancer Society.

INTRODUCTION

Standing at the Crossroads

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