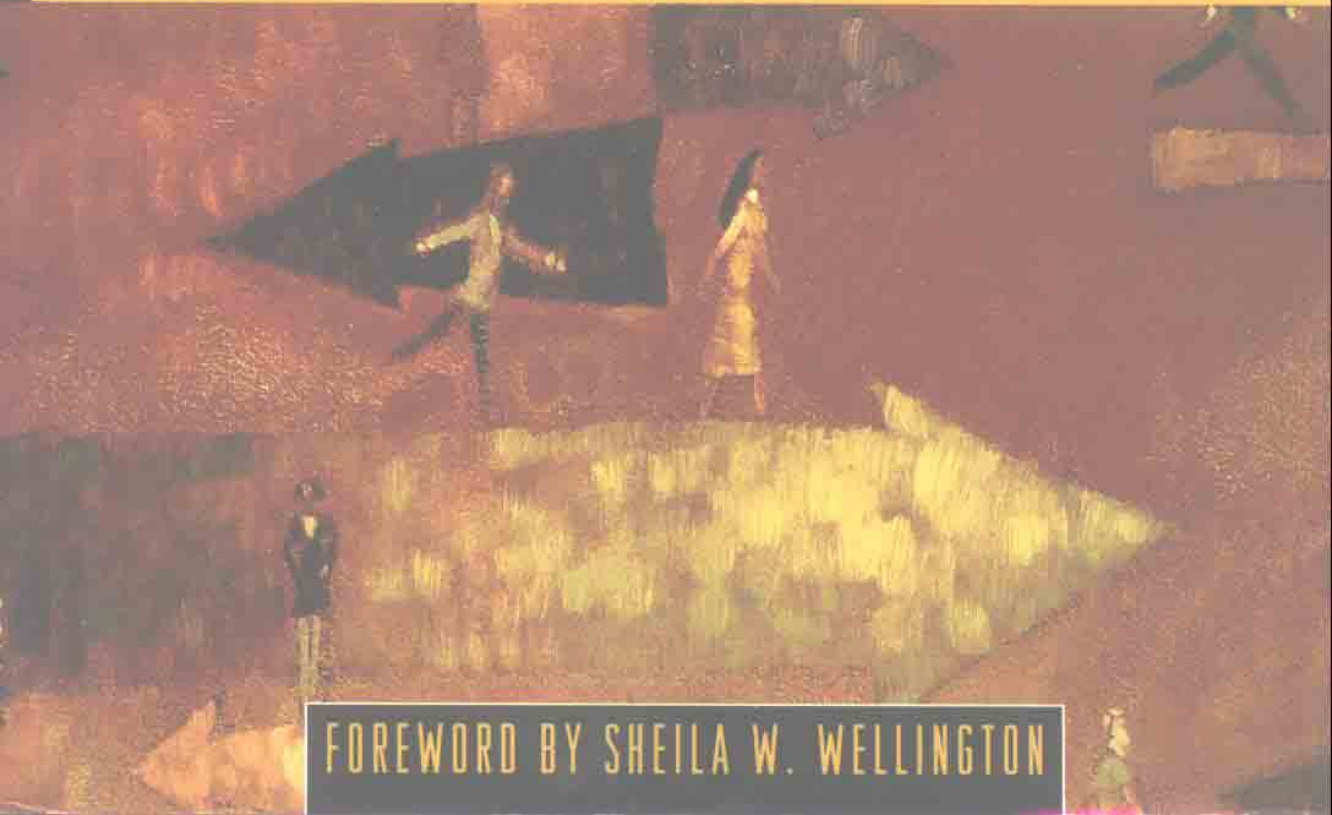
CATALYST

CREATING WOMEN'S NETWORKS

A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR WOMEN AND COMPANIES



FOREWORD BY SHEILA W. WELLINGTON

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A How-To Guide for Women and Companies

Catalyst

Foreword by Sheila W. Wellington

Jossey-Bass Publishers
San Francisco

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Creating women's networks : a how-to guide for women and companies / Catalyst ; foreword by Sheila Wellington. — 1st ed.

p. cm. — (The Jossey-Bass business & management series)

Includes index.

ISBN 0-7879-4014-3 (acid-free paper)

1. Business networks. 2. Women — Social networks. 3. Businesswomen. I. Catalyst, inc. II. Series.

HD69.S8 C74 1999

658.4'09'082—dc21

98-40255

FIRST EDITION

HB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

CREATING WOMEN'S NETWORKS

THE JOSSEY-BASS
BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT SERIES

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FOREWORD

One of the most striking changes in the United States in the last fifty years has been women's entry into the workforce. In 1950, women amounted to only 29.6 percent of the workforce. By 1997, they were up to 46 percent. And the proportion is only increasing. In fact, estimates are that between 1996 and 2006, women will account for 59 percent of total labor force growth.

The picture looks very different, however, as you move up the organizational ladder. Women have been tremendously successful in entering the workforce and gaining footholds in entry-level and mid-management positions. But look toward the top of most companies. The makeup of that group of leaders hasn't changed nearly as much in fifty years. In 1996, women represented slightly more than 10 percent of the corporate officers in the Fortune 500. Look at the top five earners in each of these companies, as Catalyst does in its annual *Census of Corporate Officers and Top Earners,* and the number drops to 3 percent.

In some companies, though, the picture looks a lot brighter. Women are represented not only among entry-level positions and at the middle managerial levels but at the top managerial levels as well—and among vice presidents, executive vice presidents, and even presidents and CEOs. What's happening there?

These corporations and firms have recognized that paying attention to business means paying attention to the changing workforce. Women now represent a substantial proportion of the talent pool from which companies draw their employees and the potential customers for their services and products. Ignoring over half the working and buying population is a bad business decision.

How do these top companies do it? They employ a wide range of strategies to recruit women, to retain women, to develop women, and to promote qualified women. They understand the opportunities that come with having women at all levels in their workforce, as well as the challenges women face in corporate America. They respond to the career development needs, work/life balance needs, and networking needs of women in their organizations. In so doing, they ensure the recruitment and retention of a talented and loyal workforce.

How can women themselves make this happen? They can come together in their organization—first, to identify and help each other gain the skills and experience they need to be successful; second, to educate top management and other employees about women's contributions to and concerns about their workplace; third, to share their knowledge about the informal norms of the company and subtle advancement strategies; and fourth, to help their company succeed by tapping women's talents. To do all this, women are working together, forming groups of like-minded employees who can help each other move their careers and their organizations forward. That is how women's networks come into being.

We at Catalyst have drawn on our more than thirty years of experience to put *Creating Women's Networks* together. It is designed to give you the tools you need to start a network of your own and set it on a course for success throughout its life span. I'm sure you look forward to getting started, so—read on.

September 1998
New York, New York

Sheila W. Wellington
President, Catalyst

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book is the product of work with women's workplace networks by Catalyst over the past fifteen years. It was conceived by Catalyst President Sheila W. Wellington in conjunction with the astute thinking of Cedric Crocker and Susan Williams, editors at Jossey-Bass, with the latter steering the project at Jossey-Bass. Betty Spence oversaw the writing and editing from the Catalyst side.

Special thanks go to Tara Levine, who drafted this book. Without her extensive knowledge of networks there would be no book. Carol Wheeler masterfully and rapidly created the final draft. Marcia Brumit Kropf was deeply involved with the project from its inception, and Bickley Townsend oversaw the research project. Thanks also to Laura O'Loughlin, who reviewed drafts and contributed her years of experience with networks; and to Ellen Wernick, who helped organize our thinking and created easy-to-use approaches for encapsulating information. We are grateful also to Carrie Lane, who set up and conducted interviews of women's network leaders, and to Debbie Zarlin, who prepared the manuscript for the publisher.

We would also like to thank Karen Sharpe, whose developmental work helped us refine our focus. Thanks especially to Susan Williams, who believes in our mission and whose dedication, insight, and patience have brought us closer to its realization.

We also thank the network leaders and others who found time in their tight schedules to share the ups and downs of their networks. Most of all, we salute the women's networks included in this book—and those we may not yet know about—for their work at supporting and encouraging our nation's corporate women. Long may they thrive!

CREATING WOMEN'S NETWORKS

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INTRODUCTION

Women Helping Women • Women Helping Their Employers
That's a Women's Network

Women's networks are a phenomenon that grew out of the overlapping need of companies to reach out to the women in their organization and the critical need of women to reach out to each other.

You probably don't need Catalyst to tell you that in many organizations, women can feel isolated and out of the loop. Many women tell us of being in offices where the men often go out to lunch together or stop off for a drink after work. Women tend to find that informality with men more difficult to achieve; they are not usually at those lunches or after-work gatherings. Yet the information shared during those "down times" is important, and if women want to gain access to it, they need to join in those activities.

But women also need to network with other women, to gain information that only other women know, such as how to navigate their workplace's waters *as women.* However, that often requires some effort: there are usually fewer women working together and they often have constraints—child-care issues, for instance—that men devote less attention to. There are often too few women in management in a particular company for them to form a critical mass in any one division or department or office. To work together for their common good, to have an impact

on the organization, even to get to know each other, they must take active steps to get together—and that means a formal network.

Loosely defined, a women's network is a group of women in an organization, formed to act as a resource for members and the company. It can be formal or informal, made up of fifty women or five hundred women. The point is that these networks are there to help the women in the company—and to help the company itself. The mission statements of a few groups speak for themselves:

WIN—Women's Interactive Network (Kimberly-Clark)

The mission of WIN is to support Kimberly-Clark in achieving growth and profitability objectives by championing the organization's efforts to capitalize on the talents and contributions of its women employees.

Women in Management network (McGraw-Hill)

The mission of the Women in Management network is to enhance the value of the McGraw-Hill companies by capitalizing on the skills and expertise of women in management.

Women's Advisory Council (3M)

The Women's Advisory Council provides women's perspectives on workplace issues and helps create an environment where all employees can contribute fully to the success of 3M.

Women's Network (Texas Instruments)

Our mission is to have a culture that values and utilizes diversity at all levels, provides equitable opportunities and develops the full potential of each employee to make Texas Instruments a world leader in productivity and profitability.

Why Have a Women's Network At All?

Like most great ideas, networks arose out of a gaping hole: there were needs that were not being fulfilled. Most women's networks form to address these three problem areas:

- First, the overall company environment often includes built-in assumptions that are more of a burden for women than for men. Women need to join together

to bring these assumptions into the open and help the company adapt to the real requirements of modern life.

- Second, company social structures tend to isolate women, making it hard for them to rely on each other for advice and support. Women need to come together to share strategies and help each other overcome this isolation.
- Third, established career paths can sometimes exclude women. Women need to get together to focus on their own career development and the development of women at other levels in the organization.

Do these concerns sound important to you? Would achieving goals like those we mention be worth the effort you might have to expend? Are you eager to get started in that direction? Or are women in your organization pressing you to support their efforts to do so? If so, you've come to the right place. This book is intended to serve as your guide to the formation and maintenance of an effective and productive women's network in virtually any business environment.

What Do Women's Networks Do?

To address the three problem areas, networks commonly take action on several fronts: they advise senior management, often through Human Resources or a diversity council, on the issues facing women in the company; they hold networking events for members; they set up mentoring programs and speakers series; and they do many other things as well. Each project or program addresses one of the three problem areas, and there are often overlaps. Obviously, as you improve the environment for women on an individual basis, you improve the environment for women overall, and, of most interest to the company, improving the environment for women improves the environment for all employees.

What Makes a Women's Network Happen?

The spark can come from a variety of places:

Sometimes it's a few women meeting to talk about what's happening at work. The talk flows fast and furious, and one woman says, to general agreement, "This is great. Let's get together more often!" Soon the mailing list starts to grow, and they have the beginnings of a formal network.

Or it might be one particular event that leads to a revelation. Perhaps a lot of promotions go through and not one of the new titles is held by a woman. Or someone goes to a meeting, looks around at the participants, and sees how few women are there—then realizes that meetings are often like this.

Or the CEO or an executive might begin thinking, "We're missing out on a lot of talent. We need to know more about what's going on with women here," and get the senior women together to figure out how to find out.

Sometimes it's the result of a question asked at the annual meeting about women's opportunities at the company. And sometimes it's an exodus of women from the organization that wakes up women and top management to the need to reach out to women in the company.

Whatever the reason, women's networks work. They are one of the best ways for women to get the career advice and support they want, and for the company to get the most out of one of its most important assets.

What Real Impact Do Women's Networks Have?

You may still feel a bit skeptical—after all, there's been a great deal of talk about networking over the years, but is it really useful? What does this sort of group actually *do* for the network members and for the company? Investment firm Dain Rauscher knows networks are good for business. The company's Association of Women Brokers made a promise to its CEO that if Dain Rauscher supported the women's network, the network members would, in turn, make themselves better brokers. As a result of the network's mentoring programs, career development opportunities, and annual conference, sales for women's network members have increased by 19.2 percent, 5 percent more than for the rest of the firm. Female brokers attribute the advantage to their membership in the network. That's just one example of network success—and we'll offer many more throughout this book.

There is a tremendous impact on the members themselves:

> For the women who have been involved in the network, it's been very much of a confidence-building, transformational kind of experience. It's been critical to the members.
>
> —*Women's network leader*

> I look at it as personal growth. You are getting experience and knowledge that is unsurpassed. It provides business experience and growth experience for women that you don't get in the workplace when you're not in a management position.
>
> —*Women's network leader*

There is also a tremendous impact on the company:

I can't imagine our culture functioning without the women's group. That's the strength of their impact.

—Senior vice president

We've really been instrumental in changing the culture. When I started, there were very few women who were doing any sort of flexible work arrangement. Five years later, we have over four hundred people working flexibly, and they're not all women. There are quite a few men with flexible hours. So we are proud that we are slowly but surely getting the message through.

—Women's network leader

There are a lot of good people in this organization and I need to find them. Through the network's mentoring program and networking events, I have access to people when I'm thinking about advancement and succession planning.

—Management liaison

How Does Catalyst Support Women's Networks?

Catalyst has long recognized the potential of these groups for effecting change for women and for companies. As the premier resource for information and advice on women's networks, Catalyst has worked with women's networks from all regions and all industries for over fifteen years. In 1988 Catalyst published *Building an Effective Corporate Women's Group,* which examines the origins, structure, and purpose of these groups. Since then, Catalyst has provided networks with concrete advice and acted as the national link among these networks. This book distills the lessons we have learned to date.

Where Are the Networks?

Catalyst has seen many changes in women's networks over time. Most important, their numbers are increasing. Currently, at least 33 percent of Fortune 100 companies have women's networks. Even a partial list of corporations and firms in which women's networks exist reads like an honor roll of big business:

Ford
IBM
Hewlett-Packard
Procter & Gamble

Motorola
Merck
Dow Chemical
American Stores
Xerox
3M
Eastman Kodak
Texas Instruments
Bankers Trust
McDonald's
Kraft
McGraw-Hill

These networks often operate with a great deal of senior-level support. Many senior executives advise women's networks, or are even the creators of the network in their organization. Women's networks are more likely than ever to be formal advisers to the company on women's issues, and they often link into other diversity efforts that are under way.

One of the most important trends is that senior women in companies are increasingly starting or participating in women's networks. This visible and active support is something new—until recently, it was believed to be unwise for a woman at or near the top to take a visible role in addressing gender issues. It appears that, finally, the career risks associated with openly supporting women's networks have decreased—a phenomenon that can probably be attributed to the slow but steady increase in numbers of women at the top.

What Does *Creating Women's Networks* Offer?

In this book Catalyst shares the learning it has gained through interactions with women's networks over the last fifteen years and in a two-year research study. That study included a series of five roundtable discussions with over fifty leaders of women's networks across the country, interviews with management liaisons at twenty-one of those companies, and a national survey of women's networks. This is the largest data-gathering process on this topic to date, and one that resulted in a rich trove and varied base of information. See Resource A for a summary of the specific findings from the study. The body of this book presents that data in usable form: the information, advice, best practices, and case studies that will sim-

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