

Break on Through to the Other Side (of that Glass Ceiling)

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Female business professionals such as Oprah Winfrey, Arianna Huffington, and [Oracle CEO Safra Catz](#) make it seem that the reputed “glass ceiling” has all but disappeared, but studies suggest it’s still there, and it’s still just as thick as ever. Department of Labor estimates that there are 72 million women in the U.S. workforce, and the majority continue to watch their male counterparts succeed from the underside of a crystal threshold.

This isn’t OK, at least not to the 47% of the labor force comprised of women, the majority of which are part of the Millennial crowd, those aged 23 to 36. So what’s a girl to do if she wants to [crack the glass](#) and shatter perceptions about the competencies of the “fairer sex?”

Set objectives and align core competencies with management.

Determine which areas of management are of interest, and discuss the probability of transitioning that way with department heads and direct supervisors. Be proactive, but try to steer clear of pushing into a position by using gender inequality as an argument.

Build a network.

Build a strong and diverse network of people within the organization. Reach out to those who might otherwise slip below your radar; even the janitor might have inside information he's willing to share once a rapport has been established. Getting to the top takes a strong foundation of people from the bottom. If networking isn't working out at your current place of employment, don't be afraid to forge relationships elsewhere. Tools such as LinkedIn are [invaluable](#) to women (and men) seeking to improve their station.

Find someone to look up to.

Seeking the help of [a mentor](#) - someone who has "been there and done that" - is one of the best ways to mar the surface of the glass ceiling. This person should be someone who has worked through the same barriers you face currently, and can offer not just encouragement, but practical advice on how to get ahead in the predominantly man's world of upper management.

Get noticed.

Ultimately, the only way to make a forward move is to garner attention for yourself. People need to see leadership abilities, technical knowledge, communication skills, and other competencies that mirror those in the upper echelons of business. Do this by asking for more responsibility – and coming through on your promises. Make sure your voice is heard in meetings, and share ideas with your team.

Take the time to understand your company's values.

It might seem like a no-brainer, but many manager-hopefuls don't actually fully understand the missions and values of their company. For instance, if you're in the IT field and need to develop an app that's never been offered before, your bosses may expect you to be innovative and think outside the box. On the other hand, time-honored professions such as accounting and law require a staunch dedication to regimented practices and traditions. Take the time to reflect on the type of person that gets promoted and which behaviors your company tends to reward.

Know your rights.

If sexism is the reason behind your professional stagnation, don't just give up or accept a fate as an underling. Women, now more than ever, have rights in the workplace. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a national organization devoted to equality for all, is a valuable resource for information regarding [women's rights](#). Don't be afraid to voice concerns to pertinent staff members, who may not be aware of issues.

Other tips

- Draft a [career plan](#) and let your supervisors know your ultimate goals.
- Participate in on-the-job training programs and higher education classes.
- Monitor your progress. Add a timeline to your goals, and check in with yourself regularly.
- Keep your resume up-to-date and learn how to write an effective cover letter that includes all [eight necessary components](#): a professional heading and salutation, three paragraphs outlining how you are the perfect fit for the position, an impactful final paragraph, formal closing, and a compelling postscript. This way, you'll always be ready to apply for open positions that have caught your eye.
- [Be flexible](#) and willing to adapt to new situations and outside influences. Many companies these days hire third-party evaluators to help determine staff strengths and weaknesses.

Finally, the most important thing you can do to further your career is to accept that a barrier exists – and resolve to push through with poise and professionalism.