

1 March 2011
MEDIA RELEASE

Working women still haven't found what they're looking for, and some despair they never will – survey

- *More than half of women aspire to progress to a senior executive role*
- *27 per cent remain unconfident in pursuing their career due to gender barriers*
- *44 per cent think it will take 10+ years to reverse the current decline in senior appointments*

Over half of working Australian women aspire to climb the corporate ladder but despite these ambitions, more than a quarter don't think it will ever happen according to a new survey from Executive Women Australia.

The online survey of 1,500 EWA members also revealed a gloomy outlook for reversing the decline over the last eight years of the number of Australian women holding senior executive positions, with 44 per cent of those surveyed believing it will take more than 10 years for business to reverse this trend.

EWA Executive Director, Tara Cheesman, said that the survey results made it clear that women want to see women in executive roles become the norm rather than the exception in Australia.

The survey was commissioned to coincide with the one hundred year anniversary of International Women's Day and was conducted by Executive Women Australia (EWA), a national initiative supporting women in executive roles and those aspiring to join them.

"What we are seeing is a large number of ambitious, very capable women with the talent and the desire to contribute as senior executives feeling like they are being restrained and belittled by gender barriers. Women won't be satisfied to continue to sit on the corporate sidelines and see the 'boys club' remain the status quo.

"What is clear is that both companies and women need to make the relevant changes for this to occur. The fact that nearly half of the women surveyed think a decline in senior executive roles will continue after a century of progressing parity in workplace is disheartening enough," she said, "And even more so that in 2011 one in 10 think the workplace will always be biased towards men."

When asked about what must be included in workplace policies and practices to help women progress their careers and rate of pay to senior executive levels, respondents ranked the following initiatives:

1. Board commitment to diversity and pay parity as the number one driver;
2. Transparent recruiting processes for senior appointments (no more golf-buddy referrals)
3. Succession planning

Respondents were also asked for their own solutions to address the issue, and some of the suggestions included:

- Comparative analysis of bonus schemes and salary reviews to ensure equal pay (same work : same pay)
- Cultivation of an equitable company culture which addresses 'boys club', bullying and other gender related bias
- Introduction of coaching and mentoring opportunities with senior staff
- Set gender targets at all levels of the business, including board
- Conduct internal education programs identifying the range of reputational and brand risks associated with gender bias and broader diversity barriers i.e. messages of women not wanted - having a long history of men only in all senior roles
- Seek community leadership, engagement and participation by reflecting societal norms that behaviours resulting in the intimidation or isolation of women will not be tolerated
- Host internal sessions to address the disparity in men's and women's perceptions of the relevance of gender in relation to promotion and profit

Ms Cheesman said there is significant evidence to indicate that businesses that are proactive about gender balance reap the rewards.

"There is increasing pressure on Australian businesses from a variety of stakeholders to increase the number of women in senior positions. However companies who only look at the bottom line should also be taking steps in this to achieve more gender balance. Research from McKinsey & Company, JB Were, Goldman Sachs and Catalyst has shown that having more women in leadership positions correlated with stronger financial returns. The time to act is now."

To expand the debate on this subject, on Tuesday 1 March 2011, Executive Women Australia is hosting *Will Gender Balance Boost the Bottom-line?* - a lunchtime forum featuring a panel providing their insights on the role of gender in producing profits. Moderated by AFR Deputy Editor and workplace parity advocate Catherine Fox, the panel will include Lisa Hudson, Fairfax Magazines Chief Executive and Publisher, Kevin Lewis, ASX Chief Compliance Officer, and Deena Shiff, Telstra Business Group Managing Director.

SUMMARY RESULTS

1. How long do you think it will take Australian business to reverse this trend?

a. Less than 6 months	0%
b. 6 month – one year	0%
c. Two to three years	15.74%
d. Three to five years	29.63%
e. More than ten years	44.4%
f. Australian business will never reverse this trend	10.23%

2. How confident are you that you will be able to progress into a senior executive role?

a. Very confident	2.0%
b. Somewhat confident	45.10%
c. Neutral	14.29%
d. Somewhat unconfident	11.16%
e. Not confident	27.45%

3. Do you aspire to progress your career into a senior executive role?

a. Yes	54.72%
b. No	11.32%
c. I am already in a senior executive role	33.96%



4. What do you think must be included in workplace policies and practices to ensure women can equally progress their careers and rate of pay at senior executive levels?

a. Board commitment to delivering diversity	23.77%
b. Internal gender diversity targets at all levels	15.98%
c. Transparent recruiting process for senior appointments	22.54%
d. Succession planning	20.90%
e. Other - please specify (e.g. training programs, mentoring, review of company culture, performance based bonuses)	16.81%

- ENDS -

For more information or to request an interview, please contact Rachel Stanton on 0402 463 764 or Nathan Burman on 0415 189 865

Executive Women Australia (EWA) is a national initiative designed to engage like-minded professionals and organisations in an effort to advance Australia's workplace diversity up-take and best practice, and to address the current rate of decline of senior female appointments. EWA is managed by Corporate Responsibility Network Australia (CORNA) and offers a range of networking events, seminars, mentoring programs and social media forums.

Founded in mid 2010, EWA has quickly gained 3,000 professional members and is fast becoming one of the nation's leading action-oriented business networks. EWA works with its membership to provide collaborative input to governments, corporations, SME's, non-profits, education and community groups to develop Australia's workplace diversity solutions.

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"What is clear is that both companies and women need to make the relevant changes for this to occur. The fact that nearly half of the women surveyed think a decline in senior executive roles will continue after a century of progressing parity in workplace is disheartening enough," she said, "And even more so that in 2011 one in 10 think the workplace will always be biased towards men."

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