



# Accelerators

Critical Competencies for Women Leaders  
in Retail and Consumer Goods



### **About the Network of Executive Women**

Founded in 2001, the Network of Executive Women, Retail, Consumer Goods and Services, is a not-for-profit educational association representing nearly 9,000 members, more than 100 corporate partners and 20 regional groups in the United States and Canada. Network members come from more than 750 industry organizations, including grocery, chain drug, mass retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers, service providers, associations and universities. The mission of NEW is to advance women, grow business and transform our industry's workplace through the power of our community. To support this mission, the organization provides best practices on gender diversity, career development opportunities, research, learning events and networking programs designed to advance women's leadership in the retail, consumer goods and services industry. NEW is open to women and men, emerging leaders and senior-level executives. NEW hosts more than 100 regional learning and networking events each year and two national conferences, the NEW Leadership Summit and the NEW Executive Leaders Forum. For more information on NEW's programs and events, visit [newonline.org](http://newonline.org).

### **About the Center for Creative Leadership**

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) is a top-ranked, global provider of leadership development. By leveraging the power of leadership to drive results that matter most to clients, CCL transforms individual leaders, teams, organizations and society. Our array of cutting-edge solutions is steeped in extensive research and experience gained from working with hundreds of thousands of leaders at all levels. Ranked among the world's top five providers of executive education by Financial Times and in the top 10 by Bloomberg BusinessWeek, CCL has offices in Greensboro, N.C.; Colorado Springs, Colo.; San Diego, Calif.; Brussels, Belgium; Moscow; Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Johannesburg, South Africa; Singapore; Gurgaon, India; and Shanghai, China.

# Foreword

It is my pleasure to introduce this NEW Learning Series report, “Accelerators: Critical Competencies for Women Leaders in Retail and Consumer Goods.” NEW is proud to be partnering with the Center for Creative Leadership on this industry-wide women’s leadership model for retail, consumer goods and services. CCL is one of the world’s leading experts in leadership development and executive education. Together we have created the NEW Career Accelerator Model,<sup>™</sup> designed to support women’s professional development.

NEW has made it our business to help advance women in our industry since 2001. Our report, “Women 2020: The Future of Women’s Leadership in Retail and Consumer Goods,” examined the business benefits of women’s leadership in the retail and consumer goods sectors, as well as the barriers and challenges women in our business continue to face.

In this report we focus on the individual, identifying the specific leadership competencies and derailment factors that can help organizations and individuals develop women in our industry.

We address here the leadership skills women need to advance. But we know women alone cannot move the needle on women’s leadership. Our organizations, our industry and our society must step up to create a level playing field for everyone.

The Network is committed to this push-and-pull strategy: Helping women become better leaders, as we do in this report, and helping organizations create opportunities for women leaders.

Our vision is this: A workplace with no limits.

Best regards,



Joan Toth  
President and CEO  
Network of Executive Women

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# Executive summary

The NEW Career Accelerator Model™ outlined in this document is designed to support professional development efforts aimed at advancing women into leadership roles. It is not intended to replace competency models used by organizations or to be a comprehensive solution for advancing women. It can, however, be a powerful tool to develop industry women and complement existing organizational models.

A variety of complementary approaches were used to identify the competencies and derailment factors presented here. We examined current research literature, analyzed existing data from thousands of male and female leaders in the retail, consumer goods and services industry, gathered data from hundreds of people working in the industry using CCL's Leadership Gap Indicator™ and conducted focus groups with NEW members.

The model, developed in partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership, includes eight leadership competencies critical for women to reach executive leadership levels in the retail, consumer goods and services industry. The eight competencies (described in detail on page 7) are: Develops and empowers individuals, develops and empowers groups and teams, strategic planning, communication, inspiring commitment, leading change, political skill and results orientation.

Derailment occurs when a leader's career potential is limited by a misalignment between the demands of her job and her skills. The five derailing factors we identified include three derailers that have stood the test of time and two newly identified derailers. The three "classic" derailment factors are: Problems with relationships, difficulty changing or adapting, and too narrow a functional orientation. The two new factors are: Fails to manage career and does not effectively take risks.

For women to advance into leadership roles in the industry, several things need to occur. First, women need to prepare for leadership roles and seek them out. At the management level, leaders need to find new ways to identify high-potential talent, encourage women to seek out leadership roles, then help them succeed. Organizations need to think deeply and differently about talent acquisition, development and succession, and must formalize practices and procedures that will help effectively incorporate women into senior leadership positions.


Collectively, we need to better understand the changes needed to make our top industry leadership reflect the rich diversity of our workforce and consumer base. To do that, we must question the assumptions and practices that prevent us from achieving higher levels of participation and performance across all sources of talent.

## Why the industry needs a competency model

As described in our report “Women 2020: The Future of Women’s Leadership in Retail and Consumer Goods,” women remain vastly underrepresented in senior leadership roles in the industry, despite increases in educational attainment and workforce representation. While women make up nearly half (48.3 percent) of the U.S. retail industry labor force, they hold just 18.6 percent of executive officer positions. Only 5.4 percent of the industry’s CEOs are women.<sup>1</sup> More work must be done to foster the changes needed for women to reach senior leadership. This competency model will help build executive leadership capacity and avoid common pitfalls. Through focused effort we can work together to create more inclusive and vibrant leadership in the industry.

NEW is committed to developing and supporting the full spectrum of talent in our industry. While our focus is on women, men are partners in this journey and many actively support the Network’s mission.

NEW works with organizations that wish to unlock the full potential of their entire workforce, starting with their female employees. Through our programming, NEW strives to be the industry’s authority and advocate on the case for change while working to remove barriers and provide solutions that drive transformation in our industry.



“In school, girls are expected to keep their heads down, study quietly and do as they’re told. These behaviors don’t translate well in the workplace for advancing careers.”

**Sharon Orlopp**  
**Global Chief Diversity Officer**  
**Senior Vice President**  
**Wal-Mart Stores Inc.**



### What are competencies?

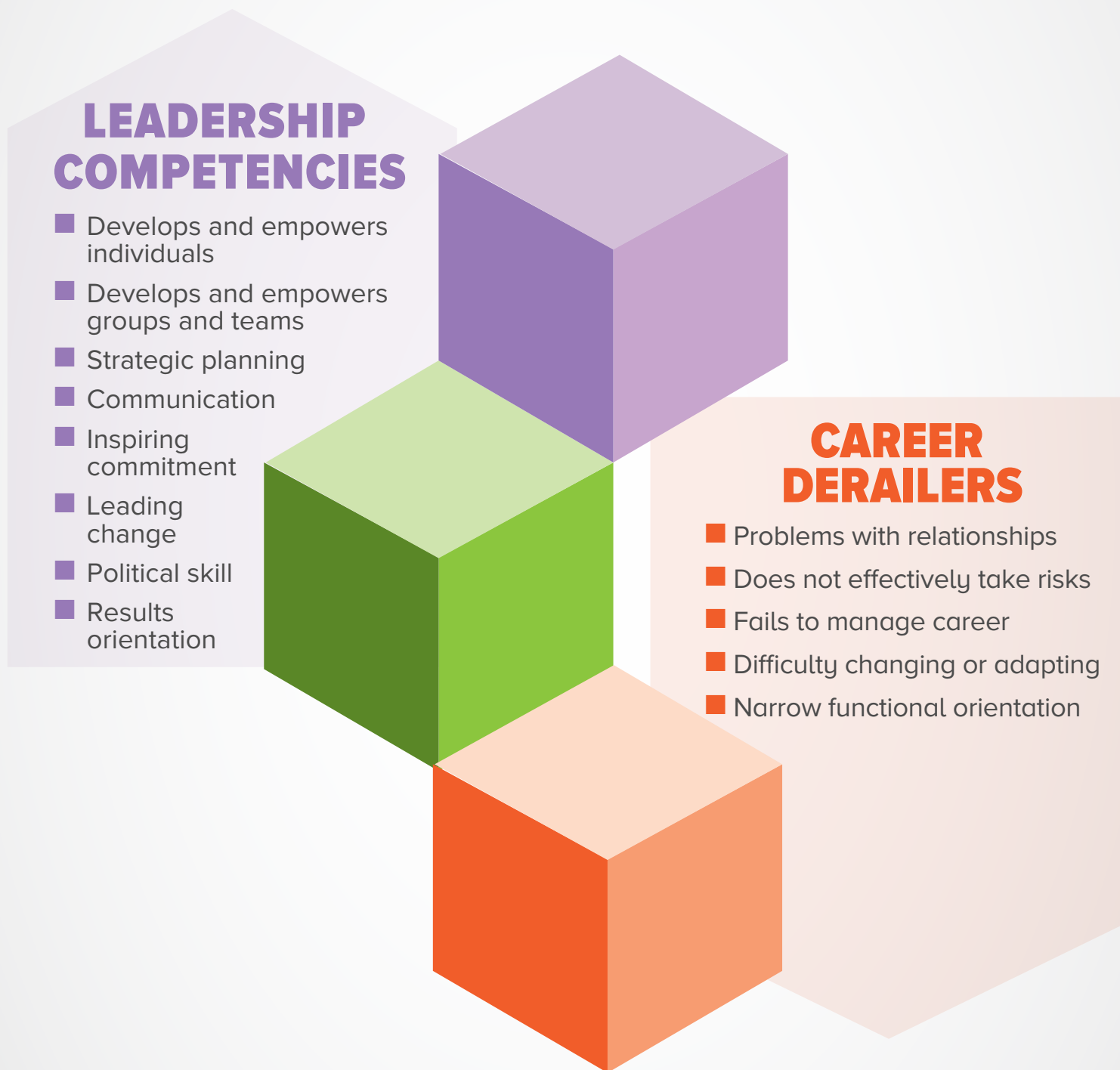
Competencies are the skills, behaviors, attitudes and other characteristics that enable successful performance.

1. “Pyramid: Women in U.S. Retail Trade.” Catalyst, 2014.

# NEW Career Accelerator Model™

POWERED BY THE CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP®

Leading Yourself, Leading Others, Leading the Organization



**Figure 1.** The NEW Career Accelerator Model™ — based on survey results from more than 1,200 Network women and four focus groups — is composed of eight critical competencies and five derailers.

# Leadership Competencies

The NEW Career Accelerator Model,<sup>™</sup> developed in partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership, includes eight leadership competencies critical for women seeking executive leadership positions in the retail, consumer goods and services industry. The eight competencies (detailed in Figure 2) are: Develops and empowers individuals, develops and empowers groups and teams, strategic planning, communication, inspiring commitment, leading change, political skill and results orientation.

## Leadership Competencies

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY	DEFINITION
<b>Develops and empowers individuals</b>	Builds the capabilities of people. Offers constructive feedback and encouragement. Delegates work and encourages individual initiative.
<b>Develops and empowers groups and teams</b>	Fosters a culture of cooperation and coordination. Manages tension and conflict well. Recognizes unique contributions of team members to overall success.
<b>Strategic planning</b>	Develops long-term objectives and strategies. Thinks and acts from a whole-system perspective.
<b>Communication</b>	Expresses the organizational vision. Transparent with information. Articulates decisions clearly to a variety of stakeholders.
<b>Inspiring commitment</b>	Motivates and inspires people to do their best. Infuses the organization with a sense of purpose.
<b>Leading change</b>	Uses effective strategies to facilitate organizational change initiatives and overcome resistance to change.
<b>Political skill</b>	Understands self, others and the environment. Uses that knowledge to obtain or achieve personal or organizational goals. Effectively influences others moving forward.
<b>Results orientation</b>	Is able to successfully meet business goals and objectives. Delivers results that contribute to the bottom line.

**Figure 2.** The NEW Career Accelerator Model<sup>™</sup> outlines eight key leadership competencies identified through our extensive industry research.

## PART 2: Competencies and Derailers

These eight competency areas are not mutually exclusive. For example, the skills to communicate well and those to inspire commitment are similar, but the constellation of skills for communicating well and inspiring commitment are distinct.

Because ineffective leadership can result from problematic behaviors, not just the absence of effective ones, we've identified five ineffective or problem behaviors. These derailment factors are described in the next section.


### Leadership Derailers

Derailment occurs when a leader has limited potential for career advancement because of a poor fit between the demands of her job and her skills.

CCL has conducted research to understand derailment for more than 40 years. The five factors incorporated into the NEW Career Accelerator Model™ are three derailers that have stood the test of time and two newly identified derailment factors (detailed in Figure 3).

The three factors that have turned up time and again are: Problems with relationships, difficulty changing or adapting, and too narrow a functional orientation. The two new factors are: Fails to manage career and does not effectively take risks.

While both of the new factors can be problem areas for men, they are particularly problematic for women, in part because women continue to face more scrutiny than their male counterparts and because women may need to manage their careers differently than men do.<sup>2</sup>



“Taking risks — big and small — takes you out of your comfort zone, allowing you to learn, grow and be challenged. But the most important thing about taking risks is this: risks eventually pay off.”

**Joy Chen**  
**CEO**  
**Yes To Inc.**

2. “Stories from the Summit Trail: Leadership Journeys of Senior Women in Higher Education,” (2014). HERS. Denver, CO.

## Leadership Derailers

DERAILMENT FACTOR	DEFINITION
<b>Problems with relationships</b>	Difficulties in developing good working relationships with others. Is difficult to work with.
<b>Difficulty changing or adapting</b>	Inability to change and adapt. Resistant to change, learning from mistakes and developing. Also resistant to feedback.
<b>Too narrow a functional orientation</b>	Lacks depth to manage outside of one's current function. Does not understand how the organization works overall.
<b>Fails to manage career</b>	Is not proactive in forging strategic relationships. Does not negotiate to do visible and valuable work to build a leadership reputation.
<b>Does not effectively take risks</b>	Does not take risks that could lead to higher rewards. Takes risks without thinking through consequences.

**Figure 3.** The five derailers in the NEW Career Accelerator Model.™

## Competency stages

Are these competencies needed by all women at all levels in retail, consumer goods and services? In a word, yes.

These competencies contribute to organizational effectiveness across all levels. However, at senior levels, the behaviors become increasingly complex and the scope becomes broader. Figure 4 (on pages 10-11) shows an overview of what each competency might look like over the course of a career.

Other factors are also important. These eight have been selected to sharpen attention on areas that are increasingly important for success and for which there is a growing demand for higher skill sets.

There is a growing demand for higher skill sets.

**PART 2: Competencies and Derailers**

Competency Stages



**Figure 4.** How key competencies and behaviors can grow over a career.



**Figure 4.** How key competencies and behaviors can grow over a career.

# The research behind NEW Career Accelerator Model™

A variety of complementary approaches were used to identify and develop the competencies and derailment factors in the NEW Career Accelerator Model.™ Working with CCL, we examined current research literature, analyzed existing data from thousands of women and men in the retail, consumer goods and services industry, gathered data from hundreds of industry executives using the CCL Leadership Gap Indicator™ and conducted focus groups with NEW members.

## Step 1: Review existing information

Research literature published within the last decade on women's leadership issues, skills, behaviors and derailment factors were reviewed. We also analyzed existing data in the CCL databases gathered using an assessment tool called Benchmarks,™ which measures 16 competencies critical for success and five factors identified as possible career derailers.

CCL has one of the world's largest databases of 360 assessments, which allowed us to explore leadership competency issues using a variety of demographic and industry variables. Responses from more than 5,000 leaders working in retail and consumer goods organizations were analyzed. We examined the data by job level (executive, middle and entry) and by gender.

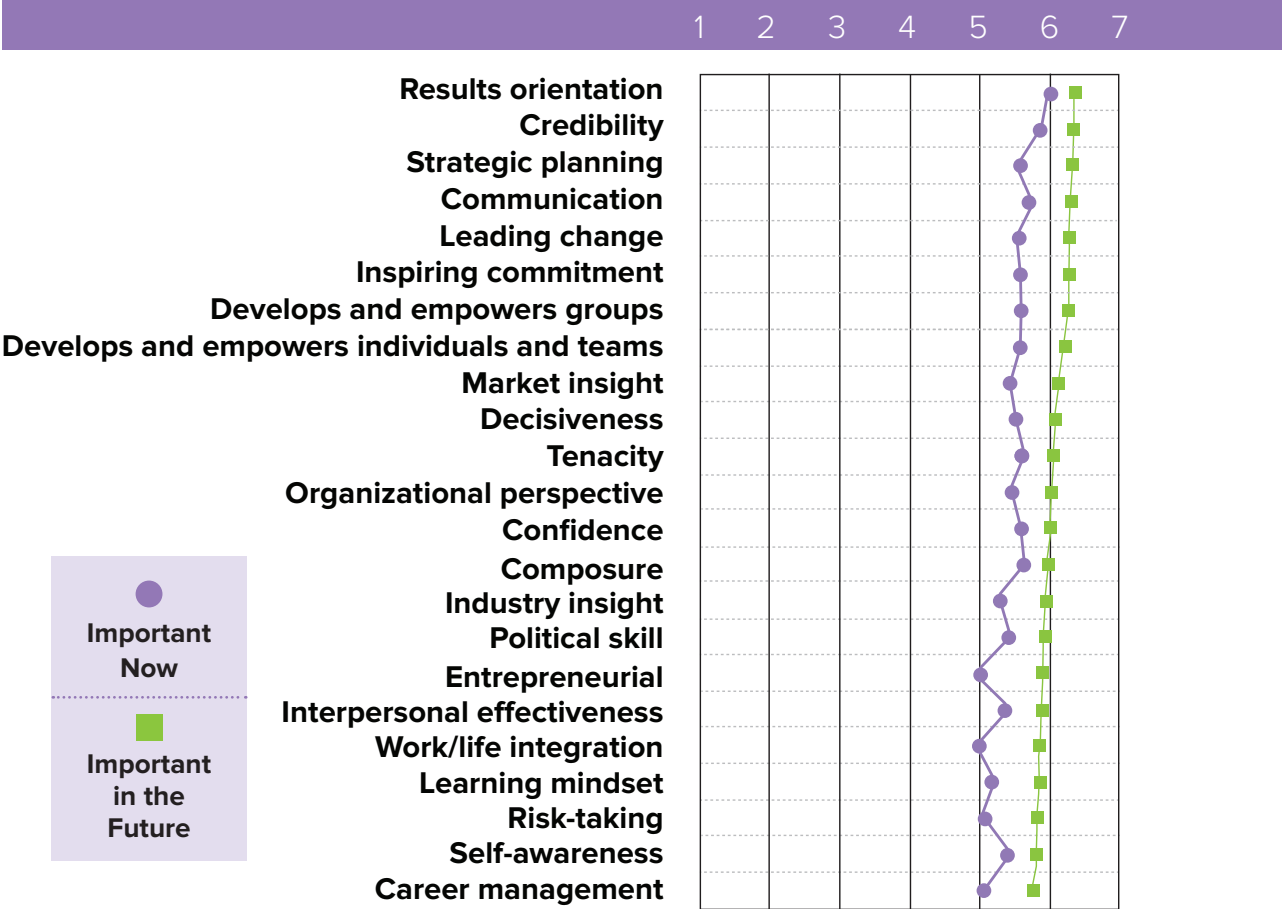
Once leadership competencies and derailment factors were identified, we sought feedback from NEW members and supporters on the selected competencies, plus additional input about whether or not there were other important competencies to consider.

## Step 2: Determine what is most critical

For organizations to build leadership capacity, they first must know what elements of leadership are needed and valued in the organization. Twenty-three competencies identified during Step 1 were included in the Leadership Gap Indicator survey, a tool for assessing leadership development needs. Network members and supporters were asked to rate the importance of the leadership competencies according to how important each skill is for success in their organization right now and how important each skill will be for future success in five years.

All of the competencies were rated more important in the future than they are now (Figure 5). In other words, these competencies are increasingly important for women leaders to develop and maintain. A closer look at the findings shows a smaller subset of competencies is critical for success now and in the future. Results orientation was rated most important for success now and in the future, indicating that leaders must deliver results that matter.

What Matters Most



**Figure 5.** All leadership competencies assessed in the Leadership Gap Indicator survey of NEW members and supporters were rated important for success now — and even more so in the future.

## **Step 3: Identify the greatest needs**

Network members and supporters were asked to rate the competencies according to the amount of overall skill women leaders in their organizations are currently demonstrating and what they need to demonstrate to be maximally effective. Figure 6 illustrates the difference between needed skill levels and current skills. The results showed that leaders lack the skills they need to be effective today. On all 23 competencies, current strength was not seen as sufficient for effectiveness.

The competencies with the greatest difference between current and needed skill are leading change, risk taking and strategic planning. If nothing changes in the future, these results suggest many women may not be ready for executive positions.

## **Step 4: Prioritize the competencies**

To determine which competencies are higher priorities for leadership development, we compared the alignment of current skill with ratings of future importance. The competencies with a clear gap between current and needed leadership capacity over time make up the NEW Career Accelerator Model.<sup>™</sup> These are areas where leaders would benefit from additional preparation for the future.

## **Step 5: Confirm the model**

The final element of the research was to verify our findings with subject matter experts — women executives in the retail, consumer goods and services industry. Four focus groups were conducted at the NEW Executive Leaders Forum in July 2014. The Forum is an invitation-only event for senior-level leaders in the retail, consumer goods and services industry, vice president-level and above.

One focus group included only senior leaders in retail organizations. The findings that emerged from this focus group mirrored the findings from other focus groups, which were composed of a cross-representation of organizations within the Network's membership.

## Leadership strength: A clear skills gap



**Figure 6.** Respondents said they needed more skill development on all competencies assessed and ranked leading change, risk taking and strategic planning at the top.

## How to use NEW Career Accelerator Model™ to drive change

For women to advance into leadership roles in the retail, consumer goods and services industry, several things have to happen.

Women need to prepare for those roles and seek them out. Leaders and managers need to identify leadership talent in new ways and help women seek out and be successful in leadership roles. Organizations need to think deeply and differently about talent acquisition, development and succession, and must formalize practices and procedures that will effectively incorporate women into senior leadership positions. Collectively, we all need to better understand the factors that will enable the senior-most levels of organizations to reflect our workforce and consumer base. And we must challenge the assumptions and the behaviors that prevent everyone from fully engaging and contributing their best.

The following are strategies for bolstering the number of women in an organization's senior leadership ranks. The change needed is not merely an issue of preparing women for leadership roles. Significant changes are required at all levels to transform our organizations and advance more women leaders.

The NEW Career Accelerator Model™ complements organizations' models and can be used alongside them.



## What organizations can do

- Offer development opportunities aligned with the leadership competencies.
- Create a diverse pipeline for key leadership positions.
- Define a clear career path for talent. Identify and communicate the steps, roles or experiences necessary for moving into roles that are more senior.
- Create opportunities for men and women to work together to create more inclusive leadership.
- Develop informal and formal mentoring programs to work on specific leadership competencies.
- Focus on strategic succession planning and include women in the discussions.
- Identify the key experiences a leader needs to be considered for a senior leadership role.
- Provide training to increase awareness of bias with a goal of eliminating gender stereotyping at every level of the workplace.
- Stop accepting excuses for the lack of senior women leaders.
- Allow for flexible work schedules or alternative working options.

## What you can do for others

- Be a sponsor to help more junior people navigate into more senior roles by being their advocate.
- Encourage and support women to assume leadership roles.
- Give high-potentials the experience of developing others.
- Support others in creating networks for themselves by introducing them to others or showing them how to successfully network.
- Teach women to stretch themselves by asking questions and learning new things.
- Be a role model for women so they can see the possibilities even in the face of hardships. Talk about the positive aspects of being a leader.
- Be a mentor or sounding board for others.
- Help others attend diverse leadership experiences as early and as often as possible.

### What you can do for yourself

- Seek out opportunities to build and demonstrate leadership capabilities.
- Clearly define career goals and choose opportunities and work that will get you there.
- Meet with a broad spectrum of people to understand how the organization and industry overall work.
- Connect and collaborate with others to expand knowledge and to create allies and sponsors.
- Choose mentors from multiple walks of life and obtain support from your family.
- Get outside of your comfort zone and be willing to stretch yourself (ask questions and ask for help).
- Promote and advocate for yourself by asking for opportunities instead of hoping the opportunities will come to you.
- Learn to be resilient and to not take things personally.
- Be bold. Stop seeking affirmation before making decisions or taking next steps.
- Be true to yourself and recognize the unique qualities you bring to the table.
- Invest in your development.

### What NEW will do

As part of our ongoing commitment to advance women's leadership in the retail, consumer goods and services industry, the Network will:

- Offer a multi-rater assessment tool created in partnership with CCL to assess these leadership competencies and derailment factors.
- Offer workshops, conferences and in-depth leadership development programs.
- Engage in additional research to more fully understand the barriers and supports women face in their leadership journey.
- Host and facilitate industry panel sessions.
- Share knowledge, research and findings tied to our mission.

## About the authors



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**Director, Global Research Insights**  
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Over the last two decades, Kelly Hannum has worked with a wide variety of individuals, groups and organizations globally investigating topics such as social identity conflicts in organizations, how individuals effectively manage boundaries between work and family, and the impact of leadership development efforts. Hannum is co-author of the WorkLife Indicator™ assessment tool, which measures how individuals manage the boundaries between work and home. She is the lead editor of *The Handbook of Leadership Development Evaluation*. Along with her role at CCL, she is an affiliate faculty member at the IESEG School of Management in France. She is the recipient of multiple awards and recognitions, including the American Evaluation Association's Marcia Guttentag Award.



**Jean Leslie**  
**Senior Fellow**  
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For more than 25 years, Jean Leslie has made numerous contributions at the Center for Creative Leadership in the areas of research, publication, product development and training. She manages a global research team that designs and delivers a variety of research services and products. She is a co-author of CCL's flagship 360-degree feedback instrument, Benchmarks®, and CCL's newest organizational assessment, The Leadership Gap Indicator®.



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As a research associate for the Center for Creative Leadership's Research and Innovation Group, Shannon Muhly focuses her time on the global Senior Executive Research Initiative, which seeks to understand the challenges and specific leadership needs of leaders at the most senior levels. She manages the Colorado campus' Ideas2Action project with the purpose of developing fresh research content for the practicing leader on topics such as developmental mindsets and mentoring and developing talent. She is co-author of "Women Leaders within Higher Education in the United States: Supports, Barriers, and Experiences of Being a Senior Leader, to Higher Education."



**Robert F. Solomon Jr.**  
**Director of Talent Development**  
**Network of Executive Women**

Robert F. Solomon Jr. designs and implements large- and small-scale initiatives for Network of Executive Women partners. Previously he served as the director of learning and development for CVPH Medical Center. Prior to this role, he designed and facilitated leadership development programs and conducted research for The Executive Leadership Council (ELC). Earlier in his career, he was senior project manager at the Center for Creative Leadership, contributing to the Leadership Across Differences project. Solomon is author of "Understanding Race & Ethnicity from a Global Perspective" and "Coaching for Career Advancement."



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