

Women in the C-Suite: A Leadership Lesson

Sharon Rowlands, CEO and President of Web.com Group

C-suite visibility for women today is still lacking and it's important that we talk about these issues. While I'm heartened to see awareness of the need for more female executives growing, the reality is that women still represent a very small minority of CEOs worldwide and only 6% in the U.S. Looking across the C-suite, the numbers are still too low, 25% on average in the U.S. This despite the fact that women make up more than half the U.S. population and roughly half the total population globally.

In the tech world, where I've spent the majority of my career, I'm encouraged to see an increased effort to empower more women leaders. The numbers are low, but slowly improving. This is important not only because companies need to reflect the make-up of their consumer base, but also because having women in the C-suite is good for business. I'm hopeful that this recognition, along with the power of women helping women and a greater understanding of the benefits of having women executives will create more opportunities, like those that I have had, for more women to become CEOs.

Here's my advice for women looking to increase their visibility in the C-suite:

- **Be Prepared:** Be prepared to face twice as much scrutiny by being twice as good. As a woman in the C-suite, your ideas and proposals will be subject to more scrutiny than those coming from a man. The best way to combat this is to work hard, prepare and be determined to be better than everyone else.
- **Find Champions:** I can't stress enough how important it

is to have “champions,” people in your corner who help open paths for you in your career. This is more than a mentor – someone who will actively promote and champion you throughout an organization – someone who sees your value and potential. I attribute part of my success to the fact that I had great opportunities and great champions along the way, but I also worked to develop the skills that I saw were necessary for the leadership roles that I wanted. There’s still no substitute for hard work.

- **Network:** Embrace the power of networking. It sounds simple, but the value of networking is often underestimated, especially for women juggling a career and a family. Nurturing a network is critical to building a personal brand and gaining exposure, which can lead to new opportunities in the C-suite.
 - **Support Women:** Have a strong voice and support other women too! Women have the potential to help each other in the C-suite by emphasizing each other’s voices so they aren’t drowned out by the men in the room.
 - **Be Your Own Advocate:** Whether it’s applying for a promotion or asking for a pay rise, women have a tendency to undervalue their own skills and capabilities. Advocate for yourself.
 - **Review Yourself:** No one is perfect. Leadership development is an opportunity, and the biggest way people grow is through self-examination. Bring in a third-party coach to conduct 360 reviews. They’ll tell you if you’re listening carefully and in an appropriate way to your staff, board, and colleagues, and give you valuable insights on what’s working and what’s not.
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About the Author: Sharon brings deep industry knowledge and a strong track record of leading multibillion-dollar high-tech companies that serve small- and medium-sized businesses, financial markets and enterprise customers. Prior to joining Web.com in January 2019, she served as CEO of

ReachLocal, a public digital marketing company, leading it through a strategic transformation and the 2016 sale to Gannett. At Gannett, Sharon served as president of the USA TODAY NETWORK Marketing Solutions business while continuing to serve as CEO of ReachLocal. Prior CEO positions include Penton Media, Altegrity, and Thomson Financial. Additionally, Sharon serves on the board of directors for Pegasystems, a global software company, and Everbridge, a critical event management and enterprise safety applications company. Among several prestigious accomplishments, she was named Customer Focused CEO of the Year in the 2016 CEO World Awards, won the Gold Stevie Award for Female Executive of the Year in 2016, and was also named Female CEO of the Year in the 2016 One Planet Awards. Sharon received her Postgraduate Certificate in education from the University of London and her BA in history from the University of Newcastle, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne.