

The Advancement of Women in IBM

It was in 1934, three decades before the U.S. Equal Pay Act, that IBM recruited its first professional women, and IBM Founder T.J. Watson Sr. promised women "the same kind of work for equal pay."

Since then, IBM has been acknowledged as a world leader in its commitment to women both within and outside of the corporation. IBM named its first woman vice-president in 1943. In 1956, 30 years before the Family and Medical Leave Act, IBM initiated a three-month Leave of Absence program, which provided women with the opportunity to take time off after the birth of their child and then return to the workplace - a policy that was extended to one year in the 1960s and three years in 1988, making it one of the most generous policies in the nation. And in 1992, the program was coupled with a Flexible Work Program that allows women the opportunity to "phase" back into the workplace on a part-time basis while still on Leave of Absence. As the number of women entering the workforce has increased continually and dramatically over the past two decades, so has IBM's commitment to understanding their needs and providing services that make it possible for them to be productive while fulfilling family and personal obligations. IBM offers a full range of flexible work schedules ranging from the ability to adjust your start/stop times by up to 2 hours before or after normal start times, to compressed workweeks, to working at home.

As a result, IBM has been recognized by Working Mother Magazine as one of the Top 10 companies in the U.S. for working mothers for twelve consecutive years. And in 1998 and 1999, IBM was recognized by Working Woman Magazine as one of the Top 25 Public companies for Executive Women, and by Latina Style Magazine as one of the Top 50 Employers for Latinas.

Today women represent over 30 % of IBM employees nationwide and 25% of its managers. Women in executive positions in the U.S. have increased from less than 2% in 1980 to 21% at the end of 1999. Globally, women comprise almost 21% of the worldwide executive population.

IBM's philosophy on women in the corporation derives from the corporate philosophy on workforce diversity in general. Diversity at IBM is defined to be all-inclusive, encompassing not just race, gender and physical abilities, but differences in culture, lifestyle, age, religion, economic status, sexual orientation and marital status. IBM views workforce diversity as a "diversity house" founded on three pillars: equal opportunity, affirmative action, and work/life balancing programs. Equal opportunity is defined as nondiscrimination and non harassment, while affirmative action is intended not to provide an advantage, but to eliminate disadvantage and provide all groups a level playing field on which to compete.

The goal of IBM's work/life programs are to allow employees to be productive and serve their customers while at the same time meet their personal and family needs. The strategy is divided into three parts: to refine and reform IBM's work/life culture; to respond to employee needs for expanded flexibility in working hours; and to support employees' needs for Child and Elder care assistance throughout their lives. While IBM's work/life programs benefit all employees, they are of critical importance to women, who typically have greater need for flexibility and responsibilities for dependent care. Thus, IBM's goal over the years has been to create an environment and programs so conducive to the needs of women employees that it will continuously attract and retain key talent.

IBM's effort to expand its understanding of the needs of women employees can be traced to 1972. The pace accelerated in the 1980s as IBM witnessed a dramatic upswing in women entering the work force, more and more of which were part of two career households. With this change, employees increasingly cited good, quality child care as a crucial issue in their work and their lives.

The Advancement of Women in IBM

As IBM sought ways to fulfill this need, it began to look at the development of a national service to which all employees could go for advice on child care and referrals to licensed child care services in the communities where they lived. When IBM discovered that no such service existed, it decided to create one and in 1984 developed the IBM Child Care Resource Referral Service, to manage the service for its employees. Employees who needed referrals for local child care facilities were then put in touch with a local resource and referral agency in their own community that could provide referrals based on their specific needs and desires. Because of the success of this program, IBM then developed a service that mirrored the child care service but for elder care instead. In February, 1988, IBM announced the IBM Elder Care Consultation and Referral Service.

The Advancement of Women is now one of six global diversity challenges at IBM. For the past four years, IBM has been reporting on the status of global Workforce Diversity to its Board of Directors, and a key component of the review is the status of women. To ensure each geography and country was focusing on the advancement of women, IBM asked each geography to develop strategies to address the challenges.

To facilitate this request, IBM hosted a three-day planning session in June, 1997 for its global women executives/leaders. Over 80 women from 19 countries attended the session. Prior to the conference, IBM conducted a survey of the women attendees to understand their perceptions of the issues and barriers to their advancement. The results of the survey indicated that no matter what country or region, the top three issues were the same -- male dominated culture, lack of mentoring / networking, and difficulty with work/life balance. During the conference, the attendees developed an overall set of recommendations which were then presented to the Corporate Executive committee which reports directly to the CEO of IBM.

These strategies have resulted in a number of history-making initiatives around the world. IBM Women's Executive councils have been established in Europe, Latin America and Asia Pacific. Asia Pacific held women's conferences in each of their sub-regions, and subsequently for all of Asia Pacific. Mentoring programs are in place for women in Europe and Asia Pacific, and employee Work/Life Issues surveys have been conducted in Europe, Latin America in 1998 and Asia Pacific in 1999.

In 1998, IBM held the second Global Women Leaders' Conference with 135 attendees from 29 countries to assess the progress and determine 1999 priorities. Once again, pre-conference surveys and focus groups indicated male dominated culture and work/life balance remained top barriers, however, lack of mentoring/networking was replaced by lack of sponsorship and access to key positions.

IBM has updated its global strategies based on these new priorities and has launched two key global projects - IBM's Partnership for Workforce Flexibility and the Global Dependent Care Assessment.

The Partnership for Workforce Flexibility is a global initiative to help IBMers find more balance between their work and personal lives. The Partnership serves as the catalyst for business areas currently engaged in addressing issues relating to workload and work/life balance and accelerate change in the work environment that will enable employees to be more successful. Through the work of the Partnership, IBM launched a comprehensive array of work/life flexibility options in 11

The Advancement of Women in IBM

Latin America countries in July, 1999. As part of the announcement, the Partnership conducted a 4 hour training programs for all Latin American managers on work/life and flexibility. The objective of this training was to ensure the 'culture' was fully supportive of the flexibility options.

In conclusion, IBM's philosophy on women employees can be phrased simply: IBM is learning and addressing the specific needs of women, and creating services that address those needs. The use of these services leads to a more effective and productive employee who will contribute their best to the corporation. We believe these key programs provide a foundation for our women and our ultimate measurement is for women employees, particularly working mothers, to aspire to both an executive life and a family. IBM's goal is to be the premier technology solution provider for women entrepreneurs, and the premier global employer for working mothers and women.