

20 April 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR: Petticoat Panel

FROM: Dorothy Knoelk

SUBJECT: Other significant findings on the subject of
women's status

1. In doing some research lately I came across an article in the January-February 1953 Harvard Business Review on "Opportunities for Women at the Administrative Level." It is written by Frances Fuller and Mary Batchelder and reports the findings of a "research project undertaken by the Division of Research of the Harvard Business School at the request of a committee studying the Radcliffe Management Training Program for Women." This is a one-year graduate course consisting of classroom instruction in administrative techniques, labor and human relations, statistics, accounting, marketing, retailing, and community relations, with two concentrated periods of field work providing actual job experience. The teaching staff includes a number of members of the Harvard Business School Faculty, and extensive use is made of the case-discussion method. The program has been in operation since before World War II.

2. I thought you might be interested in the section entitled "Conclusions," and so here it is.

3. In case this looks to you like an attempt to keep the status issue alive, let me ask you to perish the thought. I merely thought you might enjoy comparing the two sets of findings.

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DOROTHY KNOELK

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CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusions regarding job opportunities for women with administrative training can be summarized as follows.

LEVEL OF ADVANCEMENT

(1) Women are found in increasing numbers at all levels of business organizations in all kinds of business, and the trend is toward an even greater variety of jobs and responsibilities for them.

(2) As yet, however, comparatively few women in any field occupy the top executive jobs. This is true whether one is speaking of a whole organization or a major subdivision of one. Where women do occupy such positions (not counting those in family businesses who may "inherit" the job), they have a long service history with the organization and frequently have grown up with it from very small beginnings. Although only the exceptional graduate of the Management Training Program working in unusual circumstances might reasonably aspire to such a position at the moment, there is every reason to believe that such opportunities will increase in the future. Such a program, therefore, should put no ceiling on the potential of its graduates.

(3) Many women occupy positions of assistants to the top executive in major subdivisions of organizations, and a "growing number" are reaching that kind of position on the top level of the whole organization. Competent Management Training Program graduates might look to this level of organization as their goal even now.

FIELDS OF OPPORTUNITY

(1) Research and analysis work in such organizations as banks, insurance companies, investment firms, and large industrial and manufacturing companies usually require as an "entering wedge" at least a basic knowledge of accounting and statistics. Promotions depend on experience as well as training. Thus such jobs should be thought of in long-run terms similar to jobs in government service. The pay is improving, and there is a strong element of job security.

(2) Merchandizing, public relations, advertising, the women's magazine field, and food and other industries which make great use of women home economists offer a quite different kind of opportunity. They presuppose some creative talent (in the case of home economists, special training too) which, in combination with training in business administration, can lead to very highly paid and responsible jobs in a comparatively short time. The competition in these fields is keen, and the "job security" is dependent on individual performance.

(3) Personnel work is regarded as a "natural" field for women. The level of organization to which they can rise in this field seems to depend on the kind of business they choose. Where women constitute a major part of the working force, there seems to be more chance of a woman becoming head of personnel than in companies where men predominate. Strongly unionized industries and those requiring a large number of skilled employees, such as engineers, offer less chance for women to become head of personnel.

(4) New fields and new companies where employees are few and "everyone gets a chance to do everything" seem promising to women's advancement. A special instance of a new field is hospital administration, which, while it does not promise a great monetary reward, is wide open for trained personnel.

These opportunities seem sufficiently great in number and variety to justify administrative training for women. As has already been stated, however, most of the job possibilities lie in fields commonly thought of as staff functions (such as research and personnel) or in fields such as advertising which require a creative flair. Line opportunities, as such, are conspicuously absent, though a woman in a staff department may perform essentially line supervision within the department.

CHANCES FOR SUCCESS

The very "unbalance" in this report between the attention given to specific job opportunities and that given to limitations on women's advancement is significant. It reflects accurately the proportion of time given each topic in almost every interview. When asked to describe the most important jobs held by women in their organizations, most executives enumerated two or three at a maximum. The entire subject of specific opportunities for women typically was covered in 15 minutes. That was not so of the executives' opinions about women in business. Appreciable confusion and even contradiction were noted, not only as between the opinions of different executives but also within the thinking of individual executives.

For example, the fact that women do not get ahead was ascribed to women's lack of willingness to make the extra "drive" a man will make--to "stay late; study outside; make the job primary, not secondary, in life." At the same time an individual was likely to say that women are not "good executives" or do not get promotions because they "make too much of their jobs" and are too concerned with minor details. Their jobs are "their whole lives; they are not interested in anything else." Often an executive cited examples of both types of behavior and characterized them both as "unfortunate."

This kind of thinking, which appeared in so many interviews, left the impression that women are "damned if they do, and damned if they don't." On the basis of all comments received, it may be concluded that the way in which women behave on the job rather than the way they perform the technical operations thereof is the chief determinant of their executive potential in the thinking of most superiors.

For purposes of effectively training women, this seems to be the most significant finding of the study. The principal task for women with executive aspirations seems to be changing the attitude both of men and of other women toward them, i.e., by themselves giving examples of fortunate rather than unfortunate job behavior.

Therefore, the chief concern of those entrusted with the training of women for administrative jobs would appear to be: to provide their students, not merely with necessary technical skills, but also with such skills of behavior that they may help to resolve the confusions and contradictions currently existing in the minds of so many executives about women in business.