

# Few Women at the Top of Media Companies

by Laura Koss-Feder

**D**espite their household names, many of the nation's largest publishers, television stations and e-companies still have a dearth of women in top leadership positions. In fact, fewer than one in five board members of the nation's largest communications companies are women, according to a recent study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

"With few exceptions, we have not moved beyond tokenism in the number of women in top leadership positions or serving on boards of communications companies," says Susan Ness, former commissioner with the Federal Communications Commission and director of the information and society section for the Annenberg Center. "It would seem that companies that value women as buyers, viewers and customers would want to gain the expertise of women at the top of their organisations."

The study, which was released in August 2002, examined 57 of the largest companies and conglomerates in the entertainment, telecommunications and cable, publishing and e-companies, as well as individual operating units within those companies. Among 10 entertainment conglomerates, women comprise 13 percent of directors and 14 percent of executives.

Fox Entertainment Group, Inc., and USA Networks, Inc., for example, listed no women among their top executives

in their 2001 annual reports. Of the 23 largest telecommunications and cable providers, women account for 12 percent of directors and 16 percent of executives. And among the 13 most successful e-companies, women make up only 8 percent of directors and 18 percent of executives.

Women seem to fare better in the area of publishing, where they make up 17 percent of directors and 22 percent of executives in the 11 largest companies. Scholastic Inc. had the best record overall of publishing companies, with women comprising 52 percent of top executives and 31 percent of board members.

This was the second annual analysis of the communications industry conducted by the Annenberg Center, which examines the role of communication in public policy issues at the local, state and federal levels.

"The good news is that there is an increasing number of women making significant changes within these companies, but not at the actual top, top level," Ness says. "This will only change if companies put more focus on this."

## Mentoring Could Counteract Inequalities at the Top

As a way of correcting the inequities that exist, Ness recommends that corporations provide more training and mentoring to women to help guide their careers, perform internal reviews for the hiring and retention of women at all levels, and conduct succession planning for top positions that includes outreach to women.

"A pool of potential successors that includes only white males may evidence lack of sustained effort to reach outside of the 'usual suspects,'" Ness says in the report.

Women need to especially find mentors—both men and women—who can help guide them to the top, says Meredith Moore, director of research and information services with Catalyst, a New York research organisation that studies issues and trends in women and business. The organisation did its own study in 2001—the "Census of Women Board Directors of the Fortune 1000"—which found that 12 percent of all Fortune 500 board directors were female. This number was 8 percent in 1993, when the study was first done.

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“Find those people who can help you and establish a relationship with them,” Moore adds. “Talk to them in the employee cafeteria and ask to pick their brains. Get them to know and respect who you are.”

### Reflecting ‘What America Looks Like’

Those women who have achieved top status in the communications field need to push for more to women sit on the boards of these large companies, notes John Challenger, president of Challenger, Gray and Christmas Inc., a Chicago-based international outplacement firm.

“Mentoring younger women in the workplace is extremely important, both from men and women who have moved up to the top,” Challenger says. “This is a great way to help women gain access to top positions, where they will have some real decision-making authority.”

He also notes that the lack of women at the top is a major inequity for an industry that markets half of its products and services to women.

“It seems unseemly to me that a business that delivers its products to an equal number of women and men does not have more women in their leadership,” Challenger says. “That will need to change.”

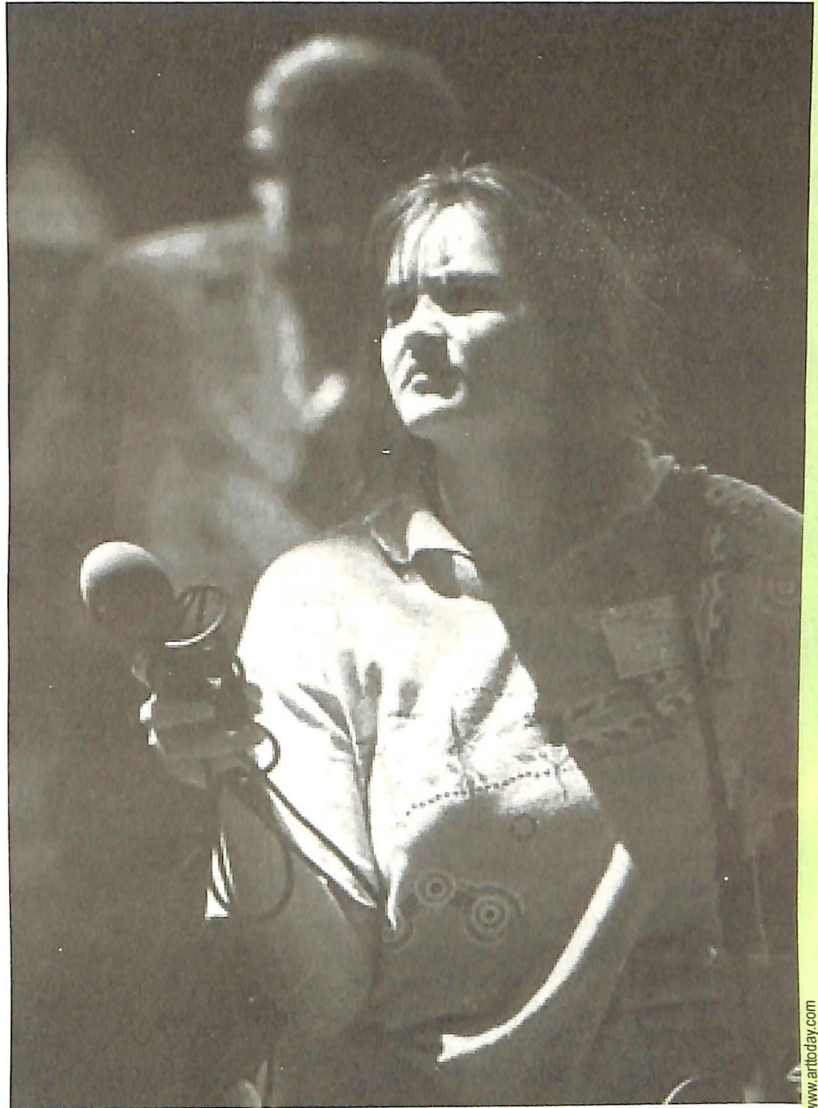
Ditto, says Terry Neese, president and co-founder of Women Impacting Public Policy, an Oklahoma City-based nonprofit advocacy group. Communications companies, which so actively serve the female public, need to take their own women employees more seriously and promote them beyond just token levels, she says.

“Corporate boards need to have representatives that look like what America looks like, and that includes women and minorities,” Neese says. “Otherwise, they will really miss the boat with their customers, particularly in the communications field.”

For more information:

Catalyst: <<http://www.catalystwomen.org>>

“The Glass Ceiling in the Executive Suite: The 2nd Annual APPC Analysis of Women Leaders in Communication Companies” (Adobe pdf format), Annenberg Public Policy Center



American women remain a minority in the U.S. media industry despite their increased visibility

of the University of Pennsylvania: <http://www.appcpenn.org/press/glass-ceiling-2002-report.pdf>

See also “Studies Show Women’s Role in Media Shrinking,” Women’s Enews, 21 May 2002: <<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/915/>>

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Source: Women’s Enews, 23 September 2002, <<http://www.womensenews.org>>