



## Businesswomen still hit glass ceiling

[By Michael Kinsman]

If you've been waiting for the day that women gain equality in executive suites and board rooms, you'll need patience.

Research recently released by the University of California at Davis shows that women hold 10.2 percent of the total executive officer positions and board slots at the state's 400 largest public companies.

That's the same percentage as a year ago.

"As the epicenter of innovation, the eighth-largest economy in the world in its own right, and a trailblazer in social trends, California should be in the forefront of women's leadership in the corporate arena," says Katrina Ellis, an assistant professor at the UC Davis Graduate School of Management and author of the study. "The truth is, it is not."

The survey shows that women hold 11.7 percent of all executive jobs in those companies and 8.8 percent of all board positions.

Women make up 45 percent of California's 17 million-member work force.

"I don't think it's realistic to expect women to hold 45 percent of those executive jobs," said Sondra Thiederman, author of the book "Making Diversity Work" (Kaplan, \$25).

Thiederman says she has seen very little evidence that men consciously discriminate to hold women out of leadership positions in the corporate world. Instead, she says, some women simply aren't as committed to a career as men and choose to spend time on raising their families.

Thiederman acknowledges that some men might have inadvertently stifled the careers of women because they prefer to have close associates who think like they do.

"We have to face up to the truth that there are cultural differences between the genders," Thiederman says. "Men and women have different styles of communicating. But what we need to do is to find a way that they can be comfortable with each other for women to be accepted better."

Thiederman said one Texas financial institution has a two-way mentoring program that pairs individuals with different backgrounds. One such match features a white male executive linked with a younger Filipina. The idea is for them to get to understand each other's cultural differences so they can work together more efficiently.

"Women may not play golf with men, or maybe they weren't in the service with them, but they can have a comfort level with each other," she says. "When this happens, I think you will find more women in the executive ranks."

The UC Davis study found that 125 companies, or 31 percent of the total studied, have no female board members or female executive officers. More than 50 percent of the companies have no women in the boardroom, and 48 percent have no women in their executive ranks.

Chris Melching, chief executive of the Palo Alto, Calif.-based Forum for Women Entrepreneurs and Executives, is offering a new placement service that identifies and recommends experienced and qualified women for openings on boards of directors.

She hopes that calling attention to the lack of women in key corporate positions will be a catalyst for change. But the UC Davis study shows she'll still have to have patience.