

What professional women can do in 2018 to rise to the C-suite

Women executives wanting to get to C-level positions would do well by positioning themselves for the role and speaking up for it. Remember, you are your best ambassador.

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Women like Sheryl Sandberg are great role models for women in corporate roles, hoping to break the glass ceiling(Reuters)

The last few years have seen many women taking up leadership positions – in business and politics – across the world. Hillary Clinton, Theresa May, Indra Nooyi, Angela Merkel, Dilma Rousseff, Sheryl Sandberg, Mary Barra, Christine Lagarde... the list goes on. Working women with more than 15 years experience must find inspiration in this data to drive themselves to top leadership roles, particularly in business.

A global report on women in business points out that women now hold over 25% senior corporate roles. And about 12% of marketing heads are women. The number of C-suite women is only expected to increase in 2018, given the trend.

If you are a working woman, what do you need to do to capture the advantages 2018 offers? Certainly, age is a good thing for w to climb up the ladder. Many of the leaders breaking the glass ceiling are in their 40s, and experience is indeed a plus. You shou not get discouraged even if you are above 50 because age is only a number and the experience you accumulate counts. Age is an asset now and the more seasoned you are, the more value you can add.

Experts argue that age is not a barrier for women looking to further their careers later in life. This is not just because they have more education and experience than previous generations but because women who take it slow mid- way for maternal responsibilities are in many ways better suited to shift into high gear at a later age than men. In 2018, women can have it all.

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Look at all the positives: Those who raise children and look after parents bring a different set of skills and perspectives to their career when they come back to corporate roles. Many progressive groups including the Tatas and Mahindras are tapping into tl talent.

Role modelling is another way younger female professionals can plan their career this year and beyond. This is especially impo in fields where there are fewer women employees. When younger women see other women in senior leadership roles, they are encouraged to adopt a similar path. Someone like Indra Nooyi can be a good role model here, although all leaders have the pot to be role models, even if they don't belong to the right stream. Inspiration is the idea; and as you climb the career path, look f types of it. This is especially relevant since women executives often feel the absence of support systems to help them lead.

Finally, women executives wanting to get to C-level positions would do well by positioning themselves for the role and speakir for it. Remember, you are your best ambassador. Even if you feel you are not fully ready for the position, put your name forward prepare to give a tough fight to similar candidates of the opposite gender. This year, given the focus on women's leadership, yo might just end up winning, provided your performance is at par with the set targets. While at it, do expand your network and le from peers in other businesses as well.

In the end, the better candidate (almost) always wins. The gender divide is expected to narrow this year and the opportunity is the here and now for those who are career-minded. Remember not to plan your career too narrowly lest it close other doors of opportunities.

Dr M Muneer is co-founder of the non-profit Medici Institute

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