

# Corporate expense? Barriers to women

As Bentley University launches center, leaders say businesses lose money by blocking talent

By Katie Johnston Chase  
 Globe Staff

WALTHAM — As Gloria Larson worked her way through the ranks at the Federal Trade Commission in the 1980s, she was often one of the only women in the room. Now, as the president of Bentley University, Larson is hoping to help get more female executives into rooms across the country with the launch of the school's Center for Women and Business.

The center, which officially opens in the fall, will focus on educating students about their leadership potential, conducting research about how and why companies should promote and retain women, and building relationships with corporations to share information about putting these practices into place. The center will host speakers, hold conferences, and fund studies, including work being done by a PhD student on women balancing multiple roles.

"This pipeline in the corporate world is leaking badly once women start to get into the management ranks," Larson said, referring to women not getting placed in top jobs, "and it's still pretty well blocked at the top."

The center will be led by a national authority on women and leadership, Betsy Myers, who was a senior adviser on women's issues to former President Clinton and chief operating officer for President Obama's 2008 campaign.

Companies with leadership teams that reflect the diversity of their customers better understand the needs of those customers, Myers said, and therefore perform better. Indeed, organizations with more women on their boards make more money, according to a Catalyst survey.

"There's an awareness out there today that, 'Wow, what we've been doing hasn't worked,'" Myers said.

"The workforce is changing. Seventy percent of the entrants are women and minorities, and we better get our act together because if we don't, we're going to lose profits, we're going to lose workforce."

Initial funding for the center is coming from \$3 million in donations from two couples with Bentley connections — Jack and Pam Cumming and Christine and Steve Manfredi — and \$1 million from PricewaterhouseCoopers, the accounting firm that employs more Bentley graduates than any other company.

At the firm, more than half of the entry-level hires are women, but only 17 percent of the partners are women — a number that the company is working to increase by grooming more female leaders, assigning employees to advocate for women's advancement, and maintaining strong connections with women who have taken a few years off to raise children. Through the Bentley Center for Women and Business, PricewaterhouseCoopers plans to share its practices, learn from other organizations, and participate in research that will further boost the role of women in corporate America.

"Leadership is a learned skill," said Niloufar Molavi, chief diversity officer at PricewaterhouseCoopers.

But leadership continues to elude many women in corporate America. According to the latest report by the women's business group the Boston Club, done in collaboration with Bentley, fewer than 9 percent of the 100 largest public companies in Massachusetts have female executive officers, roughly the same percentage as in 2003.

**And a new Bentley study found that women's perceptions about equality in the business world get worse as they progress through their careers.**



Betsy Myers, (left) founding director of the Center for Women and Business at Bentley University and Bentley president Gloria Larson say companies that keep women from top jobs are hurting themselves. (Bill Greene/Globe Staff)

**Sixty percent of women ages 18-24 said that men get more promotions, a feeling shared by 70 percent of women ages 25-30. By contrast, 51 percent of men ages 18-24 said that men get more promotions, and that dipped to 44 percent in the older age bracket.**

"When women look up the ladder, they get discouraged," said Larson, Bentley's first female president. "The odds are against them, and they can see it."

Crissi Mann can see it. Mann, 21, is graduating from Bentley next week and heading for a finance job in New York City. She grew up eating McDonald's and watching cartoons in the conference room while her mom, who was also in finance, worked her way up to the door of the executive suite but never landed a top job. "I wanted to be exactly like her, and I wanted to dress up in a suit and heels," said Mann.

Mann hopes the new center will help level the playing field, but for now, she knows the corporate world is still not a particularly welcoming place for women: "It'll be a rude awakening."

Katie Johnston Chase can be reached at [johnstonchase@globe.com](mailto:johnstonchase@globe.com).

## SUCCESS IN BUSINESS CAREERS

From a KRC Research survey of college-educated men and women ages 18-30:

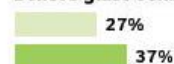
**Believe that men get more jobs than women:**



**Believe that men get more promotions than women:**



**Believe glass ceilings exist in most companies:**



**Believe glass ceilings exist in some companies:**



SOURCE: KRC Research survey of 1,000 young adults, conducted Jan. 25-31, 2011

GLOBE STAFF

KRC Research **Bradley Honan, CEO**  
[BHonan@krcresearch.com](mailto:BHonan@krcresearch.com)  
 (212) 537-8743