



McLean Fearnett Jackson

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Superior opportunities

Women are using their people skills to break into the corporate boys' club. By Beverley Head. It's been said that bosses tend to hire and promote people who remind them of themselves. Kelly Jones, chief information officer for Deutsche Bank in Australia and New Zealand, doesn't have the pretensions of, say, US mogul and The Apprentice star Donald Trump, but she would like to hire more women just like her.

When she can find them.

Jones says most applicants for IT jobs are male, generally "introverted, quiet, focused people". Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show 20 per cent of IT workers are women, compared to 44 per cent in the labour force.

She says women are generally more people-focused and better communicators. This raises women to the top in disproportion to the huge number of men lower down the ladder.

She dismisses the notion of a glass ceiling impeding female IT professionals, but concedes it is hard to switch to other senior positions that report to the CEO and the board, despite her achievements as CIO.

"The CIO role is not somewhere that organisations often go looking for management talent," Jones says, something she believes is the case for both female and male CIOs.

She predicts this may change as other executives learn about technology, and as CIOs get less technical and more about matching IT to the business.

Mary Ann Maxwell, managing director of Meta Group and a former CIO of Westpac, agrees. "A CIO in today's companies is in a very advantageous position. The CEO sees the whole picture but is not in a role where he or she should understand or manage the detail. The chief financial officer often knows the numbers but not how they were arrived at."

Meantime, it seems women CIOs can mash the English language with management-speak as well as any male counterpart. Maxwell says: "The COO has visibility but is primarily focused on operating within today's paradigm. The CIO, however, has enterprise visibility and significant involvement in people, process and technology . . . That kind of visibility is invaluable."

What this means is that most senior executives and departmental heads focus on their knitting, while the COO runs the business from directives they receive from the board through the CEO. The COO will seldom initiate their own action. But the CIO is responsible for, so must understand, the whole business; they see how technology better prepares the business for the future.

Maxwell says women must seize opportunities as they arise: "Plan when you can, but dance when there is a chance".

Another female pioneer is Gail Burke, Macquarie Bank CIO for 12 years until 2001. She, too,



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made the transition from CIO to CEO and is now managing director of BNP Paribas Securities Services Australasia.

Burke says women traditionally do well in service roles because of better organisational skills, people, project and client service management.

"They are better at dealing with the stress of demanding clients and servicing multiple clients and juggling their priorities," Burke says. "These are critical skills for a CIO."

But she says most CIOs have little exposure to profit-and-loss responsibility, as most IT departments run as a cost or service centre, making difficult the move to CEO.

Suncorp's group executive for IT, Carmel Gray, agrees that there might not be a smooth segue for CIOs advancing to the top slot. Gray is one of three female group executives on a team of seven reporting to the CEO. But even in an egalitarian company she believes the CIO role, which she says is vocational, is not necessarily a grounding for the CEO's chair.

"Nothing in this role prepares us for the revenue side of things," says Gray, the former CEO of software maker Logica in Australia. "That's not to say we're not capable of it - but the most natural segue would be to the COO."

Gray says women tend to have superior interpersonal skills, look for pragmatic solutions and understand the needs of the business. She says that as an emerging profession, career advancement in IT is based on merit and female IT managers' pay matches that of the men.

Meta's Mary Ann Maxwell, however, says female CIOs, who tend to rise through the ranks at a single company, often are paid less than job-hopping male counterparts.

There has been much debate about whether women really want the big roles - and about whether they lack desire to progress at the top levels.

Burke says that although there are examples of successful female CFOs, women CEOs are relatively rare.

"This is probably because they don't aspire to the role at least as much as men do, or they fall out of the big corporate world before the opportunity becomes available, or they are overlooked when the opportunity arises.

"I think women are hungry for the big jobs, but they are not as good as men at building up a profile that will make them a visible candidate. My job is certainly a big job - I run a big business with high growth and high inherent risk. Interestingly, my predecessor in the role was female and came from a client service background."

But she warns that the step from CIO to CEO is a big one.

"It is completely different to the CIO role at Macquarie. As a CIO, one can never be solely accountable for outcomes, because most of what you or your team does relies on funding, direction and joint participation from the business. When you are the CEO or MD, the buck stops with you. You are responsible for pretty much everything. This is definitely more intellectually demanding."



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Burke says a very good CIO who works for a demanding organisation is "well equipped" to move into running a service business.

"Don't expect much, though, in terms of work-life balance," she says. "Everyone who achieves sustained success in business has a significant workload, both men and women." Free time is a rare commodity.

"This is often harder for women, particularly when they want to have children or when their children are young.

"From my experience, partnerships and marriages typically don't last where both partners have demanding careers, which may explain why many successful women are single, or the dominant earner in their personal relationships. I think women can have children, marriages and careers, and many do. It isn't easy but it is rewarding."

Rise and rise

Look around the big end of town and women CIOs are more plentiful than female CFOs, COOs or CEOs. Some of them have the biggest CIO jobs - women such as Qantas' Fiona Balfour, Lee Barnett at AMP, and Jane Treadwell at Centrelink - running some of the biggest IT shops.

A few have made the next move, using the CIO position to step up to CEO. It contradicts recent reports - for example, in the Harvard Business Review - that women generally aren't in senior roles because they don't want them enough.

In IT, at least, they do want the jobs - and get them.

Their success in IT is more impressive given ABS figures show women comprise 15 per cent of the sector's workforce (down 4 per cent from 1998), even though women occupy 44 per cent of the national workforce.

Executive search consultant Annalie Davies says lists of potential CIO candidates are male-dominated.

The rise of the woman CIO is a trend gathering pace says Peter Hind, manager of the InTEP (Information Technology Experience Program) program, which charts CIO opinion for IDC Australia. When Hind started the program in 1994 (10 years after Australia's sex discrimination act passed), just one in 50 members was female. A decade on, it's nearer 10 per cent - still shy of New Zealand, where 33 per cent of the InTEP CIOs are women.

Phil Kerrigan, recruitment principal of McLean Kerrigan Jackson, says men still far outnumber women in the lower ranks of IT: "Women are more likely to end up at the top of the pile than the average man."

He says this is because "women are less concerned about technology; they are less impressed by the latest gizmos. They tend to look at technology from a business perspective. Also, women have a mothering, nurturing side and place a stronger focus on developing their team.

"They are more empathetic and build relationships back into the business and they are sensitive to the politics."

Mark Lelliott, managing partner of the Melbourne office of executive search company Highland Partners, identifies three qualities female CIO candidates tend to have in



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abundance, compared to their male peers: "Project management ability, multitasking and the ability to listen."

For any envious male CIO candidates, Kerrigan offers this advice: "They should bring out their feminine side."

NEXT - POSITIONS

CEO - chief executive officer: most senior executive position, with overarching responsibility for performance of the business. Accountable to the board of directors and shareholders.

COO - chief operating officer: reports to the CEO, responsible for running the enterprise on a daily basis, leaving the CEO to ponder strategy.

CFO - chief financial officer: responsible for the enterprise's financial wellbeing, in charge of the accounts, reports to CEO.

CIO - chief information officer: responsible for the business's information needs including computing and communications networks. Reports variously to CEO, COO or CFO.

Moving up and on

- Mary Ann Maxwell former CIO Westpac, now MD Meta Group
- Gail Burke former CIO Macquarie Bank, now MD of BNP Paribas Securities Services Australasia
- Michelle Tredenick former CIO MLC, now CEO MLC Corporate Solutions
- Anne Dwyer former CIO, UTS, now executive director organisation support, UTS
- Cassandra Matthews former CIO BHP Billiton
- Jozefa Sobski former CIO NSW Health Department
- Margaret Wright former executive director, IS, Macquarie Bank