



## Making it as a Woman in Corporate America

University of Idaho  
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As a male, I'm fortunate enough that I can't really imagine what it would be like to get turned down for a leadership position in a company because of my gender. Men often have an overwhelming advantage when it comes time to pick a new corporate CEO. Even today, where women are gradually making greater advances in the work force, there are still few women in highly sought-after upper-echelon positions. Alanna Vagianos states in [her article in the the Huffington Post](#) explains that there has been little to no increase of female CEOs, CFOs and board members over the past three years. Vagianos cites a survey carried out by Catalyst, an organization committed to helping women flourish in the corporate world, that maintains that for 8 years running, the percentage of women on company boards has not risen above [16.9%](#). Even more startling, from a survey conducted by Catalyst, is that of all the Fortune 500 companies [135](#) of them have ZERO women in leadership positions. There has been a marginal improvement when it comes to seeing more women taking control of Fortune 500 companies. Vagianos found that from 2008 to 2013, the percentage of women in Fortune 500 company leadership positions went from [6.2% to 8.1%](#). [But should such small gains really be celebrated?](#) As it stands now, just [4.2 percent](#) of all the CEOs of Fortune 500 companies are females.

It is common knowledge that women get paid less than men in the same position doing the same work. Mary Barra became the first woman to become CEO of the motor company General Motors (GM). GM for all intents and purposes appeared to be helping women advance in the corporate world, but it turns out, this was not the case. After becoming CEO, Barra started earning [\\$4.4 million](#) a year. The problem? The CEO before her, Dan Akerson, was making \$9 million a year doing is the very same job. And Barra is certainly not the only woman to become a CEO only to get short-changed for doing exactly what her male predecessor did before her. Ginni Rometty is the first woman to take control of IBM by becoming its CEO. She started her position with an annual paycheck of [\\$16.1 million](#). Her predecessor's income for doing the same job? [\\$37 million](#).

Lisa Quast, a former employee for a multibillion dollar company, has some advice for women wanting to get ahead in corporate America. Quast cites hard work as the first step for women in moving up in the corporate world. Quast contends that "excellent work...[and] outstanding results" are vital if women want to stand out of the crowd in order to be noticed for their abilities. Quast's second piece of advice is "[know what you want and go for it.](#)" Quast encourages women to make plans and set career goals prior to starting work in corporate America. Thirdly, Quast boldly encourages women to leave to get ahead. By leaving to get ahead, Quast is not implying women quit their jobs in protest for not getting



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promotions or equal pay. Rather, Quast suggests that if women know for sure that their skills and knowledge are not being recognized, they go work for someone that will. Quast is the perfect example of leaving to get ahead. When Quast quit working for a company that underappreciated her work and skills, she left the company and worked for one that would recognize and reward her capabilities. For Quast, the decision to work for another company allowed her to be promoted three times within two years. Quast's fourth and final piece of advice is to, as she puts it, "dress well and play golf." Her advice is simple: people will judge you, male or female, based on how you dress. Quast's advice to "play golf" really means do what others are doing. To fit in with the men she worked with, Quast played golf with them.

Quast's third piece of advice, leave to get ahead, might resonate with some women struggling to make it in corporate America, and in a number of male-dominated fields. For single, unattached women with no dependents, it just might be necessary to pick up and move on when your career has stalled because of your gender. However, for women with families and/or a spouse with an established career, simply picking up and taking off is not an option. Rather than encouraging women to leave positions where they're not valued, we need to start pressuring companies to be more supportive of developing the talent they already have, and seriously addressing the corporate culture and climate issues that often prevent women from succeeding.



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