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New Catalyst Report: Senior Women 3 Times More Likely to Lose Job than Senior Men

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Everyone has been hit by the current state of the economy, but are women in senior leadership positions being hit harder?

A new Catalyst report says yes, *three times harder*.



The report, titled "[Opportunity or Setback? High Potential Women and Men During Economic Crisis](#)," showed a striking difference for women executives when compared to men in the same positions. From those surveyed for the study, three times more women at the executive level, at 19%, had lost their jobs when their companies downsized or closed, as compared to executive men, of which only 6% had lost their jobs. Interestingly, for both women and men beneath the executive level job loss was exactly the same, at 11%.

In fact, throughout the report there were numerous job change statistics that were similar for the men and women surveyed. For instance, the numbers of promotions for women and men were similar, at 31% and 36% respectively*. Also, when it came to lateral job moves, women were at 38%, very close to men at 34%. And those starting their own businesses was nearly the same with women at 5% and men at 4%.

Highlighting Similarities, Except at the Top

It was these similarities that a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, "[Few Gender Differences in a Recession](#)," on the study chose to highlight.

The *Journal* even noted that "men overall have been harder hit by the downturn, partly because predominantly male sectors like construction and manufacturing are suffering the most." But the article concluded on the noticeable discrepancy between experiences in this economy of male and female executives, with the understatement that "women fared less well near the top of organizations."

Three times more likely to lose one's job is definitely faring "less well."

In trying to understand the experiences of these women executives the WSJ points out that the small sample size "27 women and 131 men" may have been a factor. Ilene H. Lang, president and CEO of Catalyst, responded, "gender-based stereotypes about leadership during tough times and limited access to informal networks and mentors may be partly responsible for the disparity."

Whether it was due to sample size or stereotypes, the fact that this report indicates senior level women are getting hit so much harder as opposed to senior level men is very worrisome.

Women Continue to Lose Ground in Leadership Positions

In fact, it has Lisa Quast at [Career Women Inc.](#) quite concerned. She writes in a recent blog post, "Previous Catalyst studies have already indicated that women's advancement in corporate leadership has been stagnating. The numbers are now indicating that we may not only be stagnating, but heading in the reverse direction."

In fact, [recent reports](#) from California, Massachusetts, and the UK all show losses of female leadership last year. Between 2008 and 2009, California saw a 0.3% decline of women in board and executive positions. From Massachusetts, in 2006 "30 firms reported at least one woman among those with the highest income," compared to 2009 when that dropped to 23 firms. And finally, from the UK, the number of female CEOs in Britain fell from 8 in 2008 to 4 today.

Harriet Harman, Britain's Minister for Women and Equality responded, "I reject the argument of those who say 'because the economy is in difficulty we should put equality on the backburner. It is a luxury we cannot afford right now.' Equality is not just for the good times. It is for all times. It is vital for every individual, for a vibrant economy and for a fair society."

So while the Catalyst report showed many similarities for women and men in business, its statistics for senior level women is quite staggering.

It seems the poor economy is more clearly revealing how much harder women in top positions have to fight.

The data used for the Catalyst "Opportunity or Setback?" report came from 873 MBA alumni from 26 of the top business schools who had graduated between 1996 and 2007. This report is part of a larger study, "The Promise of Future Leadership: Highly Talented Employees in the Pipeline."

*"Except in Europe where 44% of men received promotions versus 26% of women."