

# Women need to network for top jobs

Who you know and what you know are still the keys to climbing up the ladder, **CareerOne** Editor **Cara Jenkin** reveals.



Nicole Graham, left, Adrienne Smith and Stephanie Greene.  
Picture: Naomi Jellicoe

**E**DUCATION and networks may be the essential factors women need to move to the top of the boardroom table, research shows.

A lack of strategy to develop female leaders has been revealed as a missing link for many organisations, despite implementing other female-friendly initiatives.

Mercer's global Women's Leadership Development Survey finds Australian and NZ organisations lead the rest of the world in offering flexible working arrangements to women, with 84 per cent of employers providing flexibility.

It is significantly higher than the 69 per cent of organisations in the United States, 68 per cent in Europe, 60 per cent in Canada and 55 per cent in Asia. Yet Australian

## LEADERS

organisations still fail to attract and retain women "long enough" to reach senior leadership positions.

Almost three-quarters, or 71 per cent, do not have a clear, defined strategy to develop female leaders.

It is a figure worse than Europe (67 per cent) and the US (70 per cent) but better than Canada (82 per cent) and the rest of Asia Pacific (73 per cent).

For organisations that do have a strategy, mentoring, coaching, diversity sourcing and recruiting techniques are involved - all initiatives identified by respondents as being most effective to develop female leaders.

Mercer's Human Capital business talent management leader

## HIGH-FLYERS AMONG THE TOP

Four women were named in BRW's list of the top 200 richest executives in Australia. They are:

■ **Katie Page**, Harvey Norman Holdings, \$50.8 million, No. 66.

■ **Gail Kelly**, Westpac Banking Corporation, \$32.9m, No. 91.

■ **Gillian Swaby**, Paladin Energy, \$25.2m, No. 116.

■ **Karen Moses**, Origin Energy, \$14.7m, No. 185.

Marianne Roux says Australia's greatest challenge is to retain its female leadership potential.

"The problem is not the lack of female talent, rather the leaky pipeline whereby women drop out at senior levels," she says.

"Failure to actively groom women throughout the leadership pipeline is a huge risk but if it's done well it can represent a vast opportunity."

She says there still is a strong

belief in Australia that senior leaders have to be "anointed, not appointed" by a leader who can sponsor a career transition to the top. Women need stronger networks, coaching, mentoring and senior level support as well as flexibility, she says.

A good network and constant learning were keys for Commonwealth Bank regional general manager Adrienne Smith, 48, to reach her position.

"I think life experience is a really big thing," she says. "The (first) jobs I did gave me anything that an education would. You had to get on with the boss, be on time, put up with grumpy customers ... learning all that stuff is just as important."

But she says a large and varied network of contacts built up throughout her career has been significant.

"I constantly say to people when having career discussions - 'when you're building up your network, don't stay with people in your industry and have a beer with on Friday night, extend yourself,'" she says.

"If you stay with people who tell you what you want to hear, you will never grow."

Mentoring helped scosa chief executive Nicole Graham, 29, into her role. She says she had "a running start" with the organisation, having

been employed at scosa for six years before stepping into the top role in March last year.

Further education to get executive skills helped her get ahead, she says.

"I went back to uni and did an MBA (Master of Business Administration) and developed my knowledge," she says. "It's the best investment you can make in your education and also recognising that it never stops - whether that's doing a Masters or any targeted training - it's well worth the investment."

"I had a mentor as well for my career development. That's one thing I can do to work with younger females to build their confidence so they are positioned for these roles."

Netball SA chief executive Stephanie Greene, 39, says networks are important in any career.

"Women, for a whole swag of

reasons, aren't good at using their network," she says.

She says the guilt factor of thinking of career rather than family is tough on executive women.

Unlike women, men will develop networks by doing social activities such as going to the pub and having a chat after work, she says.

"Everybody talks about a glass ceiling in sport because it is a bloke's domain," she says.

"It's the last male bastion. Sports like AFL and cricket are sports steeped in tradition, are steeped in a boys' club."

Ms Greene says working her way up, using determination in the face of being turned down for a position for not being a sportsman and told she "didn't have it", led to her being the first female chief executive of Netball SA.

“It's so important to find something that you're passionate about. That's what shines through in what you're doing. It comes down to skill. I don't think there's a correlation between age and success.”

- NICOLE GRAHAM  
SCOSA CHIEF EXECUTIVE

“I've worked really hard but taken up every opportunity that everyone has ever given me. I've taken risks. Learning is a balloon which never bursts.”

- ADRIENNE SMITH  
CBA REGIONAL  
GENERAL MANAGER

“I was determined. To be frank, I had a dream. I started at the bottom and worked my way up. I've been determined to have as many opportunities as possible.”

- STEPHANIE GREENE  
NETBALL SA  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE