



MICHELLE R. CLAYMAN INSTITUTE
for GENDER RESEARCH
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

NEW RESEARCH REVEALS SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT FOR MID-LEVEL TECHNICAL WOMEN

Study Conducted by Anita Borg Institute and Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research, Stanford University Explores Retention and Advancement Issues; Provides Recommendations to High Tech Companies on How to Keep Technical Women in the Workplace

PALO ALTO, Calif. — October 1, 2008—Women at the middle level of their high-tech careers are extremely valuable to their organizations but new research indicates that this seems to be the very point at which they face the greatest barriers to advancement. According to *Climbing the Technical Ladder: Obstacles and Solutions for Mid-Level Women in Technology*, 29 percent of women are planning to leave their mid-level positions at high tech companies in the next twelve months and pursue alternative options. The study, conducted by the Anita Borg Institute for Women and Technology in conjunction with the Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research, Stanford University, will be published October 1, 2008.

Climbing the Technical Ladder provides an in-depth look into the barriers to retention and advancement of technical women and provides solid recommendations to high tech companies on how to overcome these barriers. The study examines technical women at mid-level ranking because it is a critical juncture for both women on the technical ladder – a complex set of gender barriers converge at this point – and the high tech firms that employ them. While most high tech companies do recognize the benefits of diversity, gender disparity in technical jobs remains glaringly obvious as very few women reach top technical positions such as Technology Fellow or Vice President of Engineering. Indeed, the report finds that men are 2.7 times more likely to be in a high level position than are women, and that women comprise an increasingly smaller proportion of the workforce at every level of the technology corporate ladder.

“Studies have shown that, for a variety of reasons, workforce diversity boosts a company’s bottom line,” states Dr. Caroline Simard, director of research for the Anita Borg Institute and co-author of the study. “This fact, combined with the lower number of men and women entering technical fields, makes it critical for high tech companies to focus on eliminating the barriers to retention and advancement of their technical women.”

The study found that some of these barriers to advancement include the following:

- Women are more likely than men to perceive the workplace as a competitive culture and do not believe the corporate culture is a meritocracy.
- Technical women in management positions are perceived as less technically competent than their male counterparts, creating an environment where women are viewed (and can view themselves) as “not fitting in” with the company culture.
- Mid-level women are more likely than men to believe that extended work days are a requirement for success, which may lead to the perception among women that those who cannot regularly stay late are less likely to advance.
- While both men and women value family, men are nearly four times more likely than women to have a partner who assumes the primary responsibility for the household and children. The report shows that 34% of mid-level technical women have deliberately delayed having children to achieve career goals.
- Women are more likely than men to suffer poor health due to excessive work related stress, and over 68 % report limiting their amount of sleep to achieve their career goals.

While the study shines a bright light on the barriers to advancement for mid-level technical women, it also offers recommended solutions for companies who wish to retain and advance technical women. Some of the recommendations include:

- Investing in professional development is the most profitable step high-tech companies can take to advance technical women and retain all technical talent. Companies should create opportunities for all technical employees, at all rank levels, to participate in technical, leadership and management development activities on company time.
- Since mid-level technical men are much more likely than women to benefit from partners who do not work full-time and take care of household responsibilities, companies need to offer flexibility in work schedules. Flexible scheduling is essential for retaining mid-level women who often face unique work/life challenges.
- A diverse leadership team is essential to foster a culture that values diversity. One way companies can demonstrate their commitment to diversity is to increase the female representation on their board of directors and other leadership entities.

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The report will be available for download the Anita Borg Institute website (www.anitaborg.org/news/research/) on October 1, 2008. The research findings will be

presented for the first time at the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing conference in Keystone, Colorado, October 1-4, 2008 (www.gracehopper.org).

About the Anita Borg Institute for Women and Technology (ABI)

The Anita Borg Institute provides resources and programs to help industry, academia, and government recruit, retain, and develop women leaders in high-tech fields, resulting in higher levels of technological innovation. ABI programs serve high-tech women by creating a community and providing tools to help them develop their careers. ABI is a not-for-profit 501(c) 3 charitable organization. ABI Partners include: Google, Microsoft Corporation, HP, Sun, Cisco, Intel, SAP, Juniper Networks, NSF, NCWIT, IBM, Symantec, CA, NetApp, and Capgemini. For more information, visit www.anitaborg.org.

About the Clayman Institute

The Michelle R. Clayman Institute for Gender Research at Stanford University is one of the nation's oldest research organizations devoted to the study of women and gender. Founded in 1974, the institute promotes gender equality through innovative research and dissemination of key findings to decision makers in universities, business, government, and the broader community. For more information, visit <http://gender.stanford.edu>.

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