PREPARING FOR CAREERS IN GLOBAL MARKETING: STRATEGIES FOR U.S. FEMALE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Historically, foreign employment opportunities have disproportionately favored male managers. As marketing educators, one of our tasks is to prepare our students, male and female, for such assignments. This task should not only include traditional instruction on how to do business abroad but should also include some insight into how to succeed in obtaining foreign positions as marketing managers. This latter instruction is especially important for our female students. Part of the purpose of this paper is to offer some strategies that will grant our female students greater opportunities in competing for such assignments. It should be noted that while some of the strategies suggested would also be useful to male students, the focus is on strategies for overcoming barriers that are uniquely faced by females.

In her ground breaking studies of women expatriates, Nancy Adler (1984a, 1984b, 1984c, 1986, 1987, and Adler and Izraeli, 1987, 1994) examined, among other things, the issue of why women are so vastly underrepresented in the ranks of expatriate managers. Tom Peters (1990) has argued that as businesses become "less hierarchical, more flexible and team-oriented, faster and more fluid... one group of people has an enormous advantage in realizing this necessary new vision—women."

Why are more women not being hired, considering the potential advantages they offer and the legal rights they have to such positions? The answer lies in the fact that male managers are making decisions under a set of false assumptions which are highly prejudicial to women. Adler goes on to empirically demonstrate that females are as interested as men in international assignments and that women have a much higher success rate than males on foreign assignments. It is clear that women are interested, qualified, and legally entitled to seek positions abroad, yet in many cases are being systematically held back.

Preparation, coupled with high levels of improvisation, are the keys for females getting foreign postings. Some women have taken low paying positions in international sales organizations knowing that their skills and drive would lead to better positions, while others have deliberately taken temp positions in international departments of companies so that they could showcase their talent and network with the people who make the foreign staffing decisions (Rossman, 1990). Michele Morris (1992) observes that women who succeed in business, "... are often bold, brash and big risk takers. They're not afraid to bend or even rewrite the rules."

The authors identify and discuss the following strategic recommendations for U.S. female students who may be interested in pursuing a career in global marketing: (1) acquire specialized experiences and skills prior to graduation, (2) target/screen potential positions early in the search process, and (3) prepare a self-marketing plan. Some of Adler's general recommendations are also revisited. She advises women to: (1) assume naivete, not malice from management, (2) strive for excellence in building personal qualifications, and (3) be prepared to address private life issues (e.g., marital status, dual careers, children) directly (Adler, 1993).

While progress has been made in establishing equal opportunities for women in international marketing positions, there remains an unlevel playing field. Women should, however, be somewhat encouraged by recent trends. Statistics indicate that the percentage of women expatriate managers is on the rise. In addition, the overall number of expatriate managers also continues to increase, providing a greater pool of employment opportunities for women.