

Women In Hospitality - A Retrospective And View Of That 'Glass Ceiling' - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie  
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'You've come a long way, baby!' - That chauvinistic expression should drive anyone nuts, because it simply is not enough to triumph the journey when the results are still negligible.

Yes, strides have been taken, but the real test resides in the Executive Suite and Board Room, where not only women but also minorities are sadly under-represented. Statistics are great fun, easily manipulated, whereas the real gauge is the old fashioned 'observation' technique. Look around. How many female CEO's or even Operations VP's of significant Hospitality Companies are there? The fortunate few come from family enterprises by and large. How many women run major Restaurant Chains? Independent restaurants, yes, multi-unit stores, no. Most Trade Organizations and Associations are still directed by males, even in adversarial Organized Labor. There are female Chefs out there, elevated primarily by the celebrity movement, which gave great exposure to preparation and presentation. But, how many Directors of Food and Beverage do you count? When you look up through that 'Glass Ceiling', all you see are good ole boys, chumming, puffing those cigars in comfortable leather chairs, 'harrumphing' this and that. Too bad that reinforced ceiling is explosion proof. But, the Revolution lives, right? The conflict lies just under the surface, reflected today in the very lively US Presidential campaign debate on the Democratic side - fascinating theater and historical consideration for the country - sex, race, credentials, seeking the top leadership post in the free world.

Historically, women began to make some progress with the insistence of the US Government through EEO and Affirmative Action in the 1970's. We all began to look at our numbers and categories, and project like crazy to recruit aggressively, develop our people better, promote qualifiable candidates, and begin to right the representation wrong (white males and everyone else). That mandated emphasis has waned, but women and minorities were the beneficiaries, and we began to assimilate them in our organizations. But, this was seldom in the Operations realm, which, as we all know, leads to the Executive and leadership posts in most organizations. No, we slipped women and minorities into those 'soft' disciplines, like Human Resources, Accounting, and Sales. And, they thrived, becoming top professionals and contributors.

However, the true path to the top echelon, the 'Operations Silo' was elusive, and even when one of those in a protected category expressed interest and actually was qualified, the decision to give them the opportunity was half hearted, pressured. Some did make the jump, becoming Front Office Manager or Rooms Manager, but they often were not supported, organizationally, and they burned up and out.

Over the past thirty years, sheer persistence has paid off for women. They do hold some major roles in all types of Hospitality Businesses, but there are too few women who have attained that privilege of senior leadership. We look at how our U.S. culinary field has evolved, where once the kitchen was the domain of the European males, classically trained. Our schools have stepped up, our talent, no matter the sex or skin color, has stepped in. There is much more parity. On the lodging side, we do have female General Managers, Directors of Marketing and Sales, development and finance Executives. Further ascension by women is only a matter of time (how boring to hear), for the dynamics have changed dramatically.

We face a dwindling Labor Pool at all levels, the competition is fierce, not only for talent but also for business. Most importantly, women have demonstrated that they can be excellent Managers, team players and visionaries, which we accept grudgingly. However, there is a significant barrier. Hospitality is 24/7, grueling, time sensitive and demanding. Women have challenged that paradigm, rightfully, looking for balance. For the male, he is a respectable workaholic, fully committed. For the woman, in a similar role, she has no life, almost branded with the Scarlet A - absent. Men seek balance, too, usually cushioned by their career drive. It is no longer a question of wage earner or weaker sex, we pay for performance, mostly. Balance actually increases productivity. No one in their right mind would dismiss the chance to advance their quality of contribution by reducing the quantity of their dedication.

Other Industries have adapted, understanding Work-Life issues. Hospitality people are traditionalists, but market forces will force a reexamination. Industry Executives simply cannot avoid the obvious. Women represent most of the 'back of the House', they are the majority of our service personnel, and they serve in senior capacities in our support departments. The US Presidential campaign will bring many questions, assumptions and opinions to the table, and discussions will abound. Similar conversations will be echoed around the world, as well.

Female and minority heads, in unison, upraised towards that ceiling. Male 'Harrumphers' nervously looking over their comfy arm rests towards the floor and below. The classic divide, exchanging stares and glares. Time for a dialogue, one would think. Do you, and, if so, how to engage the parties, constructively?

The author, John R. Hendrie, believes that Remarkable Hospitality is the portal to the Guest Experience and offers solutions through [www.hospitalityperformance.com](http://www.hospitalityperformance.com).

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