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filed under [Office Politics](#)

By Jennifer Keck



The Glass Hammer

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More than ever, companies in the financial services sector are recruiting top female talent, but many employers have yet to address the career challenges women face. Lack of mentoring, leadership programs, and flexible scheduling options steer women off an otherwise promising career track.

When it comes to getting ahead, a women-friendly employer is vital to your success. Here are a few ways you can ensure

you're making a move to a company that goes out of its way to recruit and retain women:

Look for the Accolades Companies with women-friendly policies often receive the recognition they deserve. [Catalyst](#) is a great place to start your search – and it's an organization we often feature on The Glass Hammer. The organization awards companies for excellence in addressing diversity issues, while also serving as a resource for businesses and job seekers.

Other resources include the [National Association for Female Executives](#), which publishes a list of top companies for executive women, [Working Mother](#) Magazine, known for its list of 100 Best Companies, and [Vault.com](#), a site that posts company rankings, salary data, and more.

For anyone working in accounting, [Accounting Today Magazine](#) is a must on your subscription list. You should also find out if your potential employer is included in the [Accounting MOVE Project](#), a yearly report that profiles firms that are making headway in retaining and advancing women.

Evaluate Programs and Policies Companies often emphasize diversity hiring, work-life balance, and/or benefits packages on their website. However, that doesn't mean they have impactful programs in place. Weeding out the posers from the real deal is essential.

“Some firms decorate their website with a string of awards that they have won,” says Joanne Cleaver, President of Wilson-Taylor Associates. “If they are claiming that they are award-winning, or on a ‘best’ list, then it is reasonable to ask them quite specifically why they won those awards and how you could expect to experience that award-winning culture in everyday life.”

Christina Danile Flynn, President-Elect for the American Woman's Society of Certified Public Accountants (AWSCPA) and Senior Manager at Rothstein Kass, agrees that women's initiatives are not enough. "The success rate of the programs is more important," she explains. "While the qualitative metrics have value, the quantitative metrics will show the true success of the program and as businesspeople we look to that."

Companies that are serious about these programs can, and do, discuss their success. Michelle Lifschitz, Human Resources Manager at CohnReznick says, "Internally, we do track our metrics. We strive to make the best decisions around talent, and we have collegiate reviews so that you get more perspective when account decisions are being made."

When programs are effective, they make a significant difference in your career. Danile Flynn attributes part of her success to the Rainmakers' Roundtable at Rothstein Kass. The program works in two ways: first, by offering sessions on how to build a network and seek out referral sources, and second, through actual networking with other professionals.

CohnReznick developed a similar program in 2005. The WomenCAN: A Collaborative Agency Network for Women provides access to mentors, roundtable discussions with firm partners, leadership development courses, and other professional growth opportunities. It also gives participants a forum where they can exchange ideas and strategies on issues that affect women. "The WomenCAN network is one of the things I'm most proud of," Lifschitz said.

Find out Who's at the Top Leadership says a lot. Are there any women in upper management or executive roles? The more women there are at the top, the more likely it is that a company has a women-friendly environment.

Lifschitz recommends you, “look around and assess the culture. In particular, if you’re looking for a woman-friendly and/or family-friendly company there are some telltale signs. The proportion of women at leadership level –partners, women on the management committee, all indicate how committed a company is to promoting women.”

Risa Lavine, the Co-Chief Human Resources Officer say you should, “consider who are you meeting with. Who are people referring to when they talk about the great things that are happening? Are you seeing women? Are there women who are part of making that happen?”

Network with Other Women One of the best ways to determine a company’s culture is by speaking with current or previous employees. If you don’t know anyone, try reaching out on LinkedIn and ask how satisfied they are with the career coaching they are getting. Are they advancing with the skills required to become partner? “If they are told ‘just keep doing what you’re doing’, then the firm is struggling to communicate the future it envisions for its rising women,” stated Cleaver.

Joining a professional organization like AWSCPA or the Accounting and Financial Women’s Alliance (AFWA) can also advance your career. Membership helps you build your professional network, and connects you with mentors.

Make Sure You Ask the Right Questions What good are women’s initiatives if you can’t ask about them during an interview? Cleaver recommends asking the following crucial questions:

“Does the firm offer a ‘career advisor’ system that ensures that I always have mentoring/coaching/sponsoring conversations with those who have a broader perspective on

the firm's growth goals and how I might fit into that growth?" This is important to ask because you want evidence that you won't get overlooked for growth opportunities.

"How exactly are team leaders held accountable for translating the firm's big-picture goal of advancing women to daily goals?" This is important because you want to make sure the firm's blue sky initiatives aren't ignored or negotiated by line managers on a whim. Team leaders should be measured on how well they deploy the firm's practices and policies to develop talent.

"If I join this firm with the expectation that I will be postponing my ambition to attain partner for a few years, how exactly would I change gears when the time is right for me to accelerate on the partner track?" While a firm may be great about flexible work arrangements, that doesn't always mean merge your way back when you're ready. "I believe it is acceptable to ask how many people are on customized arrangements and of those, how many are in leadership positions," Danile Flynn said.

Innovative firms offer the work-life and career advancement programs that support transition.

After interviewing candidates over the years, Lavine says it's OK to ask direct questions.

"Ask, 'Have you ever participated in any of your firm's family friendly programs? What were they like?' If you walk into my office, you can see pictures of my children, and I can tell the story of having had a modified work schedule and then returning to work full-time," Lavine said. "Does anyone on the team have a flexible work arrangement? Do you hear lots of different stories about people with similar arrangements?"

Be on the Lookout During Your Interview

An interview is more than a question and answer session.

Potential employers inadvertently drop hints about what it's like to work there. If something said sets off a red flag, don't ignore it.

“A lack of transparency about the process and results is a cause for concern,” Cleaver said. “Through the MOVE Project report, many firms report their results, so that is a start. We strongly encourage firms to be transparent about how they advance women. Nobody expects perfection, but you should be able to understand their approach and how it is working out.”

Lastly, trust your intuition. If the position doesn't feel like the right fit, keep looking. By following these tips, you'll be one step closer to getting your dream job.

<http://www.theglasshammer.com/news/2014/01/03/finding-women-friendly-employers/>