

# Report: Women may need different tactics to get ahead

## Taking Charge

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Just when you think you have things pretty much figured out, along comes a study that shakes up your thinking.

That happened to me when I read a new report called, "The Myth of the Ideal Worker: Does Doing All the Right Things Really Get Women Ahead?"

The short answer to that question is no, according to Catalyst, an international research and advocacy organization that focuses on women in the workplace. But, as is the case with everything, the answer really is more complicated than that.

Let's take a look at what Catalyst found. The report starts by spelling out what the "ideal worker" looks like – at least according to self-help books and business pundits. It's someone who:

- Actively seeks high-profile assignments.
- Rubs shoulders with influential leaders.
- Communicates openly and directly about career aspirations.
- Lets her skills and willingness to contribute be known to the boss.
- Seeks out new opportunities.
- Learns the political landscape or unwritten rules of the company.
- Isn't afraid to ask for help.

"Mastery of these skills seemingly paves the way to the top. But do these tactics really get high potentials to the top? And do the same strategies work for women and men?" the Catalyst report asked.

To get at the answers, Catalyst surveyed 3,345 "high potential" workers who had graduated from MBA programs. More than

half of the men and women surveyed said they utilized the full gamut of commonly accepted career-enhancing strategies. But – and it's an important but – the tactics paid off more for men than women. Even when women did "all the right things," they advanced less than their male counterparts and did not see their paychecks grow as much.

The Catalyst report found that a couple of tactics did work for women. They benefited the most when they made their achievements known to their bosses and gained access to powerful people by networking and getting involved in high-profile projects. The report said it found little evidence to support the notion that women lag behind men because they "don't ask" for career-boosting opportunities. "Maybe it's not that women don't ask, but that men don't have to?" the report suggested.

So what's the bottom line?

For starters, the findings suggest that women can't be content to think that if they work hard and put in long hours that they'll get moved up the ladder and get raises just like the men. They have to take the step and make sure that their accomplishments are known to key people in their organizations. Women also have to put the energy into building networks within and outside their organizations because who you know

does matter, whether you're a woman or a man.

The Catalyst report doesn't let companies off the hook. The report says that organizations risk losing high-potential women if they undervalue them. Companies also won't attract the best hires if they don't have a reputation for retaining and promoting talented women. It takes a plan on the part of management to build a diverse bench of talent. The commitment has to involve setting aside gender-based preconceptions and assumptions so that the right people with the right skills are placed in the right positions.

The Main Line Society of Professional Women is happy to help promote the goals of a dynamic business environment that maximizes the talents of both women and men. We offer opportunities for skill-building, networking and contribution to nonprofit organizations doing admirable work in our communities.

Come join us at our last event of the year on Nov. 30, where Tracy Davidson will moderate Donna Allie and Lynn Doyle as they discuss how they turned their ideas into award-winning enterprises. Every event in 2011 has sold out, so make sure to visit [www.sppwmainline.com](http://www.sppwmainline.com) to register early.

I'd like to reiterate a finding in the Catalyst report: "Women also have to put the

energy into building networks within and outside their organizations because who you know does matter." I hope to see you at an event soon, ready to grow your connections and your Rolodex.