



Reel Women: Lessons from Female TV Executives on Managing Work and Real Life [and Executive Commentary]

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Reel women: Lessons from female TV executives on managing work and real life

Ellen A. Ensher, Susan E. Murphy, and Sherry E. Sullivan

Executive Overview

The entertainment industry provides a rich context for understanding how executives address the challenges of managing their careers, employees, and work-personal life balance. In particular, we explore what is unique about the entertainment industry and how 15 high-profile women TV executives have succeeded in managing these challenges. For managing their careers, we found that there were several unique aspects with implications for other executives, such as the importance of being perceived as having the creative "Midas touch" and the necessity of developing a 360-degree approach towards networking. We learned that while managing in Hollywood presents a few unique challenges, it does not necessarily present specialized solutions. Finally, for managing work-personal life balance, we found that some major differences emerged with respect to values and philosophy towards managing work and personal life, at both the organizational and personal levels, that seemed to be unique. The women in this study defied the traditional concept of "having it all" and offered expanded definitions of family. In sum, this study increases our knowledge of the entertainment industry overall, the unique ways in which women executives in the entertainment business respond to specific challenges, and provides lessons pertinent to executives in other industries.

"I was sitting in a production meeting recently, intently trying to find budget cuts to present to the director of the movie One Fine Day when I was struck afresh by a scene that had become commonplace: Every person in the room was a woman—the executive producer, writer, co-producer, unit production manager and even the accountant. It was a bottom-line type meeting, in that we were charged with cutting half a million dollars from our budget that afternoon. I realized how impossible this sight would have been 15 years ago when I arrived in Hollywood (circa 1981)."

—L. Obst, Producer (Sleepless in Seattle, One Fine Day).¹

In the past 20 years, women in the entertainment industry have made tremendous progress in attaining high-level executive and production positions. Women now occupy approximately 30% of the executive slots at the senior vice president or

higher level at the major film studios.² *Hollywood Reporter's* annual list of the most powerful women in Hollywood shows women holding top positions (e.g., CEO, production chair, or president) for more than 20 organizations including major networks and studios. Moreover, smaller independent production companies run by women such as the Carsey-Werner Company have proliferated in recent years.³ In sum, women executives and producers in the entertainment industry are making significant gains in power and position.

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How does the progress of women executives in Hollywood compare with their counterparts in other industries? The proportion of women managers has increased from 16% in 1970 to 46% in 2000.⁴

However, among the Fortune 500, approximately 97% of vice presidents and above are men.⁵ Women own 26% of the businesses in the United States. However, of the \$35.6 billion in venture-capital investments in 1999, only \$1.8 billion went to women-owned businesses.⁶ Although women have made significant inroads into management, the progress of women into the highest echelons has been stymied. The "glass ceiling" is not new. What is new is that women executives behind the scenes in Hollywood are making greater progress to move into the upper-management levels than are women in other industries.

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In her 1989 book *When Giants Learn to Dance* and her 1993 reissue of the book, *Men and Women of the Corporation*, Rosabeth Moss Kanter identified three major shifts taking place in the modern organization—they are: (1) the shift from employee loyalty to a particular firm to loyalty to a profession or project; (2) the shift from employee reliance on organizational capital to reliance on one's own reputational capital for career advancement; and (3) the shift from power inherent in status and command rights to power from expertise and the ability to maintain relationships.⁷ These shifts have led, according to Kanter, to three new challenges in managing (1) careers, (2) employees, and (3) the balance of work with family. The shifts are particularly evident in the entertainment industry and give special importance to how men and women in that industry define and meet these three major managerial challenges. Although these challenges face all executives, the number of executive women in the entertainment industry provides a particularly rich opportunity to examine how successful women TV executives are meeting them.

To begin, we provide a brief overview of the entertainment industry and women's roles in this industry. Next, we discuss how the women executives met the three challenges mentioned above of managing careers, employees, and achieving work/personal balance and relate these findings to past research. Throughout our analysis we ask the question, "How are women executives in Hollywood meeting the three challenges in comparison to what is known about how other women executives meet these same challenges?" Simulta-

neously we ask, "Are there any features of these challenges that are unique to women executives in Hollywood, and, if so, are the solutions these women executives offer for handling them any different for this particular industry?" Finally, we close with a discussion of lessons that can be learned from the experiences of these successful women, and we address how their experiences can inform and be of interest to executives in other industries.

The Entertainment Industry

The entertainment business is the second-largest industry in the world (after aeronautics) and is the number-one U.S. export.⁸ As an industry, entertainment has always played by its own rules. The entertainment industry seldom relies on traditional organizational structures, depending instead on a seemingly never-ending supply of creative personnel whose loyalty is to their profession, guild, or personal network, rather than to their studio or TV network. In response, many individuals in Hollywood have developed portable knowledge and skills and make their living as freelancers, part-timers, or project workers.⁹ Experts predict that in the next decade 65% of all workers will be contingent employees, outsourced workers, or contract specialists.¹⁰ The entertainment industry's reliance on contingency workers and project work is likely the wave of the future for other industries.¹¹ In sum, the entertainment industry provides a model for other industries that are beginning to operate in similar ways.

Women in the Entertainment Industry

Women have had a long history of facing challenges in the entertainment industry. The rapid growth of television in the mid-1950s, together with governmental deregulation of the studio system, opened up more opportunities for women. They began to move into some of the more powerful positions with the resurgence of independent production companies and increased outlets for entertainment during the 1950s and through the 1980s. The burgeoning influence of the cable industry in the past few decades has also provided new frontiers for women to find managerial and leadership opportunities.¹² This article focuses on women's career experiences in the entertainment industry because women executives and producers have become an influential part of the executive ranks in a relatively short span of time (i.e., several decades). Moreover, while the entertainment industry is certainly unique in many respects, its depen-

dence on workers whose allegiance is to their profession rather than to an organization is a trend affecting many other industries as well. Therefore, the strategies that these high-profile women have followed in meeting the challenges of managing careers, employees, and work-family balance can provide valuable lessons to other professionals facing these same challenges.

Study Participants

We interviewed 15 TV executives in Los Angeles representing networks such as ABC, NBC, CBS, and their affiliates; cable stations such as the Disney Channel and Fox Family; and independent production companies with movies and TV series on Lifetime, Animal Planet, and PBS. A complete list of these women, their titles and organizations/affiliations, and the TV shows they produced can be found in Table A1 in the Appendix. Ten of the women had a track record of rapid movement within large organizations and held titles such as vice president, senior VP, and executive VP; one woman was already at the top of her organization (Anne Sweeney president of ABC Cable Networks Group and Disney Channel Worldwide). Four of the women owned their own independent production companies or worked as free-lance writers/producers. All of these women have or recently had a high degree of creative control, influence, and/or production responsibility in the cable and network television industry. These women were well educated (all had college degrees and several had master's degrees) and ranged in age from their late twenties to mid-forties with the average interviewee being in the mid-thirties. (See the Appendix for a more detailed description of the methodology.)¹³

Challenge #1: Reel Women Managing Their Careers

In her ground-breaking study "Getting Anointed for Advancement: The Case of Executive Women," Lisa Mainiero described how 55 high-profile executive women managed risky and innovative internal projects to gain credibility and break through the glass ceiling.¹⁴ Like the executives in Mainiero's study, many of the women in our study also engaged in intrapreneurial activities to rise through the ranks of their companies. The women we interviewed shared stories of being encouraged to be innovative within their own organizations and did so by embracing learning, taking initiative, and spending extra hours on the job. Ultimately, their intrapreneurial pursuits paid off

for both their careers and their organizations.¹⁵

Marette Larson, past local-area Emmy award winner, took an intrapreneurial approach by devoting extra hours at work to learning new skills, thereby adding value or capacity to her organization and her own career.¹⁶

"I completely taught myself how to use the Avid [editing system]. This way when time was short and we couldn't get an editor, I could step in and edit myself. I would stay late after everyone left at 7:00 p.m. and train myself. At first I received zero glory for this. But after awhile it allowed me to be more creative and gain greater control of projects. It is one of my accomplishments I am most proud of."

Anne McGrail, writer ("Badlands") and former production executive, took a boundary-spanner approach when she made a transition from one professional identity to another as well as from one organization to another.¹⁷ Boundary spanners like Anne typically not only change fields or disciplines, but also business areas. Already enjoying success in her chosen area of producing, Anne decided to pursue the new challenge of writing:

"I just made a big job transition from producing to writing. Now I am a writer on a new show. Before this I was a development executive—for example, my last year at CBS I helped to develop 10 scripts, we got four picked up for pilots, and three of those went on the air. As a development executive, you work such crazy hours that it's rare to get out of work before 7:30 or 8:00 p.m., and then you're usually going home with at least one script to read. For one of those shows that I helped develop, I got to know the show-runner and he said, why don't you write one of these episodes? And I got permission—I went through the channels, legal department, my bosses, and they all said fine. I wrote an episode, and it got me into the Writers Guild, and I did it after hours on Saturdays and Sundays. This experience helped me to get to where I am now."

The entertainment business is notorious for quickly and brutally punishing executives and talent whose projects fail to be commercially successful.

Although learning new skills is valued in the entertainment industry, executives need to add to

the successful ongoing practice of existing skills because the costs of failure are very high and usually quite noticeable. An oft-quoted aphorism about Hollywood encapsulates this attitude: "You are only as good as your last picture." Indeed, the entertainment business is notorious for quickly and brutally punishing executives and talent whose projects fail to be commercially successful.¹⁸ At the same time, being seen as a creative person with sellable ideas can catapult one ahead of peers regardless of education or even previous experience. Being willing to embrace learning was a common theme mentioned by these women and well stated by Anne Sweeney:

"I believe your job has to be based on your weaknesses as well as your strengths. Because if you're not taking a job where you can stretch, then I don't see the value of taking it at all. Being scared is a good thing."

Like Mainiero's executives, the women in our study sought advice and support from a diverse group of professionals. Hollywood, as a 'community of practice,' requires that individuals develop their own social capital within this community by networking.¹⁹ This involvement with a community network of professionals is consistent with Kanter's observation that individuals have less loyalty to a particular firm and more loyalty to their career. Many of the women in our study spoke of focusing their social lives around work contacts and friendships. They often sought to build their community networks by participating in activities such as hiking groups, monthly women-only industry parties, and socializing with other moms in the entertainment industry to gain information and support. Moreover, they also spoke of the importance of forging good relationships with those below them in status as well those above them (both inside and outside their own organizations) as "you never know who will be on top."

The women in our study were keenly aware of the requirements for success in the industry: embracing learning, developing relationships above and below their level, and taking charge of their own careers.

Most of the women also realized early in their careers the importance of maintaining their professional reputations through the quality of their work and assumed accountability for their own career development by getting involved in projects where

the quality of what they did could provide evidence of who they were and what kind of work they did. They knew that the next step in their careers would be heavily influenced by the step they were on now and managed their careers carefully. Nancy Redford at Fox Family Channel said:

"No one's going to get you your new job. You're responsible for your career. Be mindful that each time you do something, it's going to have some implication. How you're going to handle the next situation that's presented to you and that choice is going to define you."

In sum, the women in our study were keenly aware of the requirements for success in the industry: embracing learning, developing relationships above and below their level, and taking charge of their own careers. They worked hard and put in long hours in order to gain credibility and a reputation for work excellence. Women in other industries also recognize that high performance is a key driver of their career success.

A survey of 461 women executives and 325 women CEOs indicated that consistently exceeding performance standards was the number-one strategy for breaking the glass ceiling.²⁰ Moreover, with the increasing shift as identified by Kanter towards relying on one's own reputation rather than that of the employing organization, we will continue to see more workers thinking of themselves as working for themselves. These Hollywood women demonstrated an extraordinary ability to take a multi-faceted approach to managing their careers by excelling at what they did in the present moment, yet also preparing for the future by constantly learning new skills and developing relationships with a wide variety of industry professionals.

Challenge #2: Reel Women Managing Employees

As previously discussed, Rosabeth Moss Kanter's identification of a modern shift in leadership style from the traditional command and control to leadership based on expertise and the ability to maintain relationships can be clearly seen in the entertainment industry. For the women in our study, an important leadership challenge is having the ability to understand the creative process and the skill to facilitate others' creativity in their organizations, while at the same time ensuring financial success. The management dilemma between control and empowerment is faced when motivating and managing employees in environments of innovation and creativity.²¹

One way in which the women in our study encouraged creativity was to provide a work environment that would let individual creative talents flourish and provide opportunities for skill-enhancing experiences.

"It is important for people working in the industry to understand how to make adjustments and changes on-the-fly to make sure the process runs smoothly. I work to help new employees in the industry learn to multitask, set priorities, and be flexible."

—Tara Sandler, President, Pie Town Productions

In most management situations, managers must carefully balance issues of delegation and control, reliance on formal organizational power versus informal employee acceptance of authority, and sharing information to gain loyalty versus holding on to knowledge to retain power.²² The women in our study went to great lengths to find the best balance for these issues, especially through the strategy of empowerment. For example, one woman found that she needed to develop her successor before management would promote her to the next level.

"It's just the same kind of way of putting puzzle pieces together. I brought her in, I shared my office with her, and I just let her do it, and trained her until it was her second nature. I had to trust that it would work."

—Bonnie Brennan, Executive Producer/
Co-Owner, Visty-Brennan Productions

This type of training and empowerment of team members was often mentioned as an important way to teach knowledge of the business. For some, managerial control meant that their organization reflected their own values. This organization may constitute the project they staffed, or reporting relationships within the organization. The women in our study illustrate how a successful resolution of the control paradox can be found through empowerment. While employee control comes from the need to design the organization to meet one's own needs as leader of that organization, control can be successfully given away to an empowered workforce that shares the manager's dream of the new organization.

"After saying for eight years that if I were ever the boss I would never treat people like that, having the opportunity to give people the freedom to excel and to treat people decently

was great. It is the way I always wanted somebody to treat me."

—Kim Mandell, Freelance Writer/Producer

Another important challenge for these executives was managing in a creative environment. Many professionals in technical and creative fields find that as they become increasingly skilled on the technical or creative side, they are asked to move into management positions. This is difficult for some managers who enjoy the technical or creative sides of the job more than the management role. In addition, this problem is often compounded by the lack of management training. Instead, there is the assumption that if you were good at the creative or technical side, you will automatically do well in the leadership role. While some women in our study embraced the additional role, others found a variety of solutions to balance their managerial with their technical or creative roles. As one woman noted in her advice, "Don't be too much of an artist; it's still about business!" Others sought out work that allowed them to combine both management and creativity.

There is the assumption that if you were good at the creative or technical side, you will automatically do well in the leadership role.

"I do feel more satisfied on a regular basis, I think, than some of my colleagues. For me it's actually about the work. It's about the art of the work. The art of the management . . . the art of the art that I'm working on. I mean I really enjoy being in a position where you work with writers. My skill set is as someone who likes to put together things, find a property, and put the right people around it to help best articulate it."

—Nancy Redford, Vice President,
Fox Family Channel

Some of the women, however, found a balance between management and creativity by managing their own production companies, which allowed them to have direct control over the creative side of the work.

"I loved the opportunity of working there [as an associate producer], but I was now frustrated creatively. There I had taken on all of the production managing and coordinating challenge, but I really didn't have an outlet

for my own creativity. So finally I begged for the opportunity to step out of the management box."

—Bonnie Brennan, Executive Producer/
Co-Owner, Visty-Brennan Productions

In sum, the women executives in our study were especially aware of the challenges in their unique work environments and thought carefully about the best ways to address them. They understood the necessity of taking control to ensure high-quality products but also of empowering others to allow their creativity to flourish. Many management theorists have suggested that the leadership challenge of the 21st century is that leaders must give up power rather than accumulate it.²³ Our findings mirror what they and Kanter suggested. The women interviewed were aware that a creative work environment required management based on gaining employee acceptance of their expertise and relationships, rather than control from a position of formal organizational authority. Moreover, the women in our study often talked of finding their own personal style of management that was different from that of typical managers in Hollywood. Many of their stories demonstrated the importance of high-level social skills for managing the multitude of demands in their fast-paced and unstructured work environments. Perhaps more importantly, the way in which these women met these leadership challenges provides lessons for a wide variety of managers in today's knowledge-based economy.

Challenge #3: Reel Women Managing Personal Lives

Most professional women in a wide variety of industries struggle with the dual pressures of succeeding professionally and at the same time having a rich personal life. Managing multiple-role stress and overload is difficult given society's contradictory, gender-based stereotypes regarding work and family roles.²⁴ From the 1980s to the early 1990s, we saw the rise of the "superwoman myth" in which women were expected to perform effectively in a number of roles ranging from breadwinner to spouse to mother to elder-care provider. Although work-family balance has previously been considered a "woman's issue," recent research demonstrates that men are also very likely to have difficulty managing work-family balance.²⁵

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A recent review of the literature on work-family balance found that work-family conflict relates to a number of work, non-work, and stress-related outcomes.²⁶ Work-family conflict can have significantly deleterious effects on individuals, causing decreased life, marital, family, and leisure satisfaction, depression, substance abuse, and burnout as well as decreased organizational commitment and increased absenteeism and turnover.²⁷

There has been, however, no research examining the effect of work-family balance on women in the entertainment business. Therefore, we asked the women entertainment executives to tell us about their experiences of balancing work and their personal lives. We found that in general these women had three basic approaches to balancing their various work and personal roles: (1) career primary, (2) sequential, and (3) compromising.

The first approach, career primary, is alluring for those who find that they gain a great deal of positive regard from being mainly focused on their careers. Several of our interviewees speculated that focusing only on career to the exclusion of family or a personal life contributed to their success in the Hollywood culture. In general, working long hours and sacrificing personal relationships is still seen by some as an inevitable price to be paid for success. As Julie Resh, Fox Family Channel, noted: "What balance? I have no balance. It's 100 percent work." In this approach a woman may choose not to have children yet have supportive personal relationships that provide a satisfying personal and family life. For example, writer/producer Anne McGrail challenged the conventional definition of "having it all" and balance.

"I think there is something loaded in the term 'having it all' because it means a woman who has it all means that it is integral that she has children. But for some it is not. And it is a good thing for the population that some people feel this way because we have enough people [in the world]. So I do think I have it all, and I question why the definition involves children. I'm not maternal. I don't think I want children. I could but I don't think I want to. I don't know if I am old-fashioned or just pragmatic because I don't get having kids and then dump-

ing them off with the nanny. It works out well for me because I love being an aunt."

—Anne McGrail, Writer/Producer

According to Elinor Burkett, author of *Baby Boon*, Anne's sentiments may be part of an increasing trend as Burkett points out that 20% of baby boomer women intentionally choose not to become mothers.²⁸

Another of our participants also mentioned that while having no children aided in balance, achieving balance was still difficult.

"Balancing work and family is very difficult. So much of what is expected in terms of reading scripts or socializing bleeds over into personal time. I try to make time for a personal life by saying "No" to people and being firm without feeling bad. I feel like my husband and I need a traditional wife to help with the day-to-day details. Having no kids helps though."

—Lindy Dekoven, Executive VP, NBC

Others who took this career-primary approach mentioned that having a supportive spouse was integral to their ability to balance work and personal lives successfully. Specifically, Judy Meyers, owner of an independent production company with several shows on the air, indicated that *"I don't have kids so it is not a big deal for me. My husband also loves to cook. He definitely takes on the caretaker role."*

Demographics suggest that many women executives in the industry are choosing this approach. We found that of the 101 women who consistently appeared in the last five years of *The Hollywood Reporter's* list of the most powerful women in Hollywood, approximately 60% were not married and approximately 70% had no children. The profiles of the 15 women we spoke to mirrored these characteristics, as 60% were not married and 70% had no children.

Other executive women in this study are taking a sequential approach.²⁹ They focus first on their careers and plan to become more family focused later in life. This pattern of changing emphasis from work to family is quite typical of individuals as they move through their careers.³⁰

"I love my job and want to move up. But ultimately my goal is to be married and have a family. I don't think you can do both well. I need to be a full-time mom."

—Marette Larson, Executive Producer, KABC

Still other women we interviewed, seeking some balance between career and family focus, took a compromising approach. These women sought to find compromises between family and career responsibilities and obligations.

Of the 101 women who consistently appeared in the last five years of The Hollywood Reporter's list of the most powerful women in Hollywood, approximately 60% were not married and approximately 70% had no children.

"I have stopped beating myself about a lot of stuff [related to work-family balance]. I have kind of a list in my head of things I will get done myself and things I just won't do anymore. I won't go shopping every weekend. Instead, if my kids have birthday parties to go to, then I shop on the Internet. We also made some decisions when we moved out here. You can be out every single night of the week. Or you can have a personal life. And for that first year, it was just so cool to go to all these movie premieres and parties. After about six months of it, my husband and I looked at each other and said, 'I'm so tired.' You know we are working like crazy people and we haven't seen the kids. So now we have readjusted our life to be more focused on the four of us together and not on the outside."

—Anne Sweeney, President, ABC Cable Networks Group and Disney Channel Worldwide

Some achieved this compromise by the use of flexible and part-time schedules and the setting of priorities.

"I had my first baby, and then I went to CBS as director of current programming. I worked putting shows on the air, and it was fun. I did a job-share program there for two of those three years, which was very unusual. We had a schedule where she [my coworker] was in the office in the morning and I was in the office in the afternoons. We did that for two of my three years there, and then new management arrived and I was not able to have this arrangement anymore. These jobs can take over your life. If you do it wrong, there's a career price or family price to pay. So, every day is a challenge."

—Susie Norris Epstein, Former VP, Disney Channel

Several found that their organizations were willing to be flexible because they did not want to lose valuable employees. Some of the women in our study championed changes in their organizations that helped both men and women employees achieve better work-family balance. As Anne Sweeney, recently ranked as one of the most powerful women in Hollywood, remarked:

"I have a policy for the first day of school for everyone who has children or if you are important to a kid. If you have a niece or nephew who adores you and you want to be there to take that child to their first day of school, then you can. I think the first day of school is one of the most critical days for a kid."

Research in other industries has found that such flexibility is one of the keys to successfully managing work and personal life.³¹ Fortunately, more companies are beginning to offer flextime and flexplace.³² A recent survey of 6,451 IBM employees found that flextime or flexplace has definite benefits for the company and its employees such as fewer lost workdays and absenteeism. Moreover, some employees are more willing to stay with a firm that permits more flexibility.

"Work-family balance is a HUGE issue, and I hear about it constantly from women my age. We find that we are really on a tough corner now because you're damned if you do and damned if you don't. You're damned if you decide to work full-time, and then you're damned if you decide to work part-time."

—Stacie Griffith, Producer, Today Show

Stacie further explained that because of the flexibility in her current position, she was happy to stay where she was.

In sum, the women executives in our study are breaking the traditional linear career patterns and forging new paths that permit them to find their own work/non-work balance based on their own values and needs. As they enact these strategies, some are also changing the cultures of their organizations and encouraging their employees to create more balance in their own lives. Women, especially in powerful executive positions, should be more proactive in making changes in the workplace that encourage more work-family balance.

Reel Women and Real Wisdom

In this final section, we discuss what is unique and what is not about the entertainment business and

offer suggestions for executives in other industries facing their own challenges in managing their careers, employees, and real lives.

Managing Careers

The women in our study, as well as women in previous research, indicated the importance of embracing learning and developing innovative projects. Many of the women in our study worked within their own organizations to develop new projects. Others began their own firms and developed both new projects and new organizational cultures. One unique aspect of the entertainment industry emphasized by our interviewees is the importance of having or being perceived to have the creative "Midas touch" (e.g., the ability to write and produce a hit TV show). Hollywood has an insatiable appetite for new and creative ideas to turn into lucrative TV shows and movies; thus creativity is the currency of exchange—it is power. Those who are seen to have it accumulate connections, resources and success. Those who do not have it must offer something valuable to those who do.

Hollywood has an insatiable appetite for new and creative ideas to turn into lucrative TV shows and movies; thus creativity is the currency of exchange—it is power.

Some of the women we studied exhibited behaviors best characterized as those of "gambler careerists."³³ The women worked to develop projects that if successful would bring them the necessary resources to develop new, more expensive, and bigger projects. Success led to greater power and status in the industry. If the project was unsuccessful, a woman lost power and status. She may then have had to work on lesser projects in order to rebuild her power base. Therefore, some of the women were continuously gambling, hoping to win more and more power. Given the culture of Hollywood that one is "only as good as the last project," these behaviors were encouraged and rewarded.

This ability to generate ideas and put them into action is valued in many other industries besides the entertainment business, such as the high-tech industry. What does this mean for women in entertainment and perhaps for others seeking to learn from the successes of our interviewed executives? These women's experiences suggest that professionals in other industries should determine what is the currency of value

in their industry—be it ideas, education, or credit—and move quickly to either develop or trade for this currency. If, as is true in the entertainment business, the valued currency is creativity, then professionals should thoughtfully make decisions that help to develop themselves creatively both privately and professionally. Executives seeking to emulate the success of these women should not only spend time thoughtfully considering what projects will lead to success and are worthy of their efforts but should also commit the time and effort necessary to make sure their successes are known. Lindy DeKoven mentioned that when interviewing she noticed that women tend to come in and listen, and men sell themselves and talk about who they know. Those who can both listen and sell tend to be rare and very successful. Thus, these women were not only smart gamblers and risk takers but were also able marketers and publicists for their successes. In sum, based on these women's experiences, we suggest that other executives should aggressively define, develop, and market their own currency that has value in their careers.

Women as well as men across all industries and professions are often exhorted to network, develop their relationships with others in their professional community, and learn to communicate effectively. While this generic career advice may well apply to both men and women, there are some surprising and important exceptions to these well-known rules based on the unique nature of entertainment. Unlike executives in many other industries or professions, these entertainment executives found no traditional or consistent set of qualifications for key positions (e.g., a graduate degree or years of work experience) or a clear-cut map to success. They found that working long hours, taking risks, and translating even mundane tasks into learning opportunities helped them build but did not guarantee a successful reputation. Our women in this study had a wide variety of educational backgrounds, and most ascended quickly to their next positions by virtue of a "hot idea" or valuable connection. Like their male counterparts, these women spoke of the importance of creating opportunities for luck which, coupled with talent and timing, seemed critical for career success.

The women also noted the importance of becoming a recognized part of a community of practice through constant networking and developing social capital by nurturing long-term relationships across organizational and project boundaries. A successful TV show or film project can catapult the creator sev-

eral levels ahead, even if that person lacks the background, skills, or experience that any new position might seemingly require. For example, a high school drop-out whose past experience was that of a production assistant can be running a department of MBA luminaries and older, more experienced personnel if her last project was successful. As several of the women noted, one's current production assistant could be one's boss in six months. This situation is very different from the norm in other industries where typically most professionals concern themselves with networking up or perhaps laterally but rarely with those of lower status.

A high school drop-out whose past experience was that of a production assistant can be running a department of MBA luminaries and older, more experienced personnel if her last project was successful.

Career realities faced by women in the entertainment industry have important implications for professionals in other industries as well. In today's career environment, job mobility is often seen as positive, and inexperienced workers with a new idea or perhaps a tech-savvy approach to work may indeed be catapulted ahead of their more experienced co-workers in industries other than entertainment, such as technology, fashion, or even academia. Therefore, the implication here is that executives in other industries would be well advised to adopt a 360-degree approach to participating in their own communities of practice through which they actively include and help people in their community that are below, at the same level, and even above them in status.

To develop career connections, we echo past researchers' advice to work on high-visibility projects and with many different people.³⁴ Although the advice to network is often given, there is little specific information about how to do it. The women in our study spoke of befriending would-be allies and even competitors. One woman shared confidentially, "I go to lunch regularly with my counterpart, and we share information like what writers are thinking, who's fresh, what's the buzz. We are on opposite sides now, but we are friends because you never know [where your next job is coming from]." While this tactic might have its disadvantages, professionals in many other industries, such as medicine and science, have often found it beneficial to share information with competitors, and this may be an indicator of the grow-

ing trend of feeling a sense of loyalty to one's professional community, rather than to an organization.

Others spoke of developing a set of wooing strategies replete with tokens of appreciation (the gourmet gift basket and spa services are perennial favorites), exchanges of information, and access to connections. Men and women in other industries would be well advised to determine the norms of their own industries in terms of appropriate wooing strategies and then make efforts to incorporate these into their own career strategies.

Managing Employees

It is no secret that managing knowledge workers takes a specialized skill set. For these employees, knowledge, such as how to make a low-budget production look high budget, is the means of production and is owned by the worker.³⁵ Moreover, managing knowledge workers in a creative environment requires management that encourages autonomy and risk taking and expects participative decision-making.³⁶ The management lessons we learned from women executives in entertainment were important, but perhaps not so unique. While there were specific idiosyncrasies of the industry, the lessons are applicable across a wide range of organizational settings.

The women in our study understood the importance of effective leadership to producing high-quality creative products, which taught them the need to balance managerial control with true empowerment if they wished to be successful. We also found that these executives needed to know how to lead when unexpectedly called. The entertainment industry shows us rapid promotions that were probably only otherwise seen at the height of the Internet industry. The group we studied told stories of being assigned a management position with no advanced warning. To prepare for these rapid promotions, one must seek out management skills training and experiences wherever possible. This means devising an individual development plan that begins with a self-assessment to determine how to gain leadership experiences and management education that will develop effective skills.³⁷

The entertainment industry shows us rapid promotions that were probably only otherwise seen at the height of the Internet industry.

The culture and ensuing norms of the entertainment industry do present a unique challenge for managers, but the solution is common: change what isn't working as best you can. The perceived importance of the creative side of the industry often allows bad management practices like yelling at employees or firing them on a whim to be tolerated. The glamour of the entertainment business attracts many who will tolerate these bad practices, in the hope that they will be on the team of a creative winner. There is always another person waiting in line hoping to break into the industry.

Hollywood also has been known for promoting a culture of blame in which managers were less likely to solve problems and more likely to place blame wherever possible. However, many of the women to whom we spoke seemed to feel that Hollywood is in the midst of transition, with employees less willing to overlook illegal behavior, controlling management practices, or ill-tempered managers. For example, the executives we interviewed believe that sexual harassment, which used to be legendary in Hollywood, is much less of a problem today, particularly at the managerial level.

These successful women executives also realize that coercive management practices may force employees to comply but ultimately result in less commitment to executing the managers' creative ideas. Coercive management does not breed the kind of creativity or loyalty that these women believe they need from their personnel to get the best results. These executives found that they either needed to change their organization's culture or start their own businesses and develop a culture of empowerment to gain the employee commitment and loyalty they sought. While changing an organization's culture may be a long-term solution and not always feasible, these executives believe, as did others reported in the research, that an incremental approach of small wins can develop an environment that encourages and rewards innovation.³⁸

A final challenge that is somewhat unique to the entertainment industry comes from the requirements of managing in a balkanized union environment.³⁹ Both within and between unions, there are competing needs and expectations. For example, within the Screen Actors Guild, a very small percentage of their members make over the approximately \$7,000 a year to qualify for benefits.⁴⁰ A large percentage of their members (some estimate as high as 97%) are not making their living as actors, yet their votes carry more weight than votes of the small numbers who are working. This challenge underscores the increasing need for a lead-

ership style that facilitates communication across various constituent groups.⁴¹

These communication skills require high levels of emotional intelligence and may be developed through stretch assignments that challenge the leader. However, the larger message, one we gleaned from our executives and which appears to be the hallmark for many effective managers, is to understand the big picture and to be able to form relationships across groups. For example Kim Mandell, a freelance writer/producer, remarked, "Everyone seems to know everyone in the industry. You need to be constantly vigilant of changing alliances—otherwise your credibility is jeopardized." We believe that forming alliances within and across organizations was another key determinant of their success, but this strategy is no secret to successful high-level managers in various industries.

In sum, we learned that managing in Hollywood presents a few unique challenges but does not provide many specialized solutions. From our interviews we saw that good management practices appear to be good management practices, regardless of the industry. True, one attends to the features of the situation and changes his or her style accordingly, but generally, creative workers require a specific type of management. Our analysis, however, does indicate that management of people in the entertainment industry is evolving. Many of our women were changing their work environments and utilizing management techniques that respect the individual and promote employee creativity and loyalty.

Managing Real Life

These women executives reported some interesting similarities and important differences regarding managing work and personal lives as compared to women in other industries. They found the balancing act between work and personal life to be just as vexing as their counterparts in other businesses did. The women in entertainment did not have a magic Hollywood recipe for success but instead utilized approaches (e.g., career primary, sequential, compromising) that have also been used by women in other industries. The Hollywood executives spoke of making conscious decisions daily to support their various approaches and the importance of being unwavering and unapologetic about their life choices.

Some major differences emerged with respect to values and philosophy towards managing work and personal life, at both the organizational and personal level, that seemed to be unique. First, the

women in our study overwhelmingly accepted diverse permutations of families and emphasized an expanded definition of family. Several of the women in this study defied the conventions of typical family life and instead questioned the norm of being married with children. These women emphasized the importance of examining work-personal life balance, rather than merely work-family life. This emphasis may well be a reflection of the politically liberal and diversity-friendly culture that is pervasive in the entertainment industry. These women's experiences with work-personal balance may already have an impact beyond their own lives as an analysis of TV shows and movies in late 2001 indicated a greater number of shows depicting diverse families (e.g., more single mothers during prime time) and work-personal life approaches.⁴²

Several of the women in this study defied the conventions of typical family life and instead questioned the norm of being married with children.

The experiences of women in our study related to balancing their work and personal lives have important implications for industries other than entertainment. All industries are seeing among their employees more single moms and dads, singles without children, and people with same-sex partners. Hollywood has a particularly accepting culture and attitude toward such diverse family permutations. This culture of acceptance actually helps creativity to flourish in entertainment, perhaps more so than in other industries where professionals may feel compelled to conform to a "cookie-cutter" approach to family and work. Thus, executives in organizations outside of entertainment who see creativity as a competitive advantage might adopt specific practices from the entertainment industry that foster cultures supportive of different types of employees and their balancing acts. One such practice for recruiting and retaining talent is offering benefits to employees with domestic partners, including same-sex partners. Making these employees feel accepted and helping them to balance work and family builds loyalty and commitment. Also, executives in other industries might examine how competing firms in the entertainment industry successfully work with each other and with a vast array of professional guilds and unions to ensure competitive pay, safe working conditions, and opportunities to recognize employee achievements (e.g., Directors Guild awards and Women in Film awards).

One of the unique aspects for the women in this study, related to managing their real lives on a per-

sonal level, was the blurring of boundaries between their work and personal lives. One positive aspect was that it forced them to learn to multi-task efficiently (e.g., pitch a new show idea to a colleague while attending a baby shower or hiking with friends). Others, however, admitted to a sense of frustration that their real life and all of their relationships seemed to be so integrated into work. Most indicated that the majority of their friends, spouses, and lovers all worked in the industry and that few events were truly purely social. While work and personal life may be consuming for executives in other industries as well, the extent of the overlap between boundaries in entertainment seemed extreme.

While work and personal life may be consuming for executives in other industries as well, the extent of the overlap between boundaries in entertainment seemed extreme.

The lessons here pertain to both individuals and organizations. The best way to manage one's real life in conjunction with managing one's career and employees is to carefully assess the costs and benefits of the blurred boundaries and make a decision about what is personally acceptable. As many of the women in this study had to do, it may be necessary to pursue entrepreneurial activities in order to gain that right balance. Moreover, in the words of one woman, *"Once you find your balance, it is hard to give it up because you suffer a terrible loss on one side or the other."* Conversely, women who do achieve the desired state of a seamless integration between work and family may be reticent to give it up for other opportunities. Thus, while executives in the entertainment business may be fortunate to work in an industry that in general respects diverse lifestyles, it can also cause one's real life to become nearly indistinguishable from one's "reel" life. In sum, executives in other industries would be well advised to take Anne McGrail's lead and carefully

consider what "having it all" means and whether they can or want to do so.

This study increases our knowledge of the entertainment industry overall, highlights the unique ways in which women executives in the entertainment business respond to specific challenges, and provides lessons pertinent to executives in other industries. The entertainment industry provides a rich context for understanding many of the challenges that managers face with respect to managing in a rapidly changing work environment. As the women in this study and the rest of the entertainment business develop in their careers, they will continue to have an impact on the "reel" stories we see on TV and film and, by their example, on the real lives of executives in other industries as well.

Appendix

Study participants were obtained through alumni lists and through other contacts in the industry, and we increased our sample by using the snowball technique.⁴³ With this technique, we asked each interviewee to recommend us to a colleague, usually at a different company, who met our criteria but had a different story to tell. All of the participants gave us permission to share their stories. Over a six-month period, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were approximately one hour in length and were tape-recorded and transcribed. For this study, open-ended questions were asked focusing on the challenges of managing careers, employees, and work-family balance. Additional information about these women was collected from their biographies obtained from their staff and through information from newspapers and trade journals. We used a specific qualitative data analysis technique.⁴⁴ In this technique, qualitative analysis should combine the purposes of identifying themes and finding new insights while also considering how these data fit within existing theories. The second approach we used to understand the interview data can most closely be defined as analytic induction, or what is referred to as analytic research.⁴⁵ Within this approach, the purpose is to fit data to existing explanations of social phenomena such as careers, leadership, and work-family balance. Throughout the analysis we paid particular attention to uncovering what is unique about working in Hollywood.

Table A
List of Study Participants and Affiliations

Name	Title	Organization	Produced shows for:	TV shows affiliated with:
Kate Adler	Former Vice President, Creative Affairs	WorldWide Pants, Inc. CBS	CBS	Letterman Show; Everybody Loves Raymond
Bonnie Brennan	Executive Producer/Co-owner	Visty-Brennan Productions	Animal Planet, Disney, PBS, TLC	Moorpark 247
Lindy DeKoven	Former Executive Vice President, miniseries and motion pictures for television, NBC Entertainment, and Longform Programming	NBC	NBC	Serving in Silence: Margaret Cannermeyer Story; Merlin; The Temptations
Ann Donahue	Writer/Producer	CBS	CBS	CSI
Stacie Griffith	Associate Producer	NBC	NBC	Today Show
Marette Larson	Sales account executive and executive producer of sales promotions	ABC	KABC local news affiliate	AM Los Angeles, Kids View
Kim Mandell	Writer/Producer	Free-lance	ABC, Lifetime, WB, Learning Channel	Mike and Maty; Extra; Designing for the Sexes
Anne McGrail	Writer-Producer	Free-lance	Fox, CBS	The Badland
Judy Meyers	Executive Producer/Co-owner	Free-lance	Animal Planet, Lifetime	Hollywood Unleashed; You Lie Like a Dog
Susie Norris-Epstein	Former Vice President of Development	Disney Channel	Disney Channel	Even Stevens; The Jersey
Nancy Redford	Vice President of Programming and Development	Fox Family Channel	Fox Family Channel	State of Grace
Julie Resh	Vice President of Development	Fox Family Channel	Fox Family Channel	Gladiators
Tara Sandler	President	Pie Town Productions	Learning Channel, HGTV	A Baby Story; Designers Challenge; Weekend Warrior
Anne Sweeney	President, ABC Cable Networks Group and Disney Channel Worldwide	Disney/ABC	Disney/ABC	Even Stevens; The Jersey; Lizzy McGuire
Laurie Zaks	Vice President, Comedy	CBS	CBS	Everybody Loves Raymond

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Executive Commentary

June E.K. Delano
Eastman Kodak Company

One of the most interesting ideas in "Reel Women" is the question it raises and subtly answers: Are these talented women successful because the Hollywood culture is changing, or is the Hollywood culture changing because of these talented women? Culture is created by individuals doing their daily activities in certain ways over a period of time. When diverse players are introduced, they do things differently and the culture gradually changes. It was impossible to read about these women without believing that they are not only creating entertainment and profits, but they are in all likelihood creating a new Hollywood culture. The authors acknowledge that without much fanfare, but I mention it first because these women and their environment are so clearly acting upon each other.

The stories of these Hollywood executives were very much like my experience with women executives in general and with women executives at Kodak. Several points were particularly interesting.

A willingness to embrace learning is a common theme among these women and is generally considered a prerequisite for executive success. At Kodak, it is embedded in the nine expectations we have for all executives. However, the quote from Anne Sweeney made clear that learning is not all sweetness and light:

I believe your job has to be based on your weaknesses as well as your strengths. Because if you're not taking a job where you can stretch, then I don't see the value of taking it at all. Being scared is a good thing.

It takes a certain kind of person to step up to a career where "being scared is a good thing." Over the years, I have heard many successful and powerful executives use words like scared, terror, fear, and anxiety as they describe their careers and the challenges they have faced. These same executives will also say they have enjoyed their careers. So perhaps it is important to recognize that being an executive is like riding a roller coaster—for some it's fun and for others it's torture. These Hollywood women may be changing and humanizing their culture, but they still work in high-pressure environments that would be toxic for many people.

On a similar theme, the way these Hollywood success stories define work-life balance would be familiar to other executive women and, I suspect, completely absurd to many non-executive women. While there are opportunities to make executive lives more sane—and these women seem to have discovered many of them—there is no escaping the reality of an executive career. The expectations are higher, the hours longer, the risks greater, the stress more omnipresent, and the rewards potentially much larger than was true for the jobs most people held before becoming executives.

In coaching high-performing women, I have discovered the importance of sorting out whether they really understand and aspire to an executive life. In many cases, they think it is the natural progression of a star performer rather than a deliberate choice of work and lifestyle. And they expect the executive workplace to accommodate their personal needs and choices in the same way their current workplace does. Unfortunately, this does

not often happen. Despite generous leave policies, child-care support, flexible work policies, and other ingredients of a work-life balanced environment, it is simply not the nature of executive work to be balanced. The statistics on these Hollywood women and their interview comments prove it to be true.

Another aspect of the research, however, is that these women put a priority on enabling a balanced life for others. Anne Sweeney's policy for the first day of school was a wonderful example of the impact she can have on others and on the culture in general. Here at Kodak, we have many examples of women setting policies and expectations that are friendly to diverse lifestyles and make it easier for people to do their jobs well. Once the women break the ground, the rest of the organization often follows the same path.

Finally, I was intrigued by the way these women described the balancing act of leadership—probably the greatest challenge facing contemporary organizations. The interviews showed that these women are business savvy and focused on profits. They are also highly creative and focused on the artistic side of their work. Clearly, they are able to make hard business decisions and deliver bad news when they have to. But they are also empowering and know how to create a work environment in which creative people thrive. This ambidextrous leadership style is striking and a great model for organizations struggling with finding good leaders

(which are apparently most organizations, since recent surveys show that leadership is one of the top challenges perceived by CEOs).

Today's organizations—certainly large global companies like Kodak—are simply too complex and diversified for a single leadership style to work. Kodak's number one leadership expectation is headlined "Adaptability" and includes the ability to deal with ambiguity, conflicting realities, and paradox. It underlies an ability to deal with diverse cultures, changing markets, new business models, and other realities of today's world. It is not a leadership expectation we would have seen a decade ago, so it is interesting that it is characteristic of the Hollywood women executives in the research. I think the authors are correct when they suggest that the nature of the entertainment industry today may help us anticipate what will soon be happening in other industries.



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