

There are no guarantees

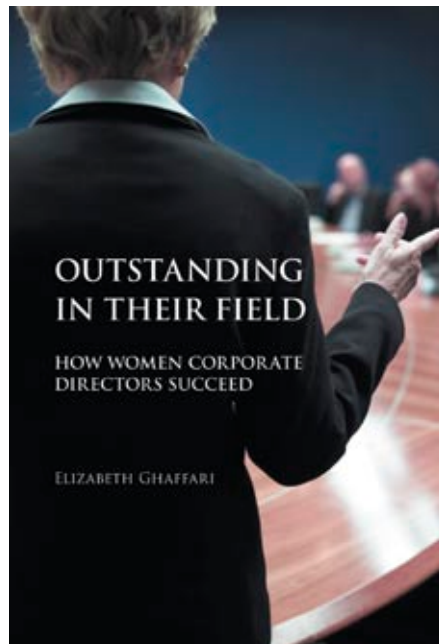
What those who made the breakthrough have in common.

BY ELIZABETH GHAFFARI

MY BOOK FOCUSED ON the outstanding 114 women who serve on the boards of California-based Fortune 1000 companies, and on the lives of 15 exemplary women in particular. These women were chosen to serve because their experience added value to their boards. Clearly, any woman can become competent, qualified, and capable of serving as a director. Some of the women we profiled came from small towns, low incomes, and hardship, while others grew up during an era when it was assumed that “good men would take care of us.” Some of the women succeeded, failed, and succeeded again. They all became corporate directors.

At the same time, it is clear that not every woman will become a director, nor should every woman become a director. A corporate board role is not an entitlement. It is an achievement.

Based on our examination of, and interviews with, these women directors of California corporations, we see leading women within the context of the steps each took to earn our respect and that of their professional peers. We are willing to turn over to them the keys to the boardroom of our major public shareholding corporations. What did they do to earn that trust and respect?



What they did

Across all the career paths that they pursued, there are some things that they all have in common:

1. They chose a worthy skill or endeavor that was of deep interest to them.
2. They refined that skill and enhanced and developed it through their personal efforts.
3. They connected with others who subscribed to goals and missions that complemented their primary area of interest; they recruited others and were

recruited by others.

4. They delivered excellent results through delegation and synergies; they didn't try to do it all themselves.

5. They built organizations, institutions, and programs that could endure.

6. They demonstrated leadership, often in the face of challenge.

No 12-step plan

Women in leadership — those whom we had the honor to interview for this book — know that they are going forward: away from a past that might have limited them and their potential.

They are ever alert for those marvelous opportunities just too good to resist. They have confidence in serendipity, knowing that many of the good things that have come their way were set in motion years ago, when they were just doing their very best. They are at ease with themselves, their lives, and their choices.

These women recognize that there is no such thing as a six- or 12-step plan that miraculously guarantees them a position on a board or career success. They do recognize that each charts her own path, chooses her own career, and adds her own value and insight to a boardroom where she has been invited to participate. Each woman makes her own progress and learns from her own mistakes.

How does a woman find a corporate board role? She doesn't. She builds a career of achievement and leadership. When a board of directors needs her skills and competencies, it will find her. And she will recognize it as an opportunity too good to resist. ■

The author can be contacted at techplace@earthlink.net.

Elizabeth Ghaffari is president and CEO of Technology Place Inc., a Santa Monica, Cal.-based technology advisory firm (www.technology-place.com). She also has a website, *Champion Boards* (www.championboards.com), that is an authoritative resource for innovative and creative analysis of the challenge of women's advancement to leadership and board service. Her *Surveys of Women on Boards of Directors of California-Based Fortune 1000 Firms* provided the biographical and research foundation for her book, *Outstanding in Their Field: How Women Corporate Directors Succeed* (<http://outstanding-in-their-field.com>), published by Praeger (www.abc-clio.com). This article is adapted from the book with permission of the publisher.