What Do Women Want?
A survey of professional women’s needs and desires for career development

The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design Research Survey Results:
Executive Summary

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During the months of August – December 2012, The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design conducted a research project that surveyed past participants of one of our leadership training programs specifically designed for women. In total, the survey was sent to 374 past participants, with a response rate of 28%, tallying 105 total respondents. The research survey asked a variety of questions about the various components of the program as well as some more specific research questions pertaining to leadership development and organizational support. The highlights of these findings are below.

**Wide-Range of Industries Represented in the Programs**
Participants hail from a wide variety of industries, but four industries topped the list: Pharmaceuticals – 16%, Financial Services – 13%, Consumer Goods – 13%, and Manufacturing – 10%.
Most Participants Have Good Tenure & Promotability
We asked survey respondents, as far back as 5 years ago, to share with us whether they have remained at the same company, moved to a new company, or are in transition. 90.1% of respondents indicated that they are at the same company, 8.9% of respondents indicated they are at a new company, and 1% indicated they were in transition. Participation in our leadership training program allowed the company to show the women they were valued, and furthermore, the positive byproduct of participation and investment in the women’s development is clearly reflected in the high retention rates across all levels and industries.

We also asked participants about their career trajectory. Results are below and indicate that over 50% of program attendees have had either a promotion or an increase in responsibility. Companies identified high potential women to participate in this program, and as a result the women in the program added knowledge and skills that resulted in increased responsibility and promotion.

![Career Trajectory Graph]

Most Beneficial Aspects of our Programs
Participants were asked which aspects of the program they found to be the most beneficial. There were seven options they could choose from (see below) and they could choose as many options as they felt were applicable. Overwhelmingly, two responses exceeded all others: “The content because it enhanced my personal development” and “The opportunity to meet other women across the region.”

The popularity of these two responses reveals the strongest connections that the participants have with the program. First, participants find the content to be highly influential in their personal career development. Secondly, the women have strong associations to our program because it serves as a conduit for connecting the women with other similarly situated woman leaders across their region.
This is a key indication of why this program might be superior to similar in-house programs—because an in-house program does not allow participants to network outside of their own organization.

The format of our program encourages a deeper connection by meeting in-person for large group sessions, as well as participating in smaller cohort groups that are safe havens for sharing information, ideas, and thought processes around program content.

Cohort groups are small teams of participants who meet in person or telephonically with a Leader’s Edge facilitator to hone in on how the program content directly impacts each of the women. The larger group sessions are the foundation for each of the topics discussed, but the cohort groups are really where the participants focus in on applying the new skills and knowledge to their current work situations. Knowing the other participants in the program can relate to the same struggles shared has been shown to be a powerful factor contributing to participants’ overall satisfaction with the program.


In Their Own Words

In addition to the multiple-choice question discussed above, respondents were given the opportunity to respond in their own words to: *How has the experience impacted your career?*

**Learning**

- The Program has enabled me to become more aware of the things I need to do to be a better leader and be recognized as such.
- It has helped me to mature in my job and make connections about what I am doing and how it fits into the bigger executive picture. I feel that my thoughts and plans are more strategic than they were before the course.
- It has been beneficial in that it made me step back & realize how I can leverage my strengths as a woman and minimize those actions that may have been putting me at a disadvantage.
- I understand now the importance of self-promotion and networking and am mindful of how my just working hard mentality can stand in my way... need to get out there more, be visible, be my biggest promoter.
- Given me an appreciation of the need for attention to professional development and value in connecting with other professional women.

**Application**

- Allowed me to reflect on my own experiences/leadership style, encouraged me to be more forceful, and helped me to further develop the women that work with me.
- Growth in my personal resiliency, better skills to network and build sponsorship, and to understand the challenges facing women in the workplace, with tools to combat these.
- Promotion!!!!!
- It has broadened my viewpoint; helped me focus on self-development - with a specific plan.
- Knowing how to gain support for an idea BEFORE it is put to a vote has been invaluable and I've gotten much more traction on my ideas this way. I've also learned to listen to those who navigate the political environment better than me, and use their guidance for greater effectiveness. Specifically, thanks to this experience and the support of my coworkers who also participated in the program, today I launched a 3-month pilot of a women's peer-led workshop at my company. Most importantly, I have the full backing of HR and our Leadership Team. Very exciting!
- Previously I would have undervalued my contribution, now I am looking for positions at the next level.

**Peer Support & Resources**

- I had just recently been promoted at the start of the group. It was impactful to have support from other women to think through difficult situations.
- The program has also helped me deal with employees - as a new people leader. I love my cohort group - they have given me so much good advice!
- The classes have provided me with the necessary "toolbox" of skills to navigate a very political environment.
- This is one of the best training programs I have been in because you get to connect with peers outside of your organization and share challenges and successes in a confidential setting.
Organizational Support
Respondents were asked to share, in their own words, how their organization can best support their career in today’s business world. Responses for this question were then coded into themes based on similarity. There were 102 total responses to this question. However, some of the answers were multi-themed and thus were split into two different thematic categories. Responses are as follows:

As the coded responses show, major themes were revealed indicating the top ways that organizations can support their up-and-coming women leaders. The top four categories were: “Provide Professional Development Opportunities” – 23%, “Better Support Women” – 18% (refers to an environmental support – i.e., better work environment, more supportive boss, more visibility for women across the organization), “Better Work/Life Integration” – 18% and “More Challenging Assignments” – 15%

Larger Implications
The larger implications of these results underscore the importance of providing robust leadership programs for top talented women. As indicated by the women, the top reason why they find the program to be valuable is because the content fostered richer, more focused personal development. Many of the open-ended responses mirrored the multiple choice answers, which indicated that participants are now more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, are more intentional about honing their leadership skills, and pay more attention to the path their career is taking.
In addition, the second most prevalent response was that participants found the opportunity to meet other women across the region highly useful. This is an important finding that sets many of our programs apart from in-house leadership development programs. As an outside program, women expanded their network and built important relationships outside of their own organization. Again, open-ended responses mirrored this finding. In addition, several women commented on the value of their cohort groups, sharing that they found their cohort to be an opportunity for sharing, more confidentially, struggles they were facing such as being a new leader or being in a difficult work situation.

Results also indicated that women need better organizational support of their careers in the form of robust leadership development programs, flexibility around work/life integration, greater visibility, and more opportunities for challenging work assignments and promotion.

Participants experienced a sense of value from their organization by taking part in our leadership training program. Other issues such as work/life integration and true organizational commitment to flexible work schedules continue to be a major obstacle for women. The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design offers a session on Resiliency, as evidenced through some open-ended responses, and is one way that our programs and seminars can address this constant battle for women, despite some progress at the organizational level. In addition, content structured around being more visible and sharing accomplishments might aid in participants gaining more challenging assignments.

Building a partnership with The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design to refine, re-envision, and get that “personal touch” so frequently lost in many other programs can be worthwhile in retaining your talent women and providing a beneficial investment for the women who participate.

In summary, our program received strong, favorable feedback from over 100 women across the nation who have taken part in our leadership training program. The program has not only significantly added to the career of the women who have participated but companies are seeing a similar benefit in addition of new skills, more knowledge, and higher retention.

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February 2013