

Helping Executive Black Women Succeed

Women of color are poorly represented in the C-suite, says Molly Shepard, president and CEO of The Leader's Edge. Shepard says black women hold only 1.8 percent of the top corporate jobs, while women as a group represent anywhere from 5.8 percent to 8 percent of C-suite leaders.

The good news is that a variety of programs exist to address this underrepresentation. For example, The Leader's Edge, in partnership with Teresa Griffin, an international consultant and coach, and president of Freeman Associates, offers a customized executive development program for black women that focuses on individual coaching plus a three-day executive retreat.

Why a program specifically for black women? "Women of color experience many of the same issues that white women do," says Shepard, "but they also have their own unique issues and challenges." Griffin says the coaching sessions help black women understand "what things are under their con-

trol. They can't control people with biases who don't appreciate differences, but they can control their own behavior and how they develop their skill sets to support and deliver their success."

Some top universities also are developing programs to help minority women succeed.

Paula Graves, minority programs development manager at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, says there is a strong need for such programs. "I think the 1.8 percent figure [mentioned by Shepard] may even be high," she says.

The Tuck Minority Business Executive Program will soon have a new offering, says Graves, in conjunction with a not-for-profit organization established to nurture executive leadership.

The program will focus on such areas as board placement by offering board preparation training, along with networking and mentoring programs for executive black women. ■

