

## COMMENT & ANALYSIS

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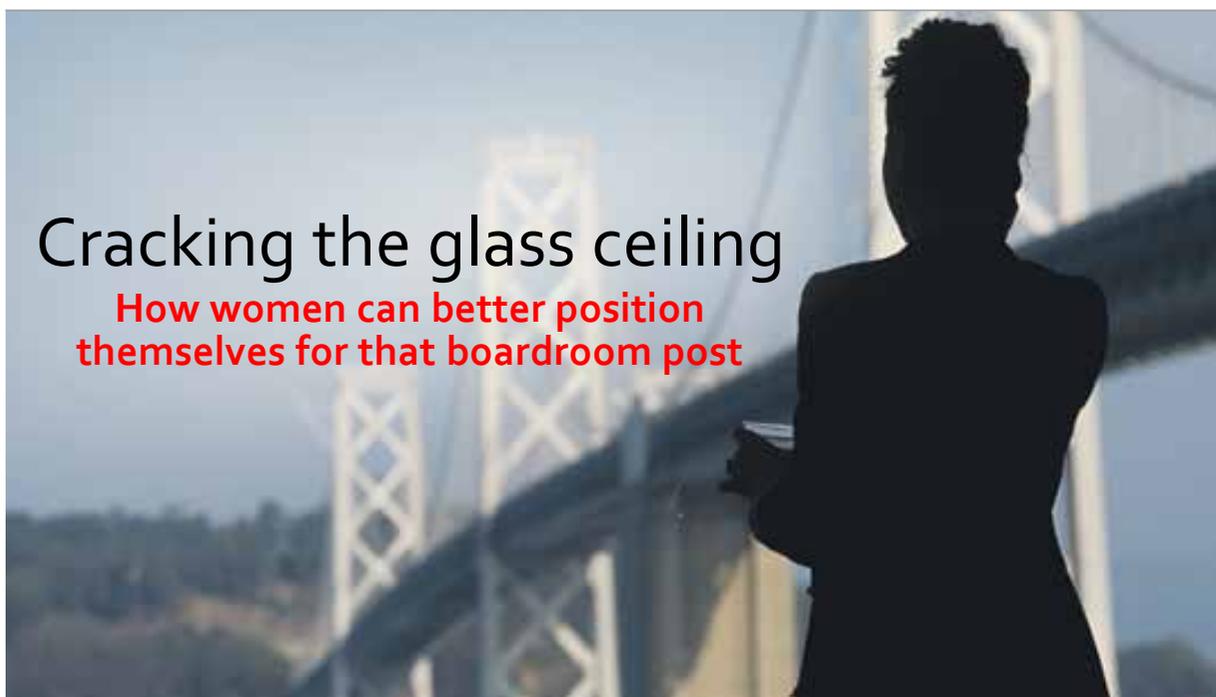


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## Cracking the glass ceiling

How women can better position themselves for that boardroom post

BLOOMBERG



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Especially around this time of year, observers tend to remark on the need for more women to enter boardrooms. On International Women's Day today, it is worth noting that this issue does not only concern women.

Companies with more women board directors have been found to outperform their

rivals with a 42 per cent higher return in sales, 66 per cent higher return on invested capital and 53 per cent higher return on equity, according to the Lord Davies Report, which was published in the United Kingdom last year.

In Singapore, where female directors on SGX-listed boardrooms constitute a doleful 6.9 per cent, having more women on boards could enhance that buzzword commodity: Productivity.

So how can women better position themselves to take up these top leadership positions?

TODAY received exclusive access to a seminar held in Singapore last week, which gave some pointers.

### GO AHEAD, GOOGLE YOURSELF

"Can you be Googled?", asked Ms Susan Stautberg, co-founder of the OnBoard Bootcamp sessions worldwide, who was the lead panellist in the Bootcamp attended by some 30 senior women executives here.

During the one-day session in Singapore, speakers shared with participants their experiences in their journey to become board members and their tips for how to get selected as directors.

If you do not show up on Google as a leader or a speaker at conferences and industry events, in press releases or otherwise, you need to gain more visibility as a wannabe board member, according to Ms Stautberg, who is also co-founder of WomenCorporateDirectors (WCD), a membership organisation of over 1,400 women directors worldwide.

"It's like running a campaign, you've got to get your info around. Don't be afraid to be seen. Women have a tendency to work late, and hope to get noticed," she said.

### START SMALLER

While "you've got to make first appearances count, you've got to have the right resume", being in Asia gives women here an advantage straight off, with the region's boom propelling the demand for directors with expertise in Asia, said Ms Stautberg.

This comes alongside a key trend of increasing requests for women directors, said Ms Stautberg, adding that women tend to ask more questions of the company, as board members, and to be more dogged in getting the answers.

There are ways to make up for any shortcomings in your CV. For example, barriers like insufficient depth in financial literacy can be overcome by taking courses, or by taking on the chief financial officer (CFO) role in non-profits.

Starting smaller, such as on the boards of non-profit organisations or educational institutions, or on advisory committees, is a good way to get a foot inside the door for a boardroom career, according to Ms Stautberg.

(An advisory committee can be assembled by corporate entities to brainstorm new ideas or work on specific problems.)

Another panellist was Ms Deb Henretta, group president of Procter & Gamble Asia, who spoke of her experience working on the board of a non-profit, where members could be volunteers: "You're walking in a situation where you don't have direct control or responsibility. You will grow your influencing skills, your ability to be positive and tactful."

It is the difference between directing and leading a group to a solution, and telling it what to do, said Ms Henretta, whose directorships include one at Singapore's Economic Development Board.

### HONE YOUR ELEVATOR PITCH

You need to be able to sell yourself to a recruiter or board member in an "elevator pitch". Bootcamp participants were invited to give their own elevator pitches, with feedback from Ms Stautberg and others.

Going on too long was a no-no. Highlighting your international expertise is always good. One participant mentioned she spoke six languages fluently, which was another thumbs-up.

### DO NOT BLOW OFF SEARCH FIRMS

Keep on the right side of search firms, Ms Stautberg advised, as blowing off a recruiting firm — for example, by not turning up for a board interview — might backfire badly when your behaviour is recorded in their global databases.

If your interview for one board does not work out, another board position might open up a year down the line, and keeping in touch with the headhunters might well help you land the new position, she said.

You can also ask the search firm about other members of the board as it is important to fit in with the board's culture, said Ms Stautberg, adding how one woman executive clinched a board position at a wine and tobacco company, partly by refusing an offer of "girly white wine", and going with the Scotch that the recruiting board member was downing. ■

Vanessa Lee is correspondent at TODAY.

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