



KORN FERRY
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Leveling the playing field: What women can do.





Work out not just where you are now, but also where you want to go.

Women can invest so much time and effort in excelling at the technical parts of their jobs that they make themselves indispensable. But that can make them un-promotable too. If they're not delivering all that great work, who will? This focus on technical skills also means that women don't invest enough time and effort in developing the relational and influential skills that are crucial at more senior levels.

So first, work out where you want to be.

Seek out people who are doing the job you want; get them to talk you through what's key for the role. Then determine where you are now versus where you want to be. Look at not just technical skills but also how well you influence, deal with politics, and build relationships. What holds you back? If you can't judge this, ask your line manager and colleagues for feedback.

Next, look at your experience and current role.

Have your projects required you to use financial acumen, create a strategy, or grow part of the business? If not, which areas must you build most? Will your current approach get you where you want to go? If not, how can you do work that has a greater impact?

“Unless women are proactive about tackling their own headwinds and managing their own careers, even the best top-down initiatives will fail.”

Dési Kimmins, Korn Ferry Hay Group



Be strategic: Live by design, not default.

Explain to the bosses what you hope to do; ask them to put you on projects that will give you the experience you need and build soft skills. Seek out important projects that get you noticed, such as responsibility for a work stream on a major change program, or assignments where you empower others to deliver.

Ask your manager for honest, regular feedback on how well you're developing the influencing and relational ability you'll need in more senior positions. Don't take criticism personally. You may need to open feedback discussions with how you think you're doing and where you think you need to improve; that's easier than asking bosses to give you feedback in a vacuum.

Think carefully about work that doesn't help you make an impact. Learn to delegate and to let go of perfectionism. You're trying to develop confidence in three areas, not just in your ability to do the nuts and bolts of the job well.

Note your progress; let it build your confidence about moving to the next stage. Take that evidence into performance discussions with the boss. Keep doing work that stretches you and takes you out of your comfort zone; don't wait until you feel 100% ready. No risks, no advancement.

If you fail, know it happens to everyone. See failures as ways to help you grow.

Build strong, strategic networks.

Think about not only who you know but also who you need to know—or to build stronger relationships with—to achieve your goals.

Ask your line manager to set you up with a mentor or sponsor, and to introduce you to the key people who can help you. Seek those people out yourself too: Have coffee with senior leaders, meet heads of departments other than your own, and identify and approach key stakeholders.

See these relationships as mutually beneficial. Determine what you can bring to the table, and make sure you return favors—for example, by introducing a contact to someone in your network.

Use this group to help you build your influencing skills. Ask these people to help you establish any weaknesses in how you sell ideas at various levels. Are you missing "executive presence"?

Develop gravitas, not guilt.

Gravitas, or "executive presence," comes from having emotional intelligence and showing grace under fire. It means you communicate brilliantly, read an audience, and project a vision. To develop this intangible quality, stand tall, project your voice, speak clearly, and dress like an executive—even before you are one.

Leave the guilt behind. You have as much potential as any man to excel at work. But you need the right support at home too. Don't be afraid to tackle difficult conversations about whose career should come first or how you can support each other by working as a partnership.