



## From the CEO

Gary Burnison

*Chief Executive Officer, Korn Ferry*

# A Moment in Time

Although it may seem that we are more divided than united these days, there is a sincere desire among organizations to be more inclusive overall. Hopeful and genuine, this desire is changing the conversation within organizations today.

Korn Ferry is committed to helping foster this change. We joined with The Rockefeller Foundation's "100x25" campaign, which has a goal of advancing 100 women to the top role in Fortune 500 companies by 2025, to learn more about female leaders. Our joint report, "Women CEOs Speak," produced some important takeaways for women and organizations. Here are some highlights:

- Women could be ready for the CEO role sooner. On average, women are about four years older than

men when they take their first CEO job. Organizations can identify potential future CEOs early and get them in profit-and-loss and operating roles.

- Building expertise and credibility in STEM or finance/business early in their careers enables women to show results in measurable terms and get close to how the business makes money—two keys to getting more promotions and roles that move a person closer to the CEO role.

- Women are driven by achieving business results and making a positive impact. Challenge is motivating for women, but so is purpose and mission. Organizations can frame roles in terms that energize women.

- Women's leadership qualities—courage, risk-taking, resilience, managing ambiguity, and collaboration—prepare them to be leaders in a complex and uncertain future.

Among the women who participated in the Korn Ferry-Rockefeller Foundation study was former Western Union CEO Christina Gold, who today is a member of several boards, including Korn Ferry's. Over dinner, Christina recounted to me her career path, which led to the top spot at Western Union, where she nearly doubled the revenue during her leadership tenure. Like many leaders in the Korn Ferry-Rockefeller Foundation study, Christina never thought about becoming a CEO early in her career. When she started out, there were few opportunities for women. Her first job out of college was counting coupons for the local grocery store—at a time when a man with a college degree could easily land a supervisory



State Street Global Advisors installed “Fearless Girl!” on International Women’s Day 2017 to spark a conversation about the power of women in leadership.

Sculpture by Kristen Visbal

position. Her break came when she was hired by Avon Products as an inventory clerk in Canada.

Christina went on to a series of firsts as a woman at Avon, from becoming its first female marketing planner to eventually becoming the first female president of its North America

operations. But when she first went into marketing there, Christina told me, she was asked whether her husband would mind if she trav-

eled. That question seems unfathomable today.

But Christina took it in stride: “I never thought of what I faced as being obstacles. My solution was to work really hard, do a great job and keep pushing. You have to deliver—there is no shortcut here.” Her advice for women who want to become leaders (completely in line with the “Women CEOs Speak” report) is to pursue operating roles. As she put it, senior roles in human resources and legal are valuable, but do not provide the kind of experience running parts of a business and having profit-and-loss responsibility

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that can open the door to the C-suite and the boardroom.

As our discussion turned to the headlines today

about sexual harassment and misconduct, Christina described how boards are asking tougher questions these days about whether incidents have occurred at any level of their organization. It’s more than knowing whether training and prevention programs exist; rather, boards want to know about their effectiveness. “This is a moment in time when things are changing,” Christina said. “I don’t think it will ever be the same.”

Amen to that. Times, they are a-changin’—for the better. ●