Making the Net work: the influence of networking on black women executives' leadership in the telecommunications industry

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Introduction

My initial desire to study this topic is a direct result of increased self-awareness. As I read Patricia Reid-Merritt's *Sister Power: How Phenomenal Black Women are Rising to the Top*, I was inspired to prepare myself for success by learning more about Black women who have "made it." The topic is one of great significance to me as I anticipate facing the "real world" of full-time employment as a Black woman, two labels which others say qualify me as a "double minority." This research will not only be personally beneficial as it relates to my pursuit of academic, professional, and personal success through leadership, but it will provide a fact-based foundation upon which future generations of Black women who possess the drive and determination to make a difference can build. After presenting my research, interviews, and a synthesis of both, I will suggest arenas in which my research conclusions may be applied.

Leadership is exemplified by growth. It is not enough to be a strong leader; in order to develop that leadership, one must continue to grow. In order to grow, one must be in the company of like-minded people. Hence, the power of networking to increase and enhance one's leadership development is great. When I look at my leadership development over the past four years, I am able to identify definite growth. This growth was facilitated by the networking situations in which I placed myself or created.

Previous research in this area reveals that women in general, and black women in particular, have a unique style of leadership which is displayed in different ways from the "typical, male" model.
of leadership. The theoretical framework I will use for this investigation will present these differences in a positive light and show how a Black woman's perspective is invaluable in formal and informal leadership positions.

The limitations of this proposed study include the fact that, although there is a significant amount of interest in this topic, the research to support this interest is relatively new and limited (in comparison to the study of men's leadership). I believe I will have access to enough information to prepare a study that will serve as a substantive contribution to the Jepson School.

My resources will include interviews with some of the women I encountered during the Women as Leaders Academic Seminar and the Women in Public Policy Internship, two programs with I participated in through The Washington Center in the summer of 1996. I will interview and study Black women executives in key positions in the telecommunications industry. After gathering my data, I will examine and analyze their source(s) of motivation, faith and values systems, and the support networks they use. I will examine the importance and influence of networking on individual success and performance as a Black woman leader.

As a result of my experiences, I have been a direct beneficiary of the tremendous power of networking. I believe it is imperative that women reach back and pull their sisters up once they have attained significant positions of leadership and responsibility. It is true that when one woman wins, we all win, but how much more of an impact do we make when we work to ensure that the number of
competent sisters in key leadership positions increases exponentially?

Initially, I wanted to interview and study black women in key positions in nonprofit organizations, government, education, and business. However, the time constraints of the semester allocated for research precluded me covering this range of arenas. After selecting business as my focus, I specified the telecommunications industry as a complement to the career I will begin with Bell Atlantic after graduation. This research has made me acutely aware of the effects of race, class, gender, and age on professional attainment and leadership development in the context of the formal organization. Nonetheless, this heightened consciousness is preparation for what awaits in the corporate sphere: a male-dominated setting which is undergoing rapid change in light of women's leadership and management. As someone with innumerable goals, boundless energy, and a child-like idealism that anything I dream is possible to achieve, I intend to take what I learn as a result of this research and apply it in the context of the telecommunications industry.
Literature Review

This research examines the influence of networking on Black women executives' leadership in the telecommunications industry. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, the labor force participation rate of Black women increased almost ten percent between 1975 and 1988 (Garwood 213). However, Black women's presence in the corporate sphere has not existed for a long period of time. In order to fully comprehend the Black woman executive's critical dependence upon building a solid support system for her personal and professional success as a leader, it is useful to examine the nature of the various barriers and challenges encountered by Black women executives. The attainment of an executive-level position does not guarantee leadership, but outstanding performance by Black women executives is a result of the manifestation of their leadership abilities.

Background and History

It is important to realize that the Black woman's entry into management level jobs in the corporate sector has been relatively recent. In 1981, Simpson reported that Black women had moved into management only fifteen years earlier. "The ability to deal with and manage people's reactions to a black person and a woman is crucial" (20). By acknowledging the effects of external factors like combating age-old stereotypes including institutionalized racism and sexism in the workplace, it is easier to understand the intense pressure felt by Black women executives. However, in spite of these
obstacles, Black women have risen above the stereotypes and discrimination to become productive, meaningful members of the organizational management structure.

In the ten years between 1982 and 1992, the number of African-American women in management in the United States increased sixty-four percent (Steele 38). However, they comprise only 3% of corporate management (and only 0.9% of female corporate officers (Baskerville et al. 39). These statistics put into perspective the "it's lonely at the top" feelings Black women experience on a consistent basis that can be minimized by the support of members in their networks.

**Black Women in Corporate America**

Deresky's 1980 survey of the situation surrounding Black women asserted

one reason for the slower upward mobility of Black women compared to whites is the self-perpetuating lower economic level, which affects educational opportunities and standards, particularly at the college level. The result is a perpetuation of a vicious, self-defeating cycle, with a lack of leadership for Black women in upward levels of the corporate world (31).

America and Anderson attempt to minimize black managers' claim that they feel they have to be "superstars" to achieve the same rewards as whites. They concede that "this might be true for those striving for high levels of executive responsibility, but for those blacks aiming for middle management this attitude may be unwarranted" (47). America and Anderson further state that "race is
not a factor with top level managers, but it can be a factor with middle management peers and with lower upper management. At the higher levels, the substantive issues are so important that any racial feelings cannot be indulged." These reports reflect an obvious choice to ignore the effects of race and gender issues on Black women in the workplace.

While these attitudes reflect a mindset that was prevalent during the 1970s and 1980s, recent literature has reiterated the same message. Surveys were administered to 748 managers and their supervisors in an organizational setting as part of a study investigating the effect of managers' gender and race on job performance attributes made by their supervisors. The findings suggest that among the most successful managers, women's performance is less likely to be attributed to ability than is the performance of men. Additionally, a black manager's performance is more likely to be attributed to assistance from others and less likely to be attributed to ability and effort than is the performance of white managers. Greenhaus and Parasuraman concluded that although black managers are perceived to have less favorable career advancement prospects than white managers, the effect of race is wholly indirect, working through job performance and daily attribution.

However, Green's statement that Black female executives must deal with both sexism and racism, a situation that puts them at the worst advantage of all corporate climbers (107) directly contradicts the beliefs of those who choose to turn away from the realities of these schisms. Sherman's research determined that the glass ceiling
- institutionalized barriers in the male corporate culture that prevent women from advancing to higher management levels within their organization - exists at or above the position of general manager, and also identified the "rock ceiling," the added dimension of racism that women of color encounter in the corporate culture. With these perspectives, it is clear that Black women who are fortunate enough to attain executive status must have a strong system of support in order to remain successful and fulfilled.

**Role of Networking and Mentoring**

Webster defines a network as a "system or pattern made up of interconnected parts" and a mentor as "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher." Black women executives today are in a key position to benefit greatly from both resources. Black women who network participate in a process of sharing the benefit of experience, nurturing, encouragement, and access to resources exemplified by active goal-setting and building coalitions and alliances. The combination of mentors within a supportive network provides an enriched environment for leadership development.

Mentors, who are themselves part of networks, provide their protégés with access to their most valuable resources, including time, financial support, the benefit of experience, and connection to other like-minded women. Robinson-Respress proposed a dual mentoring approach in which the mentee has a "professional" and a "developmental" mentor simultaneously. This attention to the multifaceted (as opposed to unidimensional) nature of the Black woman executive reflects Robinson-Respress' findings that
respondents were receiving mentoring largely from Caucasian men and women, women were willing to act as mentors to other women, an ethnic mentor and mentee preference was indicated in the sample, and the majority of the identified mentoring relationships were informal.

In a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, women managers reported having a tougher time finding mentors than men (Lancaster B1). The article suggested that minorities and others who have trouble finding role models in upper management learn about creative ways to build mentoring relationships. "When building a board of mentors, look outside your workplace and even your industry. Alumni groups, professional societies, and community groups are good places to build your mentor network."

Mentoring experts stress the need to find people who are different from you. However, Betters-Reed and Moore report that women of color have very little access to influential networks (Sekaran and Leong 40). Carter confirms that "there is an "ole boy" network and there is an "ole girl" network and both are white and exclusionary (Sekaran and Leong 41). Based upon this evidence, the fact that Black women have formed their own successful networks and utilize them to their full advantage, both professionally and personally, should come as no surprise.

Parker maintains that "when cultural members act, their actions reflect their understanding of the system of shared meaning (i.e. the assumptions, values, and beliefs about "the way things are"). At the same time, their actions reproduce that system" (23). The connection between networking and mentorship as a mode of
understanding a culture through its symbolic construction for Black women executives seems to be clear. They have a culture that belongs to them as Black women and as members of a corporate organization with its own identity. Thus, by "controlling" or "managing" organizational culture to their advantage through networking and mentoring among themselves, they are creating their own opportunities for increased, more visible leadership.

The undisputed value of African-American women's networks is the support they provide (Steele 127). Black Enterprise reported that although Black women traditionally affiliated themselves with volunteer service organizations that functioned primarily to provide assistance to others, today there has been a major shift. Professional and business development, career advancement, and work/family concerns have become important agenda items for most Black women's groups.

Steele documents the early formation of Black women's networks in Black Enterprise:

As early as 1972, Black women in New York began forming alliances based on their shared professional experiences. What started as the brainchild of its first chair, Jewell Jackson McCabe, and a group of about two dozen women quickly burgeoned into a national organization--The National Coalition of 100 Black Women. Determined to advance the "empowerment of black women," the coalition put leadership development and enhancement of career opportunities [for women] through networking and programming high on their agenda.

In 1975, a more loosely structured organization of Black women came together to form the Corporate Women's Network. Spearheaded by corporate insider
Brenda Schofield, these women focused on developing specific "survival" tactics and sharing resources for the growing numbers of Black women managers and executives in the private sector (128).

Many women attest to the effectiveness of networks that have given them the ability to interact with women possessing an abundance of wisdom and experience who are ready to groom them for leadership.

According to the CEOs surveyed in the 1986 study "A Survey of Leaders on Leadership Development and Empowerment for Black Women," the most important qualities Black women should possess if they are to become effective leaders are strong interpersonal skills, solid experience, and a good education. This advice reveals that business leaders are looking for people who can motivate others, utilize the talents of their staff, are visionaries, persuasive, and can delegate authority (Baskerville et al. 90).

This same article, which featured twenty-one of corporate America's most influential power brokers, emphasized the women's ability to affect the organization's bottom line. The executives profiled have line authority over budgets and revenues totaling billions of dollars; these women control subsidiaries, divisions, or departments that have a substantial impact on the fiscal health and direction of the companies for which they work (39). This is meaningful because the phenomenon of Black women in positions of power significant enough to impact change is still being adjusted to in the context of the white male-dominated corporate culture.

Telecommunications
In 1988, Black women, who "succeeded in turning their technical and managerial experience and impeccable credentials into lucrative visible, decision-making positions," represented 1.8% of the officials and managers of major corporations (King 45). Peoples and Robinson's 1996 examination of market structure and racial and gender discrimination in the telecommunications industry following the divestiture of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) cites several studies revealing that prior to the 1970s, the exclusion of minorities in telecommunications, and the restriction of women to low paying clerical jobs, was pervasive (309). However, as a new millennium approaches heralding the information age, Black women are presented with unlimited potential. This research seeks to clarify if this potential can propel greater numbers of Black women into the executive ranks of this industry. The percentage of Black women employed in telecommunications was 11.05% following the 1984 AT&T divestiture (312). Are strides being made to increase this number? This research will examine this question in relation to the role of networking on the Black woman's assent to the top of the corporate ladder in telecommunications.
Methodology

The goal of this research is to examine the influence of networking on the Black woman's assent to the top of the corporate ladder. The leadership qualities these women exemplify and the leadership positions they hold will be analyzed in relation to the effects of race and gender. As we approach a new millennium, the telecommunications industry will continue to see steady growth as the effects of deregulation permeate the corporate mentality. Mergers and acquisitions resulting from deregulation will open lucrative career opportunities for flexible people who possess technological savvy and outstanding communication skills. Black women are among those who will be greatly affected by increased opportunity for advancement and leadership.

Based on these future projections, the role of networks, encouragement from family, and support from non-minorities will be examined. A qualitative approach to this research will be most effective because the study of leadership characteristics unique to Black women executives in the telecommunications industry is relatively exploratory.

In short, the strengths of qualitative studies should be demonstrated for research that is exploratory or descriptive and that stresses the importance of context, setting, and subjects' frame of reference (Marshall and Rossman 46).

Ethnographic interviews will be used to identify the elements contributing to Black women executives' success and advancement to
significant leadership in the telecommunications industry. I will use the interview results to describe and analyze the process of networking as it affects the Black woman's ascent to the top of the corporate ladder in the telecommunications industry.

Spradley (1979) identified twelve elements of the ethnographic interview. The three most important are explicit purpose, ethnographic explanation, and ethnographic questions. Explicit purpose informs the subject of the reasons for the interview. Ethnographic explanation identifies for the subject the goals of the ethnographer. Finally, ethnographic questions are used by the ethnographer to gather cultural data. Ethnographic analysis is the search for the parts of a culture and their relationships as conceptualized by informants (Marshall and Rossman 1993).

The data will be analyzed from the perspective that the Black woman's culture in the corporate environment is distinct and that her experiences are unique from others in the same environment. The frequency of themes and concepts related to networking will be noted and categorized, presented in chart form, and analyzed for the implications upon this research effort. In 1973, Strauss noted that qualitative data are exceedingly complex, and not readily convertible into standard measurable units of objects seen and heard; they vary in level of abstraction, in frequency of occurrence, in relevance to central questions in the research. Probably the most fundamental operation in the analysis of qualitative data is that of discovering significant classes of things, persons, and events and the properties which characterize them (Marshall and Rossman 113).
Parker, who uses a qualitative approach in her exploratory research on African American women executives within dominant culture organizations, acknowledges Yukl's (1989) criticism that qualitative methods are sometimes too imprecise for reaching firm conclusions about specific relationships. However, she notes Polkinghorne's (1991) observation that qualitative methods are especially useful in the "generation of categories for understanding human phenomena and the investigation of the interpretation and meaning that people give to events they experience" (Parker 35). I decided that a qualitative approach would be appropriate in my effort to show the relationship between networking and Black women executives' attainment of significant leadership positions and accompanying responsibilities in the telecommunications industry. Additionally, this research will identify the people comprising Black women executives' networks and what these actors contribute to the Black woman seeking upward mobility.

The materials and information needed to successfully complete this research include access to previous research (obtained through library and internet resources) and access to the subjects. Network sampling, also known as snowball sampling, is a strategy in which each successive participant or group is named by a preceding group or individual. Participant referrals are the basis for choosing a sample (Schumacher and McMillian 381). With such a specialized population to sample, it is highly likely that this method will yield the most fruitful results.

The respondents for this research are Black women working in the metropolitan Washington, D. C. area at the executive level of the
telecommunications industry. Executive level refers to any position including specialist and above (manager, director, vice-president, president). Demographic characteristics of the sample are: race, gender, age, educational background, and professional training. Five respondents constitute the sample size for this project. The number of respondents is proportionate to the number of women who hold comparable positions in the participants' geographically restricted area of metropolitan Washington, D.C.

A questionnaire (consisting of open-ended questions that facilitate discussion) will be created and disseminated to potential respondents who possess the experience that will be valuable in this research effort. Informational interviews (conducted by phone and electronic mail) as well as statistical data will be used to present a well-rounded picture of the subjects of this research. Anticipated problems associated with data collection include busy schedules and accessibility to the sample. Additionally, a limitation to the use of this methodology is the fact that the data collected may be difficult to measure.

The study will include the respondents' comments and suggestions on ways Black women who aspire to executive positions in the telecommunications industry can use networking to their advantage. As the numbers of Black women increase in these leadership positions, exemplifying the rule rather than the exception, the more receptive the corporate structure will become to the unique leadership skills Black women bring to organizations.
The ages of the respondents ranged from 28 to 50. One respondent began her career in consulting and had been with her current telecommunications company for 19 months. One respondent has a law background, and the fact that telecommunications law became her specialty worked to her advantage. She attributes hard work with helping her attain a lucrative position where she exercises considerable influence and leadership within her organization. Another respondent has been with her organization for 31 years. Each respondent emphasized the importance of a graduate degree and ongoing professional development in order to polish leadership skills. However, the most recurrent theme was ensuring that the right people see your leadership and help you build on your potential: networking was hailed an vehicle for achieving this goal. The respondents also encouraged young Black women to work hard, expect success, hone essential interpersonal and communication skills, and make their efforts visible.

Data was collected via electronic mail and phone conversations. It should be noted that the fact that every question was not answered by all respondents may account for less than five answers in the data tables. The responses to each question are displayed in bullet form in this section to show the diversity among and similarity between answers before generalizations are made. The data revealed that the challenges encountered by Black women executives in the telecommunications industry were not that different from
other industries. The respondents acknowledged that Black women face significant challenges in the corporate environment, like overcoming the stereotypes and perceptions of being "nurturing, administrative, non-thinking types," but they were split on whether their challenges differed from those of Black men and non-Black women. I conclude that the effects of race, class, and gender stratification pose a challenge, but the barriers are not impossible to overcome. One of the most helpful support mechanisms can be having someone with whom to share and process similar experiences; a strong network can provide this opportunity.

Respondents' specific job responsibilities included the following range:

- supervising a team of programmers throughout all phases of the system development life cycle;
- managing UNIX system administrators, developers, and system administrators;
- representing all of the organization's interests throughout the state;
- marketing responsibility for government solutions, which encompasses public relations, advertising, and marketing communication and analysis; and
- working with individuals, groups, and systems in establishing and managing teams using team-based structures and systems as the foundation.

The intense level of personal motivation, regardless of professional or organizational support, was impressive. These respondents possess a dynamism that Black women aspiring to executive
positions, whether in telecommunications or any other industry, should seek to emulate. Self-assured, self-confident, well-educated, goal-oriented, and committed to bringing others up with them, these respondents provided invaluable first-hand knowledge of the corporate culture in the telecommunications industry. Practical career guidance included: be willing to make lateral moves to enhance career development, get recognized, and always work to gain more skills. Their definitions of success ranged from performance in an organizational setting to inner fulfillment due to personal competence. At the same time, they display a commitment to service and reaching out to others, whether they are subordinates, peers, or superiors; the capacity to affect others seemed important to the respondents.

How has networking influenced Black women executives' leadership in the telecommunications industry? Whether directly or indirectly, networking played a role in their success and leadership development in an organizational context; all respondents agreed that it was a valuable resource. The goal of this research, to examine the influence of networking on the Black woman's assent to the top of the corporate ladder, was achieved by analyzing the effects of race and gender on the leadership qualities these women exemplify and the leadership positions they hold. Not only did the respondents provide information about networking, but they shared invaluable advice to young Black women aspiring to executive levels in the telecommunications industry.
Questionnaire for Black Women Executives in the Telecommunications Industry

Please provide the following background information (it will remain confidential, but I need to collect the data): age, position in organization, specific responsibilities, number of years in this organization, was telecommunications your first career choice?

1. How do you define success in the telecommunications industry?

2. What has contributed to or influenced your success in this industry? (Please rank in order of significance and give examples)
   - personal factors
   - professional factors
   - organizational factors

3. To what extent does networking play a role in the success of your career?

4. How has networking influenced your leadership development?

5. With what types of networks are you affiliated?

6. What advice can you offer young Black women who aspire to executive levels in the telecommunications industry?

7. Are the challenges you face in telecommunications any different from those experienced by other women or Black men? If so, what are they and how are they different?

8. From an insider's perspective, what are the positions attained by Black women and how do they get there?

9. How do you describe yourself in the context of your job (i.e., initiator of change, implementor/executor, evaluator, coach, team leader)?
Participants' Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executive</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position/Title</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Specialist, Information Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Manager, Systems Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>President/CEO</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Sr. Organization Development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Consultant-Human Resources Corporate Systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Each subject was arbitrarily assigned a designation as Executive 1, Executive 2, etc.
Question 1:
How do you define success in the telecommunications industry?

Definitions of Success in the Telecommunications Industry

- Success is different things to different people. Personal success is different from professional success. To me, success is when I exceed the objectives that I have set for myself. I always have personal and professional objectives. When I exceed these, I feel successful. However, this success is short-lived. Once I accomplish an objective, I set new goals.

- Success is doing work that you love; being very good at it; and being recognized and rewarded for being very good at it - this is not my definition, but is that of George Carlin, the comedian.

- Success in telecommunications is no different than in any other business. You must know the business you're in, know your products, your customer, and understand your customer's business problems. Ultimately, you must produce results (revenue).

- Having a good job that you like, one that has an impact on the bottom line, and one in which you are able to help and influence others who come after you.
Question 2:
What has contributed to or influenced your success in this industry?
(Please rank personal, professional, and organizational factors in order of significance and give examples)

Factors Influencing Success in This Industry

• Three of the five respondents ranked influences on their success in this order: 1) personal, 2) professional, 3) organizational

Personal

* I am a very driven and highly motivated person. I believe I can accomplish anything I set my mind to (through Christ who strengthens me), regardless of anyone or anything. I've managed to juggle my career and commitments to raise my son well. My experience as a single parent is very difficult, but it has made me realize that anything is possible as long as you expect success.

* I think I would have been successful in any industry I chose; I have confidence in my skills. I don't believe that the attributes that have made me successful apply only to telecom. I think my interpersonal skills have been invaluable. I try to communicate with folks in a way that makes them comfortable. I believe that communication is not what I told you but how you perceived what I said. So, it's important that you understand who you are talking to and what they are hearing you say. Interpersonal skills, combined with a strong work ethic have definitely been my strong points.

* Simply put, hard work and dedication pay off.

Professional

* I am an extremely professional person and I pay special attention to how I present myself to others -- yes, that means I spend a lot of money on clothes. One thing I've learned it is that image may not be everything, but it sure goes a long way! Another factor contributing to my success is that I am very efficient and I know my capabilities.
* Due to my interpersonal skills, I am always willing to help out other organizations in the company. In this way, my network has grown tremendously. Based on a large network, you find out about opportunities which lead to professional success.

* Being one of the best at what you do also pays off.

Organizational

* Good organizational skills have been critical. I live by my Franklin Day Planner and would be lost without it. I also write down and plan my day at the close of business each day. I keep organized files and at least give the appearance of always being on point.

* In terms of how I'm organized, I think I have a place for everything. I always know where everything is and I always have everything prioritized.

* Being in a company which recognizes and rewards talent is essential to being successful.

• One respondent ranked influences on her success in this order: 1) professional, 2) personal, 3) organizational

Professional

* The ability to deliver quality performance in order to be considered a leader by management. Education and skill get your foot in the door, but once inside, you must demonstrate your skills set.

Personal

* Mentoring has been key. A good network and the right people on your team definitely make a difference. However, my actions are dominated by my personal standards; I don't go to work to prove anything to others, but because I want to do an excellent job.
Organizational

* Timing is everything for opportunities; willingness to be flexible (relocation, accepting challenging assignments for experience's sake) also contribute to success in the organizational context.

- One respondent ranked influences on her success in this order: 1) organizational, 2) personal, 3) professional

Organizational

* Understanding who is in charge; just because you do not engage in politics or games-playing does not mean that the game does not go on around you.

Personal

* Keeping networks open. Make sure you do not keep in touch with persons in your network only when you need something.

Professional

* Keeping up with trends and strategies of the business contributes to professional success. Make sure that you conduct yourself professionally at all times. Follow practices and policies carefully. Use expenses and vouchers in the right way. Taking advantage of all educational opportunities; varied assignments; mentors, good role models; and open, honest supervisors, directors and Vice President have all contributed to my success.
Question 3:
To what extent does networking play a role in the success of your career?

Role of Networking in Career Success

• Networking is EXTREMELY important. While a person will only have continual "success" based on their skills, it is critical to let the right people see those skills at work.

• Networking is extremely important. People serve as your #1 resource. I may get information in a two minute phone call that it takes someone else a week to find simply because I know who to call. Also, the larger your network, the more opportunities you are aware of. It always helps to know the right people.

• Only a little - it is helpful but not essential.

• Extensively! Key people in my network helped me to get this far in my career. Networking provides exposure to and the opportunity to interact with women in other positions and key leadership roles. You gain an appreciation for getting to certain positions, and this is essential to success. You may not have the information, but someone in another organization may have it to help you reach a particular goal or objective.

• It's been a big part of my success; I made contacts in all of the jobs that I held through networking. I also went to the field and met both managers and associates who affected my work downstream to ensure that barriers to productivity were not erected. Additionally, I am one of the founding members of ATMAA (Association of Tele Managers and Associates) a 20+ year-old organization that provides educational, networking, social and other activities to primarily African American employees in Bell Atlantic.
Question 4:
How has networking influenced your leadership development?

Networking's Influence on Personal Leadership Development

- I cannot really say that networking has influenced my leadership development.

- I think we are always networking. The people you work with on a daily basis are part of your network. The way things open up for you is when you grow your network. Because of my work ethic combined with my communication skills, I have always had managers take notice of me. I have been put on many top priority projects which provide me an opportunity to grow my leadership skills.

- Not very much.

- I strongly encourage others to work at it because it makes a significant difference in the opportunities you gain exposure to.

- I have been mentored by many people, mostly white males in executive positions. Also, because of the network I built, I have been able to place both management and associate employees in other employees to opportunities that otherwise would not have been available. For example, I have been a facilitator in the Black Manager Workshop (an internal Bell Atlantic program) for the last five years. This assignment has significantly impacted my personal growth and development in many areas. I was given this opportunity because of the network that I built over the years with the person in BA who had accountability for staffing for this seminar.
Question 5:
With what types of networks are you affiliated?

Types of Network Affiliations

• I have a network within my workgroup, within my family, and at church. I am a member of the Alliance of Black Telecommunications Employees, Inc. and also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

• I am active with the Women of Washington, Women’s Leadership Forum of the Democratic National Committee, National Black MBA Association, Coalition of 100 Black Women, Alliance of Black Telecommunications Employees, Inc., AT&T Mentor Program, National Urban League - Black Executive Exchange Program, Leadership America, and Africare. I also serve on the Board of Directors for the Lupus Foundation of America.

• I am affiliated with both internal and external networks. Internally I serve in a leadership capacity in AMTAA as the HR liaison for a mentoring program started by ATMAA. Outside of Bell Atlantic, I serve in several leadership positions in a large, inner city United Methodist church in Washington, D.C., serve on one of the Board of Directors for Grandma’s House, a residential and care facility for children with HIV and AIDS, am a member of NABTP (National Association of Black Telecommunication Professionals) and also a member of CITE (Consortium of Information and Telecommunications Executives).
Question 6:
What advice can you offer young Black women who aspire to executive levels in the telecommunications industry?

Advice to Young Black Women Aspiring to Executive Levels in the Telecommunications Industry

• My advice is simple -- expect success and win anyway. What that means is always keep a positive attitude and view every outcome as a winning one. If you make a mistake you're really winning because that's one more thing you've learned. Perform at a consistently high level and make your efforts visible. Always be professional in mannerism and appearance, study your profession and know your business -- this may require taking evening classes, reading telecommunication magazines etc. Always keep in tune with what's going on in the telecommunication industry -- I took a class in Telecommunications last semester and it was VERY helpful. Don't be afraid of suggesting change and seeking out more efficient ways to do business.

• Be ready to give your all. That applies to any industry not just telecommunications. Don't sit back complaining about how Black people are treated. I tell people that if you don't have a plan of action, don't come to me with a problem. You can sit around day telling stories of how badly you've been treated. If you are better than the next person and you know you are better, that's not enough. You must have the skills necessary to make everyone aware that you are better. Interpersonal and communication skills are a must.

• Work hard; be the best at what you do; find a company or business in which you can be recognized for being the best.

• Skill, experience, and results that affect the bottom line are a given. You have to know the way the game is played in whatever corporate culture you find yourself. It is not enough to do just what is expected; be twice as good and outperform your non-Black peers. Always watch over your shoulder; be cautious about who you trust because all friends and colleagues do not have your best
interest at heart. Surround yourself with a few people who are loyal, whom you can trust, and who have your back.

Learn as much as you can about the industry, do your homework. Where are minorities, especially African American males and females, clustered? Historically we are in large numbers in PR, HR or administrative departments. Stay away from those areas if that is the case. The opportunities are not that great for advancement, and sometimes are ignored. Take field assignments as often as possible, especially when given the opportunity to supervise employees. Network with people both inside and outside of your field. Attend out of office parties, retirement affairs, this is where a lot of information is shared informally. Be viewed as a team player, be willing to broker relationships, rarely refused an assignment if you can help it, use it to your advantage. Find out what the boss' strengths and challenges are and use them to your advantage. Take advantage of educational seminars as well as tuition assistance programs. Get a mentor, several if possible. Recognize milestones in people's lives such as birthday, job changes, promotions of your subordinates, peers and bosses. Cultivate relationships at all levels of the business from the mailroom to clerks to officers as you can find them.
Question 7:
Are the challenges you face in telecommunications any different from those experienced by other women or Black men? If so, what are they and how are they different?

Black Women's Challenges in Comparison to Other Women or Black Men

- I don't think the challenges I face are any different from other women or Black men.

- Black men have a different experience because a lot of times, I believe, they are perceived as too aggressive even before they speak. So, even though all of us have to get past that first perception, the perceptions about the Black male are more negative than those of the Black woman so they are at a greater disadvantage. Other than that, our challenges are the same.

- They are vastly different - but since black women are used to being challenged on every level at whatever they do, we are able to achieve in spite of the problems we face.

- Men and women have different challenges anyway! I don't know of specific differences since I'm not a Black man. I haven't worked with that many since there are not that many of them at this level.

- Yes, they are different; African American women are still viewed as nurturing, administrative, non-thinking types. Black men, especially those of large stature, are not in large numbers in the corporation for several reasons: fear, difference in style and manner of dress, speech, and lack of developmental opportunities.
Question 9:
How do you describe yourself in the context of your job?

Leadership Roles Displayed in the Job Context

• Initiator of change and definitely a team leader.

• I am all of the above. I manage about 15 UNIX system administrators, developers, and systems analysts. I have to be aware of what is going on with my group members so that everything goes smoothly on a daily basis. I assist them when they have problems. I provide positive and negative feedback. I also have to provide an atmosphere where folks can motivate themselves.

• I am a team leader: I like to push others to attain their best and to reward others for giving their best to the mutual corporate objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROLE</th>
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Recommendations and Conclusions

Currently, different definitions of "management" and "leadership" are being recognized. Leadership is visionary, initiatory, charismatic, innovative, and strategic. In contrast, management means maintaining momentum, balancing interests, stabilizing forces, and implementing tactical plans (Russell Reynolds Associates 4).

Black women are both leaders and managers in the corporate world. Herein lies a potential for dynamism which many exemplify. I would submit that Black women must do both extremely well to attain and retain their executive positions.

Many organizations have internal formal networking and mentor programs in place, which is very positive; these should definitely continue. I recommend that Black women executives become even more willing to network with and mentor young Black women who aspire to attain similar leadership positions. This contribute to their leadership development in the organizational context by helping them establish relationships and giving them access information useful to career development.

Additionally, continued accessibility to men and women mentors of non-Black backgrounds should also encouraged. Taking advantage of the opportunity to influence others in a positive way, both personally and professionally, can provide a mutually beneficial relationship. I submit that responsibility to others constitutes a huge portion of leadership. Helping others to build their networks and serving as a mentor is a major step on the road towards ongoing change in the corporate realm. The telecommunications industry is a wonderful place to begin.

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Units: Civilian noninstitutional population and civilian labor force in thousands of persons; participation rate as a percent (the civilian noninstitutional population divided by the civilian labor force).

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<td>2000 (projection)</td>
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<td>1988</td>
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<td>2000 (projection)</td>
<td>70.7%</td>
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Source:

Units:
Civilian noninstitutional population and civilian labor force in thousands of persons; participation rate as a percent (the civilian noninstitutional population divided by the civilian labor force).


