

WORK/LIFE BALANCING ACT

Working mothers can be great CEOs

■ Many companies owned or led by women have been highly successful.

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Want to see what the future could look like for working mothers? Look inside a company run by one.

Go ahead, point out that Marissa Mayer, the CEO of Yahoo, hasn't exactly made life easier for the working mothers at her company when she banned telecommuting. But if you look past Mayer, at the more than 8 million companies owned or led by women, you will find leaders at the helm who are creating workplaces where I'd want to work.

Many of these women bosses are leading their companies much differently than men. They are socially conscious, interested in mentoring, willing to grant flexibility and making an effort to pay fairly. They are using a style of leadership that's attractive not only to women but to men, too.

And guess what? Their companies make money.

Sure, there are great male leaders. Ask a room full of people whether they would have wanted to work for Steve Jobs and most hands would shoot way up without hesitation. Not mine.

I would rather work for Christine Day, the CEO of Lululemon Athletica, a mother of three who wears exercise apparel to corporate meetings. Day is considered one of the most successful female CEOs of a public company and has tapped into what women want, not just in the workout products they buy, but also in the

place where they work.

After a 20-year-journey through the ranks of Starbucks, Day now uses a collaborative style of leadership to empower her employees and build a company that can grow fast while remaining nimble.

Today, 50 percent of Lululemon's board and 80 percent of the senior leadership team are women. Day gave a pay increase to all employees making less than \$85,000. She initiated a flexible return to work program for all new mothers in the headquarters and stores. And, she encourages her employees to exercise, participating alongside them in in-store fitness classes whenever possible.

"We've developed a very high performing company," Day recently told Katie Couric. "...There are things I've done that change the way we work."

We've all heard the claims, the theories, and the speculation about the ways leadership styles vary between women and men. Men are considered more strategic. Women are more nurturing, natural problem solvers, good at developing others and building relationships. Researchers say those traits are helping women build companies that can positively impact families and communities.

It's not just how women lead that's inspiring to me. Many female CEOs are better about giving flexibility, providing onsite childcare, allowing pets at work and offering training and opportunities to advance. That trend will be increasingly important with women-led businesses expected to generate one-third of new U.S. jobs by 2018.

Most importantly, women leaders see value in mentoring. In Florida, a new study by The Commonwealth Institute South Florida shows women led-organi-

zations are flourishing and care-

• **TURN TO MOMS. 6B** fully finding employees who fit the culture. Although worried about growing and maintaining profitability, women leaders still consider mentoring others to be valuable to their organizations. More than three quarters of the women said they spend time informally developing other women for leadership in their organization.

Finding time to mentor while growing her business has become increasingly challenging for Donna Abood, chairman and founding partner of Colliers International South Florida, a commercial real estate firm listed as one of TCI's top women-led companies. But Abood feels she and other women leaders are more willing to take time to do it anyway. "I'll stop and explain things, bring them into meetings, include them in emails," — even spend a few hours mentoring one-on-one.

Also, because she's a mother, Abood says, employees come to her for solutions to work life issues, rather than quitting. "I think women leaders spend more time addressing employee needs."

Moreover, researchers say successful women leaders understand people issues in greater depth and see the value in retention. Valerie Holstein, president of Cable Organizer of Fort Lauderdale, says her 50 employees call her "Mother Goose" because she takes the time to deal with details, to find out what



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makes someone tick and what turns them off and even personalizes rewards.

Holstein, a mother of two, says the empathy and nurturing she brings to the workplace has been a powerful motivator, driving her team to perform at 100 percent. She offers flexibility, continuing education and continual opportunity for advancement.

During her 11 years in business, Holstein says she has mastered listening to others, empowering them, and moving them toward where she wants them to go.

That leadership style has helped her build Cable Organizer, an online electrical and telecom distributor, into a profitable internet retailer and a top women-led business in Florida. "As a women own-



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er, if you want loyalty, everything you do, every move you make has to be excellent."

Another key differentiator, female leaders repeatedly say they want to make a difference in their community as well as make money. Founded just four years ago by CEO Mayi De La Vega, ONE Sotheby's International Realty's saw a 30 percent growth year over year in 2012 while incorporating a giving back program into its business plan. De La Vega encourages her agents to give a portion of commissions to charities for women and artists.

"We have an ongoing education process for our agents to fall in love with these charities and understand the causes."

As a women leader, De La Vega feels she's bottom line oriented, but in a different way than a male would be. She says her job is to create an environment that makes work and life responsibilities easier for her 300 agents, 40 staff

members, and the community.

"I think money will come. It's byproduct of creating the right environment."

Of course, I realize there are women who rise up to become leaders or "queen bees," only to hold other women back. But I'd like to think we're going in the other direction. I'd like to believe the future for working families will improve as more women take the helm and use their unique strengths.

Leadership coach and author Debora McLaughlin believes we're on that path: "Women think of ways to build community in the company. When you are working from a shared vision, performance increases and profitability happens."

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