

Have you come a long way?

By Margie Collins



This year marks the 30th anniversary of Margaret Thatcher's ascent to power as the first woman prime minister of the United Kingdom.

"At the time, there was an overarching question that now seems so old-fashioned as to be almost arcane: was it possible for a woman to hold down the office of the Prime Minister and be accorded the same respect and deference as a man in the same position? Serious commentators questioned whether the public would allow a party led by a woman to succeed at the ballot box; in crude terms, would any woman have the balls to lead the country?" wrote political correspondent John Sergeant.

The Iron Maiden, described by arch-chauvinist Francois Mitterand as 'having the eyes of Caligula and the lips of Marilyn

Monroe', faced a daunting task and looked for all the world to see that she might fail: the economy was going rapidly down the lavatory; inflation and unemployment were inexorably rising and the unions had turned ballistic. Today, Mrs Thatcher is universally admired, and disliked, in almost equal measure, and students of politics, social and historical commentators continue to forensically dissect her legacy with Talmudic precision.

"Much of her success in office stemmed from being a woman – not her feminine wiles – but in being so unclubbable in the way men are and which inclines them to compromise. She lacked a sense of humour but she had the authority of a battle-hardened warrior," wrote columnist Andrew Alexander. "She put her head down and charged."

An easy target for criticism in the testos-

terone-fuelled, male-dominated world of Westminster politics, she was constantly upbraided for being tough and insensitive. "I'm not here to be nice," she said.

In 2008, across the pond, there was a real possibility that Hillary Clinton would become the first female President of the US. In the gruelling hustings, she was not expected to lose Iowa, the first of the primaries. So Bill, 42nd President of America and husband of Hillary, was let loose in the next round of primaries, in New Hampshire. "I'm sorry I can't make her younger, taller, male," he thundered on the campaign trail.

In Germany, Angela Merkel was the first female to become chancellor. Not averse to being called Deutschland's Margaret Thatcher, she has been venomously attacked

A head for getting ahead - advice to the sisterhood

• **J. Grasso:** "Return every phone call the day you get it, regardless of time, even if you have to leave a message. Don't take things too personally and don't be easily offended. Work hard, maintain balance, guard your dignity, respect others, be honest. Things happen for a reason; sometimes, the things that seem to be your greatest disappointments turn into the greatest opportunities."

• **G. Knatz:** "Be a team player, share the credit, go above and beyond to show you're exceptional. Use "we", not "I"; it's not about individuals, it's about the organisation you lead. Bring out the best in people who work for you. My style has been to surround myself with the best and brightest, and to look for people smarter than me."

• **M. Bottiglieri:** "Don't be scared of challenges. Have determination, perseverance, professionalism, negotiating skills, good business sense, pragmatism and tenacity. I think one needs to rise through the ranks before getting to the top position to make you remember where you came from and make you respect other people's work."

• **M. Scott:** "Competence. Make your results visible! There are available networks, use them!"

• **M. Dixon:** "Reach for the stars without stepping on anyone's toes. Have the right attitude. Get a mentor."

• **G. Araya:** "Believe in yourself and never give up, even if you fail on your way to the top."

• **I. Rosberg:** "Dare to be different."

by her critics as being an 'incomplete woman' for being childless. You can't win, can you?

Meanwhile, in the macho world of gauchos and huasos, Michelle Bachelet, mother of three, became South America's first woman President, in 2006. "It was said that Chile, a traditionally sexist country, was not ready to vote for a woman. The fact of being a woman became a symbol of the cultural change the country was undergoing," she said. In neighbouring Argentina, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner succeeded her husband to become, in 2007, the country's first elected female President.

They are glacially slow to happen, but these are, nevertheless, seismic shocks to a world order that, since time immemorial, has largely been ordained, organised and operated - by men. "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman," Elizabeth I cried as she rallied her army to defeat the Spanish armada, "but I have the heart and stomach of a king!" Thanks to the right of primogeniture, it would be another 234 years before Victoria's reign, and then another 51 before Elizabeth II.

In her book 'The Feminine Mystique', which defined a generation of women, Betty Friedan rumbled the plight of desperate domestic goddesses who were, they said, happy to iron their husbands' trousers, not to wear them. In 'The Second Sex', Simone de Beauvoir philosophised that: "One is not born, but rather, becomes a woman."

Over 40 years of feminism (hot on the heels of Germaine Greer, Gloria Steinem and Erica Jong) and emancipating women from their kitchens and apron strings taught women that biology does not dictate destiny; they could do anything a man could do; want everything a man could have - money, influence, respect, power, status. But, we have sent men to the moon, mapped out the human genome and spliced DNA and still, women have yet to storm the largely male-populated citadels of power in huge numbers, and the majority remain very much not the equal, but the second, sex.



"It must be recognised that in the last few years, the percentage of females in the workforce has risen significantly - onboard as well as ashore - and not only as employees but also as managers, which is good news"

In an incontrovertibly man's world, there are - if few - exceptions. Tarja Halonen is on her second term as President of Finland; Ellen John Sirleaf is President of Liberia; Mary McAleese is President of Ireland. Yulia Tymoshenko is Prime Minister of the Ukraine, Iceland's is Johanna Sigurdardottir and Mozambique's is Luisa Diogo. The Philippine President is Gloria Arroyo and India's is Pratibha Patil. Indra Nooyi, as

PepsiCo's Chairman and CEO, is feted as the most powerful businesswoman in the world; Cynthia Carroll is CEO of the mining giant Anglo American; Marjorie Scardino is Pearson's CEO; Christie Hefner presides over Playboy Enterprises; Kraft Foods has Irene Rosenfeld and Ho Ching is head of Singapore's very powerful Temasek.

Women walk a very tight rope, but are making new inroads all the time, but the pace of change is slow, the advances rare and far between. And while some companies and industries remain steadfastly men's clubs, others - notably shipping and maritime-related industries - if not laying out the carpet of welcome, have at least opened their doors wide open to women who have claimed the top positions in their fields.

Pam Conover, 53, is President and CEO of Carnival Corp.'s luxury cruise brand, The Yachts of Seabourn. "It is the third time in her career that she has been selected for the presidency of a cruise line, an unprecedented achievement for a female executive," read the announcement of her appointment in 2006.

"While there aren't very many of us in the 'corner office', there are many women in high-profile positions in the cruise industry, in marketing, sales, shoreside-support and ship-repair operations," she said. "My experience has been that any gender bias has overstayed its welcome and the smart operators have long since taken to recruiting talent wherever they find it."

Marita Scott, 51, Managing Director of Norway-based NorthEdge Risk Services, member of the Maritime Resource Group of Bergen's Chamber of Commerce and President of the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA) International (see box), said: "The shipping industry is more male dominated than other industries, and this is reflected in top positions, but I think the speed of development in gender equality is assisted by being part of an information society and global standards in corporate governance." However, she adds: "I have been at business dinners where the main speaker has referred to a fellow female professional colleague, sitting at his side, as 'pretty' and 'delightful' - all done in a well-meaning way, but still quite embarrassing."

Geraldine Knatz is the Port Director of the Port of Los Angeles. "A big deal was made about me being the first woman to head the Port of Los Angeles. I don't think the industry, while male dominated, has a bias against women; it has been changing. Once you get to a certain level, the position is more important than the gender," she said.

Jeanne Grasso, 48, is partner at Washington, DC-based Blank Rome LLP; she provides legal advice to clients on maritime and environmental issues. She said: "Over my 15 years in the industry, it's becoming more common to see women in senior positions and more commonly sharing a podium with men at events."



“I believe I was put in this position to be a change agent. Change is hard to do, and many don’t like changing things”

Mariella Bottiglieri is the 31 year-old Managing Director and Chartering Manager of Naples-based Giuseppe Bottiglieri Shipping Co. She said: “It’s undeniable that there are more men than women in the industry, but it must be recognised that in the last few years, the percentage of females in the workforce has risen significantly – onboard as well as ashore – and not only as employees but also as managers, which is good news.”

Irene Rosberg is Copenhagen Business School’s Programme Director of its Executive MBA Programme in Shipping & Logistics (Blue MBA). Her perspective is historical: “The industry, for a great many years, has been very tradition bound and male dominated, as those who had been involved in this business were former seafarers. However, in an intensely competitive and fast-changing global environment, the industry has realised that it cannot afford to be slow to embrace change or to lag behind. To change the image of this industry, we have moved beyond traditional leadership-development models and become more active in identifying and recruiting the next generation of leaders. Many of these new talents happen to be women.”

“I think that women in shipping have had to work harder than men to prove they could do the job well. I think it’s all to do with attitude. As a woman working in the industry, I don’t go moaning about gender differences; I go about learning and doing my job well, helping my customers,” said Maria Dixon, 51, Managing Director of ISM Shipping Solutions.

Through a glass ceiling - darkly

It’s a given that, in order to be considered ‘good’ in whatever women do, they must do it twice as well as men. This aphorism gave rise to the notion of the alpha female, described by writer Polly Toynbee as someone “pretty exceptional. There aren’t a whole lot of people trying to be like her. Those women who do get to the top are mavericks and hybrids.”

The Office for National Statistics reported, in 2007, that girls were outperforming boys at all levels of education and were graduating with better degrees. Despite the high number of women hired at entry level, the number of women in very senior positions or who get to the top is still quite small. Some of those who keep climbing the slippery ladder of success to take their rightful place in boardrooms and corporate hierarchies inevitably seem to hit a glass ceiling; they suddenly get cold feet and their resolve to go higher and farther weakens.

“It shows progress has stalled. The glass ceiling is visible; it’s no longer glass, but a concrete barrier. Some call it ‘maternity ceiling’. There’s no doubt that if you want to make it to the top, you have to make sacrifices. The demands are such that some find them unacceptable,” said Joy Kingsley, 46, Senior Partner at Pannone.



“I like to think, that women who are talented will rise on their own”

“The glass ceiling is very real. Firms take in equal numbers of graduates who work their butts off, get to their early 30s, want children, then leave. Firms are happy with that, because they have had 7 or 8 years of high productivity at fairly low cost,” Catherine Gannon, solicitor, said.

“There were times when I bumped against it myself or saw it happen to other women. On the other hand, there were times I have had opportunities offered to me that were not available to males,” said Geraldine Knatz.

“I’m not sure if, consciously, it’s a glass ceiling, but I think subconsciously it is. For example, when recruiting a person for a board or management post, we tend to consider those we already know, or are visible to us. If women aren’t visible, how can they be recruited? Some women need to work more on their ‘image’ and to promote their strengths. Being visible also includes doing extras, such as taking part in industry associations, networking, being in the media,” said Marita Scott.

In Panama, 28-year-old Gabriela Araya is the commercial director of Setimsa, a ship-repair company. “The glass ceiling exists. There are also fewer opportunities in the industry for women; also more stress, more pressure to succeed and more responsibility for women in top positions.”

Sex and Power - tougher for ambitious women doing it all

In 2008, the UK’s Equality & Human Rights Commission published its Sex & Power report, an audit of a range of posts in 25 categories of power and influence, which showed the biggest fall in the numbers of women in top jobs. It found that fewer than 20% of MPs, just 11% of FTSE100 directors and 9% of senior judges, were women. The report said it would take at least 200 years before there could be parity in the numbers of men and women in the ‘mother of parliaments’.

Nicola Brewer, Chief Executive of the Commission, said that against all expectations, things are getting tougher for women with ambition. “We always speak of a glass ceiling. In some cases, it appears to be made of reinforced concrete. We have an inflexible workplace, designed to fit the 8am - 8pm male culture; that has to change.”

The facts are that there are family-hostile, female-unfriendly companies out there, and bosses unwilling to provide flexible working hours for mothers returning to the workplace; the egregious gap between men’s and women’s salaries needs addressing; the cost of childcare, when it is available, is prohibitive. Some women scale the heights of the corporate ladder and once they reach middle management, they stop climbing. After their childbearing years, some who think their family needs should come first choose not to return to work.



“For me, the key is to do something that matters to you, that you enjoy. Then the effort and persistence required for success won’t be counted as a sacrifice, but as part of the fun of doing what you want to do”

Work-life balance - do you juggle?

- **G. Knatz:** “I don’t and it bothers me! But I have allowed senior management to take every other Friday off and I try to do it too. I get up very early, at 4.45am every day, to give me more time. And I make sure I exercise every day. I don’t lunch, generally.”
- **J. Grasso:** “It’s difficult! Being married to a patient, understanding and supportive husband is very helpful. Plus minimising the amount of sleep necessary!”
- **M. Bottiglieri:** “The industry requires you to be almost always contactable and reachable, but technology is making our life easier – mobile phones and emails. Of course, this means that your work never leaves you completely, but if you love your job, you don’t feel it as a sacrifice!”
- **M. Dixon:** “I have a laptop and a telephone in my kitchen. I’m practically on stand-by all the time!”
- **P. Conover:** “I’m not very balanced as I work a lot. I’m lucky to have a very understanding and supportive husband.”

Sir Alan Sugar, businessman and star of the TV show ‘The Apprentice’, once said that many employers routinely binned the CVs of women of childbearing years. As an employer, he said, he would like to be able to ask women candidates at interviews: ‘Are you planning to get married and have children?’ In the UK, this question can get you in trouble with the law, but according to Sir Alan, it gives businesses the easy option – “Just don’t employ them”.

Working women who break all gender barriers find they need a small army of people to help them, and they especially need husbands or partners willing to play an equal and active role in the domestic front – housework, as well as parenting. Many women work very long hours and come home to a house that needs tidying up, a family that has to be fed; their husbands take it for granted they will still do most of the heavy lifting at home.

Erin Pizzey, who in 1971 founded the first refuge for battered women, said in a TV documentary (BBC2, June, ‘The Trouble with Working Women’): “There’s been a subterranean war between men and women, which has been won by women, and they don’t actually understand what they’ve lost. I don’t think anybody foresaw that what a freedom of choice would do is imprison many. Many women have to work so hard and I just see an exhausted generation of women trying to do it all.”

Women hold the keys but men control the locks - it’s complex

Experts argue that some of the limitations that constrain women’s advancement in the workplace are largely self-imposed, and that the home has become the battlefield for a power struggle between a working wife and a working husband in a war neither can win. Have we set the bar too high, they wonder – the lovely house, the adorable 1.7 children, the big job? Can a marriage withstand two workaholics who are barely there for their children and for each other? Nobody seems to object to a woman being a successful scientist, lawyer or investment banker, if at the same time she manages to be an outstanding mother, a loving wife, an excellent housekeeper.

A recent study by the management consultancy DDI, based on the career patterns of 10,000 managers in Western countries, including those of 3,800 women, found that only 7% of women in male-dominated industries reached executive level, and that only one in 14 women have a real potential to reach the top. “Most women never reach the glass ceiling,” the report said, “they slide down instead on glass walls before they get near the top. If careers are like trains, it seems men board the InterCity, while women make do on the suburban line.”

The findings were disputed by the think-tank, Civitas. “It isn’t invisible discrimination; it’s imaginary discrimination. There’s no gender gap. There is a childcare gap and that is not a matter for employers. Women don’t put themselves forward for promotion or they don’t work the long hours because they’re bringing up children. The reasons for that are complex,” said Anastasia de Waal of Civitas.

Avivah Wittenberg-Cox, founder of European Professional Women’s Network and author of ‘Why Women Mean Business’, said: “Women may hold the keys, but men still control the locks. Most companies have a policy to spot high-potential employees between the ages of 30 and 35, yet this is exactly when ambitious women are likely to be having children. Today, women account for more than half of university graduates and more than half of the top talent in business. Yet, so much of the corporate world remains a place where women can only succeed if they act like men. For a lot of women, that’s just unappealing. Women don’t necessarily



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want to get to the top, but they want to be excellent at everything they do – as mother, daughter, girlfriend, wife or professional.”

Mariella Bottiglieri, one of the youngest female directors in Italy’s shipping industry, comes from a family whose shipowning activities go back to 1850. Maria worked as a broker in London for four years before joining the family firm. “I grew up hearing about freight rates, ports, vessels, navigation issues.



“Many of the talented people who are sitting in mid-career positions today are women. They have to seize the opportunity and aspire to lead within the industry, rather than just settling for a job”

I played with my Barbie dolls in the engine room of a vessel! I grew up on ships and felt that I was destined to be in the shipping industry, working in the family business. I feel lucky because I'm doing a job I love. It requires frequent travel and is often around-the-clock work. For a woman with a husband and kids, it's not always easy to balance her job with her personal life, but if she likes her job, she can succeed.”

Irene Rosberg does not believe that, for it to succeed, the shipping industry requires one set of tools for men and a different set for women. “I believe one of the main reasons for women lagging behind is the extra pressure of family demand which, in many cases, makes highly qualified, high-achieving women take a detour from their career path. What needs to be done is to develop a system which helps these women resume their jobs. It's difficult. You have to be prepared to make sacrifices.”

Panamanian-born Maria Dixon worked her way up from clerk/secretary in the

Consulate of Panama in London to become, years later, the consulate's head of shipping, the highest post a non-diplomat can hold. “You have to run the extra mile to ensure success – either in washing the car, baking a cake or negotiating a multi-million-dollar contract. If I have helped my customers get the certificate for their ship to sail, get the mortgage registered before the bank's closing time, or saving them millions of dollars at risk, people in our industry remember.”

Pam Conover's work in the cruise industry began as a banker involved in the financing for companies building cruise ships. “I became fascinated with the idea that the end-product of a cruise is a dream fulfilled. We take our guests to places they have always wanted to see. It takes a very different type of management to oversee a product that really only lives on in the memory of your customers. It requires a person to be forward-thinking and imagine. For me, the key is to do something that matters to you, that you enjoy.

The Norwegian way - 40% quota of women in boardrooms

In 2002, in response to the public mood in Norway, Ansgar Gabrielsen, then Trade & Industry Minister, introduced a government-backed proposal to impose female quotas of at least 40% for boards of companies listed on the Oslo Stock Exchange. Those in breach of the quota would be prosecuted. The law was passed in 2005.

Gabrielsen said that his ‘boardroom revolution’ was inspired by American studies showing that the more women there are at the top of a company, the better it performs, the higher its share-price growth, and with more female customers, the law makes good economic sense. A survey of Norwegian women appointed to board positions showed that most of them had significantly higher educational and professional qualifications than their male colleagues; the majority of them also distinguished themselves in other professional careers.

“What's the point in pouring a fortune into educating girls and then watching them exceed boys at almost every level, if, when it comes to appointing business leaders in top companies, these are drawn from just half the population – friends who have been recruited on fishing and hunting trips or from within a small circle of acquaintances? It's all about tapping into valuable under-utilised resources,” Gabrielsen said.

Norway is ranked by the World Economic Forum as one of the best countries in the world for working women – they enjoy free childcare, maternity leave on full pay for a year, ‘papa leave’ for six weeks, and they are allowed to return home for one to two hours in the middle of a working day to breastfeed their babies.

Then the effort and persistence required for success won't be counted as a sacrifice, but as part of the fun of doing what you want to do.”

Jeanne Grasso says that in the past, “many women did not choose the maritime industry as a career choice, and are thus under-represented and lag behind in leadership positions.” She concedes that because women in the industry are in “such a minority, the obstacles to overcome are greater, and if a woman makes a mistake, I think it's much more noticeable because there are so few women in senior positions.”

“The problem is that it's harder to forgive a woman for failure,” said Mariella Bottiglieri.

“Women are more apt than men to admit they screwed up,” said Geraldine Knatz. “I've screwed up numerous times, but it's never been because I haven't worked hard. I think women are driven to put in lots of hours to deliver on promises they made.”

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"Women normally have the pressure of family life, which is added to the pressure of work life. As a result, in many cases, they end up losing face time at the office, which negatively impacts their success," said Irene Rosberg.

Social engineering to favour women

At the end of April this year, Harriet Harman, Labour's deputy leader, published the controversial UK Equality Bill, a piece of social engineering which promotes equality in the workplace, gives employers legal powers to discriminate in favour of women and to reveal and correct pay gaps between male and female workers. The bill, to be debated in coming weeks, will challenge male dominance of top jobs and encourage more women to apply for senior posts.

Miss Harman said: "Sometimes we have to take scary methods in order to achieve worthwhile results. It's about saying 'because you are a woman, I'm going to put you in this promotion'". In February, UK Communities Secretary Hazel Blears said: "Maybe if we had more women in the boardrooms (of banks), we may not have seen as much risk-taking behaviour."

Sir Richard Evans, Chairman of United Utilities, takes a dim view of enacting law to change culture. "I agree that we don't have enough women on boards, but I think the problem is much more deep-seated than that. It is that companies are not ensuring numbers of women are coming through to senior management positions from which they can break through the glass ceiling and into boardrooms. But getting the best out of human capital begins in schools and universities, at the stage of careers advice and later, advancement in the workplace. A big culture change is required to tackle that and I don't necessarily believe changing the law changes people's attitudes," he said.

Jacey Graham, Director of a FTSE100 cross-company mentoring programme declares: "There's no appetite for quotas in the UK. There is an appetite to facilitate tal-



WISTA sisters round the world

In 1974, five women brokers in the tanker market met at a London restaurant for lunch; they had so much fun exchanging views and news they decided to meet again – on a regular basis; they founded the Women's International Shipping & Trading Association (WISTA). Today, there are over 1,000 WISTA members (and 20 national WISTA associations) around the world.

WISTA is for women in management positions in maritime transport and related trades, including banking and finance, insurance and law and risk management. Their website states: "To be a woman in a male-dominated industry has never been easy and getting to the top is harder still." And: "The increase in women's representation is far too slow. Too many women are too modest and there's a lot more leadership potential than meets the eye."

WISTA's 2009 annual conference is in September, on the theme of 'Diversity and Corporate Social Responsibility.'

ented women coming through, but they must be seen to compete on the same terms as male colleagues."

Irene Rosberg added: "Many of the talented people who are sitting in mid-career positions today are women. They have to seize the opportunity and aspire to lead within the industry, rather than just settling for a job. They need the right education and professional skills. Globalisation, the environment and changing technology are all placing new demands on the industry and a great deal of pressure on women and men in top positions.

More emphasis should be put on preparing people in the sector by giving them the right competence to face these challenges."

"I like to think," Jeanne Grasso said, "that women who are talented will rise on their own."

Pam Conover recalls one of Seabourn's captains trying to convince her that the company needed to increase the spending on the teak deck. "He explained to me that teak is like a woman, it responds well if lovingly stroked and oiled, but becomes tired and ugly if left alone to the elements."

"I believe I was put in this position to be a change agent. Change is hard to do, and many don't like changing things," said Geraldine Knatz.

"Maybe if we had more women in the boardrooms (of banks), we may not have seen as much risk-taking behaviour"

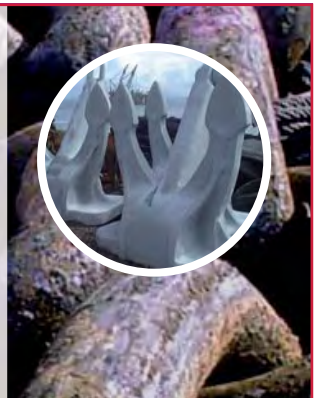
Maria Dixon is hopeful for the future: "As time goes by, I believe the industry will reach a balance. In the past, when you went to a shipping gala dinner, reception or exhibition, women there were most likely to be the wives of executives. Today, most women are there representing their own companies. We have come a long way, without banging our drums or demanding rights, but showing professional capability."

Sigmund Freud said that despite his 30 years of research into the feminine soul, he has not been able to answer the great question that has never been answered: "What does a woman want?" It's not a conundrum. Women have come a long way, but life is a long row to hoe, so have farther and further to go. Men will still go on as before and a sage reminds us that it doesn't much matter whether the cat is black or white, just so long as it catches the mice. What do women want? The same things as men want, apparently, and the recognition that they hold up half of the big, wide sky. ■



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