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**HEADLINE:** O.C. **ENTERPRISE:** 'GLASS CEILING' STILL STALLING WOMEN ON RISE

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**BODY:**

When Veronique Brunard graduated from college to begin a career in public relations, she expected great things. But two years in the working world taught her that not everyone would take her seriously -- especially, she believes, her male supervisors.

Frustrated by her lack of progress, she returned to school to study for a master's degree in business administration. She hopes the additional training and financial knowledge will make an impression on future bosses.

"I learned that what I thought might be possible is not always, or it might take more time," said Brunard, 25, who will graduate in May from Chapman University in Orange. She plans to stay in the communications field.

"I may be in the shadow for a while, but I have a lot of energy. I will try to fight some of the barriers. . . ."

A U.S. Labor Department study this summer helps illustrate Brunard's concerns. The study concluded what many women and minorities have believed for a long time: that they face invisible barriers in their careers. The yearlong study of nine Fortune 500 companies found that women and minorities face the so-called glass ceiling at lower levels than previously believed.

Among the problems, the study found, is that women and members of minorities were frequently excluded from informal career-enhancing activities such as networking.

After the study was released, Labor Secretary Lynn Martin promised to stress educational and voluntary efforts by business to break promotional barriers for women and minorities.

Brunard was one of eight female MBA candidates and recent graduates that The Times interviewed from three Orange County universities. Some, like Brunard, said they will try to fight barriers that exist for women trying to climb the corporate ladder; others said they will sidestep the issue by starting their own businesses. And a few said they do not believe that a glass ceiling exists.

"Maybe I'm a bit naive in my view of how things really work, but I think you can let your skills speak for you," said Mary DeBolt, 32, who is studying part time for her MBA at Cal State Fullerton. She has worked for eight years as a computer systems analyst for General Dynamics in Pomona, and she is hoping the degree will propel her into management.

Aline Dupont, who will graduate from UC Irvine in May and plans to join an accounting firm, said she has given the glass-ceiling issue a lot of thought. "I just read a book about women and accounting, about the history of what women have had to work against -- the old boys network -- to make partner," she said.

"I'm not highly optimistic but I'm not discouraged. . . . I still believe that if I work hard enough and I'm smart enough, that's how I'll make partner." Dupont says she makes a point of asking during job interviews whether the employer has women in top positions.

Just feeling empowered enough to ask those questions is a new development for women, says Judy Rosener, a UC Irvine management professor.

"Up until now, women never felt they were in a position to ask the questions," Rosener said. "They felt they were lucky to get a job. Women felt inferior, not credible."

Another UC Irvine student, Kim Finder, said her employer brought up the glass-ceiling issue with her during a job interview. She graduated in May with a combined bachelor's and master's degree in business administration and began working in July for the Price Waterhouse accounting firm in Costa Mesa.

"They made a point of telling me about the opportunities for women in management," said Finder, 22. "I'm not one who's big into women's issues, but now that I'm here, I'm certainly glad they have active policies."

#### How to Shatter 'Glass Ceiling'

- \* Try to view your job as your supervisor might. People tend to overplay the importance of their jobs, which can get them stuck there.
- \* Choose a "line" job over a staff job. Line jobs are those concerned directly with making money: in production, operations, sales or marketing. Typical staff jobs are in human resources, accounting, legal and payroll departments.
- \* Set your sights, if only symbolically, on the chief executive officer's job. The symbolic function of a goal is that of a beacon shining far ahead to guide you when other directionals malfunction.
- \* While it may not be a good idea to tell people you are aiming for CEO, do openly express interest in the job one level above yours.
- \* Choose a company that has demonstrated willingness to promote women into top management.
- \* Keep an eye on your competition. Imitate the smart people. If they leave the company, you may want to take a cue from them.

Source: "Games Mother Never Taught You" by Betty Lehan Harragan.