

Monday, October 20, 2008

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. | MANAGEMENT


GET 2 WEEKS FREE
 THE ONLINE JOURNAL SUBSCRIBE NOW | THE PRINT JOURNAL SUBSCRIBE NOW

Today's Paper ▾ Video ▾ Columns ▾ Blogs ▾ Graphics ▾ Newsletters & Alerts ▾ New! Journal Community

Subscriber Log In ▾

 HOME | U.S. | WORLD | **BUSINESS** | MARKETS | TECH | PERSONAL FINANCE | LIFE & STYLE | OPINION | CAREERS | REAL ESTATE | SMALL BUSINESS

 ASIA | EUROPE | EARNINGS | ECONOMY | HEALTH | LAW | **MANAGEMENT** | MEDIA & MARKETING | MORE INDUSTRIES ▾ | COLUMNS & BLOGS
TOP STORIES IN
Business
 4 of 10
Initiative Moves Women Up Corporate L...

 5 of 10
Crisis Helps Stimulate the Dollar

 6 of 10
Leading Indicators Edge Up
Economic China

THEORY & PRACTICE | OCTOBER 20, 2008

Initiative Moves Women Up Corporate Ladder

LeasePlan Hires Consultant, Offers Counseling and Revisits Pay Plan to Transform Its Culture and Promote Female Employees

By CARI TUNA

Article

Comments

MORE IN **MANAGEMENT** »

KEY SAMPLE OF SUBSCRIBER CONTENT

 FOR FULL SITE ACCESS: **SUBSCRIBE NOW - GET 2 WEEKS FREE**

Shortly after joining LeasePlan USA as its head of sales and marketing in 2003, Mike Pitcher met with representatives of the vehicle-leasing company's top customers. To his surprise, most were women.

Women also outnumbered men among LeasePlan's 450 employees. Yet the vast majority of top managers at the company, a subsidiary of Netherlands-based LeasePlan Corp., were men.

Soon after, LeasePlan began an effort to transform its corporate culture -- rooted in the old-boy network of fleet managers -- and promote more women. Executives hired a consultant to offer women career counseling, revised the company's pay plan to stress performance over longevity, and displaced some longtime managers. Today, three of the eight top executives are women, up from one in seven two years ago.



MIKE PITCHER

Women employees say LeasePlan is a more supportive and collaborative employer. Mr. Pitcher, now the company's chief executive, calls the initiative a strategic investment rather than "the politically correct thing to do."

"LeasePlan doesn't build anything," he says. "Our sustainable competitive advantage is our people."

LeasePlan's approach could provide a roadmap for boosting the presence of women in management at other companies in traditionally male-dominated industries, experts say.

Such efforts require sustained commitment at the top, says Sheila Wellington, clinical professor of management at New York University's Stern School of Business. Executives "need to make it very clear that this isn't the flavor of the month," says Ms. Wellington, a former president of Catalyst, a research firm focusing on women's workplace issues.



Email Newsletters and Alerts

The latest news and analysis delivered to your in-box. Check the boxes below to sign up.

 CareerJournal Update This Week's Most Popular

 On the Editorial Page

 Also send me information about more WSJ Features

SIGN UP

[Terms and Conditions](#) | [Go to Email Center](#)

People Who Viewed This Also Viewed...

On WSJ.com

In My Network

[Obama Receives Unexpected Greeting](#)
[Awaiting Yahoo Earnings, Sans Enthusiasm](#)



Getty Images

Ms. Wellington says executives must hold middle managers accountable for supporting and promoting female subordinates, particularly at smaller companies. "If [LeasePlan] can do it in this industry, it goes to show that it can be done anywhere," she says.

Fleet managers emerged in the 1940s to oversee the leasing and maintenance of corporate car and truck fleets. Most

employees were men, many of them mechanics, says Cindy Brauer, managing editor for Automotive Fleet Magazine. LeasePlan was founded in 1963.

Today, many companies that use fleet managers assign the relationship to human-resources departments, staffed primarily by women. But most executives at fleet-management firms are still men.

LeasePlan executives launched their initiative in 2006. They hired Pathbuilders Inc., an Atlanta human-resources consultancy that focuses on women, to craft a program that includes a skills assessment, career guidance, and tips on communicating and building a "brand." The program, which taps about 30 women each year, also features networking events and a panel discussion with female executives from other firms.

The broader effort to transform the corporate culture distinguishes LeasePlan from other companies trying to promote women, says Maria Goldsholl, chief operating officer of Mom Corps, a staffing company specializing in flexible employment for women.

"I deal with companies every day who say that they want to promote women ... but they don't make sure that there is a change in the culture," says Ms. Goldsholl, who, at a previous employer, had hired Pathbuilders for a project.

Ava Turner, 49 years old, started at LeasePlan in 2006 as an accounts-payable supervisor. She had worked in similar jobs for several companies since the early 1980s and had never considered doing anything else. Later that year, she was selected for the Pathbuilders course.

The program prompted her to think that her knack for managing people wasn't limited to accounts payable. When a top post in LeasePlan's license and title department opened up this year, she successfully sought the promotion. She now supervises eight people, up from three, and is considered a salaried, rather than hourly, worker. "I realized maybe there is something else out there for me, maybe I do want to go a little bit higher," she says.

Balancing the Scales

LeasePlan CEO Mike Pitcher offers these tips for promoting women:

- Show top managers are committed
- Explain the business reasoning
- Create opportunities for promotion
- Consider hiring a consultant -- Provide networking and mentorship opportunities

One in five women participants in the first class has since been promoted, Mr. Pitcher says. Six of the company's top 14 managers are now women, up from four two years ago.

The program also appears to be boosting job satisfaction and engagement among LeasePlan's women employees. In a 2006 survey, 35% of women agreed that "management supports my efforts to manage

my career." The following year, 47% of all female employees and 71% of program participants agreed. The percentage of women who said they think positions at LeasePlan are awarded fairly increased to 30% from 22%.

Gerri Patton, director of client activation, says the program helped her become more confident and outspoken. The 23-year LeasePlan veteran encourages her female subordinates to apply. "I wish I would have done that program 10 or 15 years ago," she says. "There's no telling where I would be ... The sky would have been the limit."

Write to Cari Tuna at cari.tuna@wsj.com

MORE IN [MANAGEMENT](#) »

Email Printer Friendly Order Reprints

Share:

[Paulson Sees 'Efficient Process' to Take Bank Stakes](#)

[Exelon Lowballs Warren Buffett in NRG Bid](#)

[Long-Shot, Low-Budget Rays are AL Champs](#)

Video >



Tips on Dealing with a Poor Performer
4:00



The Risks of Technology for Health Care Providers
2:48



Boss Talk: IAC's Barry Diller
3:18

More in Management

[Initiative Moves Women Up Corporate Ladder](#)

[Get Rid of the Performance Review!](#)

Most Popular >

Read Emailed Video Commented

1. [Opinion : Palin's Failin'](#)
2. [Opinion : A Liberal Supermajority](#)
3. [Colin Powell Endorses Obama](#)
4. [Opinion : Anna Schwartz: Bernanke Is Fighting The Last War](#)
5. [Obama Shatters Fund-Raising Record](#)

Most Read Articles Feed

**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
AUDIO NEWSCAST PORTAL**



**DIAL
1-800-WSJ-3916
to hear FREE
audio newscasts,
updated daily.**

DOW JONES
A NEWS CORPORATION COMPANY powered by Adondo Corporation

Sponsored Links

2008 New Car Prices

Buying a New Car, SUV or Hybrid? Find Discount Pricing in Your Area!
www.WhyPaySticker.com/New/Cars

Don't Let Yourself Go!

It's never too late to lose weight. Read how I lost 44 pounds fast!
LaurasWeightLoss.com/Success

Wall Street Journal

Wall Street Journal Free Delivery & 4 Weeks Free
www.wallstreetjournal.com

Subscribe Now for Full Article Access and Get

TWO WEEKS FREE

SUBSCRIBE NOW

WSJ Subscriber's content provides:

- **Personalized** tracking of industries
- **Heard on the Street:** up-to-the-minute news and analysis that affects the markets and industries
- **Core business news:** "What's News" and new "Management" section

Related Articles and Blogs from WSJ.com

Sponsored by

Delinquencies Mount for American Express OCT 20, 2008

WorldSpace Files for Bankruptcy, Listing \$2.12 Billion in Debt
OCT 17, 2008

Washington: AIG Needs a Crackdown, Cuomo: I'm on the Job.
OCT 16, 2008

: Despite Crisis, U.S. Drug Companies' Cash Is Safe*
OCT 13, 2008

Related News From the Web

Pee Dee women honored for their contributions to our
businesses OCT 17, 2008
scnow.com

Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation's Women's Initiatives
Win Healthcare B... OCT 14, 2008
news.aol.com

Mom, the next corporate titan - The Boston Globe OCT 13, 2008
boston.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

BACK TO TOP ^

Search News, Quotes, Companies

SEARCH

GET 2 WEEKS FREE

THE ONLINE JOURNAL SUBSCRIBE NOW

THE PRINT JOURNAL SUBSCRIBE NOW

Log In or Subscribe to access your WSJ.com Account

Help & Information Center:

- Help
- Customer Service
- Contact Us
- New on WSJ.com
- Tour the new Journal

About:

- News Licensing
- Advertising
- Conferences
- About Dow Jones
- Privacy Policy - Updated
- Subscriber Agreement & Terms of Use - Updated
- Copyright Policy
- Jobs at WSJ.com

WSJ.com:

- Site Map
- Home
- U.S.
- World
- Business
- Markets
- Market Data
- Tech
- Personal Finance
- Life & Style
- Opinion
- Autos
- Careers
- Real Estate
- Small Business
- Corrections

Tools & Formats:

- Today's Paper
- Video Center
- Graphics
- Columns
- Blogs
- Alerts
- Newsletters
- Mobile
- Podcasts
- RSS Feeds
- Journal Community
- Forums

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Digital Network

- WSJ.com
 - Marketwatch.com
 - Barrons.com
 - AllThingsD.com
 - FiLife.com
 - BigCharts.com
 - Virtual Stock Exchange
 - WSJ Asia
 - WSJ Europe
- Foreign Language Editions:
- WSJ Chinese
 - WSJ Portuguese
 - WSJ Spanish