When Female Business Brains Leave

Well trained professional women are leaving the IT (information technology) profession despite the fact industry expectations of a 22% increase in jobs in the next ten years.

According to Marsha Walton, a former producer of science and tech for CNN, **the IT industry is losing the talents of career women in substantial numbers**. They are either moving to other business models or leaving the tech field completely.

The National Center for Women and Information Technology report by Catherine Ashcraft, senior research scientists found —

- In 1991 36% of IT- related jobs were held by women; by 2008 it **decreased to 25%**
- **56% of departing women** were leaving after 10-20 years in their careers
- A 25% reduction in attrition would **add 220,000 women to the talent pool** for science, engineering and technology

Some of the reasons identified for women leaving the profession include —

- **Gender pay disparity**
  - 2008 salaries for women were $70,370 vs. $80,357 for men
  - **After 15 years of experience salaries are still 15% less than their comparable male counterpart**

- **Management discrepancies in retaining and promoting qualified women**
  - Not addressing a work environment of subtle job hostilities
  - Failing to support and reinforce decisions in behalf of women
  - Not providing and expanding **mentoring** programs for women
    - those mentored show higher job satisfaction, more promotions and higher compensation

Ashcraft also documents **two other critical work environment conditions** that can seriously affect the decision of women to continue their IT careers.

While companies have created a **flex-time** working schedules to accommodate women, the very practice itself in some parts of the industry can have negative consequences. Women report a **"stigma"** attached to it and as if they are receiving "special treatment" when they have to deal with family issues.

In an effort to appear as if a company is meeting its diversification goals, **women often become a scapegoat**. Either they will be promoted before they are ready or being given a **"glass cliff"** assignment. "Glass cliff" means **projects men are avoiding because they have an inherent high risk failure which are then assigned to women**.

The failure of company leaders to address these issues or reinforce their diversity policies means that career oriented **high caliber female business brains are leaving**.

They are taking their IT skills, knowledge and expertise and **looking for more meaning in their work** elsewhere — smaller companies, non-profits and their own entrepreneurial businesses.

It will be interesting to watch the impact these highly skilled female business brains will have in their new

endeavors.