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Corporate Executives Say More Minorities in the C-Suite is Good for Business
But African-American women are having a tough time breaking through

WASHINGTON, DC – January 7, 2009: Senior corporate executives who participated in a recent survey commissioned by The Executive Leadership Council® believe it is important to have minorities in senior executive roles.

Conducted by Harris Interactive, the poll of 150 executives from a broad range of industries, services and locales, was taken between November 4 and December 2, 2008. The findings show that 75 percent of corporate executives believe that having minorities in senior executive positions is particularly important to providing new ideas and innovation and to better reflect the diversity of customers.

The poll, conducted immediately following the election of Barack Obama, occurred at a time when there was increased discussion of how the election of the first African-American President of the United States would impact opportunities for minorities seeking to move into the C-Suite and on to corporate boards.

The findings also showed that African-American women in particular face serious challenges in their climb up the corporate ladder. Thirty-one percent of the surveyed executives attribute those challenges to weaker or less strategic networks available to African-American women. Inaccurate perceptions of African-American women's capabilities (24 percent) and work/life balance demands (23 percent) round out the top three issues cited as preventing or slowing down their rise.

“Frankly, the findings confirm what we found in our in-depth research completed earlier in 2008,” said Carl Brooks, President and CEO of The Executive Leadership Council, the leading organization for the most senior level African-American executives in corporate America. Completed in spring 2008, the *Black Women Executives Research Initiative* was a year-long study of success factors and impediments for black women executives aspiring to the most senior positions in America's top companies. “Not only should senior executives cultivate more trusted and strategic relationships with high-potential black women executives, it is important for black women executives to have and execute detailed plans for advancement and demonstrate a passion for the values and culture of their companies,” said Brooks.

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The Executive Leadership Council (ELC) poll yielded a number of findings that coincided with the earlier in-depth research, including:

- African-American women should seek high-visibility stretch assignments to improve their access to C-Suite positions, (73 percent);
- African-American women should set career goals and create the action plans necessary to achieve them (67 percent);
- African-American women should work with executive coaches to prepare for and take full advantage of critical feedback (57 percent).

“CEOs and black women executives seem to have a significant disconnect about how they view some of the behaviors and experiences of senior black corporate women,” said Ancella Livers, Executive Director of the ELC’s Institute for Leadership Development & Research.

- *Said a CEO, “There is an issue whether black women have emphasized whether they have taken on the most challenging assignments, but are not getting credit for it and not getting the value for it. You want to anticipate what you want, and what you think is owed to you, and ask for it in advance.”*
- *Said one of the black women executives, “I didn’t get feedback about why I wasn’t considered for the General Manager role. I was given the feedback that ‘this position is not for you’ rather than hearing, ‘this is what you need to do to become the GM.’”*

Combined with its research, the Institute intends to use the survey results to finalize programs for senior and mid-level black women executives to help them strengthen strategic relationships with senior level men, build networks and increase visibility. “In spite of the barriers, many black women are skilled and ready to assume the responsibilities of the C-Suite. This work allows us to create a roadmap to help prepare mid-career black women who aspire to the highest levels of leadership in today’s corporations,” said Dr. Livers.

Respondents to both studies provided concrete suggestions when asked what major corporations can do to increase the number of African-American female executives in their senior management teams.

- *“Corporations need **cultural change** to attract African-American females and females in general. Second, **specific training** for women and African-American women by major corporations.”*
- *“There needs to be senior management complete **commitment** – not just a pet project of the CEO.”*

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About the Executive Leadership Council

The Executive Leadership Council is an independent, non-profit 501(c)(6) corporation, founded in 1986 to provide African-American executives of major U.S. companies with a professional network and forum to offer perspective and direction on national and international business and public policy issues. It is the preeminent organization that recognizes the strengths, success, contributions, and impact of African-American corporate business leaders. Council members – more than 400 executives, one-third of them women – represent more than 280 Fortune 500 corporations. For more information about The Executive Leadership Council, please visit www.elcinfo.com.

About the Executive Leadership Council Survey

The Executive Leadership Council survey was conducted by telephone within the U.S. by Harris Interactive for the Harris Interactive Executive Omnibus. The survey was fielded between November 4 and December 2, 2008. The sample included a total of 150 executives from a broad range of industries, services and locales and included respondents from companies with revenue of \$1 billion and above annually. Respondents included CEOs, Chairmen/Executive Vice Presidents and Vice Presidents/Directors.

Black Women Executives Research Initiative Report

The year-long study of success factors and impediments for black women executives as they aspire to the most senior positions in corporate America included interviews with 76 black women executives, 18 CEOs, and 38 peers.

The report was commissioned by The Executive Leadership Council and The Executive Leadership Council Foundation, conducted by Springboard—Partners in Cross Cultural Leadership and supported by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation and the Moody's Foundation.