

# Your job: How to get ahead

An expert offers hints to working women of the '80s



Freddye Pettet of the Portland Urban League.

If you want to get ahead on the job, you must learn to dress for the position you want to attain.

**Y**OU'RE a Black woman and you've managed to get the kind of job you really like and which you know you're qualified to handle very well. But because you're Black and you're a woman, you know there might be some hurdles—ones bearing labels such as "age, sex and race discrimination," "sexual harassment," "job stress" and "office politics."

How can you avoid the barriers to your career success? Why can't you simply do your job well and win the promotions and salary increases you deserve? How can you, a black woman, get ahead on the job?

Black working women—no matter whether cleaning ladies or corporate executives—have always had to deal with such questions, and the answers are likely to become more complex during the '80s as competition for jobs increases and as the available jobs demand much more skilled personnel.

A young woman who deals with career questions every day and who has formulated a number of answers to them for today's Black working woman is Chris B. Bardwell, president of The Career Connection, a Chicago-based career counseling and consulting firm, and director of employment/professional staffing for The American Bar Assn.

"It doesn't matter whether a black woman is seeking job advancement from secretary to administrative assistant, from bank teller to loan officer, or from, say, hospital housekeeper to supervisor of the department, the rules for getting ahead are about the same," says Ms. Bardwell, who also is founder and director of The Minority Women's Center for Self Development & Career Advancement, the first center of its kind in Chicago offering a year-round program to help minority women determine to succeed in the working world, analyze the direction of their careers, and learn to cope with on-the-job problems and the problems of balancing personal and professional lives. "There are certain basic things that have to be observed, certain rules that have to be learned. Quite often, when things aren't going right on the job, black women develop paranoia; they become isolated and defensive, and blame themselves for their lack of progress. They start spinning their wheels and wondering, 'What's wrong with me?' Often it isn't 'me' at all; it's those inevitable hurdles that are in the way. Women who fail to understand this haven't learned the rules and haven't learned how to play the game of getting ahead very well."

Some of the rules Ms. Bardwell advises black women to follow are:

- First of all, recognize the fact that you are black and female and

that this is a dual barrier as it relates to how you are perceived within your company. White males are going to perceive you entirely differently than they perceive anyone else—other white males, white females or black males—who has a position similar to yours. It's a fact of corporate life, so you have to develop the skills to deal with it.

- Discover your personal career strengths by sitting down and examining your skills, your abilities, your weaknesses and your accomplishments since you've been on your job. Write everything down and study your list. This will help you learn just who you are, what you have to offer, and what you have to do to improve yourself. Be brutally honest; don't lie. You have to know who you are and what you have to offer if you plan to advance.

- Once you know who you are and what you have to offer, the next step is to learn the political structure of the environment in which you're working. Develop the "political savvy" for whatever games that may be played and any conflicts that might arise which might affect you on the job. Document everything. Make carbons or photocopies of all letters and memos you send out and route them to people who need to know this information. However, don't constantly "bug" people by sending them copies of trivial information. Keep a personal log of projects and activities you've initiated so that you can take credit if you have to.

- Develop your career image: learn to dress properly for the job. Remember, you aren't going to a party or concert, you're going to work. So, as the old saying goes, *Dress for success*. You don't get a second chance to make that first impression, so select the proper clothes, groom yourself perfectly, and carry yourself on the job in a manner that will make your supervisors take favorable notice of you. After all, they're the ones who'll probably decide whether you should be promoted or left at the same level.

- Find a mentor—someone in the organization who will give you real help and support when you need them. Develop a good, close relationship with that person and discuss with them any problems you have. Be willing to go to your mentor or to an outside support group or organization to talk things out

with people who have had experiences similar to yours. They're usually able to help you come out of the "fog" and see things clearly enough to deal with them.

- If you aspire to a higher position, look around at some of the people who have already "arrived." Try to look and act like them. If you can afford it, dress as well as the woman who already has the position you'd like to have. If you can't afford it, then look as perfect as possible in what your budget permits you to buy. If you don't know what's appropriate, ask someone, or read magazines that offer such information.

- If you have the slightest problem

in speaking—in using correct English, in getting rid of certain colloquialisms, in communicating effectively—you should make every effort to get some help. You might speak one way at home and among friends, but you'd better learn to speak "right" if you plan to impress the people who count in your organization.

- Develop a network or "political base" for contacts and for career-building skills that will help you reach your goals. Connect with other people who are doing jobs similar to your own or to a job you want. I learn all you can through this networking and make all the contacts you can. Also join professional

organizations and associations that can help your career development.

- Take advantage of career development opportunities and activities offered by your company. Attend seminars and workshops in your field or in the field in which you'd like to work in the future. Consider taking some college course that will enhance your skills. Read career development books, publications, professional journals and other material that will offer vital information written by experts. Also update your resume periodically. If an opportunity does arise where you work or somewhere else, you'll be ready with an up-to-date summary of your skills.

- Learn necessary decision-making skills that will enhance your career development and will help you in terms of negotiating for raises and better positions. Develop objectivity about yourself. This is critical. Take stock of what you already know, what you need for improvement, and what you know nothing about.

- Get help from a professional career counselor if you think you need it. Such a person not only helps you focus your skills for a new position but also can help you advance within your organization. A career counselor also can tell you how to motivate yourself and can provide career direction.

## Women stepping into more jobs

It might seem a bit strange to think of coal miners or butchers putting on lipstick and perfume after a long day of work, but it happens. In fact, it's an almost common sight now that a number of women have started to test their skills in traditionally male-dominated job arenas.

For many black women of the '80s, the tools of their trade are (or will become) hard hats, safety goggles and steel-toed shoes instead of typewriters, steno pads and pleasing telephone voices. Whatever their reasons—the adventure of trying something different or the search for bigger paychecks—more and more women are tackling jobs that are often described as "men's work." The so-called "weaker sex" can be found in the darkness of coal mines or working alongside men as carpenters, painters, firefighters, railroad engineers, crane operators, tractor-trailer drivers, plumbers, construction workers and in many other positions that routinely have been handled by men.

From an economic point of view, there are some advantages when women decide not to try nursing, teaching or clerical work but, instead, take employment that many

of their friends call "dirty and greasy." For example, a woman working as a roustabout in a construction and maintenance crew on an offshore oil rig can earn a starting salary of \$27,000 compared to the \$10,000 she could make as a secretary or typist.

On the other hand, many of those same women might experience difficulty because of the physical demands of a number of the higher-paying jobs. Jacqueline Jones, a firefighter assigned to Fire Engine Company 13 in Newark, N.J., says: "I love what I'm doing, but the amount of physical exertion during basic training (six weeks) caused so much fatigue that I just didn't think I'd make it." She made it a year ago and, like some other owners doing "men's work," has won praise from her superiors and fellow workers alike. Nevertheless, there are still some men who just don't like the idea of working alongside women and are quick to groan that "You can't do this kind of work" or "You should be at home having babies." In cases like these, women such as Brenda Solomon, a third-year apprentice carpenter in Memphis, have learned to live with such attitudes. "Whenever I hear men

saying things like that, it just makes me work that much harder to show them that I can do anything they can do."

That kind of confidence has helped women make major breakthroughs in areas that previously

had been labeled "off limits." And by the end of this decade, those in non-traditional jobs probably will have changed the minds of many who believe that a woman's place is "at home in the kitchen."

## Federal job opportunities— are they still there?

Due to the recent budget cuts mandated by Reaganomics, "frosts" and "freezes" are seriously affecting the employment outlook. One area specifically forecasted to suffer from financial cutbacks is that of the Federal Government.

In the past, when college graduates were interested in a career with the Federal Government, they started the application process by taking the Professional and Administrative Career Examination better known as the P.A.C.E. The P.A.C.E. is a 3-hour written test which is the principal means of entry into government for liberal arts and general business graduates, although it is open to all majors and to applicants with equivalent experience. These positions are

in the areas of Administration/Management Support, Claims and Benefits Examining and Regulations Compliance. Applicants who receive passing scores on the written test are placed on a Civil Service competitive inventory in score order and referred to agencies as vacancies open. Previously, about 7,000 placements were made each year in approximately 100 different categories of jobs. Within specific fields, positions are classified by grade levels based on the level of job responsibility. Salaries correspond to the grades; the higher the grade the higher the salary. Therefore, if one is qualified for a GS-9 position and accepts a job at the GS-5 level, the pay would be for the GS-5 salary, not the GS-9 salary.

# Sears



Kathy M. Roberts

### An Opportunity Equal To The Challenge

Kathy M. Roberts began her career with Sears Roebuck and Company in 1971 as a salesperson. Her second position as a clerical worker in the personnel department quickly evolved into the post of store trainer.

In 1977 she transferred to the Roosevelt store as personnel assistant where her responsibilities involved hiring, training and policy administration for about 120 employees.

After leaving the Roosevelt store she assumed the duties of personnel manager for the SeaTac store in Federal Way.

Presently, Ms. Roberts is employed as personnel representative for the Sears Overlake store in Bellevue, Washington.

As personnel representative, Ms. Roberts is accountable for establishing a liaison between managers and employees. She is also one of five personnel representatives who travel to 14 stores between Bellingham and Aberdeen.

A native of Tacoma, Ms. Roberts said she doesn't want to stay in personnel forever and she enjoys working with Sears because the company does not limit anyone.

Originally, Roberts had planned to become a school teacher and attended Pacific Lutheran University for two years.

A resident of Kirkland, Roberts is a collector of old movie stills, enjoys shopping and leisurely walks.

Sears is the largest retailer in the world with almost 4,000 locations all over the country. That means you as an employee will have lots of resources to work with and a lot of room to show what you can do.

You'll have the opportunity to prove yourself. As a Sears employee, you'll have responsibilities. And you can be sure that the challenges and opportunities will last throughout your career, because Sears develops its talent from within.

Why don't you look into the career opportunities at Sears. You just might be in business.

For more information about opportunities at Sears Contact:

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