

Fostering Equal Employment Opportunities for Women

American Women in Radio and Television Power Breakfast

Remarks of Commissioner Kathleen Q. Abernathy

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As prepared for delivery.

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to be here. I would like to commend AWRT's efforts in promoting the entry and advancement of women in broadcasting, cable, and related communications companies. It's a pleasure to be with such a dynamic and intelligent group of women. I wish my daughter could be here with us today. You're the kind of role models I'd like her to meet.

I say that particularly after a recent conversation I had with Julia. When I was driving her to school, she turned her head and asked me a very surprising question: "Mommy, why is it against the law for a woman to be president?" I couldn't believe this question was coming from *my* daughter. I probed further. It turned out that she'd been studying the presidents at school, saw that none of the past presidents had been female, and being the logical girl she is, inferred that women weren't allowed to be president.

Unfortunately, if I took my daughter to many major radio and television companies, she might think the same thing about women becoming executives there too. According to a 2001 study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center, women make up only 13 percent of the top executives of media, telecom, and e-companies, and only nine percent of their boards of directors. And these figures may actually exaggerate women's participation in top-level jobs. Of all the executives included in the analysis, only three percent were women with "clout titles," that is women with executive vice president status or above.

Now it's not the numbers themselves that I'm worried about. If only 13 percent of employees were women qualified for – and wanting to hold – executive positions in media, telecom, and e-companies, so be it. Everyone, women and men alike, make choices about lifestyle and work, and the appropriate balances between the two.

What troubles me is if women are precluded from the opportunities they want to pursue, because of discrimination, lack of awareness of job openings, or lack of opportunities to develop the needed skills to pursue higher positions. I don't want to see women who are equally qualified and equally capable kept from attaining the same levels of achievement as their male counterparts. That's what I want to talk about today. Specifically, I will discuss ways in which the government, companies, and individuals all can ensure equal opportunities for women in the media workplace.

GOVERNMENT

Let's start with the government. There are both external and internal opportunities for improvement at the FCC.

Internal Opportunities

By internal opportunities, I mean the Commission's ability to be a good employer. Our numbers suggest the agency is on the right track. Here the FCC is a role model for other parts of the U.S. government, and indeed many businesses as well. Fifty-two percent of FCC employees are female, compared to 45 percent government-wide. Thirty-eight percent of FCC supervisors are female – that's six percentage points higher than the number of female supervisors government-wide and well above the industry average.

External Opportunities

External opportunities are found in the Commission's ability to require businesses to offer equal opportunities to all workers. The FCC has administered regulations governing the EEO responsibilities of broadcasters since 1969. The courts, however, have repeatedly struck down our rules as unconstitutional.

In particular, under the Commission's most recent rules, if a broadcaster chose the EEO option that allowed it to design its own program to suit individual needs, the broadcaster was required to report the race, sex, and referral source of each job applicant. The purpose of the reporting requirements was to enable the public and the Commission to evaluate the program's effectiveness in reaching the entire community.

The court, however, held that this option was unconstitutional, because the requirement would pressure broadcasters to focus their recruitment efforts on minorities and women. The court was concerned that nonminority job applicants would be less likely to receive notifications of job information solely because of their race.

Accordingly, in December of last year, we initiated another attempt at creating EEO rules that would withstand judicial scrutiny. In the notice of proposed rulemaking, we stated our intention to maintain our anti-discrimination rules as well as fashion rules for “broad outreach” that would be effective and meaningful. As proposed in the NPRM, broadcasters would have three outreach obligations:

- 1) recruit for every full-time vacancy in a manner designed to achieve broad outreach;
- 2) send job vacancy announcements to recruitment organizations that request them; and
- 3) select and complete a designated number of non-vacancy specific outreach approaches, such as job fairs, internship programs, and interaction with educational and community groups.

The broad outreach and anti-discrimination rules will help enable all segments of the community to become aware of specific job openings and broadcast opportunities in general, and to develop the knowledge and skills to pursue them. Media companies then would be benefited by a wider range of qualified applicants from which to choose – and qualified candidates would have a fairer opportunity to compete for jobs the companies offer.

The Commission has set forth a specific proposal, which I believe allows companies a considerable amount of flexibility and discretion in how they will reach the goal of broad outreach. I hope that media companies will comment on this proposal or introduce other alternatives. The insight and viewpoint of the industry and the public are, as always, an important part of the process.

COMPANIES/LAW FIRMS

Government action, however, cannot and should not be the only answer. It is essential that the private sector be enlisted in efforts to provide equal opportunities to women in the workplace. I have a number of suggestions based on programs already in place in some companies, which can contribute to this effort.

Mentoring

Companies and law firms can facilitate executive-level mentoring. Mentoring can make or break it for a new employee – that is something I have learned from experience. Early on in my career, I was fortunate to work with a female law partner. She helped me develop my abilities and told me I was special. Working for her was not easy. My mentor was demanding. But I learned from my mistakes

and developed the skill set I needed to get the job done. My mentor was the key reason I moved into telecommunications.

Recruitment

Companies and firms also can encourage executive recruiters to seek out qualified women. Women often have difficulty tapping into informal, traditionally male networks, but a strong executive recruiting program can help combat this problem.

Training

In addition, corporations can identify programs to train more women for top-level positions. Often it's not a problem of women not wanting to advance – instead it's a problem of few women having the opportunity to develop the necessary prerequisite skills for these positions.

Companies may elect to work with industry associations or other entities involved in this area. For example, the National Association of Broadcasters Education Foundation sponsors the Broadcast Leadership Training Program. The program, targeted to aspiring broadcast owners and CEOs, teaches senior level broadcast managers and entrepreneurs specific knowledge and skills necessary for assessing, purchasing, owning, and operating radio and television stations. Program participants are able to meet with a range of experienced individuals, including: distinguished broadcast executives, FCC staff and leading communications attorneys, and members of the Wall Street and banking community.

Internal Awareness

Finally, companies and firms should be aware of how their culture encourages, or discourages, women from advancing within their institutions.

One problem is how many people continue to perceive the role of women in the workforce. Pollster Celinda Lake found that 62 percent of men felt very comfortable with a woman CEO of a clothing company, but only 55 percent felt very comfortable with a female CEO of a high tech company.

Another problem can be an overall lack of flexibility from corporate America. Having a family need not be mutually exclusive with having a career, but some companies unwittingly may force a woman to decide on one or the other.

Corporations can conduct internal studies to determine whether their organizational culture encourages retention of female executives.

INDIVIDUALS

But all this is not to say that you need to wait for the government, or your company, to take steps if a woman's role in the workplace is to improve. You can and should take the initiative as well.

Some of my advice here is basic: Work hard. Take risks. Learn the technology. Be yourself.

Mentoring

However, you need not take these steps alone. Seek out mentors and mentoring programs. I suggest you research potential mentors, and then ask to talk with them on some specific points for a set period of time. You want to encourage your mentor to take you under his or her wing.

Alternatively, if you're already at the executive level, become a mentor. Take time out for the younger folks. I think you'll find it a rewarding relationship as well. I am currently serving as a mentor for a John Gardner Public Service Fellow. It has been a great opportunity for me to share my experiences and the lessons I have learned along the way with someone who is just entering the working world. In turn, I learn a lot about the issues women continue to face from the opportunity to understand her perspectives, obstacles, and achievements.

Getting involved in mentoring is easy. For example, the Federal Communications Bar Association sponsors a mentoring program for young attorneys and lawyers; all you have to do is sign up.

Networks

Networking also is an important avenue to explore. You can join a relevant trade association, such as AWRT. And once you're a member, get involved and be active. Not only can you meet people, but you can also become a leader and role model for other women. As part of that organization, you can encourage your industry association to examine convention and conference programming to ensure that executive women are featured speakers.

One of the best – and toughest – decisions I ever made was to serve as president of the FCBA. When I was asked to head up the organization, I was 38 years old...and I just learned I was pregnant. I wasn't sure I could handle it. But, when I asked my husband Chuck what I should do, he said "go for it." I did. It was an amazing

opportunity. I had a great time working with members of the Bar and networking with different lawyers in the organization.

In addition, I have enjoyed my involvement in a more informal networking group, which brings together women in the telecommunications industry for lunch on a regular basis. There is no set agenda for these meetings. It just gives women a chance to share stories, experiences, and goals.

In conclusion, many things can be done to ensure that women have equal opportunities. We at the Commission are going to do our best to make sure that these opportunities are made available to all. But it's going to take more than that – equal opportunities require a joint effort. Real reform depends on the work of companies, and individuals within them, as well. All of us have an obligation to continue to create an environment that provides opportunities for talented women to succeed both in government and in industry. In order to compete in the workplace, women don't need better opportunities – we just need equal opportunities.

I don't want my daughter Julia to think that women aren't allowed to be top executives or pilots or president. I want us to show our daughters that we women are capable of the highest achievements, and I want our granddaughters to expect nothing less of us.