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Are You Challenged?

filed under [Breaking the Glass Ceiling](#)

by *Liz O'Donnell (Boston)*

Women may feel unchallenged at work but that isn't stopping them from taking risks and proactively managing their own careers. According to new research from [Accenture](#), almost half of female business professionals around the world (and a similar number of men) believe they are insufficiently challenged. Yet these same women feel confident in their skills and capabilities.



The global consulting firm reported this information after surveying 3,600 professionals in medium to large organizations in 18 countries across Europe, Asia, North America, South America and Africa. Forty-six percent of the women surveyed said they are not significantly challenged in their current roles. This, despite the fact these respondents feel confident in their abilities to manage their workloads, meet deadlines, delegate and negotiate.

The survey also revealed that 59 percent of the women believe their careers are successful or very successful and that their jobs require them to stretch beyond their expected responsibilities on the job.

Despite the lack of challenge from the top down, 81 percent of the women who categorize themselves as very successful, said they assume added responsibilities in order to advance their own careers. They also reported learning new skills, considering new positions and regularly asking for new challenges.

Georgette Pascale felt the need to push herself to the limit when she was working in technology in New York City where she says "keen businessmen and women constantly battle(d) to get to the top" of a cutthroat industry. Pascale, who now owns her own public relations firm says she, "definitely felt an added challenge in my workplace to rise to the top over the males." She admits that much of the pressure she felt, she probably created herself. "Both the company and the clients were male-dominated," she says. "I always went above and beyond." Pascale often took assignments that others didn't want.

Today, Pascale manages an all-female workforce. She advises women to rely on themselves, not other people, to advance their career. "It's up to you," she

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says, “to differentiate yourself from the pack.” This is especially relevant for recent college graduates entering competitive fields such as financial service, law and technology. “There is a sense of entitlement,” says Pascale, “a sense they should be getting more handed to them.”

According to the Accenture study, taking on added responsibility isn't the challenge for women. Asking for the payout is. In several countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, women are more likely than men to ask their superiors for new challenges. However, they are less likely than men to ask for pay raises and promotions. Fifty-six percent of men have asked for raises versus 48 percent of women. And 42 percent of men have asked for promotions versus 37 percent of women. This trend of not asking for the reward and recognition is, “so, so sad,” says Pascale. “We need to speak up more.”

Natalie Holder-Winfield, an employment lawyer and author of the book [Recruiting and Retaining a Diverse Workforce: New Rules for a New Generation](#), offers this advice to women looking to advance their careers. “Remember that career development is in your own hands, not the hands of the people who assign you work.”

Holder-Winfield also recommends looking outside of your place of employment for new challenges. She says professional trade organizations are great places to develop new skills. Finally, as we have [recommended here](#) on The Glass Hammer, she suggests creating your own personal board of directors.

“These are people you have on speed dial who you can call to vet ideas and situations instead of having private conversations on your own heads,” she says. It's not always easy to hear feedback on your performance, but it is a key step in getting ahead and getting paid for it.

A full report on the research, *Untapped Potential: Stretching Toward the Future*, is available at [here](#).

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