

Over the last eight years, the number of women in high positions within companies in Brazil has risen from 8.1% to 15.25%. This is an admirable move towards redressing the imbalance of power which exists between the sexes in the corporate world, but considering that women account for 41% of the workforce, the struggle is far from over. However, according to Silvana Case, Vice-President of the Grupo Catho human resources consulting service, "In 20 years, around 40% of Presidential positions within companies will be occupied by women."

Starting on the Road

Carla Cico, President of Brasil Telecom and winner of the "Established Executive" category of the first "Britcham Businesswoman of the Year Award", suggests that the numbers of women in high positions of responsibility in companies are perhaps low "...because fewer women started off on that road, not having the encouragement to go into business. It is also perhaps more natural for a woman to dedicate herself to what they call the 'Liberal Professions' such

as doctors, journalists and lawyers than to go for a corporate career."

Being encouraged to go into the corporate world in the first place is crucial to seeing women at the top of the ladder in

the future, but Claudia de Souza, winner of the "New Talent" category of the Businesswoman of the Year Award, suggests that training is also important. "We don't see senior women coming out," she says. "They are very good at the operational level and have advanced a lot but we don't see leadership capabilities developing which will really put women in the same position of opportunity as men. In order to address the balance, women in all areas need to develop some leadership capabilities."

Maria Bonomi, the artist who was commissioned to create the statues which were awarded to Carla and Claudia, also talks about this idea of encouragement. "Because nothing is really expected of a woman, if she lives intensely and fully employs her creative force, she can achieve so much more. On the other hand, if she fails, she fails completely and she is judged all the more because of it."

An Aggressive Streak

It has been suggested that men are more successful in reaching positions of power because of a more aggressive nature. "Men may be more aggressive as they are more assertive while women go deeper and are more reflective,"



Carla

suggests Claudia. "In order to be more assertive, women may need to go through coaching and be less inquisitive. Rather than hesitate, just do it."

But have too few women not been reaching positions of corporate power in Brazil simply because of discrimination? Carla does not feel that she has been discriminated against because of her sex during her rise to the top but believes that there are problems at a wider level. "In Brazil there is still a very deep discrimination between men and women. I am not talking about the corporate situation, but at the level of everyday life. This is something that is not acceptable, not because of feminism or whatever, but because of human dignity. I think that at some levels of Brazilian society, women are treated in a very undignified way. So there are problems but not specifically in the corporate world."

Maria Bonomi believes that "Women executives are oxygenating the business world with new angles and perceptions of how to pursue goals, create opportunities and conduct negotiations. A woman lives by her passions and that passion goes into her work.."

Motherhood and the Office

The problems of combining a career with motherhood is something that both Carla and Claudia felt was an issue of great concern. "We should be giving women the opportunity to be able to spend the early years of their children's lives together with them," stresses Carla. "It is important for women to be able to go back to their career. Of course women have to understand that you can be *anything* but you cannot be *everything*, so you should find a balance. In life, it is not everything to become the CEO of a company, there are other satisfactions and ambitions in life and one of those is to become a mother."

As a mother of two, Claudia spent some years in the UK. "In Britain, mothering is an occupation which is recognised by society and respected. In Brazil, that is not something looked at as an occupation in the sense that

mothers in Brazil don't feel they have a career. Whilst head of the Parent/Teacher Association, I was learning about life - human relationships and people management. I learnt a lot about life in the UK - a culture that gives you the space to do mothering."

"Bit by bit women are overcoming the barriers which exist in the work market," says Silvana Case and hopefully



Claudia

awards such as the Britcham Businesswoman of the Year Award will go some way towards providing women with a platform and encourage others to become involved in the corporate world. "I hope that this kind of initiative will stimulate more women to take the burden and the pleasure to try to complete their corporate career," says Carla.

