

Q&A

Business Plan: Women in Leadership

Former U.S. Federal Reserve executive Cathy Jones Minehan '68 focuses on principled leadership as dean of a business school dedicated to fostering women leaders.

Interview by Karen McCally '02 (PhD)

WHEN **CATHY JONES MINEHAN '68** approached corporate recruiters on the Rochester campus in the spring of 1968, most told her they didn't take women into their management training programs.

The Federal Reserve Bank of New York hadn't either. But it decided to take a chance on Minehan the following fall. That marked the beginning of her almost 40-year career in the Federal Reserve System during which she rose to become the president and chief executive officer of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. The first woman president in that bank's history, Minehan served with the presidents of the other 11 Federal Reserve Banks on the Federal Open Market Committee, the body that guides U.S. monetary policy.

In addition to chairing the executive committee of the University's Board of Trustees, Minehan is chair of the board of the Massachusetts General Hospital, chair of Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick's Council of Economic Advisors, and a member of MIT's Investment Company Board. She serves as a director of Becton Dickinson and Co., VISA, MassMutual Financial Group, and MITRE.

In August, she becomes dean of Boston's Simmons College School of Management.

The Simmons School of Management plays a distinct role in business education. Tell us about it.

The management school, and the MBA program in particular, is small, but it's iconic. It fills a particular position in the market both locally and nationally—and to some extent internationally—in that it has always focused on business education for women.

Its vision is to educate women to serve in positions of power and principled leadership. That term "principled leadership" means ethics, governance, corporate social responsibility, diversity management, and organizational behavior. We believe we have a special competency in this area.



LEADERSHIP: The new dean of Boston's Simmons College School of Management, Minehan says the school's vision is "to educate women to serve in positions of power and principled leadership."

Is this a response to the recent financial crisis?

No. Simmons has long made principled leadership training the capstone of its MBA program, and we've been recognized by the Aspen Institute as the No. 1 small MBA program for doing so. But the financial crisis has made the concept of principled leadership resonate even more strongly.

Why do you think there's a need for a business program focused on women?

Certainly there are many women at most business schools. But when you look around, and you see what happens when women get into middle management, how quickly many "drop out," and how few make it to top management, I think there's a role for a school where issues to do with gender and organization, with women and leadership get discussed. And that might happen more easily in a single sex environment.

There are also real social advantages in finding ways for women to advance. Just look at it from the perspective of the pipeline of people entering industry. The student body at most graduate schools, including business schools, can range from 30 percent to 60 percent women.

If your pipeline is filled with women and you can't find a way to move them into senior management, there's something wrong. You're losing brain power. And that can't be good—for society, for businesses, for anybody.

It's sometimes said that balancing family responsibilities is what slows women down. Do you agree?

There's something about this issue that really raises the hair on the back of my neck. It seems to say that women should be seen as secondary contributors solely because of family responsibilities.

In my experience, even if shorter hours are a factor, good women contribute greatly; and they should be expected to do so. My husband and I both worked while we were raising our two kids. We made a lot of adjustments. I don't think there's a one-size-fits-all solution. I think it's something that each couple, each family, each staffer needs to figure out how to do whether it involves child care, elder care, or simply having a life outside work. And businesses should recognize and support those decisions.

How should employers respond to these challenges?

By welcoming diversity. And I think, in general, businesses are much more focused on diversity now because they realize that if they don't, they could be missing out. They could be missing out, for example, by assuming that because someone is a woman, they're going to be raising children, and that raising children will make a woman less valuable on the job; or because someone is an African American and didn't come through the same schooling that a manager is accustomed to, that makes them less valuable. That's not smart business decision making. There just isn't enough talent to go around. We have to create an environment in which everyone who can contribute feels comfortable doing so. **R**