

## What's Your Ladder Style?

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I don't believe there is only one ladder that all women climb to achieve success. If women have been made to feel that reaching the top of the ladder is what determines failure or success, then I'm here to tell you, you've been misled. Every woman comes from a different walk of life and socio-economic background. Some were required by their parents to attend college as soon as they graduated from high school and then quickly move into their career field. Others such as me did not have that opportunity nor was it expected of me. It was much later in life that I decided I wanted to get a college education and begin climbing a career ladder. I came to believe that by bringing value to an employer, that value would be compensated accordingly by the organization I worked for, or by way of an offer to join another company.

Women don't just climb one very tall vertical ladder with most of us making it a third or half way up the ladder while very few make it to the top in a CEO position (if the CEO position defines the top). Not every woman has the same career goals or drive as the one next to them. Some may want to reach CEO status while others are satisfied with managing a department in a retail store. It doesn't make one person better than the other; it only means that their goals are different. I look at career ladders as having four different styles; Step-Stool, Step-Ladder, A-Frame and Extension. Each style of ladder represents the steps required to achieve a particular goal throughout one's career. Based on your goal - you can determine which ladder you are currently climbing and whether or not you want to climb the next one in line.

### **Step-Stool**

The step-stool represents your first job. This would most likely be a part or full time job worked as a teenager or young adult. For example, Kathie, a sixteen year old, was hired at Taco Bell. This was her first work experience and she was content just to receive a paycheck. This is where she started learning what it means to work for a company and such lessons as the importance of showing up on time, following instructions given by your boss, how to deal with customers and consequences and rewards for not being dependable or completing a task on time.

## **Step-Ladder**

The step-ladder represents the next style of ladder and set of goals to achieve in your career path. Kathie continued to accomplish more in her job by taking on other responsibilities but was also interested in doing something different. She was thinking about leaving Taco Bell to gain knowledge about nurse assistant positions. The first rung on the step-ladder for her was to gather information about the job and find out what, if any, schooling will be required or if the employer would provide the training. The next rungs on the step-ladder were signing up for classes or training and then applying for a nurse assistant job. The next was working as a nurse assistant, followed by taking on additional responsibilities such as training new nurse assistants and/or helping write policy and procedures for tasks pertaining to the position. Reaching the top rung of the step-ladder for Kathie was working as a lead nurse assistant and managing other assistants.

You reach the top of each style of ladder when the job you are currently performing does not provide any other opportunities. Some women will be happy to reach this status and stay in this position on the step-ladder for years to come. Others like Kathie, want to see what other opportunities are available on the next ladder. Again, there is no right or wrong ladder, it's entirely up to you as to which one you want to climb.

## **A-Frame**

Now that Kathie has worked as a nurse assistant and has achieved the most she can in this position, she has decided that she would like to pursue a career in nursing by obtaining a Bachelor's degree in Nursing and becoming a Registered Nurse. She is ready to climb the next ladder, the A-Frame.

The first rung on the A-Frame for Kathie is attending school for nursing followed by volunteering for the Red Cross or a hospital to learn more about what nurses do and get some insight into the job. By doing this, she can learn from other nurses on the job by listening to them share with her their experiences of job and school. The next rung on the ladder is graduating with her nursing degree and reaching the top of the A-Frame would be working as an RN in her field of choice; whatever her goal was.

## **Extension Ladder**

The extension ladder is symbolic of the "sky being the limit" for our success. Whatever your dream or goal; you can achieve it by climbing the extension ladder. Before beginning this

climb, Kathie had already achieved success of climbing three other ladders and is ready to begin her next journey.

Her next goal was to become a Physician Assistant working at a large hospital. She has been working as an RN for several years and has gained the experience necessary for her next career goal. The next rung for Kathie was to begin researching what it will take for her both in experience and education to accomplish this goal. Once the information was gathered, she enrolled in school (the next step on the extension ladder). She obtained her Master's in Nursing and completed the Physician Assistant program. She has been working in this new role for several years now. If this is where she wants to remain, then Kathie has accomplished her career goals one ladder at a time and one rung at a time. If she wants to continue on from there, she can extend the ladder a few more rungs.

The beauty of climbing the extension ladder is that it is an extension of your career. Once you have reached your goal as Kathie has, you can extend it further if you so choose by taking the next rung to the next level of your career. The ladder continues to extend as you add rungs to it based on where you want to be. There is no right or wrong style of ladder to climb; it's simply the ladder that will bring you as far you want to climb. Each woman is unique and individual; some content with achieving Step-Stool status and others only if they reach the Extension Ladder status.

Victoria Pynchon, Esq. a very successful attorney sees a career as a life and the development of a career as something that is done in a circle as opposed to seeing career climbing as a vertical ladder in which one tries to get to some perceived "top" of their profession. For some, climbing a very tall vertical ladder may seem like a journey that is impossible to reach or have no desire to ever reach the "top" (whatever defines the top) so therefore, they perceive themselves as failures. That is precisely why I believe there are different styles of ladders and not just one vertical ladder leading to some perceived top. You define which style of ladder you want to climb and how high. Whichever ladder you choose to climb, however high you wish to ascend, take pride in, and be the best you can be at every aspect of your job and life.

"The ladder of success is best climbed by stepping on the rungs of opportunity."

Ayn Rand