

# U.S. ARMY WOMEN GENERAL OFFICERS AND THEIR STRATEGIES FOR ASCENSION

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## ABSTRACT

*A dearth of women General Officers exists in the Army. Only 4.3% of Army General Officers are women (U.S. Department of the Army, 2007). A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted using a modified van Kaam method by Moustakas with semi-structured, audio-taped, and transcribed interviews. The study explored the perceptions and lived experiences of a purposive sample of 23 women active duty Army General Officers, in terms of what leadership factors and competencies the participant officers believed enhanced their ability to be selected and serve in the highest senior leadership positions in the Army. As demonstrated by the research, seven themes emerged that may provide leaders with factors and competencies that may positively impact selection for advancement and career ascension in the U.S. Army and throughout the business community: (a) professional competency and doing a good job, (b) interpersonal skills including good communication skills and taking care of people, (c) being known by your good reputation, (d) taking and doing well in the tough jobs like command, (e) luck and/or timing, (f) not aspiring to make General Officer, and (g) mentoring.*

**Keywords:** Women Leaders, U.S. Army, General Officers, Promotion Factors, Career Ascension, Glass Ceiling, Mentors.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Women make up 51% of the population in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003) and 14.3% of the active duty Army personnel (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005). The roles of women in the military have undergone significant changes in the past three decades. A major change occurred in the mid-1970s when the all-volunteer military force was formed. That change, coupled with President Gerald Ford signing Public Law 94-106 in 1975 created greater opportunities for women in the military. This new public law allowed women to attend the formerly all male U.S. military academies (Boyce & Herd, 2003). The new law was groundbreaking because these new regulations afforded women the opportunity to attend service academies and become officers in the Army, Navy, and Air Force and lead military men (Devilbiss, 1990).

Changes in women's rights in the military have paralleled changes in women's rights for employment opportunities in the civilian sector. The number of women entering the workplace in lower and mid-level positions has significantly increased during the last 30 years. However, the proportion of women attaining high-level corporate leadership positions has remained relatively small (Catalyst, 2006). During the same time, 1973, women also volunteered and entered the military in record numbers. According to Titunik (2000), as the number of women increased in the military, there was an awareness that women in the military were "becoming essential rather than ancillary in the armed forces" (p. 229).

In the mid-1970s, after the Vietnam War, voluntary enlistment into the new all-volunteer military was low. The Department of Defense realized it had to increase the role for women in the military (Binkin & Bach, 1977). More women were needed to fill many of the vacant military positions. The increase in women into the Army also resulted in the Army announcing in 1972 that all military occupational specialties (MOSs) would be open to women except for 48 combat or hazardous duty MOSs. This was a major change for the United States military and for American society. As women soldiers in the Army increased in numbers from 3.9% in 1974 to 15% of women soldiers in 2005 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005), so too have the number of women selected and placed into the officer or primary leadership roles in the Army.

### 1.1 Promotion Inequities

Although the United States military was one of the first organizations to allow women and minority ethnicities equal status and equal pay, the Army still faces equity challenges with respect to promotion and advancement opportunities for women and minorities. Although statistics show women comprise 15% of the active duty Army, women officers are underrepresented in the most senior leadership positions, the

General Officer ranks (Looney, Kurpius, & Lucart, 2004). Advancement opportunities for women officers in the United States Army in achieving the rank of General Officer are disproportional to the number of women serving in the Army. Only 4.3% of Army General Officers are women (U.S. Department of the Army, 2007). Pinch, MacIntyre, Browne, and Okros (2004) reported an under-representation of women in the most senior ranks in the officer and noncommissioned officer corps in the modern day military. DiGuglielino (2000) stated that female United States Army officers appear to reach a glass ceiling at the rank of Brigadier General (one-star General).

## **1.2 Purpose of Study**

A qualitative phenomenological research study was conducted using a modified van Kaam method to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of a purposive sample of 23 active duty women Army officers currently serving or having served in the Army who attained the rank of General Officer (GO). The study explored the participants perspectives, specifically what factors the participants viewed as important for women Army officers interested in career ascension in being selected for advancement into the leadership role of GO. The researcher interviewed female Army GOs with the intent of using the interview information to identify patterns and themes relating to what factors were perceived by the women GOs as important in attaining their senior leadership roles in the active duty Army.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Historical Overview**

Women have unofficially been in the Army since the Revolutionary War. Not allowed to be soldiers in the Army, women participated in the early days of U.S. history as nurses, seamstresses, cooks, spies, and as soldiers by impersonating the male gender. Women, with the exception of nurses, were not officially in the Army until World War II. Instead, women were members of the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the Women's Army Corps (U.S. Army Women's Museum, 2002). In the spring of 1948, after two years of legislative debate, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act on July 2, 1948 (Congressional Record, July 2, 1948, as cited in Sherman, 1990). The Women's Armed Services Integration Act, was signed into law on 12 July 1948 (ibid). This legislation allowed women (other than nurses) eligibility to serve in the active duty military in times of peace as permanent regular and reserve members of the Army, Navy, Marines, and the recently formed Air Force. The Women's Armed Services Integration Act also set limits on the number of women serving in the armed forces. The integration act stipulated that enlisted women could comprise no more than 2% of the total force in each branch of service and women officers (excluding nurses) could not exceed 10% of the enlisted women strength. Career opportunities for women were also limited because women were not allowed to have command authority over men (Women's Research and Education Institute, 1998).

On November 8, 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Public Law 90-130 that removed the restrictions on the careers of women officers by removing the 2% ceiling on women serving in the WAC. This Presidential Executive Order also permitted WAC officers to be promoted from the rank of Colonel up through the rank of GO (U.S. Army Women's Museum, 2002). The Army promoted the first two women to Brigadier General on June 11, 1970. The two women were Anna May Hays, Chief of the Army Nurse Corps, and Elizabeth P. Hoisington, Women's Army Corps Director. With the abolishment of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1978 by Public Law 95-584 (Fuller, Fowler, & Ranville, 2006), women were recruited into the Army in greater numbers and integrated into the predominately male Army.

### **2.2 Army Culture**

In the last three decades the percentage of women soldiers serving in the U.S. Army has significantly increased. In 1972, 1.8% of Army soldiers were women. In 1980, 9.1% of soldiers in the Army were women. In 1991, there were 93,100 women in the Army and the percent serving in the Army had risen to 11% (U.S. Army Women's Museum, 2002). By 2005, the percentage of Army soldiers that were women had risen to 14.3% (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005). A corresponding positive change ratio in the number of women selected, trained, and placed into officer or primary leadership roles has also increased. U.S. Department of Defense personnel tables show 15.3% of active duty Army officers are women. A listing of Army officer rank by gender is shown in Table 1 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2005).

**Table 1**  
***Army active duty officer personnel by rank/grade and gender (September 30, 2005)***

Rank/Grade	Total	Male	Female	% Female	% Male
GENERAL	10	10	0	0	100
LT GENERAL	45	45	0	0	100
MAJ GENERAL	100	94	6	6	94
BRIG GENERAL	152	147	5	3.3	96.7
COLONEL	3,775	3,328	447	11.8	88.2
LTC	9,134	7,975	1,159	12.7	87.3
MAJOR	14,835	12,822	2,013	13.6	86.4
CAPTAIN	24,967	20,449	4,518	18.1	81.9
1 <sup>ST</sup> LIEUTENANT	7,490	5,879	1,611	21.5	78.5
2 <sup>ND</sup> LIEUTENANT	8,666	6,926	1,740	20.1	79.9

Note: Table 1. Adapted from U.S. Department of Defense, 2005. This information is U.S. Government public domain material and is not copyrighted.

Women in the Army have limited career opportunities compared to men. Army women are not allowed into most Army combat military occupational specialties by the 1994 Department of Defense Directive (Aspin & Dorn, 1994). The federal law for combat exclusion restricts women “from assignment to units and positions below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground” (H.R. 1815, 2005). Serving in combat arms branches such as the infantry, armor, Special Forces, and most field artillery positions are restricted for women. Frels (1999) stated, “Only combat arms officers have been selected to the highest levels of Army leadership. The majority of Army General Officer positions are held by combat arms officers” (p. 18).

The U.S. military, specifically the U.S. Army, is structured in a very hierarchical and authoritative manner. Ellefson (1998) stated that the Army by design is male dominated and the Army is often addressed in literature as a *brotherhood*. “The assumptions of masculinity are deeply imbedded in the organizational processes and structures, so much so that they are nearly invisible” (p. 3). The Army organizational culture promotes an environment that is focused on masculinity, authority, and making command decisions.

### **2.3 Leadership Theories**

People have been managing and leading people for thousands of years. Leadership theories such as the Great Man Theory to Social Theories of Leadership, to Transformational Leadership have been introduced and accepted by scholars. Until the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, leadership could be defined through the actions of historical figures. Initial theories of leadership centered upon the characteristics, virtues, traits, and actions of great individual leaders, primarily men, who possessed supreme power over his people and cultures. These individuals played a dominant part in the course of events and the fate of nations. Great man theorists believe that certain men are superior to other men. Some men are leaders who are “endowed with unique qualities that capture the imagination of the masses” (Bass, 1990, p. 37). The great man theory was logical, believable, and imperfect. It did not take into account the numerous context sensitive actions, behavioral choices, and historically significant events where there were no preordained great leaders involved. Historically, some leadership researchers maintained the situation, not someone’s traits, skills, or actions, is the most important determinant of who emerges as a leader (Murphy, 1941; Person, 1928; Spiller, 1929; as cited in Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2002).

Social role theory suggests men and women in a society have different leadership positions based on society’s social structure. Many social processes influence the different genders psychologically in a manner that encourages differentiated gender role performance (Eagly, Diekmann, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Koenig, 2004). Researchers have documented that women all over the world are under-represented in management positions compared to men. In earlier research, Research on typical gender stereotypes has consistently produced statements such as: men are more competent leaders than women, and women are more articulate and communal than men (e.g., Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Williams & Best, 1982, as cited in Sczesny, 2003).

Senior military leadership positions have historically belonged to men. However, this dominance of men as emerging leaders is not limited to the military. Considering the male gender as the forthright leader is well documented in industry, research, and laboratory settings as well (Eagly & Karau, 1991, as cited in Gibson, 2005). A possible explanation for these phenomena could be that men emerge as leaders because they have stereotypical male traits that match the cultural and social beliefs of leaders. If people have unspoken expectations that leaders possess masculine traits, makes it difficult for women to be perceived as leaders. Gender based discrimination in the professional arena has been called the *glass ceiling*. The glass ceiling is a phrase commonly used to describe the inability of women and minorities to ascend past a certain management level of an organization. "This phenomenon is called the *glass ceiling* to describe a barrier so subtle that it is transparent yet so strong that it prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy" (Morrison & von Glinow, 1990, as cited in Sczesny, 2003, ¶ 1). For female soldiers, glass ceiling gender stereotypes present the potential for a dampening of career opportunities.

The Transactional theory of leadership focuses on offering rewards and punishments to motivate followers. Burns (1978) stated, "the relations of most leaders and followers are *transactional*—leaders approach followers with an eye to exchanging one thing for another: jobs for votes, or subsidies for campaign contributions" (p. 4). Northouse (2004) described transactional leadership as a leadership style that encompasses the majority of leadership models and transactional leadership is concerned with the leader conducting exchanges with his or her followers.

As the name implies, the transformational theory of leadership transforms followers by challenging them to ascend beyond their immediate desires and self-interests. Transformational leadership focuses on change and inspiring the followers to achieve excellence in an organization. "Key features of the transformational style include empowering and mentally stimulating subordinates: you consider and motivate them first as individuals and then as a group" (U.S. Department of the Army, 1999, p. 17). This leadership theory builds on transactional leadership and encourages trust, innovation, and risk-taking. In transformational leadership, the leader must lead by example, possess strong values, and share a clear and inspirational vision of the future with the followers. Leadership requires unique responses to the situation, people, and problems that exist in any context. Transformational leadership aspires to imbue people with a higher moral interaction than simply maximizing the traditional transactional basis of leadership centered on self-interest and an exchange or transaction. It is ennobling, embracing, nurturing, motivating, and understanding while seeking to expand human capacity through innovative thinking (Kouzes, & Posner, 2002).

Based on analyses of informal surveys, interviews of managers, and personal experience in organizations, Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003) posited, "female leaders, compared with male leaders are less hierarchical, more cooperative and collaborative, and more oriented to enhancing others' self worth" (p. 569). Current research indicates this collaborative and nurturing style of leadership that many women leaders use is called transformational leadership. A meta-analysis by Eagly et al. (2003) determined women are more likely than men to inspire, mentor, and creatively stimulate their followers while leading. These leadership actions have transformational qualities that build cohesive organizations.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

To assist in the exploration of the experiences of Army women officers who have attained the rank of GO, a qualitative phenomenological analysis was the best research approach for the problem being explored. According to Creswell (2002), *qualitative* research enables the researcher to learn from the participants' by keeping the direction of study open. In this method of research, the participants are asked to describe the subject under study in their own words. The result of these descriptions or narratives was the emergence of patterns that improved understanding of the phenomena being explored. A qualitative research process allowed an exploration of a topic that emerged from data collection and data analysis.

### 3.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology attempts to describe personal experience and reveal the underlying meanings of human experience. From a historical perspective, German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is credited with being the founder of phenomenology (Spiegelberg, 1972). Kleiman (2004) stated, phenomenology is the “science of intentional consciousness” (p. 13). Phenomenology can be defined as the meanings things have based on a person’s subjective experience. Phenomenology studies conscious or intentional experience from the first person point of view in a personal reflection of lived phenomena.

Husserl introduced the concept of phenomenological reduction. Husserl’s construct of phenomenological reduction refers to the process of reducing the recognized data through phases of evaluation until only applicable invariant themes and patterns remain. These themes and patterns are ultimately the essences of the object (Husserl, 1927).

### 3.2 Population

Purposive sampling is a deliberate method researchers use to select study participants with particular characteristics from an accessible population determined to be appropriate for the needs of the study (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). The researcher intentionally selected participants who met the researchers’ required parameters. These parameters included selecting active duty women Army officers who have held high leadership responsibilities within the Army, and who have been selected and promoted to the rank of Brigadier General or higher.

There are 38 living GOs (Army Human Resources Command, General Officer Management Office, 2006). In 2006 there were 14 women Army GOs who were currently serving in the U.S. Army. There were also 24 living women GOs who have retired from the Army.

**Table 2**  
**Available participants**

Number of living U.S. Army Women promoted to GO	Rank of Participant	Sample Interviewed
28	Brigadier General (one-star)	15
8	Major General (two-stars)	7
2	Lieutenant General (three-stars)	1
	Total =	23

The youngest General interviewed was 47 years old, serving on active duty for 25.5 years, and she had been commissioned an Army officer in 1981. The oldest General interviewed was 77 years old. She had retired from the Army in 1986, at age 57. The oldest GO interviewed entered the Army in 1954 and she had served 32 years in the Army; two years as an enlisted member of the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) and 30 years as a commissioned officer in the Army when she retired in 1986. The average amount of leadership experience among all 23 participants serving as an Army officer was 30.5 years. The number of years serving as a General ranged from one to 11 years, with an average of 3.8 years as a General Officer. Table 3 provides demographical background information on the 23 individual participants.

**Table 3**  
**Demographics of female U.S. Army GO study participants**

Participant	Range (years)	Range (years)	Mean (years)
Age	47	77	56
Experience in Army	25	32	30.5
Experience as GO	1	11	3.8

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

Step one of the modified van Kaam method of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994) included listing and preliminary grouping of every expression relevant to the experience of the lived experiences and perceptions of a purposive sample of 23 women Army GOs. Step two, reduction and elimination of unrelated text, entailed removing information that was repetitive or not related to the essence of the experience. Step three, clustering the invariant constituents, involved grouping the clusters into core themes. Step four, ensured the themes were validated with the participants' complete transcription. Step five, constructing individual textural descriptions of the experience, involved documenting themes of the individual participants based on her lived experiences. Step six, constructing individual structural descriptions of the experience, involved creating a description from the textural descriptions and using imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Constructing individual structural descriptions required the researcher's use of imagination, intuition, and understanding to account for the feelings and beliefs associated with the women Army GOs. Finally, constructing a textural-structural description of the totality of meanings and essences of the lived experiences completed the final step of the modified van Kaam analysis. Moustakas (1994) posited that core themes emerge from the "composite description of the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (p. 121).

#### 4.1 Findings

*Interview Question: From your experience, what specific personal competencies and skills contributed most to your career development and advancement?* GO14's response was typical; "I think the skills I had sustained me in teamwork, effective communications, inspiring others to reach their potential, all of those things, just really working and developing those that work around you. It's really been those personal things that have guided me. It's really all about the soldier. You know, taking care of soldiers. Leading them well, managing them." The majority of the participants (13/23 or 56.5%) stated working with other people, interpersonal skills, or communication skills were their most important skill that contributed to their career development and advancement. GO20 stated, "I'm nice. I like people. If you don't like people you can't be a leader, because you're not sensitive to what's going on with them. I think more than anything else, it would be a love of people." The participants discussed multiple personal skills and competencies for career advancement. Table 4 lists specific participant skills and competencies based on their lived experiences that contributed to their career advancement and development in the Army:

**Table 4**  
***Participant skills and competencies that contributed to Army career advancement***

Skills and Competencies	Number of Responses	Participant Percentage
Communication skills (speaking/listening)	14	60.9
Interpersonal skills/People-person	10	43.5
Leadership/Command	9	39.1
Good value system/Courage/Confidence/Loyalty	8	34.8
Hard work/Take tough jobs	6	26.1
Teamwork	5	21.7
Physical fitness	5	21.7
Domain knowledge/Education	4	17.4
Good sense of humor	4	17.4
Develops/Helps people	3	13.0
Flexible/Adaptive	3	13.0
Caring/Trusting	3	13.0
Mission focused/Results oriented	2	8.7
Values history	2	8.7
Emulates good practices	1	4.3
Lifelong learner	1	4.3
Organized/Disciplined	1	4.3
Innovative	1	4.3

*Interview Question: How did you prepare yourself for high levels of command and leadership?*

Several participants expressed that their actual Army experiences and performing well in various duty positions was a very important factor in preparing for higher levels of command and leadership in the Army (48%). GO2 said, "When you are being looked at as a Colonel or Brigadier General, then what you bring to the table are the lessons learned from your cumulative experiences and hopefully everything that I had learned, or the real lessons, the nuggets you take from commanding at three separate levels before I made Brigadier General." GO23 replied, "I think the Army prepared me. They [the Army organization] prepared me through professional assignments and schooling and mentors and coaches who I met throughout my career." Almost half (11/23) of the GOs mentioned the importance of directly observing both good and bad leaders and learning vicariously through their accomplishments or failures. GO8 stated, "I think a lot of it was done by paying attention to what was going on. Picking and choosing the best of everybody around me. Learning; learning from other people's mistakes." GO5 commented, "I had the opportunity to watch General Officers at high levels do their jobs and hear their philosophy on what works and what doesn't work. Of course that goes two ways: you learn what you want to do, and you learn what you don't want to do." GO17 reported, "Observation. Looking at other officers and other individuals that I thought were very good. Learning as much from those that I thought had bad attributes as those that did good." A large percentage, 43%, of the participants stated education and military schooling was instrumental in their preparation for increased levels of responsibility and leadership. Over a third of the GOs, 8/23, (35%) believed that the mentoring they received from males or females throughout their career helped develop their leadership abilities and the qualities expected of leaders.

*Interview Question: From your lived experiences or perceptions, what factors do you think are important in getting promoted to General Officer?* This interview question was intended to provide factors the participants thought were important in getting promoted to GO. The responses to this question allowed the researcher to compare and contrast factors considered important by the participants. Core themes of the research question emerged from this interview question. Over half of the of the participants (15/23 or 65%) stated that working hard, taking the hard jobs and being professionally and technically competent were factors they believed are important in the process of getting promoted to General Officer. Almost half of those interviewed (11/23 GO participants; 48%) stated one's reputation, visibility with other officers in different branches or specialties, or being known by others in other Army fields is important in getting promoted to General Officer. Almost one third (7/23 or 30.4%) of the participants believed luck and/or timing is an important factor in getting promoted to Army General Officer. Mentorship and/or sponsorship were cited as a factor in getting promoted to GO; but some of the participants did not have a mentor or sponsor when they were selected for promotion to General Officer. It was interesting to note that 5/23 of the participants (22%) stated an important factor in getting promoted to GO was not worrying about it or not making the promotion a priority in an officer's career. Table 5 lists specific factors participant's thought, based on their lived experiences, were important to their Army promotion to General Officer:

**Table 5**  
***Important factors for promotion to GO***

<u>Important Factors for Promotion to GO</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>	<u>Participant Percentage</u>
Competence/Performance in job/Command	15	65.2
Reputation/Visibility/Being known to the board	11	47.8
Luck/timing/Needs of the Army	7	30.4
Sponsorship/Mentorship	6	26.1
Don't make attaining GO a goal	5	21.7
Adaptability/Flexibility/Well-rounded	5	21.7
Taking care/Developing people	4	17.4
Team player/Place organization above self	4	17.4
Values (integrity/loyalty/courage)	3	13.0
Communication skills	2	8.7
Education	2	8.7

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Seven themes and patterns emerged from the participant responses to the interview questions. Many themes emerged in this study however; seven overarching themes were consistently mentioned in the dialogue during the interviews by the study participants. As demonstrated by the research, these seven themes are: (a) professional competency and doing a good job, (b) interpersonal skills including good communication skills and taking care of people, (c) being known by your good reputation, (d) taking and doing well in the tough jobs like command, (e) luck and/or timing, (f) not aspiring to make General Officer, and (g) mentoring. The data presented may provide career strategies for advancement for senior leaders in the Army and managers in the business world.

Doing a good job and professional competence emerged as the most common theme perceived as important in the participants career ascension. Professional job competence aligns with the research of Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer, and King (1999) who stated the skills, abilities, and behaviors that were seen as what the organization valued included: “working hard, demonstrating technical proficiency, having good people skills, accomplishing goals and contributing to the bottom line, exhibiting strategic thinking and being open to change, taking risks, making good decisions, applying creativity and innovation, and dealing effectively with conflict” (p. 7). The majority of the participants (65.2%) mentioned competence and doing a good job as important for promotion to Army GO.

Leadership research has accentuated the importance of having good interpersonal skills to effectively lead others (Bass, 1990). Based on their lived experiences, the majority of the study participants (60.9%) reported communication skills such as their speaking and listening skills contributed most to their career development and advancement. GO9 mentioned, “I would definitely say, being able to articulate oneself, either in writing or orally, because that is a very important skill set; to be able to concisely counsel someone, to motivate them, to encourage them. Whether that is on a one-on-one basis, or in a crowd.” GO17 commented, “God gave me an ability to speak. I think you can’t underestimate the power of being able to talk to people; being able to use the way you speak as influencers with people.”

Being known by your good reputation was a theme that emerged from the experiences shared by the GOs. The participants labeled this important factor, of having your good reputation known by others as: “reputation”, “visibility”, “exposure” and “being known.” Almost half (47.8%) of the participants believed a person’s reputation and being known to the board members sitting on the Brigadier General Promotion Board is an important factor for selection to General Officer. This data aligns with the research of Mainiero, Williamson, and Robinson (1994) who reported executive women discussed the importance of obtaining support and acknowledgement from higher leaders in the organization. The interviewed women executives in the 1994 study spoke in terms of gaining *widespread support* from their leadership, getting *exposure* from the senior level managers in the organization, and achieving *visibility* above her immediate supervisor (Mainiero et al., 1994).

Taking and doing well in the tough jobs is a theme that is replicated in the business world all around the globe. Catalyst (2003) conducted a worldwide research study of executive men and women and their career advancement. Both genders reported that having been provided leadership opportunity (83%) and receiving challenging assignments (80%) were very helpful factors in their personal success in the organization. It appears that job experience and taking the hard or challenging jobs (and doing well in the tough jobs) can advance both men and women in their careers.

Luck and/or timing was another frequent response and luck/timing was cited by 30.4% of the participants as factors the participants thought were important in getting promoted to GO. GO19 stated, “Then [after professional competence and taking the tough jobs at Division and Corps], probably the most important factor in making General Officer, is standing in the right place when lightning strikes”.

The comment of “do not aspire to make GO” was frequently related as the GOs shared their lived experiences. GO11 stated, “I’d tell them not to aspire. I think this is the approach I took and I give that as advice, and that is, do your best. I don’t think you can be a Lieutenant coming in [the Army], planning to be a General Officer. I think at some point you get to be much more self-serving than the servant or the



shepherd serving our soldiers and our men and women in uniform.” The researcher thought it was interesting that 39% of the participants stated they were surprised when they made GO, or that they had not made making General Officer a goal in their Army career. GO2 described herself as an “accidental general” because when she entered the Army in 1959, the highest rank a woman officer in the WAC could attain and serve in was a Lieutenant Colonel.

Mentoring relationships has always existed in the workplace, although the term mentoring has not always been used to describe the relationship (Catalyst, 2002). Mentoring, also called sponsorship and coaching, was a factor that was mentioned by 26.1% of the participants when they were asked what factors they thought were important for promotion to Army General Officer. Through mentoring relationships, some of the participants believed they were given tough assignments or assignments they had not considered that played a major role in their career selection and ascension to GO. Many of the participants in this study mentioned the helpfulness of mentoring or coaching (primarily by senior male Army officers). GO3 commented, “I listened to my mentors; all of which were men, because there really weren’t any women out there.”

The phenomenological methodology provided a deeper understanding of how 23 women Army GOs perceived the factors and competencies that they considered important to the selection and ascension of women officers into the General Officer ranks. The results of this study indicate that women Army officers who aspire to achieve higher levels of Army leadership should do the best possible job in the assignment they are given, prepare themselves mentally, physically, and emotionally, accomplish the mission, take care of their soldiers, mentor and be mentored, and they should not aspire to make General Officer until they are Colonels in the Army.

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