

# ***An Interview with Sandra Ohrn Moose***

## ***Senior Vice-President and Director, Boston Consulting Group***

### ***1999 Carolyn Shaw Bell Award Recipient***

***Interviewed by Barbara M. Fraumeni, Chief Economist, Bureau of Economic Analysis***

I ended up being one of the few women majoring in economics at Wheaton College, although I had intended to major in chemistry. My father, a businessman, felt as though economics was a good discipline, very practical and could take me in a number of different directions professionally. Also, I benefited by having two faculty members, both of whom were well along in their years, who took an interest in me. One was acting president of the college who had experience working in government and academia. She was the one who opened up my horizons in the same sense as my father did.

The nice thing about my cohort group at Wheaton, it was that it was the first cohort group at Wheaton where most of the women majored in the social sciences or physical sciences and were interested in doing something professionally before getting married. At that time, Harvard Business School didn't accept women for the two-year degree program, only for an Associate MBA degree from Radcliffe. So I went to Harvard for a Ph.D. in economics. As it turned out, sometime in the fall of 1963 they decided to let the women who had enrolled in Harvard Business School in the fall of 1963 stay on for two years and graduate with an MBA.

Having gone to a co-educational high school, one of the things I loved about Wheaton and being all female was you could do anything that you wanted to. You could study as hard as you wanted to and you really weren't worried about the social pressures of being perceived as too smart that no young man would ask you out on a Saturday night. I found it was just a wonderfully supportive environment to try out new things, to study as hard as you wanted to, and to go into positions of leadership.

Wheaton gave me a lot of confidence, maybe some false confidence. I say false confidence because I think women's schools did not in those days teach economic theory. During my first week at Harvard, I didn't understand an awful lot of what was going on. Fortunately there were two other women in my cohort group and I had math as a background. In one course there was a section mate and he couldn't believe the three of us knew as little as we did. So he took it on as a challenge to teach the three of us because he didn't want us dragging down the grade point average of his particular section. We didn't know how to repay our tutor, as he really didn't want money. So instead we used to invite him to dinner and we fixed him up with a lovely woman. Two or three years later, they got

married and they're happily married today.

Wheaton has now gone co-ed. I was on the Board of Trustees when that decision was made and found it personally a difficult decision because I got so much out of the all-women environment. I voted for it and it turned out to be a good decision because most young women today don't want to go to a single sex school. I think it's terrific that Wellesley and Smith have the endowment to keep them single sex.

In terms of my Ph.D. program, it was tough going all the way. I did enjoy teaching—they did allow me to teach—which broke some new ground. Evidently they had allowed a woman to teach once before but supposedly she went “hysterical” in one class. The university was desperate in my cohort group because they didn't have enough graduate students to teach. The six young men I had in the junior honors tutorial were so disappointed that they were the only ones that got “the woman.” Eventually they got used to having me as their tutor and I did form mentioning relationships with them. In fact one of them called me as recently as two years ago to ask my advice.

Finishing up in the middle of an academic year, I thought I would try to get some non-academic experience. I ended up having an interview with the founder of The Boston Consulting Group. In my interview with him, we scribbled back and forth on the blackboard. At the end of three hours he looked at me and said “well, lady you've got a job if you want one but I've never heard of a woman before in management consulting.”

By the time I got to BCG, I already felt as though I was a pioneer because there were so few women anywhere at Harvard. I didn't want to do anything that would make people say, “oh boy, we'll never hire another woman.” I probably made personal sacrifices and tradeoffs that in retrospect I didn't really need to do. As a result my personal life suffered. I bent over backwards to make sure the quality of my work was always very good and worked easily ten or fifteen percent harder than my average male counterpart.

So by the time I got an opportunity to sit on the Board of GTE, fortunately they had already had another woman on the board who was older than I: Juanita Kreps, who had to go off the Board when she became Secretary of Commerce. They thought that she was very valuable and had some good insights. Since there were so many women employees in a

telephone company and women shareholders, they really wanted to have another woman. We came up to a major decision, which I actually opposed in a board meeting. I was articulate as to why I was opposed to it and I voted against it, which was the first time in quite awhile that anyone had voted against a proposal before the Board. Needless to say the company went ahead and as it turned out, it was a disaster for the reasons that I said. That won me points with the directors and they decided that I wasn't too bad after all, despite being a woman and being young.

On these Boards, I was also very sensitive to the promotion and status of women in each of these organizations. At Rohm and Haas they had not allowed women to take on manufacturing line-operating responsibilities being overly sensitive to the sometimes hazardous nature of chemical manufacturing. Today Rohm and Haas must have, I think, four plant managers who are women and one of them has responsibility for one of their largest plants. And there's a woman now who is a senior vice president who probably will be a future contender for the CEO position.

It is very hard to balance a business career with your family. Flexible hours are still difficult in most business environments. It's a bit easier for consultants to have some flexibility, but the hours are long. When I was running the New York office, we ended up having over 50% women. And with respect to the East Coast officers, 15% of them are women. So I feel good about bringing women along and mentioning them. There are organizations that I belong to that are trying to do mentioning for women in business, including the Committee of 200. The Committee has been involved with Columbia and Harvard, in the latter case in sponsoring a week long seminar in entrepreneurship for women.

I was lucky in that I had a very supportive mother. I was married for about 16 years and actually my husband was very supportive. If you have a family that just doesn't buy into the notion of a woman having a serious career, then it's very hard to have a career. But having said that, it's still demanding in terms of trying to get on with a career, taking care of my mother, and I had two stepchildren who came every weekend.

I managed my work to avoid it creeping into the weekend. I really was able to draw a “bright line” around it. I got some of that from my father. I would say “oh, I have to go into the

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office on a Saturday.” My father sat me down one time and asked if I was really working as efficiently and as effectively as I should. He felt there was something wrong with my work style if I couldn’t get it done in the five days. You need to have time for yourself, for your family and to take a break from work. My father basically said that if it isn’t important enough to do Monday through Friday, it isn’t important.

What I find in talking to young women, who are having children, is that they are often hesitant about hiring people to help them. Their instinct, if anything, when they go to hire people is to hire younger, cheaper folks. I will advise against that. And similarly in terms of managing a household, hire a high-quality trustworthy person, who can clean your house, run errands for you, etc. Even though you are spending a fair amount of your salary doing that, it’s well worth it. I have

a bookkeeper. I encourage every woman who is interested in a serious career to spend more money on services.

In terms of women playing leadership roles, it’s easier today. This new generation of men who are heads of organizations has been brought up differently. Some of them have had mothers or wives who have had careers or daughters seeking serious careers. Most companies are attempting to implement some sort of flexible work schedules to retain high quality women. I find that women in leadership roles are often a little different than men by being much more oriented around the team and this is well received.

My advice is not to try to do it all at once. Role models and mentors are valuable. I did a piece of research work about 15 years ago at BCG and interviewed a number of both women

and men who had left too early in their career. What came out loud and clear from the women is that they needed more mentioning, especially at critical junctures in their careers, namely promotion points. Different skills are required as you move in your career. They also needed the support and confidence that they can really perform well in a new role. My suggestion is always to pick two, don’t just have one mentor. The reason is you learn different things from different people. Also at the time for promotion, it’s always much better to have two voices saying she’s terrific and she deserves a promotion than just me.

I have found in my own work that women fear failure more than they desire success, whereas men seem to be much more oriented for the brass ring. Part of what failure teaches you is to pick yourself up and to try again.