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Business & Economics

Among Equals: The Rise of IBM's First Female Corporate Vice President

Ruth Leach Amonette
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One of the first women to break through the glass ceiling in corporate America tells her fascinating story of rising to the top in four short years. In the 1940s that was quite an accomplishment, even by today's standards.

Among Equals chronicles the fourteen-year career of Ruth Leach, who was hired after college as a typewriter demonstrator and advanced to become the first female Vice President of IBM. The book also gives a descriptive view of IBM in its early days; it's evident that daily operations were greatly influenced by World War II during the 1940s. The author presents a rare insider's view of that time period. Not too many people may know that IBM produced guns for the war and artificial hands for injured veterans.

Like those brave soldiers on the battlefield, Leach approached her career with a fearlessness that is evident in her writing. She tells poignant and sometimes amusing stories of what her life was like then: enduring many grueling cross country train trips visiting IBM branches across America, leaving friends and family to move to other states when the job required it, working almost twenty-four hours a day with no social life.

Upwardly mobile professionals may recognize that some of these pitfalls of corporate advancements hold true even today. Conversely,
readers will be awed by the opportunities Leach had and the famous people she had the honor and good fortune of meeting in the course of her job, such as Bing Crosby, Dwight Eisenhower and numerous other American and foreign dignitaries.

This book clearly illustrates through many examples that corporate attitudes toward women in business at that time were generally very different than they are today. It provides a fascinating historical look at the business ethics of that time and the foresight of IBM's president Thomas J. Watson, Sr., in promoting the advancement of women outside of the traditional limits. It's a story of innovation, not only in business, but also in business ethics and attitudes.

Cindy Patuszynski