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This iconic cup is instantly recognizable throughout the Western U.S., and it's no accident, as the company behind the image rated highest in virtually every category in the annual Most Trustworthy Brands survey.



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EDITOR'S NOTE

COMPASSIONATE, NURTURING, COLLABORATIVE – characteristics common to most women. These traits, while valued by society, continue to be undervalued by Corporate America and, in fact, have kept women out of the corner office. Big business still favors more competitive, testosterone-driven men. Just look at the paltry 4 percent of female CEOs at the helm of Fortune 500 companies. This, despite the fact that corporate boards that seat more women statistically return greater ROI to their shareholders than those that don't, according to Catalyst, a New York-based organization that tracks women in business.

It's one of the reasons more women are launching their own businesses, where there are no ceilings to limit growth. As they establish their companies, however, a different corporate hierarchy is evolving – one that doesn't include just one CEO square on the organization chart. It has nothing to do with work/life balance or job sharing. It's about merging skills and strengths to create the strongest leadership team possible. Women-owned companies are embracing co-CEO roles.

Consider Santa Ana-based nonprofit The Wooden Floor, an arts-focused youth development program with a \$2.2 million annual budget. Co-CEO Melanie Rios Glaser, artistic director, and co-CEO Dawn Reese have created an innovative dual-leadership structure that capitalizes on their collective strengths. Melanie is creative, while Dawn is operations-focused. The benefits: Melanie spends more time with students and families, while Dawn concentrates on visibility and brand awareness. The result: For the ninth consecutive year, 100 percent of senior graduates from The Wooden Floor have completed high school on time and immediately enrolled in college.

At Irvine-based PR agency Beyond 15, Lauren Ellermeyer and Leslie Licano joke that one serves as president on even days; the other on odd days.

"We wanted to be equal contributors," Licano says. "As women, we're really good at compromise. 'If you feel one way and I feel another, talk me into it.'" The women say they weren't concerned with a traditional structure that would name one person as the ultimate decision maker.

"Do we need a top-down structure?" Licano challenges the notion. Apparently not. The agency launched in 2009 and today boasts eight staff members and 16 clients, including national and international brands.

"I think it makes a stronger partnership in the end," Licano says of their shared leadership structure.

SeaLegs is a Huntington Beach wine bar that is collaboratively run by co-owners Alicia Whitney and Lisa Nonemaker, who have built a business that, after only one year, is already working on its second location and has a plan to franchise. With revenues of some \$2 million, the team is a testament to the co-leadership structure. Read more about SeaLegs on page 18.

Futurists project that as technology replaces humans in the workforce, a "care economy" will unfold in which the most-valued career skills will be eye contact, concern and trust – an evolution that may propel more women to the top ranks in Corporate America. That stat may become less important, however, as more opt to run their own companies.



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