

## WOMEN'S UNION LEADERSHIP: CLOSING THE GENDER GAP

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*Women comprise 44 percent of the labor movement, but a smaller percentage of union leaders. We discuss the importance of having a leadership that is representative of the membership, some of the differences between male and female leadership, and why the labor movement needs more women leaders. In order to promote women's leadership, we first discuss a four-stage model of how union leaders develop: finding your voice, developing basic skills, figuring out the politics, and setting the agenda. We then add suggestions about what current union leaders can do to promote women's leadership at each of these four stages.*

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There is a saying in the labor movement: The leadership should look like the membership. Substantial progress has been made toward including women and people of color in leadership positions. But somewhat like the gender wage gap, the leadership gap appears to be, at best, closing at a very slow pace, over decades. Women clearly benefit from union membership, whether they are leaders or not. They get economic benefits and access to a workplace justice procedure simply by being union members. But the labor movement suffers when a large portion of its members is excluded from leadership positions. In this article, we will address the extent of the gender gap in union leadership, why it matters, and what we can do to fix it.

### How Big Is the Gap?

Currently, women make up 46 percent of the U.S. labor force and 44 percent of union members (U.S. Department of Labor 2007). So if the leadership of unions looked like the membership in terms of gender, about 44 percent of leaders would be women. While it is widely believed that union leadership is still dominated by men, it can be difficult to quantify the gender gap. There is even less data on minority women, so we focus here on women overall, but research on minorities in union leadership is also highly desirable.

There are many levels of union leadership: stewards, officers, and executive board members at the local level; international union staff and officers; state and local labor council leaders; and federation (American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations [AFL–CIO] and Change to Win) leaders.

Data about the percentage of women leaders are available for some, but not all, of these levels. Starting at the highest level, one of three (33 percent) of the top officers of the AFL–CIO is female (AFL–CIO 2007), as are 18 percent of the members of the Executive Council (AFL–CIO 2007). Similarly, 20 percent of the Change to Win Leadership Council is female. One of the two female members, Anna Burger, is the chair (Change to Win 2007).

Within selected unions, Milkman (2007) compares the percentage of top U.S. union leaders who are women to the percentage of members who are women in 1978 and 2000 (see also Cobble and Bielski Michal 2002). For example, in 2000, 38 percent of American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees' (AFSCME) top leaders were women, compared with 52 percent of their members. Using this information, we can create a women's representation ratio ( $38/52 \times 100 = 73$ ) that is one possible measure of the extent to which the leadership "looks like the membership." A representation ratio of 100 would be a perfect match, and a ratio less than 100 would indicate women are underrepresented. A representation ratio over 100 indicates a group is overrepresented, as with the ratio of 129 for male leaders in AFSCME. Of the nine large unions listed by Milkman, this ratio of women leaders ranged from 73 (AFSCME) to 13 (International Brotherhood of Teamsters [IBT]). The data also indicate remarkable change over time. In 1978, for example, AFSCME's representation ratio was only 8, and two of the unions listed (Communications Workers of America and IBT) had no women in top leadership.

Data about the gender of union leaders at the local level are more difficult to find. Melcher et al. (1992) have perhaps the most systematic sample, although limited to local unions in Massachusetts. They find that women are well-represented as stewards, comprising 31.4 percent of stewards and 32.4 percent of members for a ratio of 97. However, the ratio fell for the top four elected officials, and was dramatically lower—44—for local union presidents. Only 14 percent of local union presidents were women. Minority women fared even worse, with a ratio of 33 (3.3 percent of presidents, compared to 10.1 percent of members).

In a more recent study, Chang (2005) reports that 35 percent of the stewards and officers were women. This sample should be seen as illustrative—but not definitive—of the range of local union officers who are women because it only includes those who attended labor education programs. In addition, there is no information about what percentage of members were women in these locals. Chaison and Andiappan (1987) also found that women were underrepresented as local union leaders at the time, with about 34 percent of local leaders who are women. In this Canadian sample, the women leaders also tended to hold lower-level positions than the men, hold offices in smaller local unions, and have fewer hours and receive less pay for their union work. Similar findings were reported in a case study of British trade unions (Ledwith et al. 1990). Overall, the evidence suggests that women have made progress at the lowest levels of union leadership (i.e., steward), but less so at higher levels.

### Why Does It Matter?

There is evidence that unions improve women's economic circumstances. For 2006, union women made about 30 percent more than non-union women (U.S. Department of Labor 2007). In addition, unionized workers are more likely to have health care benefits and pensions. So, does the gender of the leadership matter?

We think it does, for a number of reasons. First and perhaps most obviously, women's earnings are still significantly less than men's, with U.S. women earning only about 81 percent of what men do. But unionized women earn 85 percent of what men do (U.S. Department of Labor 2007). Unions can be especially influential in this regard. Unions have done a great deal to equalize pay within a job classification; but many jobs are segregated by gender, and the jobs that are dominated by women tend to have lower pay. This is often true within a single bargaining unit. Unions could do more to close this gap. For example, Arlene Holt Baker, Executive Vice President of the AFL-CIO, fought for comparable worth and pay equity earlier in her career with AFSCME.

A second reason is that women might choose to advocate for different issues than men do. In the Melcher et al. (1992) study, 63 percent of male union leaders agreed with the statement, "Women's concerns are accurately represented by male union leaders." However, only 27 percent of the women agreed with that statement. For example, higher pay for female-dominated work would likely be on the agenda of many union women. Other issues related to work-family balance, such as child care, elder care, and flex time might be on the agenda as well. There may also be issues related to the quality of work life that are not as easily quantified or covered by traditional contract language. For example, about a third of workers report being bullied at work, and about half of all workers are affected as either a target or a witness. Women are the targets of bullying more often than men (Workplace Bullying Institute 2007). Bullying is a workplace justice issue, and perhaps a gender issue as well, but one on which unions have not taken the lead. Traditionally, unions have placed more emphasis on two forms of organizational justice—distributive (i.e., pay and rewards) and procedural (e.g., grievance procedure)—and less on interactional justice. Ironically, unions do emphasize interactional justice (i.e., being treated with dignity and respect) in organizing drives. But 96 percent of first contracts have a grievance procedure, compared to only 17 percent that have a dignity and justice clause (Juravich, Bronfenbrenner, and Hickey 2006). However, Simpson and Kaminski (2007) report that minority women, in particular, place a higher priority on interactional justice than men do. An increased focus on dignity and respect on the job and pay equity are just two examples of how the priorities of women leaders might be different than men's.

A third reason why women's leadership is important is that it could bring a different approach to solving the crises the labor movement currently faces. With union members at only 12 percent of the workforce (U.S. Department of Labor 2007) despite a decade of renewed emphasis on organizing, it seems clear

that more of the same is not good enough. As the pool of potential leaders is expanded—to include more women, people of color, and gays and lesbians—the pool of ideas, possible solutions, and approaches to solving the problem is also expanded.

Most research on gender differences in leadership style and effectiveness is conducted with corporate managers rather than union leaders, although some includes the leadership of other non-profit organizations. In particular, the recent rise of women to the presidencies of a number of top-tier universities is a noticeable trend. Given the scarcity of research on the gender composition of union leadership, we turn to this research on leadership for general principles that are likely to apply within unions as well.

To date, the research suggests that women are less competitive and hierarchical than men. Instead, women are more cooperative, interdependent, and concerned about the welfare of the entire group (Jacobs and McClelland 1994; Schwartz and Rubel 2005; Winter 1988). Since unions are democratically structured organizations, with elected leaders rather than appointed managers, a cooperative style seems appropriate. Women are also less likely to be tolerant of unethical business practices and unscrupulous negotiation tactics (Franke, Crown, and Spake 1997; Swamy et al. 2001; Volkema 2004), attitudes that are consistent with labor union goals.

Women are also more likely than men to be transformational leaders, which is characterized by being a role model, inspiring others, strategic thinking, innovation, and mentoring and developing others in the organization (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen 2003). This contrasts with transactional leadership, which is based on a more limited relationship that exchanges rewards for the performance of specific tasks. Transformational leadership has been found to be more effective (Judge and Piccolo 2004) and is seen as especially relevant in contemporary organizations, which operate in a dynamic environment with a complex set of interconnections with other organizations. As capital has become globalized, some see a need for a global labor movement to serve as a countervailing force (Bronfenbrenner 2007). An organizational and institutional change of that magnitude calls for transformational leadership, and women are more likely than men to be transformational leaders. At the statewide level, one woman transformed her union by establishing a vision (mobilize, organize, representation, and education or MORE) that was used to measure all activities of the union.

At the level of the local union, the relatively narrow focus of the transactional leader seems more aligned with a servicing model of unionism. Men and women are roughly equal in the extent to which their leadership style is characterized as transactional. However, as unions shift to an organizing model of unionism, we would expect transformational leadership to be a key element that can result in a more active and mobilized membership. Indeed, Fullagar et al. (1994) found that new union members became more involved in their union if their shop steward was more transformational. Thus, there is a role for transformational leadership at the local union as well.

One additional set of findings from the organizational literature is relevant here. Firms that have a greater percentage of women in top management perform better than firms that have a lower percentage of women in top management (Catalyst 2004; Krishnan and Park 2005). Since financial performance is one key measure of whether a business organization is achieving its goals, results such as these raise the question of whether more diversity in union leadership would help labor unions achieve their goals.

For all these reasons, it appears that unions would benefit from having more women in leadership positions. In order to make that happen, it is helpful to understand how union leaders develop.

### How Union Leaders Develop

In contrast with the copious research on leadership styles and leadership effectiveness, there is significantly less research about how adults develop their leadership skills over time (Avolio 2007). Work generated by Kieffer (1984) in a study of community activists, replicated and refined in later studies with union activists (Kaminski 2003; Kaminski et al. 2000), addresses this issue. The simplified version of the model has four stages. The first stage is *finding one's voice*. This is the first step in understanding oneself as a person with power in an organizational setting. It requires a basic sense of self-esteem that many people develop as they grow up in supportive families. For those who do not have that experience or those who simply have not been active in the union before, it typically requires some external threat to force them to take this first step. It may be a threat to close a workplace, a serious health and safety incident, or egregious management behavior that prompts a previously inactive union member to speak out. Union members who come from families that strongly value union activism are often more comfortable about the value of their voice to the union. However, even women who have high levels of self-esteem may feel uncomfortable speaking out in a workplace or union setting that is hostile to women.

The second stage in the process of developing union leaders is *developing basic skills*. In the union setting, this might mean working on a committee, taking workshops to improve communication skills, or learning a technical skill that is central to the union such as grievance handling or organizing. Union activists in this stage benefit greatly from having a mentor. A good mentor can provide opportunities to put new skills into use, provide encouragement about the member's skill and capability, and offer guidance and advice when requested. A second factor that particularly helps activists in this stage is belonging to a group of peers who meet regularly and are at a similar stage of development. The peers can be a huge asset to each other, because they can ask questions without fear of being embarrassed in front of their mentor.

The third stage of the leadership development process is *figuring out the politics*—and it is a stage at which even experienced leaders can stumble. Once individuals have the technical skills they need, they look for opportunities to use those skills. Depending on their interests, they might take on special projects or

run for office. At this point, they need not just the technical skills, but also political skills. They start noticing and asking questions about how things really get done in the union.

In some ways, the third stage can be a danger point for aspiring women leaders, especially in traditional locals based on the servicing model. Aspiring women leaders in such settings might find a “good-old-boys” network that is not open to them or to new ideas. Furthermore, incumbent leaders, male or female, may feel threatened by them and so may put obstacles in the path of the aspiring leaders. Of course, many local unions do not operate this way. But either of these effects might cause the aspiring leader to become disillusioned with their union and to disengage from labor activism.

The fourth stage in this journey is *setting your own agenda*. At this point, the new leader has mastered the technical and political skills, and sets their own directions. They initiate and lead projects that others carry out. Once a leader has reached this stage, they typically become a mentor to others. For women leaders in this stage, it is especially important to mentor other women, because too often, women cannot find mentors among the male leadership. Aspiring leaders will likely learn different things from male and female mentors, and could benefit from both. Men who are committed to diversity and inclusion can be especially influential by using their leadership position to expand the pool of upcoming leaders so that it produces a leadership team that “looks like the membership.”

Far from being simply an altruistic venture, the process of mentoring others can also help leaders consolidate their own power. By mentoring others, they generate loyalty and political support in future circumstances. The further their protégés rise in the organization, the more people they, in turn, influence—and the more people who support the mentor.

This four-stage model has considerable conceptual overlap with a different model of women’s union leadership development. Ledwith et al. (1990) identify three issues to be resolved—entry, consolidation, and directing—over four stages in a union career: activist, local leader quasi-elite leader, and elite leader. Although the two models are organized differently, they share many overlapping ideas. We refer to the first model as the four-stage model, and the second one as the union career model. The models are compared in Table 1.

In the Ledwith et al. union career model, the *activist* stage deals primarily with issues of entry and corresponds to finding one’s voice. In this stage, members initially become active, typically for one of three reasons: family background that valued union activism, injustices of mistreatment of workers, or being sponsored or encouraged by union leaders. It is perhaps in this stage that the two models most closely correspond.

The second stage, *local leadership*, corresponds to developing basic skills. Having a mentor or sponsor was also identified as key in this stage. In the union career model, the key challenge at this stage was consolidation of power bases. Resistance from male members, both in the workplace and in the union, was a common issue. For example, Ledwith et al. report

Table 1. Two models of how union leaders develop

Four-stage model		Union career model	
Stage	Issues	Stage	Issues
<i>First stage</i>	Finding your voice	Activist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family background</li> <li>• response to injustice, change initiated by management</li> <li>• sponsorship</li> </ul>
<i>Second stage</i>	Developing basic skills	Local leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consolidation of power</li> <li>• importance of sponsorship for women</li> <li>• importance of peers for men</li> </ul>
<i>Third stage</i>	Figuring out the politics	Quasi-elite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• importance of sponsorship and support from members</li> </ul>
<i>Fourth stage</i>	Setting your own agenda	Elite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family and childcare issues</li> </ul>
<i>Authors</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feeling like your opinion matters</li> <li>• self-esteem</li> <li>• family background</li> <li>• threatening events</li> <li>• communication skills, union skills (e.g., grievance handling)</li> <li>• working under the direction of others</li> <li>• importance of both peers and mentors</li> <li>• learning how things get done</li> <li>• leading projects</li> <li>• developing and leading projects</li> <li>• mentoring others</li> <li>• balancing different interests</li> </ul> Kieffer 1984 Kaminski et al. 2000 Kaminski 2003	Ledwith et al. 1990	
<i>Notes</i>	Developed based on both male and female union activists and community activists	Developed based on female union activists	

Women workers were offered opportunities for upgraded jobs—to ones most of the men were doing. But, “The men didn’t like it so they did everything from standing there laughing to doing things to break you down.” The men’s hostility, and management’s warning that if the women failed to achieve required targets when they were upgraded they would “get the door,” meant that no women did apply. It seems that the male [union] representatives in this case did not see their behavior as threatening, nor that they were allowing women to fall victim to a management strategy of diving and rule. (p. 119)

In contrast, the four-stage model was developed based on work with both male and female union leaders, and so gender bias did not become a key issue for the study participants overall. In the four-stage model, peers and mentors were both important in the second stage. However, in the union career model, peers were more important for male leaders and mentors were more important for female leaders.

The third stage in the union career model is moving into the *quasi-elite*. Women who succeeded were supported both by mentors who were above them in the hierarchy and by rank-and-file members. This is perhaps one version of “figuring out the politics,” the third stage in the other model. Finally, the fourth stage of both models, *elite* activism and setting your own agenda, are very similar.

Ledwith et al. also add a set of three issues (entry, consolidation, and directing) to be resolved in each stage (activist, local leader, quasi-elite, and elite). The first issue, entry, involves gaining access at each level, including moving into official positions. The next issue, consolidation, refers to building and maintaining a power base, so the union leader can stay in the positions she has acquired. This is especially important for leaders who are in elected positions. The third issue, directing, involves taking steps to proactively lead the union, for example by setting, promoting, and enacting an agenda. Thus, the Ledwith et al. model includes a layer of complexity not found in the Kaminski et al. model. However, both of these models can be useful in providing theoretical guidance about how to support and promote women at each stage of leadership development.

### **How Can We Increase the Representation Ratio of Women Union Leaders?**

Recent work by Eagly and Carli (2007) notes that the path to leadership is often more problematic for women than for men. While the metaphor of the glass ceiling has been quite popular in describing the predicament of women in leadership, Eagly and Carli point out the glass ceiling metaphor suggests there is only a single barrier for women. Once this barrier is broken, the implication is the advancement of women leaders is unimpeded. Since this is seldom the case, Eagly and Carli find it more appropriate to use the image of the labyrinth or maze, with winding paths, dead ends, and unexpected obstacles. Thus, no single strategy alone will result in a balance of female and male union leaders. Instead, multiple strategies must be employed to achieve an increase in the proportion of women leaders. Models of leadership development are helpful for



identifying points at which current union leaders—male and female—can take action to increase the number of female union leaders. The following suggestions have been drawn from a variety of sources, including Eagly and Carli (2007) and the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2007), and are grouped to correspond to the four stages of the model, although leaders and members at all stages can benefit from these recommendations.

### *First Stage: Finding Your Voice*

The primary goal in this stage is to encourage participation and ensure that the newly active member feels that the union values her voice. This preliminary stage assumes that the potential leader is a relative newcomer—someone who would benefit from some socialization to the values and norms of the context (Kwesiga and Bell 2004). Local leaders—stewards and officers—can do a great deal to help members at this stage become more active in the union. When a union official approaches a relatively silent member and asks for her opinion, it confirms that her voice matters. Local leaders are providing validation by soliciting input and listening to their response. After a number of encouraging interactions, leaders can persuade the inactive member to take on a larger and more formal role in the union. In addition to working with individuals one-on-one, union leaders can also work to ensure that the setting is an inclusive and participative one, rather than one that caters to a dominant culture (Brislin 1994). By creating a culture where workers from a variety of different backgrounds are free to voice their concerns, union leaders can be assured that no one will feel excluded or ignored.

All too often, new women activists face hostile environments. Kirton and Healy (1999) describe this interaction at a local union meeting:

There was a new woman, it was her first meeting last month. She came into the room and sat next to me because I was the only face she recognized and I heard some men at the end of the table saying, "who's that, where's she come from?", but they didn't make any effort—they could have come up and said something friendly. (p. 41)

Simply reaching out to new members on an interpersonal level can have a large impact, and foster a far more inclusive environment that is welcoming rather than adversarial.

### *Second Stage: Developing Basic Skills*

There are several strategies that union can put in place to help women develop basic skills: training, mentoring, and establishing a cohort.

*Offer Training and Development for Everyone, Including Women and Minorities.* Union leadership involves technical skills related to contract language and labor

law. It also involves conflict resolution and interpersonal skills, such as the ability to work with members who are upset because of discipline by management or unhappy with a proposed contract. Other skills include public speaking, one-on-one mobilization, and general organizational skills. Beginning activists might be naturally good at some of these things, but no one is good at everything, and most people need training to help them master the wide range of skills they will need.

Because women have traditionally had less access to such training, the United Association for Labor Education (UALE) and the AFL–CIO co-sponsor four regional women’s summer schools each year. The schools are hosted by one of the UALE member universities and generally have a very high proportion of women instructors. Other programs are offered by a single university, such as the Regina V. Polk Women’s Leadership Program at the University of Illinois and the Summer School for Women Workers at the University of Michigan. Several unions have their own women’s programs as well, such as the United Steel Workers of America’s (USWA) Women of Steel. The women’s schools typically offer skills courses such as grievance handling, collective bargaining, communication/public speaking, and labor law, as well as more topical workshops such as immigration reform or health care policy. They include a cultural component as well. And while we instructors like to believe that the women who attend the schools learn from us, we also know they learn a great deal from each other. They are able to share their stories—both successes and failures—and compare situations across unions. The sharing of information and networking across unions, in our view, adds a vitality to the programs that is not found in programs conducted for a single local union. An added benefit is that because women are from different local unions, they are unlikely to be political rivals and can relate to each other as peers. This adds to the supportive environment characteristic of women’s programs (see Greene and Kirton 2002 and Kirton and Healy 2004 for their analyses of women’s schools in Britain).

We are often asked if we still need the women’s schools, some 25 to 30 years after they began. We think the answer is obvious. There is still a considerable gender gap in union leadership. And it is not unusual at the women’s schools to have some women say that their local only pays for men to go to training. The only way these women can get training is if it is specifically designated for women.

*Create a Cohort/Peer Group.* Union activists in the second stage can benefit from having a group of peers who are going through the same learning process. A large local union could, for example, hold workshops for newly elected stewards, and as a group teach them about grievance handling and member mobilization. Or an international union could create a cohort of recently elected local union presidents, or new staff representatives. Having a set of peers that meets regularly and is dealing with the same issues creates a network that can provide both technical and social support for years to come. Women could benefit from either (or both) and an all-female or a mixed-gender cohort, but a cohort of new

women leaders might be especially effective. Melcher (2008) reports that one union in Massachusetts followed this strategy by deliberately choosing to send a group of women to leadership development training at the same time. The group formed a strong bond, worked together over time, and supported each other as they rose through the leadership ranks.

*Create and Maintain Mentoring Programs.* It is well-established by now that effective mentoring can add greatly to the development of all leaders—men as well as women (de Vries, Webb, and Eveline 2006). Research has shown that careful selection and training of mentors allows for changes in the mentor as well as the protégé. Mentors can increase their understanding of the demands placed on their mentees, and can provide helpful suggestions tailored to the particular situation. By providing opportunities for connections and networking (Higgins and Kram 2001), developing leaders can garner the support they need for building self-confidence and countering any negative gender assumptions that they might meet (Chesterman, Ross-Smith, and Peters 2005).

### *Third Stage: Figuring Out the Politics*

In this stage, emphasis shifts from individual skill development to building an understanding of the organizational context and power structure. Mentoring is important in this stage as well as the previous one. Other strategies organizations can use to help women leaders develop in this stage include offering appropriate roles and providing opportunities in the broader labor movement.

*Create and Maintain Mentoring Programs.* In the third stage, mentors can help women understand the power structure and how to accomplish goals within it. Although informal (or naturally occurring) mentoring has some advantages over formal mentoring programs, a danger is that members of certain groups simply do not get mentored. In contrast, one of the benefits of a formal mentoring program is that it ensures that women and people of color have access to mentors.

*Offer Appropriate Roles.* Current leaders who genuinely want to promote women as leaders should avoid “tracking” women into certain, less valued roles, and instead, develop them so that they can achieve “clout” jobs (Burke and Vinnicombe 2005). Eagly and Carli (2007) report that women managers are often given less desirable assignments: either those that are so routine that no matter how well they do it, no promotion will result; or they are sometimes offered prestigious assignments during a significant business downturn, so they are almost guaranteed to fail (Ryan and Haslam 2005). In local unions, women are more often recording secretaries than presidents. They are likely to chair a committee that organizes parties and picnics, rather than one that organizes new members. Women need to actively seek roles in grievance handling, contract negotiations, and organizing, and incumbent leaders could help aspiring women

leaders by training and publicly supporting women who have been appointed to significant leadership positions.

*Provide Opportunities in the Broader Labor Movement.* Activists who attend programs and events outside their own local union can gain a broader perspective about how unions work. By talking with people from other unions—both other locals and other international unions—they come to understand what is common to all unions and what is unique to their local. They will also likely learn about how other people—and especially other women—advanced in their union careers. The information they learn will help them understand how to move up within their own political structure.

#### *Fourth Stage: Setting Your Own Agenda*

As women advance to higher levels of leadership, they are more likely to be one of a few, or perhaps, the only woman at that level of the hierarchy. Interventions in this stage—reducing tokenism and institutional changes—are designed to increase the number of women at these levels, and help those that have arrived stay in their positions.

*Reduce Tokenism.* Women face increased pressure when they are in the position of being the only woman at a given leadership level. As Kanter (1977) has noted, when representation in a group is not balanced, this creates problems for the individual in question (Chesterman and Ross-Smith 2006; Li, Karakowsky, and Siegel 1999). This individual may either feel obligated to represent all women, which can be challenging, or they may recognize the futility of that and seek only to represent themselves, and decline to promote other women at all. Having several women on a committee of 12 or so can make a big difference in at least three ways. First, the tone of the committee is likely to change since the presence of women in leadership roles can change the degree of collaboration and collegiality (Ross-Smith, Chesterman, and Peters 2005). Second, having several women members enables the male members to see each woman as an individual, rather than as the stand-in for all women; this will also challenge any gender stereotypes and misconceptions that prevail (Yates 2006), since research has shown that these gendered assumptions shape both men's and women's behavior (Ridgeway 2001). Third, when an issue has different implications for men and women, having multiple women on the committee makes it more likely that the women's views will be heard and not dismissed.

Kirton and Healy (1999) report that a large British trade union, the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union achieved a women's representation ratio (described earlier) of 103 on its National Executive Committee in part by reserving four seats for women. While this is a controversial practice, it has been effective in terms of number. Without these seats, the representation ratio would be 75. Women can only hold the reserved seats for two consecutive terms, after

which they are assumed to be better known and more likely to be elected to one of the regular seats.

A similar strategy was used by the Ontario Federation of Labor. In addition to improving the gender leadership ratio, it changed the discussions at the table. One union leader said it “changed the issues raised, changed who gets to hear what we talk about, and changed rank and file perceptions of who has power; in fact, it has put the discussion of power itself on the agenda” (Briskin 2002).

*Sustain Commitment through Institutional Interventions.* With all of the challenges and pressures that can attend a leadership position, it is no wonder that stress could affect union leaders. For women in particular, the increased visibility that a leadership role brings could result in greater stress from the larger expectations of other members as well as oneself. How might the strains of the leadership role be counteracted? We suggest two strategies. First, direct discussion of and workshops addressing the stresses and emotional work involved in the leadership role would serve to alert women leaders to these challenges. Second, promulgating change strategies that would address issues of gender bias would be necessary for guaranteeing that women do not feel they are “misfits” when it comes to the climate of the union. Many still harbor hidden assumptions about women as leaders (Jogulu and Wood 2006) that could effectively be addressed (and re-addressed) by the senior leadership.

These last two recommendations (reducing tokenism and sustaining commitment through institutional interventions) are especially important at higher levels of leadership and among full-time union staff. But the leadership development model can be revisited at each level of leadership, so that individuals can go through the four stages more than once (as with the Ledwith model). For example, while most members begin as local union activists, they need to undergo orientation and learn skills. Perhaps they set for themselves an agenda of becoming a local president. Once they achieve this goal, there are new skills to learn, such as managing a union hall and understanding the financial statements of the local. If these individuals were to succeed as a local president and move up to international staff, they could go through a development cycle again. They might need to focus on understanding the internal politics of the international, for example. There is a development process at each level, and higher level leaders can use this model to encourage women's leadership at every level within the labor movement.

## Conclusions

We believe that women union members need to see themselves reflected in the leadership of the labor movement. We also believe that the labor movement needs the type of leadership that women offer. And while many union leaders would agree with us, progress has come very slowly. We think that it is unlikely to speed up in the absence of specific strategies.

In order to see swifter progress, several factors must come together. More women must develop their skills and demonstrate their commitment to the labor movement. Women must work with other women, and with male allies as well. But even the best of intentions among individual labor activists are not likely to be sufficient to make significant changes in the gender gap in union leadership. Changes in organizational structures and cultures are needed as well. Because the data that we have suggest that many unions have not achieved a fair representation of women leaders, it is difficult to point to successful models. (Exceptions to this are the unions for traditionally female occupations, such as nurses, flight attendants, and teachers.)

Thus, we have used the theoretical model of how people develop as leaders to identify specific organizational strategies that unions can make to help promote women leaders. Many unions have tried one or two of these strategies, such as training targeted at women and reaching out to new members. But we are not aware of unions that have tried systematically to implement at least one strategy at every stage of the model. Thus, we are not able to assess the effectiveness of these measures. However, because they are linked to a theory of leadership development that has been tested empirically with union leaders, we believe these strategies are promising, particularly if a union adopts a range of them.

In 2005, the AFL–CIO (2005) passed a diversity resolution that recognizes the obstacles that women and people of color face in becoming labor leaders. It calls for a range of efforts to increase the diversity of union leadership, including

1. Delegates from each international union to the AFL–CIO convention should generally reflect the gender and racial composition of its membership
2. Requiring diversity in AFL–CIO-sponsored conferences and trainings
3. Making the AFL–CIO a model of hiring practices for women and people of color
4. Urging international unions to report annually on the representation of women and people of color in their membership as well as in staff and elected leadership positions at all levels.

This last item, measuring and tracking representation in leadership, could be a powerful tool for women and people of color who currently feel shut out of leadership positions, and for members who feel like their interests are not being represented. While we do not yet know the extent of compliance with this resolution, its adoption by the AFL–CIO sends a powerful signal that the top leaders of the labor movement support an increase in diversity in union leadership.

By aspiring to—and ultimately achieving—a leadership that looks like its membership, unions and union leaders can fully develop the careers and potential of all of its members, rather than limiting this to a select few. We believe that it can make unions more effective overall. Even beginning the endeavor of

balancing the leadership in larger institutions is a difficult task. However, the enormity of the enterprise should not deter us from taking the necessary steps on the path to gender equity in union leadership.

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