

WEL President Cindy Kushner says the chief complaint she hears from boards that want to pursue gender diversity is that they can't find "board-ready" women. Interested female executives, meanwhile, don't know where to start or how to assess their opportunities.

WEL serves as a matchmaker of sorts, providing specialized training to high-level women on topics ranging from corporate governance to risk management and then connecting those high-level executives with search firms. D'An says her contacts through the group and her skill set in the accounting field landed her a spot on the board of Alico, a land management company operating in central and southwest Florida.

Mentoring is an important part of the group's mission. Evelyn Follit, a former RadioShack executive and member of WEL, sits on the boards of Catalina Marketing and Winn-Dixie. She says her path to the boardroom began in 1999, when the CEO and chairman of RadioShack instructed her and other company executives to join the board of one publicly traded company to broaden their perspective on issues. Her boss felt that they could bring back valuable lessons by looking at how other companies dealt with governance, technology or capital acquisitions.

"If you ask all of us, all of us had a

Taking Action:

Ann Spector Lieff says she had to network aggressively to land a board seat after Specs Music was bought out in 1998 and her CEO position was eliminated. She now serves on several boards and mentors other women.



> Florida Industries (2006)

Sector	% of Board Seats Held by Women
Retail/Restaurant	14.8%
Utilities	11.4
Consumer Goods	11.0
Pharmaceuticals	9.1
Transportation	8.4
Financial Services/ Real Estate/Finance	7.9
Services	7.9
Industrial Manufacturing/ Construction	6.4
Technology/ Telecommunication	6.0
Healthcare	5.5

wonderful mentor and several mentors throughout their careers," she says.

Kushner worries that even the modest strides women have made in Florida's boardrooms could diminish. She notes that while the number of female board members in the state increased slightly last year, the number of C-level positions held by women dropped from 7.6% in 2004 to 5.4% in 2006. That means that the pipeline for qualified women for future board positions narrowed.

Follit sees a few bright spots. She points to government reforms like the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, which involves strict auditing standards designed to improve corporate governance, as opening up doors for women. "Sarbanes has required all of us to remain financial-

ly literate, and from that perspective, it broadens the pool to include many women and minorities," Follit says. "Some of the best financial process and insight come from people who are CFOs and are on audit teams, and there is much more of a female representation." Overall, she remains optimistic: "If you peel back this onion and look at the basic business environment in which we're all doing business, there's lots of reasons for women to get involved."

Boardroom Changes

WEB LINK: For more on the impact of women on corporate boards, go to FloridaTrend.com/Links.

Eileen Escarola