KEY FINDINGS

ASIANS IN AMERICA
Unleashing the Potential of the “Model Minority”

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The Center for Work-Life Policy
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in New York City. CWLP’s flagship
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task force focused on global
talent innovation. The 67
global corporations and
organizations that constitute
the Task Force, representing
four million employees and
operating in 190 countries
around the world, are united by
an understanding that the full
realization of the talent pool
is at the heart of competitive
advantage and economic
success.
KEY FINDINGS

Asians in the United States have long been viewed as a “model minority,” lauded for their hard work, ambition and impressive qualifications. A mere 5 percent of the population, they are one of the fastest growing minority groups and a vital part of the nation’s talent pipeline. Consider, for example, the representation of Asians at top schools: They account for 15 to 25 percent of Ivy League enrollment, 24 percent at Stanford and a stunning 46 percent at UC Berkeley. At the same time, this highly credentialed, motivated talent pool seems to come up against a “bamboo ceiling” that prevents them from breaking into leadership ranks. Fewer than 2 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs and corporate officers, for instance, are Asian. How can we understand this disparity? In this study we examine the subtle workplace biases and dynamics that keep Asians from making it to the top, many of which are masked by the general perception of Asians as a highly qualified, successful “model minority.” It is only based on a better understanding of the experiences and challenges of Asian professionals that companies can realize the full potential of this rich talent pool.

AMBITION AND ASPIRATION

- Asians are more likely than Caucasians to aspire to hold a top job: 64 percent of Asians versus 52 percent of Caucasians.
- Asians are more likely than other groups to value being highly compensated and to place importance on having a powerful position and prestigious title.
- Asians are just as likely as any other group to ask for a pay raise or promotion.

FAMILY TIES

- Asians are much more likely than Caucasians to have eldercare responsibilities. These range from 9 percent of Asians having elders living with them, to 30 percent providing monetary support to their parents.
- Asian men and women are less likely than Caucasians to have children. Asian women over 40 are more likely than others to be non-parents.
- Asians are more likely than Caucasians to report feeling guilty about the trade-offs between their childcare and eldercare responsibilities and their work.
- Only 23 percent of Asian women have off-ramped—voluntarily leaving their jobs for a period of time—versus 32 percent of Caucasian women.

STALLING AND SCALING BACK

- In spite of their ambition, Asian men are more likely to feel stalled in their careers than men in any other group: 63 percent feel stalled versus 46 percent of African-Americans, 51 percent of Hispanics and 48 percent of Caucasians.
- Asian men are more than twice as likely to say they intend to quit their current job within the year as Caucasian men, while Asian women are 40 percent more likely to say they plan to leave.
- Asians are more than three times as likely as Caucasians, and significantly more likely than African-Americans and Hispanics, to scale back at work—reduce their ambitions, work fewer hours, consider quitting, etc.—owing to issues of bias.

TRIPWIRES ON THE WAY TO THE TOP

- Twenty-five percent of Asians feel that they face workplace discrimination because of their ethnicity, while only 8 percent of African-Americans, 9 percent of Hispanics and 4 percent of Caucasians believe this to be the case.
- Nearly half of Asian men and women (48%) report that conformity to prevailing leadership models—having to act, look, and sound like the established leaders in their workplace—is a problem.
- Only 28 percent of Asians say they feel very comfortable “being themselves” at work, versus 40 percent of African-Americans, 41 percent of Hispanics and 42 percent of Caucasians.
- Asians, particularly Asian women, are less likely than people of other ethnicities to share new ideas or challenge a group consensus in a team meeting.
- Fewer than half (46%) of Asians have a mentor in their professional life, making them 15 percent less likely to have a mentor than their Caucasian colleagues.