



Cathleen Benko

**EDITORS' NOTE** Cathleen Benko will soon be stepping out of her role as Deloitte's Chief Talent Officer to take on other priority areas within the organization that tap into her acumen for business strategy, workplace innovation, and transformational change. These are all skills she honed in her Talent role and prior roles as leader of Deloitte Consulting's high technology industry sector, global eBusiness, and award-winning Women's Initiative. She also continues to serve as advisory principal for a major technology client. Benko has been named one of the "25 Most Influential Consultants" and a "Frontline Leader" by Consulting Magazine and is the recipient of its "Leadership Achievement Award" for Women Leaders in Consulting. She is co-author of *Connecting the Dots: Aligning Projects With Objectives in Unpredictable Times*, *Mass Career Customization: Aligning the Workplace With Today's Nontraditional Workforce*, and *The Corporate Lattice: Achieving High Performance in the Changing World of Work*. She earned her M.B.A. from Harvard Business School and B.S. from Ramapo College.

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**You co-authored *The Corporate Lattice*. How did the corporate lattice concept come about?**

Five years ago, we were looking at the intensifying issue of workplace flexibility since it was a top reason both women and men were leaving the firm. We had invested a lot of time and effort in various flexible work arrangements, and yet, it

# The Corporate Lattice

An Interview with Cathleen Benko,  
Vice Chairman and Chief Talent Officer, Deloitte LLP

hadn't moved the needle. When we looked externally, we found everyone was in the same boat.

So we examined the trends and concluded that a fundamental and structural shift had taken place in the world of work. Family structures have become increasingly nontraditional; women represent the majority of college graduates; and today's workforce is more diverse in every dimension, from gender to generations.

There are also big changes in the workplace. For example, in the past few decades, organizational hierarchies have become 25 percent flatter. This is meaningful because the corporate ladder signified that power, rewards, prestige and even the size of your office were tied to the rung you had reached. But if there are fewer layers, does that mean there are fewer opportunities to be successful? Recognizing that in today's world, there are different models of success, for both organizations and individuals, was a key finding of this work. There is no effective one-size-fits-all model anymore.

So we looked for a model that better serves today's environment and a lattice does that. Unlike the linear ladder, the lattice is a grid – a multidimensional model that enables organizations to break away from industrial-era hierarchy and create more connected workplaces. Lattice organizations provide varied career pathways. They share information transparently, create communities, and provide collaborative and meaningful options for employees to contribute, regardless of their organizational level.

**Do young people understand the benefits of a career in professional services?**

Yes, it's well understood. Historically, something north of 40 percent of the graduating classes of the top business schools go into professional services or investment banking.

What's different is that for Boomers, there were a couple of inflection points in their careers when they would ask themselves if it was all still working for them, whereas younger people will ask themselves if "it's working" for them every morning.

In Deloitte's journey to become a lattice organization, we have moved from being a career destination to being a career enhancer. Some may stay a long time and become partners while others will not. Either is okay, as long as there is continual development and expansion of skills, experiences, and relationships.

**You have talent that goes to work elsewhere or has retired but with whom you maintain relationships. Why have you decided to extend those relationships?**

It's paramount for us because it's about life-long relationships that transcend employment. In the lattice model, you can visualize the fluidity more. It's part and parcel of the notion of career enhancer, because you extend the life and reach of the relationship as you traverse your own career grid.

**Are you personally able to find a work/life balance?**

I find the term "work/life balance" unfortunate, because work and life are not competing forces. It's more of a mosaic and how you fit the different aspects and elements of your life together. That is why we coined the term "career/life fit."

There has always been a notion that high performance is at odds with having a life. But, with today's workforce, high performance and sustainable career/life fit are mutually reinforcing. How to integrate work and life will be different for each person. The lattice recognizes that there is no set way.

**Women in business have experienced much more growth, but will we get to a stage where it becomes a matter of talent and not gender?**

It's not that business leaders aren't paying attention to the gender divide, but the numbers have not materially changed in 10 years.

The situation isn't going to improve until we adapt to the workforce's changing expectations around career progression and work/life integration. Women are more likely to have nonlinear careers. For example, when a woman leaves the workforce for a period of time, she might get back in. But only one out of 10 of those who return are able to get back on their original career path and income trajectories.

So a lattice model makes more sense because it presents many more ways to keep contributing – by moving upward, sideways, diagonally, and downward. This trend transcends gender, as men increasingly are having nonlinear careers as well.

Elder care is going to be a big part of this equation, because while women in the early years disproportionately manage child care, when you look at elder care, caretaking is gender blind.

Deloitte is at the forefront of this movement. It comes down to the fact that our business depends on our product – people. There is a direct correlation between our ability to grow and the number and quality of our people.

We chose to set the market for workplace flexibility just as we did for the women's initiative and it brings us to where we are today. ●