Women

In Business Now Series

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*Thanks to my mother and father
and Michael and Maureen for their
help and support*

IN BUSINESS NOW

Women

Anna Eckersley

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Introduction

Women are in demand in the 1990s. Their influence could revolutionise the workplace during the next decade. Housewives everywhere will soon be running businesses, standing for Parliament and making their mark in the city. At least that's what we are told by the media, and by politicians.

But the fact remains that women earn only two-thirds of a man's average salary. They are still largely responsible for running the home, caring for young children and generally making ends meet. Ten million of them now go out to work, but the majority of these women are confined to low paid and low status work with little hope of promotion.

The 1990s will undoubtedly present new and exciting opportunities for women to move into management roles, professions and traditionally male spheres, but they are expected to be mothers, housekeepers and supportive wives as well.

This book aims to explore the position of women in business today, how they arrived at their current position in society and what the future may hold.

Demographic changes

Changes in the population mean that there will be a 25% drop in the number of school-leavers by 1995, as well as a huge increase in the number of elderly people in Britain. So employers will be trying to attract a million women back to work to aid the economy, at precisely the time when many of them will be expected to care for their elderly parents. The skills of women have not been in such demand since the Second World War. Then the Government and employers provided nurseries, laundry facilities at work and a number of other schemes, to allow women to run their busy lives effectively.

The balancing act

Women of the 1990s will have to become very good at balancing the needs of their families and their employers, and this time around they should remember their own needs too.

Workplace nurseries, flexible working hours, equal pay and better rights for part-time workers could be temporary measures which disappear again when the skills' shortage is over.

If women are to overcome the history of discrimination at work, as well as in society generally, they must seize their chance during the 1990s. Equal opportunities at school, during training and at work, are all necessary before women can compete on an equal footing with men. The burden of housework, childcare and eldercare must be shared more with men, and acknowledged by the State, before real progress can be made.

So the next ten years could well be as memorable for women as when they won the right to vote earlier this century, or when equality legislation was introduced in the 1970s. But the questions still to be answered are: Who will foot the bill for the necessary changes? Will Britain's increasing involvement in the European Community increase women's equality? Can attitudes be changed as quickly as the law?

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