

# Providing an edge

Women make up half of this country's workforce, but hold a scarce number of executive positions. A Philadelphia-based company takes aim at the issues and challenges women face in the workplace with the goal of breaking through to those top jobs

Story by  
**STEVE TARTER**  
Photographs by  
**ERICA MAGDA**  
of *Mystique*

**M**onica Warner doesn't like to use the words "glass ceiling" to describe limitations on women in management. "That phrase isn't used as much as it used to be," said Warner, who serves as director of marketing and client services for The Leader's Edge/Leaders By Design, Philadelphia-based executive coaching firm.

The Leader's Edge was started by Molly Shepard in 2000 to address the issues and challenges women face in the workplace while Leaders By Design was formed later to help foster partnerships between male and female executives, Warner said.

Prior to founding The Leader's Edge, Shepard was president and co-founder of Manchester Inc., a career-development consulting firm in Philadelphia.

Long excluded from top management positions, women have made definite progress in recent years, said Warner, noting that the number of women CEOs of Fortune 500 firms has gone from 0.2 percent in 1995 to 3 percent in 2008.

The number of board seats held by women on Fortune 500 firms has risen from

9.6 percent in 1995 to 15.2 percent in 2008, she said.

"The progress of women managers is creeping in the right direction but it's not moving as rapidly as we would like," said Warner, 29, who works out of her Peoria home office.

Progress is definitely needed in the high-tech field where women hold less than 10 percent of executive positions and make up less than a third of the technology-sector workforce, Warner said.

"It is true that women make up half of the country's workforce yet are scarcely represented in the top executive positions. That is what The Leader's Edge is trying to break through," she said. "Organizations have a tendency to hire and promote people who are similar to them so with men already



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at the top, it is easier to promote another man. Women are seen as more of a risk," Warner said. Originally from Connecticut, Warner said she enjoys working with different companies across the country on a project-by-project basis.

"I try to support our sales people with the day-to-day operations. Working on the design of programs on a bottom-up basis is very rewarding. You get to see the result of your work," she said.

It's also an ever-changing smorgasbord of business challenges for Warner.

"We have worked closely with a well-known financial institution for several years in a row now to help develop their top talent female employees. Each year this company identifies a group of high-performing women and rewards them with executive coaching to continue to develop their leadership skills for future contributions at the organization," she said.

The Leader's Edge also created an Executive Leadership Institute for Women with one of the nation's top tax and auditing firms, Warner said.

"The institute utilizes quarterly classroom sessions along with monthly virtual discussions in small groups to reinforce leadership learnings," she said.

In the corporate world, many



Monica Warner poses for a photo in Peoria Heights recently. Warner is the marketing director for The Leader's Edge, a national development group that seeks to boost women managers.

### Finding that edge

► To reach Monica Warner, call (309) 966-2531 or log on to [www.leaders-by-design.com](http://www.leaders-by-design.com) or [www.the-leaders-edge.com](http://www.the-leaders-edge.com).

firms seek a third party to help them with executive coaching.

"Many companies are looking for an objective party to help them," she said.

The Leader's Edge also tailors development programs that allow employees to learn new skills, Warner said.

The company is also involved

in outplacement and transition services for firms. "As you might expect, unfortunately,

that's big right now," she said.

Steve Tarter can be reached at 686-3260 or [starter@pjstar.com](mailto:starter@pjstar.com).

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