In 2002, in a ground-breaking move, Johnson & Johnson partnered with Smith College Executive Education for Women to develop a program that would dramatically increase the number of women prepared to assume leadership roles within their company.
In 1995 only 14% of positions at the vice president level and above at Johnson & Johnson (J&J) were held by women.

“Johnson & Johnson had a great reputation as a family-friendly company but like many other corporations at the time, there were few women in executive positions.”

JoAnn Heffernan Heisen, founder of the WLI (Hewlett, 2007)

J&J sees over 30% increase in women at executive levels

A JOHNSON & JOHNSON CASE STUDY

SUMMARY

In 2002, in a ground-breaking move, Johnson & Johnson (J&J), a U.S. based global pharmaceutical, medical devices, and consumer packaged goods manufacturer, partnered with Smith College Executive Education for Women (Smith) to develop an annual program, currently in its 11th year, which would dramatically increase the number of women in senior leadership positions within their company. This extraordinary collaboration has helped J&J develop, sustain, and retain a robust pipeline of female executives.

WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

A strategic launch

In 1995, only 14% of positions at the vice president level and above at J&J were held by women. The writing was on the wall: with women being more than half of new hires, why weren’t those numbers represented at the senior levels? Clearly, something had to be done about this leadership gap. The executives at J&J knew that if they didn’t address the problem head on, the company stood to lose its competitive edge.

In a strategic move, J&J launched the Women’s Leadership Initiative (WLI). According to JoAnn Heffernan Heisen, co-founder of the WLI, “Johnson & Johnson had a great reputation as a family-friendly company but like many other corporations at the time, there were few women in executive positions.” (Hewlett, 2007) The WLI set out to change this through a variety of initiatives including strategic leadership development for high-potential women. J&J partnered with Smith College Executive Education for Women and began sending a cohort of 20 women every year to two of Smith’s on-campus executive programs: “The Smith College Leadership
LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE
Not enough; not fast enough

In 2002, J&J’s learning officers came to another critical realization. The group of 20 women they were sending through Smith’s programs each year was not enough to fill the company’s pressing need for female executives. And it wasn’t getting them fast enough to their ultimate goal to be the #1 company in the world for women executives.

In order to fill the leadership pipeline more quickly, they again called on Smith to develop a new, annual initiative that would double the rate at which high potential women were being prepared for advancement.

Smith responded by designing a customized leadership program exclusively for J&J women – a program that would transform 50-60 high-potentials from all across the global organization to become highly effective leaders.

The program was named The Leadership Edge: Strategies for Shaping Your Future at Johnson & Johnson, and launched in 2002. Since then it has been delivered annually at the corporate headquarters in New Brunswick, NJ. In 2011, J&J decided to run the program twice a year to address the need to develop more global female talent, doubling the number of women entering the pipeline.

LEADERSHIP RESULTS
30% increase in female representation
A program worth its weight in gold

The results speak for themselves. As of 2005, the percentage of women at the vice presidential level or above has risen to over 30%.

Smith College Executive Education continues to link business leadership learning to the J&J brand and Credo. To date over 1500 J&J women have attended a Smith program, and in 2010 the partnership expanded yet again to include another custom-designed program for women in Research and Development (R&D). The Ethicon Women in R&D program was delivered in a modular format over an 18-month span and included an innovative session for men as well as coed sessions.

“We partner with Smith College because we’ve seen a retention rate of 95-96% as a result of the program”

Anthony Carter, Current Chief Global Diversity Officer

“There is no doubt that Johnson & Johnson has benefited enormously from these programs and our women rave about the experience. To attend one of their sessions is a gold star on their resume.”

JoAnn Heffernan Heisen
Founder of the Women’s Leadership Initiative (Interview, 2009)