

# Up-the-ladder advancement may be past: Leask

By Linda Lord-Jenkins  
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Janie Leask worked her way up from a secretary to president of the Alaska Federation of Natives but believes that the days of working your way up the ladder are falling prey to the age of educated specialists.

Leask is the first woman to hold the job of AFN president and says it is the first position in AFN that she actually sought out.

All the other job advancements she received at the Federation were made at the behest of a male supervisor, she admits, and says that she usually thought she was not ready for those advancements.

The 33-year-old woman attended high school in Anchorage, and moved to California to attend college but was unable to take the classes she was interested in. She changed her plans to attending business college and got her first job — in a bank.

She later got a job in the U.S. Government after scoring in the top percent of the job applicants. Leask credits her typing skills — the skills that often get women jobs — for landing her that position but the fact that her other application scores were excellent didn't hurt.

She points out that her father strongly encouraged her and her brothers to learn typing, saying the skill would hold them in good stead in the future.

After returning to Alaska, she joined AFN as a secretary, left to work for an oil company, and was re-hired as an executive secretary. When Sam Kito was made president, he named her his special assistant and gave her increased responsibilities including handling news releases, research and budgeting.

When Byron Mallot was named president, he appointed Leask executive vice president



Photo by Patty Ginsburg

Janie Leask, President of AFN, says women and organizations both suffer if the women do not seek the jobs they are capable of.

# Perfectionism kept Leask from applying

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— he didn't ask her, he told her, said Leask who remained in that position until taking on the president's title.

She says that through her ad-

vancements in the federation she never sought increased responsibility or job title.

"Perhaps it's because that all along I never felt ready . . .

I've always been a perfectionist and had a higher level of expectation for myself," she said.

Part of the job advancement conflict came because she wanted to perform absolutely perfect in one job before tackling another.

"For me it's been a matter of resolving that in my head . . . and coming to learn that perfection can never happen," she said.

The decision to seek the job of AFN presidency came at the point when she was considering a general job change.

"I had started looking for another job. I felt I had been here too long and needed a change. I got another job offer but when the time came I decided I didn't want to leave. I decided to stay and then it became a matter of lobbying the Board (of directors), talk-

ing to different people and seeking the job.

When she was appointed, Leask said few of the board members would admit to reservations about her being a woman. However, she has learned in the past year that more had those reservations than would admit it.

As she thinks about her own job advancement and reluctance to seek out new positions, she would advise women to seek out those positions they want, to take the risks which may be hard to take.

"Risk-taking is very difficult. One of the hardest things I did was to put my resume together, to sell myself to an organization." Women often find it difficult to sell themselves, she said, and adds that that hurts more than themselves.

"If you have a job interest and you sit back and do no-

thing you are the loser but so is the organization you are interested in. If you really feel you can do the job it is your loss and the organization's loss."

The days of working one's way up through the organizational ladder are not over but it is certainly more difficult, she says because of the needs of corporations both private, regional.

"When I came in the corporations were looking for people who were interested and dedicated but not necessarily specialized.

"Now they need expertise and education. That is really important but at the same time it is not everything. That can't teach them common sense; it can't teach them to care.

"Women should get involved, talk to people, read up on the issues."