I have found the business world to be as fascinating and challenging as I thought it would be. I've learned many things - both through my own experiences and those of others.

I celebrated my second anniversary of working for IBM as a Systems Engineer last December. It has been both rewarding and challenging. I would like to recap some of the events that lead to my career choice.

Since I was young, I have been fascinated with business and always wanted to know how it operated. When I was growing up, with two older brothers and a younger sister, my mother was constantly supporting us - a super motivator. We grew up knowing we could do anything we wanted if we tried hard enough.

College has many things to offer to those who will let it. Due to my strong interest in business, I studied finance and real estate. I wanted to go into banking and did not want to wait four years to begin working. I have worked at various jobs since I was fourteen and at a local retail store during most of my college career. I was also involved in my sorority, many clubs, and had an active social life. I have always thought of college as a place to learn and grow. My junior year was spent studying in Seville, Spain and traveling in Europe.

When I returned to the United States I was ready to finish college and begin a career. Since I graduated midyear, I spent most of that first semester in job interviews. As a finance major, many avenues were open to me. I was most interested in banking, sales and insurance. As a member of Phi Chi Theta, a business fraternity for women, I was fortunate to hear Lynn Roper speak. She was one of two women stock brokers in Lincoln at that time. I was very impressed with this woman and her accomplishments; so I arranged a personal interview with her for advice on how to succeed in business.

She suggested that I search for a company with a good training program. She recommended certain books to read concerning women in business and advised me to interview with as many companies as possible. I also talked to other people. One of my banking professors felt that being a Bank Examiner would be a great way to learn banking. One of the bank officers I talked with in Lincoln warned me about negative attitudes toward women. These people were all a tremendous help to me.
“Real World”

Assertive Attitude

Armed with a positive attitude, a resume and knowing what I wanted; I set out to land a challenging career. I was looking for a career that was challenging with rewards for a job well done, the right salary, and a certain amount of control. I interviewed mainly through the University of Nebraska placement center and local Lincoln businesses. I found that the more assertive I was, the more confident I became and the more job offers I received.

I feel that the benefits of interviews are threefold: 1. finding out more about yourself; 2. finding out more about the company; and 3. the company finding out more about you. I really checked out the companies I interviewed with and especially their attitudes toward advancement and women in business. When I was in college, I thought the business world treated all applicants the same and used the same criteria for everyone. I soon found out how wrong that was. I had both good and bad experiences. I would like to tell you about a couple, not to dwell on the subject, but to make you aware of what can happen. Some of my interviewers asked questions which were clearly illegal and irrelevant, such as: “Do you plan to marry and have children? If so, when? What if your husband won’t let you travel?” I clearly stated that I wanted a career, and even if I did get married, I certainly would not marry anyone who had such backward attitudes toward women in business. One company man, after I responded in this way said, “Well, of course you would say that - that is a very good answer for a woman.” I replied, “If you thought I would say that anyway, why did you bother to ask?” That left him speechless. Needless to say, I got the job offer!

Company Discriminates

If someone had told me what I am about to tell you, I would not have believed it. The most blatant case of discrimination during my interviewing came from one of the local Savings and Loans. In one of my banking classes, a male classmate had told me about an opening as a loan officer at the Savings and Loan Company he worked at. I was excited about working there. I had had a savings account there since I was eight and the people were always very friendly towards me. I went immediately to the personnel office and stated that I would graduate in December with a Finance degree, and wanted to interview for the loan officer position my friend had mentioned. She said, “The only opening for you is Receptionist.” I replied that I did not study finance to be a receptionist and felt that my talents could be better utilized as a loan officer. She told me that I would have to take a typing test. I told her I never learned how to type on purpose because I did not want to be a secretary. She said, “Everyone who has applied for jobs here has taken a typing test - even our President.” Well, if the President took it, I could too, so I took the test and scored a miserable ten words a minute. She told me never to come back to that institution until I learned to type, but to fill out an application in the meantime. As I filled out the application, this woman dictated a letter to be sent to five men. It went something like this: “I enjoyed talking to you about your opening for a loan officer. I would like you to come in next week for a second interview to further discuss this position.” I could not believe what I had heard. I got up, went into her office and said, “I just heard you dictate those five letters, I know you have an opening for a loan officer and I would like to be considered. She said, “For you the only opening is for a receptionist.” I was furious. Imagine, having a finance degree and only being allowed to interview for the position of receptionist! I did not report that incident then. I was afraid of how it would affect my chances of ever getting a job in Lincoln.

Discussion Helpful

One banker told me I could be a teller at $600 a month, that their bank was very competitive with other banks, and that the officers were making $12,000 a year, the highest paid in Lincoln. Of all the banks I talked to about loan officer or management trainee positions, I did not get a single offer. I was insulted and hurt, but I did not let that get me down. I knew what I had to offer and what they were missing. I would not work for any company with such discriminatory attitudes and for the salaries they were willing to pay.

I traveled to various cities and interviewed with many companies. I received so many job offers I did not know what to do with them all. I narrowed them down to the three most promising: Systems Engineer for IBM; bank examiner for the comptroller of the currency; and internal auditor for a large local insurance company. I discussed the pros and cons of each offer with Lynn. She pointed out factors that I had not even considered and was immensely helpful. I urge everyone to discuss career plans with a successful business person.

I chose a career with IBM for the following important reasons. IBM offered the best opportunity for me to utilize my skills. I would be selling and installing computers with a specialization in banking, finance, distribution and construction. I would be responsible for many
accounts, could plan my own schedule, have extensive training to enable me to do the job right, and travel. IBM cared about my career path which would be unlimited. IBM pays well for a job well done, and recognizes accomplishments. At that time, there were few women in the fascinating field of computers and business.

**Training Important**

I started my career with IBM on December 26, 1978 as Systems Engineer for the General Systems Division. I was responsible for selling and installing computers for various businesses and acting as a technical consultant on business operations with cost effective business solutions. My first year was spent mostly training in classrooms or on the job. I spent seventeen weeks in training in Atlanta, Georgia, the head quarters for my division and the location of most of the education centers for new employees. These classes were an experience in themselves. There were four classes. The first three were five weeks long for both Marketing Representatives and Systems Engineers. The last class was two weeks long and was for Systems Engineers only. They were comparable to seventeen weeks of finals. We were graded on everything daily, which caused a lot of pressure. My classmates were from all over the United States, most had never met anyone from Nebraska before. The instructors were all past proven System Engineers or Marketing Reps. I was impressed with the caliber of students and instructors; I have become very close to many of the IBM people I met.

The first class taught us the basics of how a business runs, contrasting manual operations with the advantages of using computers, how to make effective sales calls and presentations and how to justify business computers.

The second class was very technical in nature. We learned many details of our computers, got to know the product line inside out and learned several programming languages. We also learned the importance of having superior products, programs and customer service.

The third class was an overview of the many application programs which IBM offers, such as manufacturing, retail, finance, distribution, construction, law firms, hospitals, and medical groups.

The final class was for System Engineers only and covered how to manage territories, more sales call techniques, more programming, and the importance of customer service.

**Proving Competence**

In between classes, I was responsible for special projects and was free to accompany others on sales calls to improve my skills. I was on an uphill learning curve that entire first year - both in learning my job and in working with others.

When I started, there were no higher ranking women role models for me to follow. I had to learn to cope with people who really question the ability of women to do a complete job. More than once, a male coworker would say to a male customer, “Karen was hired to satisfy EEO requirements,” or some equally obnoxious statement. The solution for me was to pursue my work with as much energy as possible, proving that I was more than capable for the job.

In one of my first classes, I had a male advisor tell me he could not believe how well I was doing, especially since I had three handicaps: 1. I was young; 2. I was a woman; and 3. I was straight out of college.

I read a few books such as, *Business As A Game* by Albert Carr and *Wising Up* by Jo Foxworth. I began to realize that business really is a game and if you want to win you have to play by the rules. You have to know what you want, set goals and time frames, and not be afraid to ask for such things as well-deserved raises and promotions.

**New Responsibility**

After a year of training, I was promoted to Associate Systems Engineer. With this, came the responsibility of managing a territory. Mine started with twenty-two business accounts in Lincoln, Beatrice, Nebraska City, Fairbury and Hebron - all current users of IBM equipment.

Besides the training for new employees, IBM offers a variety of industry classes. I went to several concerning construction, distribution and finance. IBM also offers annual conferences in certain industry areas. This past year, I was able to accompany some of my customers, along with two thousand other IBM customers, to the Construction Conference in Washington, D.C. At the conference we were able to learn about new developments in the construction industry and compare different methods of handling business solutions. I found the conference valuable.

Currently, I handle about forty-five accounts with more to come. My customers are very important to me. I concentrate my efforts on learning more about their particular needs and offering better business solutions. The computer industry is constantly changing with more to learn in every area, and it is up to me to keep my customers abreast of all the new possibilities available to them.

**Satisfying Career**

My career with IBM is everything I wanted and more. The people I work with and my customers are super. Management helps with my career planning. They know I want to go as far and as fast as I can and continued
that I am planning to go into marketing this year. For a job well done, the rewards and recognition are there. My days are fairly flexible - I plan my own schedule as results are what counts. I am free to learn and grow as much as I am capable of.

In addition to a satisfying career, I feel that community involvement is very important. I have been a member of the Nova Chapter of Business and Professional Women for over two years. We have monthly meetings with very informative speakers. The group is made up of many talented business women, and I find it fascinating. I also helped on the United Way Campaign, and am a member of the Pi Beta Phi Alum Club and UNL Alumni Association. Due to my interest in Sales and Real Estate, I am also involved with Mary Kay Cosmetics and have an active Real Estate license.

My future plans include getting more involved with the Republican party and local politics and the business college - helping business majors chart careers, and obtaining a Masters Degree in Business. I really feel that I have had a rich life so far and am looking forward to a very positive and fast-paced future.

My overall advice to anyone is to maintain a positive mental attitude, know what you want, how to get it, develop a detailed plan of action and then go for it. I truly believe that you can be anything you want to be, if you believe it yourself.