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'Executive presence' for women in the office

By Beth Fitzgerald

Verizon executive **Maureen Kuper** graduated this week from the Rutgers Executive Leadership Program for Women, a six-month course of lectures, coaching and meetings with peers — other ambitious female executives from companies like **Merck**, **Chubb**, **Johnson & Johnson** and **Novartis**.

The classes happened to start just as Kuper was taking over a new post at Verizon that came with more work, responsibility and travel.

"I didn't see how I was going to be able to afford the time," for the leadership program, Kuper said. Instead, the course gave her new management strategies she immediately put into practice at Verizon, where she oversees 400 technicians who service the telecommunications needs of very large corporate customers.

"Each time I went to the program, I felt I could breathe again — it gave me new ways to deal with challenges," Kuper said. Instead of draining time from her executive duties, as she had feared it would, "it turned into this place where I found wonderful people and new strategies" to deal with the stress that comes with a bigger job.

Brigid Moynahan has led the Rutgers program since it was launched in 2000 by the Rutgers Institute for Women's Leadership. She described the program as a catalyst for career advancement for women, who are nominated by their companies for the program because they have been identified as leaders. Moynahan also runs her own business, **The Next Level**, in Montclair, which designs and leads corporate programs in mentoring, coaching, team building, diversity and leadership.

Moynahan said the elusive factor of "executive presence" is an area the program tackles.

"Women still need to be seen as leaders," she said. A woman executive may rank high on leadership ability assessments, "but that doesn't translate into 'this person should run the business,'" Moynahan said. "Women need to be very clear about framing their own leadership so others see it; they need to step into their power."

Kuper, a 20-year Verizon executive, said her goal is to continue rising through the executive ranks at the company, "and this program will help me get there. Already, I can feel it has helped me get through

obstacles that I would have gotten through, but it would have taken me longer.”

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