



3rd Annual

Women's Leadership Impact Study

FLORIDA
MARCH 2025



The
Women's
Edge

MENTOR. PARTNER. LEAD.

Contents

ABOUT THE STUDY	2
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INTRODUCTION	4
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KEY FINDINGS & TRENDS	5
Employers show intent to support women’s advancement to leadership but lag in setting specific goals and taking action.	5
Survey feedback partially explains the gap between intent and action.	6
Active support for women of color has waned.	7
Support for LGBTQ+ women is questionable and concerning in the context of the current political climate.	8
Businesses are leveraging a combination of traditional best practice strategies as well as newer, technology-oriented approaches to women’s advancement.	9
Subjective survey feedback provides important insight.	11

A ROADMAP FOR SUCCESS	12
Assess your culture, inclusion status, and support for women.	13
Create a comprehensive, measurable action plan that includes realistic goals.	14
Nurture a culture that’s aligned with your plans and sets you up for success.	15
Offer education, knowledge growth, and skills training.	16
Use proven, cost-effective approaches: mentorship, sponsorship, allyship, ERGs, and customized career support.	17
Communicate often and with authenticity.	19
Embrace new approaches and technologies.	20

ENDNOTES & ABOUT THE AUTHOR	21
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About the Study

The 2025 Florida Women's Leadership Impact Study marks the third year of longitudinal research examining the status of women's leadership among Florida's employers. Designed and managed by The Women's Edge (TWE), this report focuses on data collected throughout 2023 and 2024.

The study examines the development, training, and benefits employers offer to support women where they work. Its goal is to catalyze progress in women's leadership, including the advancement of women of color and those whose other intersecting identities place them at risk for marginalization or underrepresentation.

Where possible, this report highlights relevant comparisons to past years, and it sometimes references broader contextual data. The *Roadmap for Success* (page #12) is a hallmark of all TWE reports. It provides specific, measurable recommendations for sustainable progress.

Survey participants include Florida-based small, medium, and large organizations.

- Company revenues range from approximately \$5 million per year to more than \$50 million per year.
- Private companies represent 63% of respondents, non-profits 21%, and public companies 16%. The percentage of public companies who participate has steadily increased since the study's first year.
- Industries represented include real estate, construction, financial services, advertising, health care, human services, professional services, retail or wholesale, advertising, hospitality, higher education, public services, and publishing.

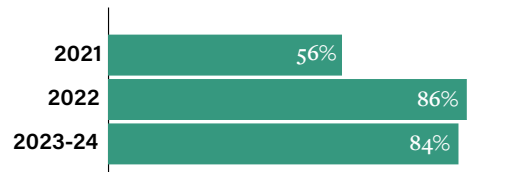
Readers Notes: "Metrics" are referenced frequently throughout this report. Survey participants responded to questions about the use of metrics on a variety of factors, including: leadership development, retention, and promotion/advancement to senior leadership for all women and for women of color.

Survey respondents and independent source material use a variety of terms in reference to peoples' identities. In this report, for direct quotes we use terms consistent with the original source. Thus, the reader may see variations such as: LGBTQ; LGBTQ+; or LGBTQ+IA; women of color; Black; BIPOC; African American; Hispanic; Latina; Asian; or Pan-Asian.

Notably, women hold the CEO or top executive job in a full 84% of responding companies. This figure stood at 56% in the study's first year and at 86% in year two.

- The significant percentage of participating companies with women CEOs perhaps reflects the study's focus: women leaders might be more inclined to support and engage in research examining what impacts women's rise to leadership! TWE also acknowledges that these statistics could skew results in favor of support for women's leadership.
- Among responding organizations, 64% of their executive teams are comprised of women, yet only 4% are women of color.

FIGURE 1
The Percentage of Women-Led Businesses Participating in the FL TWE Women's Leadership Study has Grown



"Kaufman Rossin continues our commitment to this study, because we know how important it is to gather and share information about the women-led businesses in our state. Women leaders are everywhere, providing products and services, creating jobs, and offering role models to younger women and girls across Florida!"

JANET ALTMAN
Chief Marketing Officer

KAUFMAN
ROSSIN

In comparison to the high percentage of businesses led by women among TWE survey respondents, far fewer Fortune 500 companies¹ (about 10%) are women-led. Data for smaller companies shows that women own or run about 34% of small businesses or franchises².

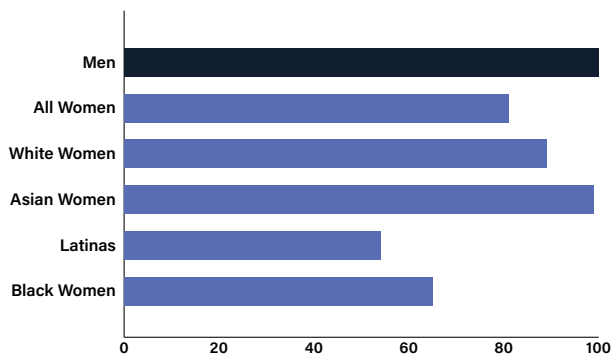
Introduction

This year's Florida survey indicates that women's leadership progress is mixed and, in some areas, actually waning. Current independent research is simultaneously demonstrating the fragility of national progress. Leanin.org data³ suggests that the past few years' progress for women into senior ranks has been largely driven by a reduction in their line roles, and that at the current rate of progress, it will still take close to 50 years for women to reach parity in the corporate world.

This, in combination with significant tailwinds facing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, will remind readers how much work still needs to be done, and why this report is relevant.

The following pages identify examples of mixed progress in supporting women's leadership. The data demonstrates that women working in Florida-based businesses – like other women nationally and globally – face obstacles to career progression.

FIGURE 2
Independent 2024 Research Indicates that for Every 100 Men Promoted to Manager, Fewer Women are Promoted³



Asian women have experienced significant improvements for promotion at the junior level, but they encounter major hurdles later in the pipeline. Asian women and Latinas have the lowest promotion rates from director to VP.

One of the most persistent challenges is the gap between intent and action, which the report explores. For broader context, it is also important for readers to bear in mind that, nationwide, women continue to fall behind early in their career journey. This sets them on a lagging path compared to men for the remainder of their career (Figure 2).

This report contains two major sections:

Key Findings and Trends (page 5) synthesizes major takeaways from the most recent survey and compares them to previous years wherever possible. Highlights include:

- Stated intent to develop women leaders versus declines in women-specific leadership development programs
- A decline in support for women of color and questionable support for LGBTQ+ women
- Minimal metrics to track support for women's advancement
- The most used and respected initiatives to support women at work
- Insights gained from open-ended feedback

A Roadmap for Success (page 12) outlines specific recommendations for any organization committed to supporting and advancing women's leadership. It includes:

- Organizational assessment
- Plan development with realistic goals and metrics
- Culture building to support sustained progress
- Effective, efficient evidence-based best practices
- Consistent, transparent communications
- New innovations, iteration, and course correction

Key Findings & Trends



Employers show intent to support women's advancement to leadership but lag in setting specific goals and taking action.

The percentage of survey participants with goals to increase women in leadership has decreased significantly, from

64%
in 2022

to

44%
in 2023-2024.

The positive news is that companies want women to succeed. However, too many are falling short in setting measurable goals, implementing actionable initiatives, and holding leaders accountable.

There's good news when it comes to intent:

- A desire to develop high-potential women remains strong, with 94% of respondents saying, "We want to further develop the talent of high-potential women."
- Businesses who say they are committed to formal goals and metrics have remained consistent over the course of three years. Most recently, 40% of employers said they have formal goals, compared to 39% for the previous two years' studies. Similar percentages of companies say they have informal goals and metrics.

While such findings suggest support for progress, related data is contradictory:

- Respondents who actually have goals to increase women in leadership have dropped significantly, from 83% in 2021 to 44% this past year (Figure 3), and metrics to track progress for promoting and advancing women have also declined.
- Only 9% of respondents have a dedicated leadership development officer or champion for women's leadership.
- Only 27% of companies say they have resources and funding dedicated to women's leadership development, and even fewer – 18% – say they offer leadership development specific to women.
- Support for women with intersecting identities has declined. This is explored further on pages 7 and 8.

Survey respondents identify the following to help accelerate their own work to advance women's progress: "proactive pressure at the top of the organization," "successful executive women in our industry and elsewhere who can set the right example," and "external discussion in the media, in our industry, or more broadly."



Survey feedback partially explains the gap between intent and action.

Accountability for progress in women's leadership appears minimal for most companies. Despite stated aspirations to advance women, survey results show that most companies do not include the advancement, promotion, or retention of women as a specific component in the performance reviews or compensation decisions of managers. (Figure 3)

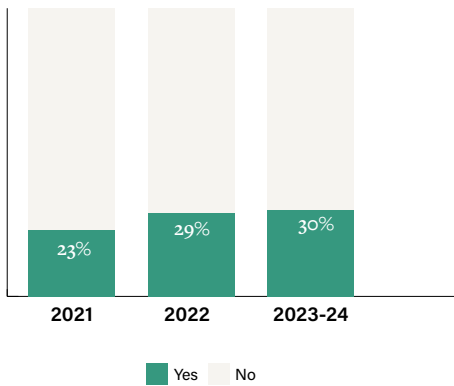
It's challenging to identify the many reasons for the gap between intent and action. The survey responses provide clues.

Businesses report that they value numerous initiatives and approaches, while also consistently reporting barriers to implementation:

- An impressive 100 percent of respondents have a positive view of employee resource groups (ERGs) and senior leader listening tours.
- A significant 100% of respondents also see the positive impacts of leadership development programs, conferences, professional networks, women's leadership conferences, and executive coaching. Leadership consultants also get very high marks, with 93% of respondents affirming their value.
- Somewhat surprisingly given the pushback against diversity, equity, and inclusion, more than 90% of respondents have positive views about such training.
- A robust 86% of respondents are positive about sponsors for women, and 80% give positive scores to the use of manager financial incentives for the development and advancement of women.
- In contrast to these positive views, respondents report several barriers to delivering on their intentions: limited resources, a lack (intentional or not) of prioritization, and organizations that are too small. Accountability is also lacking.

FIGURE 3

A Minority of Respondents Include Advancement, Promotion, and Retention of Women as a Specific Component in Performance Reviews/Compensation of Managers



"Companies have to take time to get to the root of their challenges and come up with transformative solutions. These often include intentional mentorship, sponsorship, advocacy for opportunities, giving public credit and recognition to BIPOC employees, providing consistent education about employee experiences, and robust communications."

SOYINI CHANG
Co-Founder and CEO





Active support for women of color has waned.

"As a Hispanic Woman of Color who owns a construction business, I wish there were more women project managers, superintendents and skilled laborers in the industry - it's improving, but so much more can be done. It starts at the high school level, for exposure."

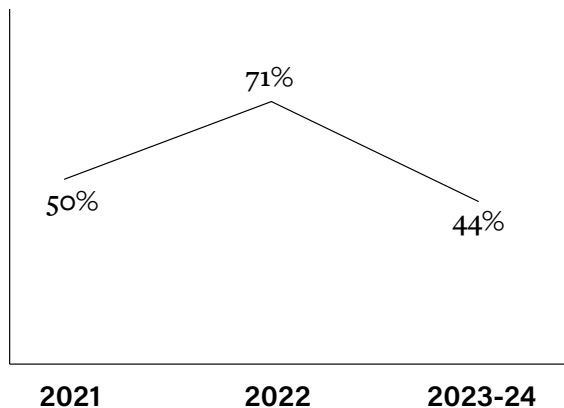
Anonymous survey participant

Women of color looking to climb the corporate ladder face a more challenging landscape right now. This is resulting in disproportionate underrepresentation in senior leadership, and it impacts Black women the most.

- Over the course of three studies, metrics to track progress for retaining women of color have been sluggish. A mere 22% currently do so, and this marks a decline from 26% for the first two years of data collection.
- Businesses with a formal goal to increase the number of women of color in leadership have also declined, after a sharp peak in 2022, a time when the country's political and social backdrop was more supportive of progress for women of color. (Figure 4) Likewise, metrics to track progress against these goals is declining, and currently stands at 18%, down from 26% in each of the two previous studies.
- When we ask employers how they define success in advancing women of color, one of the top responses is "increasing rates of women of color in every stage of our organization." This feedback makes the downward trend in support for women of color particularly frustrating.

FIGURE 4

The Proportion of Businesses with a Formal Goal to Increase the Number of Women of Color in Leadership has Declined



Independent data³ shows a disturbing uptick in the percentage of women of color who say their race/ethnicity has played a role in missing out on a raise, promotion, or opportunity to advance. For Black women, the numbers have moved from 45% in 2018 to 61% in 2024. Over the same period, they have increased from 10% to 29% for Latinas and from 26% to 39% for Asian women.



Support for LGBTQ+ women is questionable and concerning in the context of the current political climate.

More than

75%

of LGBTQIA+ women still fear coming out at work, according to a survey of more than 2,000 LGBTQIA+ women and non-binary professionals⁶. Seven out of ten survey respondents say they experience discrimination, with higher rates for those who belong to additional marginalized communities.

Almost

80%

of respondents in the same survey believe it is tougher for LGBTQIA+ to advance their careers than it is for straight, cisgender women.

As the backlash against businesses who show support for LGBTQ+ employees and customers heightens, leaders have an opportunity to review their values and identify the actions they can take to ensure inclusion for this community.

Survey results show that support for increasing LGBTQ+ women in leadership roles – although never high – has decreased over several years, from 33% at its peak to 25% for the most recent data.

- Importantly, 90% of reporting organizations have mechanisms for all employees to track and address hostile environments. This is a critical support in today's complex environment: LGBTQ+ women and all employees with marginalized identities should be aware of – and in some cases, reminded of – this resource.
- Considering the toll it takes simply for LGBTQ+ women to come out, the importance of having such “safety mechanisms” in the workplace is significant. McKinsey data⁴ demonstrates that 1 in 5 LGBTQ+ women have to come out at work about one time per week and almost 40% have had an uncomfortable experience doing so “in the past month.”
- Lesbian and bisexual women often experience disrespectful behavior in their workplaces⁵. They are more likely than other women to experience microaggressions, including being interrupted/spoken over and having their judgment challenged. They are also more likely to receive negative feedback, such as being told that they are too outspoken and confrontational.

Independent research⁶ shows that despite – or perhaps because of – the marginalization that LGBTQ+ women face, lesbian and bisexual women are significantly more likely than other women to advocate for new opportunities for women of color, publicly acknowledge them for their contributions, and speak out when they see bias and discrimination against women of color at work.



Businesses are leveraging a combination of traditional best practices along with newer, technology-oriented approaches to women's advancement.

Independent studies⁹ demonstrate that sponsorship is a proven strategy to boost women into leadership, yet responding employers are underutilizing it. (Figure 5)

Sponsorship is discussed in the Roadmap for Success on page 17.

While dedicated resources and development could be more robust, employers' ongoing reliance on proven initiatives – along with the introduction of newer innovations – is a positive sign.

Mentorship, whether formal or informal, remains the most frequently used initiative to help advance women and establish an inclusive workplace. (Please see Page 17 for more information on mentorship.)

- About half of all respondents offer mentoring programs (Figure 5), and there is significant opportunity to increase this number since a full 92% give this approach positive scores.
- Substantial data⁷ indicates the extensive positive impacts of mentorship for women, historically underrepresented groups, and all employees.

Customized benefits stand out among offerings to help recruit, retain, and support women.

- A full 78% offer “flexible and/or remote work” options, 41% provide mental health benefits, and about one third are offering transition and skills training along with updating hiring policies related to work gaps. Well-being offerings are also on the increase.

Companies are embracing new innovations to support women's career journeys.

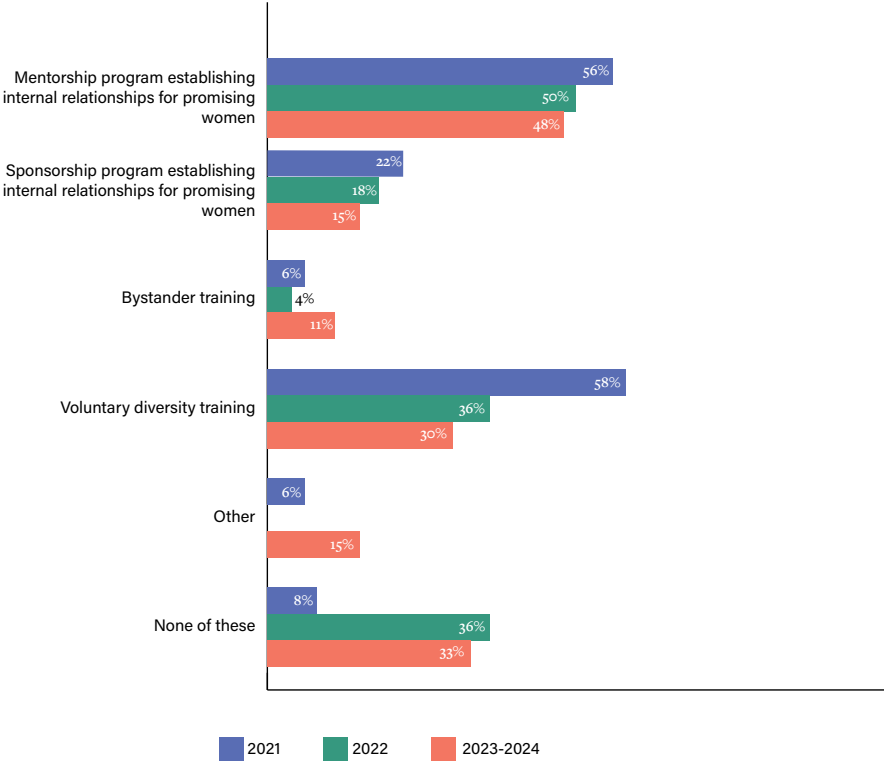
- Over 40% of respondents now offer online leadership development platforms, 30% provide virtual mentoring, and 26% have introduced skills-based learning platforms.
- A small number of respondents are using AI-powered recruitment and promotion approaches and data analytics for gender equity. We expect this number to grow in the coming years. AI tools⁸ are particularly useful to streamline repetitive tasks involved in recruitment, and they can often enhance the candidate experience.

“As a business owner, I am hands on and work with the women in our company. Over the years, I have mentored women in our company, and some have gone on to start their own companies or work in bigger corporations.”

ANONYMOUS SURVEY PARTICIPANT

FIGURE 5

A 3-Year Look at the Most Utilized Practices Among FL Study Participants to Support Women's Career Advancement





Qualitative survey feedback provides important insight.

Open-ended questions provide greater understanding that goes beyond the static nature of survey questions.

Respondents' written comments provide good examples of informal approaches to supporting women.

- *While we have formal initiatives, we also embrace informal goals like mentorship and fostering an inclusive environment. We're continually working to strengthen these efforts and welcome feedback for further improvement.*
- *Informally, we want to encourage growth on a personal and professional level for our women leaders. We look at them holistically and try to encourage growth in all areas.*

A proportion of committed survey participants are smaller, women-owned companies who hire mostly women.

- *As a women-owned communications firm, we understand the importance of continuing to encourage women employees to succeed and grow both within the company and industry, as well as individually.*

Some feedback signals awareness of the decreased emphasis on support for women and all employees from historically underrepresented groups (race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+, disability, etc.)

- *I'd love to learn more about the specific skills and activities my peers are successfully investing in to help their women, and especially women of color, rise to the top.*

In written comments, employers tell us they use knowledge gained from their survey participation, TWE's Roadmap for Success, and TWE's Report Reveal Event to bolster their progress.

- *We are having more discussion surrounding hiring and mentoring of women but still have a long way to go to make it an integral part of our process for executive leaders.*
- *We hired an HR Director, our Director of People and Culture. Big investment for our nonprofit but a great start to making big changes.*
- *We are becoming more transparent and reminding people of the benefits of having women in leadership.*
- *We are monitoring metrics for accountability.*

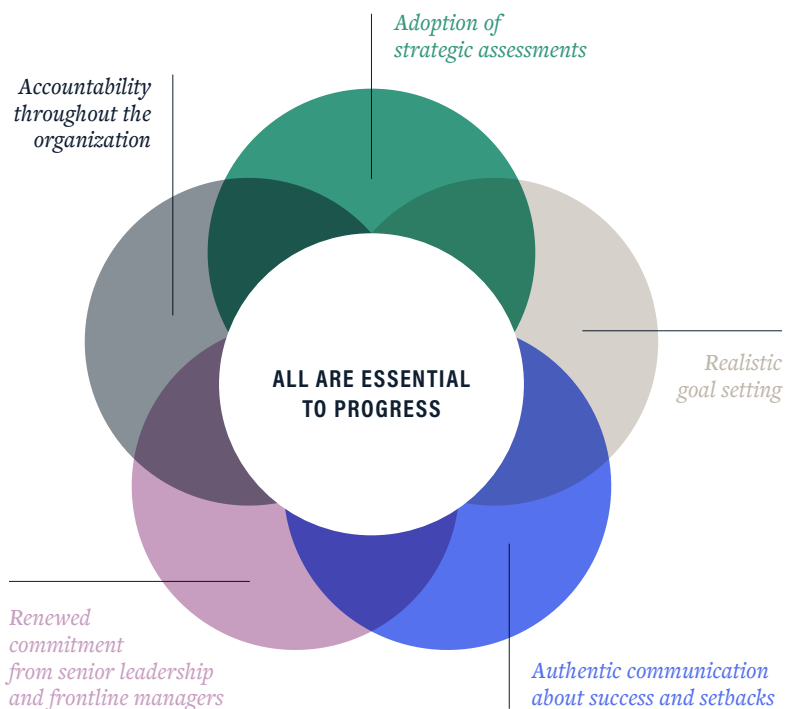
Respondents often share their personal hopes and creative ideas for positive change.

- *I would love to see parental leave for men. When men don't take leave, the full burden of parenting falls on women.*
- *In women's leadership development, we are focusing on fear of failure, negotiations, and holding hard conversations.*
- *We foster work-life harmony. We offer extended leave, flexible hours, and a wellness room that is equipped for nursing mothers.*

A Roadmap for Success

Each year, The Women's Edge (TWE) provides a robust roadmap for success. It is informed by survey results and external data.

We encourage readers to use it as a guide to enhance their efforts to achieve gender equity and advance qualified women to leadership. The goal is to build a future where women gain access to and thrive at every level of leadership!



The roadmap outlined on the following pages highlights specific strategies directly related to issues that have emerged in the 2023-24 study. Ideally, these recommendations will become part of a blueprint for action for women's leadership among all participating organizations.



Assess your culture, inclusion status, and support for women.

To create the best plans and initiatives for your organization, you need to know where you stand. A variety of tools and approaches exist. Be sure to use both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Many organizations have a gap¹⁰ between the existing culture and the desired culture – the one that will support employees and advance the business's goals. The starting point needs to be an accurate assessment of your workplace culture and related factors, such as engagement and inclusion.

Quantitative tools, such as culture audits, include data gathering and a variety of survey approaches. In-depth engagement or culture surveys are standard approaches. In addition or as an alternative, you can use shorter and more frequent routine pulse surveys. These provide an opportunity to focus on one issue (or a few) at one time. Pulse surveys can be appealing because they can be completed quickly. They are an efficient way to gather information.

The best culture and engagement survey approaches respect anonymity, are current, and investigate questions and concerns that are important to employees and are actionable. They provide an opportunity for traditionally underrepresented groups – often including women – to fully participate and have an impact.

Qualitative information is also vital – it often reveals “the why” behind quantitative data and it can help identify creative solutions to challenges. Qualitative research includes focus groups, listening sessions, open-ended survey questions, and 1:1 discussions with new, experienced, and departing employees.

HOW DO YOU START?

Engagement or culture surveys are an effective way to safely engage in inclusion work amidst pushback against diversity, equity, and inclusion. Think back to the disconnect between employer intent and action discussed on pages 5 and 6. Effective quantitative and qualitative assessment can help your organization learn why this might be happening and identify solutions customized for your business, your stakeholders, your size, and your culture.

Consider employee audits.

Employee engagement audits can provide key insights, including: measuring employee satisfaction, identifying areas for improvement, tracking employee engagement, building trust if survey results are shared with employees, measuring organizational performance and health, gauging employee productivity/retention, observing confidence in leadership, and driving business performance.



Create a comprehensive, measurable action plan that includes realistic goals.

Remember that

64%

of TWE survey respondents say they have leadership development initiatives, but only

18%

are dedicated to women leaders and only 9% to women of color.

How can your plan address this?

An effective plan will align with overall organizational goals and incorporate targeted programs, smart resource allocation, innovative technology, and metrics.

Your plan should be ambitious – containing some stretch goals – yet also realistic and attainable. While guided by appropriate leaders, employees throughout the organization should be able to contribute to the plan. Consider convening a diverse planning group comprised of employees in a variety of roles and representing multiple levels.

The plan should include feedback mechanisms, effective communications, and accountability for progress against goals.

Survey respondents indicated that formal goals and metrics are underutilized and challenging for some employers. A sampling includes:

- Tracking progress against goals on recruitment, hiring, onboarding, reviews, specific talent development initiatives, and promotion processes.
- Tracking the percentage of women in specific leadership roles.
- Tracking and correcting for gender (or other) pay gaps.
- Measuring the rate of retention for women at all levels to identify “broken rungs” to leadership.
- Measuring engagement in and effectiveness of career development offerings.
- Gauging gender ratios by departments and even locations.
- Analyzing qualitative information obtained through informal feedback, one-to-one sessions, exit interviews, or anti-harassment reporting mechanisms.
- Broadening job qualification criteria to enhance recruitment.
 - In addition to traditional credentials, seek transferable skills, leadership potential, and personal attributes like resilience, communication, and adaptability.
 - Develop a skills-based recruitment model¹¹ where potential candidates are assessed on both past jobs and on their ability to solve real-world problems, collaborate, and innovate.

Anonymous TWE survey comments indicated that some companies see too few women in the recruiting talent pool for their industry.

Can your plan include creative approaches to recruitment that address this problem, such as thinking more broadly about what makes a candidate qualified, finding new locations to find qualified candidates, or offering a women’s wellbeing program as a benefit?

3

Nurture a culture that's aligned with your plans and sets you up for success. Your workplace culture is the backdrop to your goals and initiatives that will ensure sustained progress.

Despite the current pushback at the national level, initiatives focused on hiring more people from underrepresented groups are still valued. A recent study from the Public Private Strategies Institute¹⁵ shows that 82% of business leaders still consider diversity initiatives as essential to their business strategy, including many from both sides of the political spectrum. Only 2% of these leaders say the initiatives aren't important!

A focus on inclusive culture and employee engagement remains a popular concept in the current anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion climate. It is the crucial support system for the success and sustainability of all other actions.

While the acronym "DEI" is criticized, the actual policies and initiatives businesses use to ensure a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment are desired¹² by many leaders and employees. Examples include parental leave, educational programs that build awareness and provide skills, wellbeing offerings, fair access to opportunities, and equitable hiring/promotion processes. Ample independent data¹³ shows that employees desire inclusive cultures where they can thrive.

Remember that culture¹⁴ is often defined as the combined attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that make up the work environment. It's how you do things and how you treat people!

- Leaders have a mandate to set the tone. They are the role models who visibly and actively advocate for a workplace where all employees can contribute to a sense of belonging.
- Leaders should model and nurture trust, encouragement, empathy, psychological safety, and a shared sense of values and purposes. Executives often require training or coaching to develop expertise in these traits that were traditionally considered "soft skills" and that are now recognized as vital.
- All employees have a stake in culture-building. They should recognize that culture is a "top to bottom" affair, believe they "have a voice," and feel personally responsible for progress. This is why involving rank and file employees in plan development (page #14) is crucial.
- The most inclusive cultures are marked by an ability to hold honest and challenging conversations about difference. This skill is also vital to agile and successful teams. (page #16)



"Over the past year, our efforts have contributed to expanded opportunities for women, ensuring their voices are heard at all levels of the business. We are creating spaces for mentorship, advocacy, and skill-building, and we are empowering women while also shaping a more inclusive and forward-thinking organization where diverse perspectives drive innovation and success."

AGNE BRITTON
Director, Talent Management and Development





Offer education, knowledge growth, and skills training.

When managers lack skill in providing feedback or holding hard conversations, they often avoid them. This can be especially true for men whose direct reports are women. "Research shows that getting ahead requires constructive criticism, and that many women don't get those frank assessments," notes The Wall Street Journal⁶. An abundance of data indicates that men often get specific, sometimes tough, feedback that helps them achieve specific goals, while women more commonly receive "vague, personality-based feedback." This, combined with women being dubbed "aggressive" when they assert themselves, presents an ongoing barrier to success.

Programming should be sequential and sustained. It should align with business goals and support all employees.

At a broad level, "inclusion" training is sometimes criticized as being ineffective. This criticism is deserved only when a one-off approach is taken. When educational offerings are well-designed, integrated with broad organizational plans, and support employees in their specific/future roles, they are highly effective. Of note, respondents to this survey gave diversity, equity, and inclusion training high marks.

Frontline managers are an often-overlooked group when it comes to training and support, yet their impact on employees' workplace experiences is significant. They can benefit from customized workshops that teach them how to convey information to their own teams about leadership, culture, engagement, inclusion, gender equity, and effective communication.

At a minimum, training or upskilling should include the following:

1. Foundational information about concepts like culture, engagement, empathetic leadership, fairness, equity, or inclusion in the current political and social context. Real-life experiences of coworkers should be discussed. This focus on genuine experiences of fellow employees breaks down barriers and helps dispel zero-sum thinking. ("If you get ahead, I won't.")
2. Offerings that are marked by compassion and trust (and avoid blame), allowing all participants to feel a sense of psychological safety and ask questions that facilitate growth.
3. A powerful blend of data and human stories. The data/story approach connects to the heart and the mind...an essential connection in becoming knowledgeable about women's career journeys and all employees' ability to succeed.
4. Specific, actionable strategies with immediate application. Workers will be able to see the direct connection between training and their work, and they will value this practical aspect.
5. Guidance on holding challenging conversations. These offerings are vital given the current U.S. culture. Ideally, training should address two kinds of dialogue:
 - Conversations across difference with the goal of listening/learning/building trust.
 - Feedback conversations about performance. This is especially important in supporting women's career advancement, because women get less honest, effective feedback than men do.



Use proven, cost-effective approaches: mentorship, sponsorship, allyship, ERGs, and customized career support.

TWE research and independent sources consistently affirm the benefits and popularity of widely accepted best practices such as mentorship, sponsorship, allyship, and employee resource groups (ERGs).

These are powerful, cost-effective approaches that support women and all employees. Understand the role and benefits of each, then tailor them to suit your organization's needs:

MENTORSHIP & SPONSORSHIP

Mentors mostly listen and advise, while sponsors use their influence to connect proteges to high-profile people, assignments, pay increases, and promotions. However, the delineation between the two relationships is sometimes subtle – in fact, a mentor frequently becomes a sponsor.

Table with 2 columns: MENTORS and SPONSORS. Rows compare roles such as 'Mentors have mentees' vs 'Sponsors have protégés', 'offer advice and support' vs 'invested in a protégé's career success', 'support' vs 'promote', 'craft a career vision' vs 'drive their protégé's career vision', 'suggestions on how to expand their network' vs 'make new connections for them', and 'provide feedback' vs 'personally vested'.

Whether engaging in mentorship, sponsorship, or both, many of the same recommendations apply. Here are few:

- Establish a formal program with a small cohort. A pilot program run by an ERG is often a great way to start.
- Invite employees throughout the company to participate, but pair mentor/mentee or sponsor/protégé with intention and care.
- Offer training to all mentoring/sponsoring pairs before they begin. Give them a roadmap to use for guidance and an agreement for both parties to sign.
- Set a timetable of one year for your pilot. At the conclusion, get and give feedback, adjust your program accordingly, and launch a new cohort!



"Investing in our Team Member Resource Groups, particularly our Women's Resource Group, has been instrumental in advancing women's careers in our organization. Programs like The Women's Edge Strategies for Success and other targeted development initiatives have yielded tangible progress in representation, leadership growth and engagement."

AGNE BRITTON

Director, Talent Management
and Development

spirit

ALLYSHIP

Allyship is an approach too often conflated with "woke" attitudes that are criticized in today's work environments. And, yet, it has functioned as a well-respected, highly-effective approach¹⁷ for years. Underrepresented employees value authentic allyship and are more likely to remain with an employer if they believe they have workplace allies. And finally, TWE respondents have affirmed its importance in open-ended comments.

- A **workplace ally**¹⁸ is usually someone from a historically well-represented identity group. They support coworkers from historically marginalized communities. They amplify others' voices and take active steps to ensure that underrepresented coworkers feel a sense of psychological safety and belonging. They are committed to building a positive workplace culture.
- Fostering a culture of allyship requires minimal cost. Yet the act of allyship builds stronger workplace relationships, adding to a positive, productive culture.
- Provide allyship training. This will diminish confusion about the term, teach employees how to become an ally and how to avoid pitfalls, and demonstrate the many benefits to the organization and individuals.

EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

Employee Resource Groups are employee-led groups that help foster a diverse, inclusive workplace and lead to higher retention rates¹⁹. Committed volunteer employees manage most ERGs. Committed senior executives lend their active support as an "advisor" or "sponsor" of the ERG.

The best ERGs align their activities, at least in part, with broader business goals. Be sure your ERGs are engaging in this way.

Provide your ERGs with adequate resources, including funding, training, and access to leadership.

PERSONALIZED CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Personalized career development can address unique needs. With a customized, curated plan, women can select the support they really need. It should include or reflect current skills assessment, lifestyle needs, personal challenges, skill gaps, and ultimate goals. Some people need more mentoring or allyship as part of their plan. Others need to acquire traditional skills ranging from negotiations to communications. Still others might desire future-focused, transformational leadership skills.

Be sure managers and employees craft a plan together. Consider the use of 1:1 career coaching and enrollment in programs such as The Women's Edge *Strategies for Success*. Online resources, including cost-efficient approaches like LinkedIn Learning, are also an option.

6

Communicate often and with authenticity. Be the role model.

Leaders rarely communicate as much as they believe they are²⁰. And yet, good communication results in employees having the information they need to succeed and a work culture that's more positive. The importance of how much leaders communicate became more apparent during the pandemic, when remote work became the norm. Employees became more aware – and critical of – whether leaders were checking in and providing sufficiently detailed communications.

Leaders at all levels have an important responsibility to communicate consistently and authentically.

Employees easily recognize disingenuous or inconsistent communication, which erodes trust, engagement, and success. Leaders are the role models for honest communication that supports positive culture, inclusion, and women's advancement.

- Communicate about the organization's plans for women's advancement. Talk to employees about their roles and experiences and where the organization stands on its inclusion journey.
- Share success stories and setbacks. Leverage internal communication channels and internal social media. Hold town halls and other in-person forums.
- Communicate externally. Share information about your company's commitment to women's advancement on your website. Include details about successful initiatives.
- If necessary, adopt new phrasing for your inclusion efforts:
 - Focus on "culture, engagement, fairness, and equity" versus "diversity." Almost everyone can relate to these concepts, regardless of their "DEI" views.
 - Talk about inclusion like this: "We want to get all qualified applicants to the table, and our hiring approach does just that."
 - Position your women's leadership development as a well-accepted component of a forward-thinking, successful organization.

TWE survey respondents say that a visible commitment from senior leadership, including senior women, is a key to progress for women's advancement. Independent research²¹ supports this viewpoint: When people have role models, they are significantly more likely to believe their career is fulfilling, feel they are established in their career, and feel that their career pays them enough.



"Businesses need to establish robust communications about how they are driving institutional change. Without proper communication channels in place, employees remain unaware and disengaged, believing that nothing is changing."

SOYINI CHANG
Co-Founder and CEO





Embrace new approaches and technologies. Be accountable, iterate, and course correct.

Find opportunities to support women’s health and emotional wellbeing at work. Mercer research²³ shows that both male and female employees want employers to strongly support women’s health, ranking it second in importance after living wages. (Figure 6)

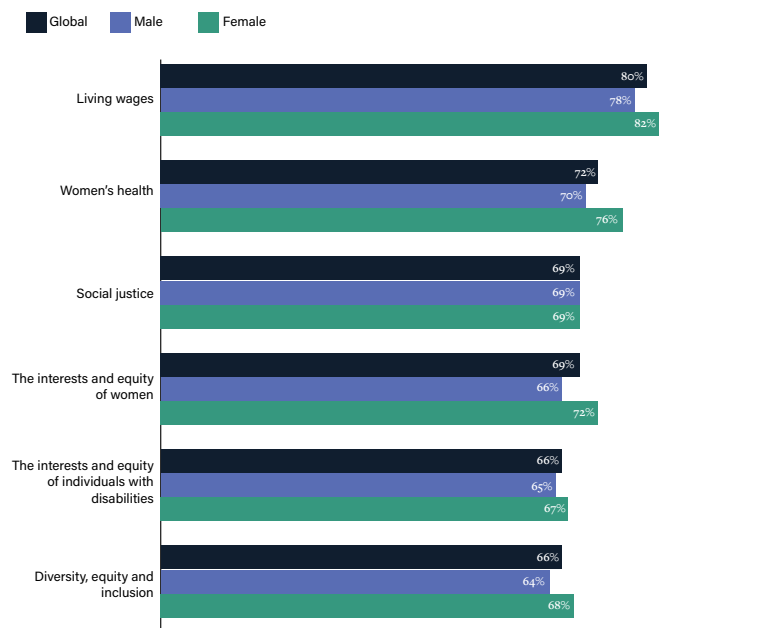
Mercer concluded that, “Men are faring better than women when it comes to mental health and psychological safety, and even in relation to healthcare access and affordability.”

You are engaging in an ongoing, long-term process, so be ready to adjust your strategies over time.

- Use feedback, continuous internal data collection, and new insights to enhance and adapt your initiatives. Leverage external information provided through reports such as this one.
- Recall the lagging use of metrics identified in the survey. Adopt metrics and tailor them as much as possible to your team’s needs.
- Ensure organization-wide accountability, with goals tied to job descriptions and by tracking success quantitatively and qualitatively.
- Solicit feedback from participants in women-specific programs to identify areas for improvement. Incorporate the input into program design.
- Use new technologies such as gender pay-tracking and AI solutions that help debias job descriptions. (Be aware of new biases that can creep in when AI is employed.)
- Remain committed even when budgets are constrained. Consider how to reallocate resources instead of cutting programs. Remember cost-effective approaches like mentorship, sponsorship, allyship, and ERGs. They are low cost/ high impact!
- Celebrate success stories to fuel commitment and sustainability for your programs. This proven approach²² enhances culture and boosts employee engagement!

FIGURE 6

How important is it to you that your employer strongly supports the following issues?



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