

Social Impact

Leadership in gender equality; reduced inequalities; peace, justice, and strong institutions

4 Ways to Build Gender Equality in Your Organization

According to the World Economic Forum, gender equality is vital for sustainable development and is “not just the concern of half of the world’s population. It’s a human right, a concern for us all because no society can develop — economically, politically, or socially — when half of its population is marginalized. We must leave no one behind.”

How equality benefits us all is evident economically and socially in corporate America. Most CEOs are already familiar with data from McKinsey & Company that found that companies with more balanced leadership do a better job recruiting and retaining talented workers, which leads to reduced costs for replacing top executives. It’s also more profitable.

Where do we stand in terms of gender equality in the workplace? According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in December 2019, women held 50.04% of American jobs, up from 49.7 percent just one year ago. However, a recent survey by Korn Ferry shows that women hold only 25 percent of key leadership roles, and while that is up from 23 percent in 2018, it’s still a far cry from being representative.

The path to full equality in the workplace isn’t necessarily easy, but it’s worth the extra work as the business cases show. Here are some ways you can start to build gender equality in your organization:



Dr. Nancy O'Reilly, PsyD, an author and educator, and founder of the Women Connect4Good foundation. Her latest book is *In This Together: How Successful Women Support Each Other in Work and Life*.

01

Guarantee Equal Pay
Overall, women still earn just 85 percent of what their male

counterparts take home, according to calculations by the Pew Research Center. That number is even less for minority women. No female demographic is exempt from the wage gap, and few, if any, fields are immune. The Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) projects that the U.S. economy would generate additional income of more than \$512 billion if women received equal pay. Look over your organization’s pay rates, identify any disparities, and take steps to ensure equal pay for equal work immediately.

02

Provide Equal Access and Opportunity. Mentorship and sponsorship programs and initiatives are a good idea

for women and men and should be made available. AAUW researcher and author of the “Barriers and Bias” report Kevin Miller also says that it’s essential that women are included in informal cultures of mentorship and sponsorship. If a male leader is more likely to do some informal mentoring with other men, that can negatively impact women. Since many business discussions and decisions are made after hours — at the golf course, the club, or numerous other social events — it’s important that women are included. So, if you invite your colleagues out for a drink or a round of golf, invite men and women in an appropriate workplace way.

03

Fix the Broken Rung. Given the fact that women represent the majority of the workforce, we know they do not enjoy equal representation when it comes to organizational leadership. Part of that could be due to a lack of qualified women in the pipeline. According to McKinsey and Lean In’s “Women in the Workplace 2020,” the “broken rung” is still holding women back. For the sixth year in a row, women continued to lose ground at the first step up to becoming a manager. For every 100 men promoted to manager, only 85 women were promoted. That means you need to set equity goals and share them, putting diversity and equality top of mind. Corporate gender strategist Jeffery Tobias Halter says that the way to do this is to keep managers accountable for hiring women. If a manager fails to promote a woman, saying there was just no one ready, ask, “Why not?” Then require them to get more women in the pipeline for promotion. Policies do nothing without action. When management is held accountable for outcomes, then more women move into upper management.



You Go, Boss

Hugo Boss will allow staff the option of remote working every Monday and Friday, even after the coronavirus pandemic has abated. “The future belongs to tailored combinations of office-based and off-site work,” says Jochen Eckhold, human resources director. Their headquarters in Metzingen, Germany, already offers childcare for working parents, health prevention programs, a company doctor and fitness studios.



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04

Learn to Be Flexible. More women have been forced to choose more flexible work, which may be part-time and closer to home, because they need or are expected to provide care for their families, especially now amid COVID-19. Julius Pryor III, leader of diversity strategy at Cerner Corporation, says that it’s crucial for employers to help their staff balance their work-life and external life, adding, “Eldercare, childcare, women are carrying the burdens for all of these things outside of work.” One way to help and retain top talent is to make flexibility in the workplace a built-in feature for women and men. And that doesn’t just mean remote work. It can also mean a four-day workweek or shifting work hours (especially now) to accommodate better direct care needs and the difference between office hours and school hours.

As many companies are adjusting the way they work during the COVID crisis, now is the perfect time for us to level the playing field and make gender equality a vital feature of the new normal in the workplace. Moving forward, women and men need to share their work and life experiences to develop strategies that serve employees and employers to maintain high-performing employees and reap the resources and rewards of diverse talent in the right places. We can do all of this and more when we remember that we’re in this together. ■