



# INCREASE THE RETENTION RATE OF WOMEN AT ALL LEVELS OF YOUR ORGANIZATION

BEST PRACTICES  
TOOLKIT

**WLI**

WOMEN'S  
LEADERSHIP  
INSTITUTE

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# WHY IT MATTERS

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## INCREASING THE RETENTION RATE OF WOMEN AT ALL LEVELS

Improved economic conditions give employees power in the marketplace. **And in most industries, female employees have even more power as there is a greater need for gender diversity in the workplace.** Business leaders and HR professionals are increasingly challenged to attract and retain skilled female workers to support their organizations' growth, satisfy clients looking for gender diversity, and keep the cost of turnover down.

**Thankfully, most turnover is preventable.**

**As part of the ElevateHER™ Challenge, the Women's Leadership Institute presents a toolkit of best practices to assist in increasing the retention rate of women at all levels of your organization.**

Some of these can be implemented in a relatively short time period while others may be practices to adapt over time.

For a complete collection of best practices in all areas of the ElevateHER™ Challenge, visit: [WLIUT.com/toolkit](http://WLIUT.com/toolkit)

## Why Women Leave

In a study of 4,800 women, the two main reasons why female employees leave:<sup>1</sup>

- 1. They don't feel valued for the diversity they bring.**
- 2. They don't see a future career.**

## WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT AWAY

### **Implement Stay Interviews.**

Stay interviews, unlike exit interviews, are a preventative tool aimed at employee retention. It is recommended that these interviews be held once a year or twice a year during periods of high attrition. These interviews are held between the manager and each of their retention targets to try to identify and reinforce the positive reasons that keep each individual employee at the company.

If you are looking for an interactive approach to stay interviews, Instructure's Bridge Drivers card exercise is an effective way to evaluate what drives a particular employee to stay or leave an organization. Complimentary card decks and instructions are available at [Bridgedrivers.com](http://Bridgedrivers.com).

**Many find the information collected by stay interviews is more actionable than secondary source information** because it is specific and forward-facing. Adding stay interviews to your recruitment strategies can help your organization retain critical employees.

Yet, even with their success, stay interviews can pose a challenge for employers if managers are not prepared to accept and address issues that may arise during these conversations. Employers must ensure there is a process for handling the issues that arise from these interviews. If there is no action taken or follow-up received, stay interviews can backfire.



*"It's important for managers to create a safe space for employees to share true feedback, without fear of retribution. If not, you may get positive feedback and still lose talented people."*

Kathy Luke, VP, Operations  
LendingClub

### **Create Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).**

**Resource groups help employees feel valued**, realize their potential, provide safe spaces for discussions, and offer mentors to guide them and give constructive feedback.

ERGs are particularly helpful for new employees during the on-boarding process. **Studies show that the first 60 to 90 days of employment are a critical time for any new hire**, and they can be particularly challenging for members of traditionally underrepresented groups. That short window of time can mean the difference between whether an employee stays for the long run or leaves the organization before the year is out. ERGs can be leveraged to acclimate employees and engender a sense of loyalty and belonging to their new company.<sup>2</sup>

Research from The Conference Board, a nonprofit business and research association, found that virtually all companies surveyed reported that ERGs were a critical component of employee retention.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Do's and Don'ts to Start an Employee Resource Group:**<sup>4</sup>

- 1. Make sure your group has diversity.** Include all kinds of diversity, including women from different management levels.
- 2. Don't be exclusionary.** This means welcoming all employees who want to join, including men!
- 3. Promote.** You want everyone in your company to know your employee resource group exists. Hold a launch party or include details about it in the onboarding process.
- 4. Don't be shy about funding.** While asking for funds, highlight the "hard skills" your group will discuss like negotiation, productivity, etc.
- 5. Let others lead.** Allow others to take positions of leadership and guide the group.

*Read more details at [zenefits.com/blog/employee-resource-group-5-steps/](https://zenefits.com/blog/employee-resource-group-5-steps/)*

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### **Create fluidity throughout the organization.**

In order to retain and recruit women, organizations should focus on offering individuals the opportunity to move throughout the company and into positions that leverage their skills, enable development and offer new experiences which interest and inspire them.

### **Allow Job Shadowing.**

Make it easy and straightforward to move to other departments or roles. Job shadowing allows employees to understand other opportunities available within your organization and gain exposure to leadership.



*"If you've got flexible maternity and paternity benefits and flexible workplace rules, this is a huge opportunity for your company to hold onto those talented women and not lose that advantage...those women will contribute at the exact same level as a talented man."*

Deepika DeSilva, SVP, Chief Science Office  
BioFire

# 17%

According to the Harvard Business Review, seventeen percent of women leave the 'fast lane' of their career because **work is not enjoyable or satisfying.**<sup>5</sup>



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## PRACTICES TO ADAPT OVER TIME

### **Implement or update your coaching program.**

If a coaching program is already in place, an annual review of the program is recommended to ensure the program goals are being measured and met.

According to Forbes, "employee retention requires making employees feel invested in and not just utilized for their productivity. One of the best ways to keep great employees feeling cared for and engaged is through coaching programs."

**Here are 6 things to consider when thinking about a coaching program.**

- 1. Determine Desired Outcome.** What is your desired outcome? Is it employee development, more women in senior roles or retention?
- 2. Determine Application & Pairing Process.** Will you have an open enrollment or invitation only process? Will you use a committee to pair participants?
- 3. Determine Measurements.** You'll need to measure your desired outcomes.
- 4. Determine Timeframe.** How long will your mentorship last? We recommend 6 to 12 months.
- 5. Train.** Both mentees and mentors should be required to participate in training.
- 6. Celebrate successes.** Celebrate successes both during and at the end of the mentor period.

More details on this process are available on WLI's blog at: [wliut.com/start-a-coaching-program/](http://wliut.com/start-a-coaching-program/)



### **Implement or update your recognition program.**

Nearly half (47%) of the HR professionals surveyed in The 2018 SHRM/Globoforce Employee Recognition Report cited employee retention/turnover as the top workforce management challenge for the third consecutive year.<sup>6</sup>

It is important your company or organization has in place an effective approach to employee recognition. You may choose to use tangible, monetary or digital rewards. There are many HR tech systems available for recognizing employees. These are useful, but the human element should never be eliminated. Here are a few that are proven:<sup>7</sup>

- Motivosity – social platform
- Kudos – social network and peer-to-peer recognition system
- Bucketlist – earn points for high performance, recognition with certificates

### **Effective Employee Recognition Includes:**<sup>8</sup>

- 1. Be timely.** Catch people doing exemplary work and acknowledge their efforts.
- 2. Keep recognition in context to a goal.** Random affirmations are much less meaningful than those tied to a business goal.
- 3. Keep recognition appropriate in volume/scale.** Recognition should match effort and results, or it loses meaning.
- 4. Be authentic, not automatic.** You have to mean it when you give employees recognition. Sincerity goes a long way.
- 5. Be careful with cash.** Monetary rewards can link value to cash when it should be linked to appreciation of extra effort. Money is appropriate much of the time, but it's not the only motivator.

Read more details on WLI's blog:  
[wliut.com/recognition-program-tips/](http://wliut.com/recognition-program-tips/)

### **Add flexibility into the workplace.**

Research shows adopting flexible working arrangements assist in the retention rates of women. What these arrangements look like and how they vary from company to company, continue to evolve. Below are examples of what some companies are doing to promote flexibility in the workplace.

#### **1. Unlimited PTO**

Who's using it: Workfront, Mammoth HQ, LinkedIn, FullContact, Netflix, Evernote

#### **2. Remote or Distributed Time**

Who's using it: Western Governors University, SkyWest, FormAssembly, Sqwiggle, HelpScout

#### **3. Family-Focused Support Programs**

Who's using it: Kimley-Horn

#### **4. Job Sharing**

Who's using it: U.S. federal government, Qualcomm

#### **5. 9/80 (9 hour days, every other Friday off)**

Who's using it: Raytheon

#### **6. Work Online Wednesdays**

Who's using it: Upwork

For more details on each of these and how to apply them to your company, visit WLI's blog, [wliut.com/workplace-flexibility-ideas/](http://wliut.com/workplace-flexibility-ideas/)

### **What flexibility does your company offer?**

Add your company to our growing list!

Email us details and we'll gladly update this document and our blog post: [admin@wliut.com](mailto:admin@wliut.com)

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### RESOURCES:

1. <http://www.genderintelligence.com/women-leadership-just/>
2. <https://www.fairygodboss.com/articles/here-s-how-women-s-resource-groups-can-make-real-change>
3. <https://www.conferenceboard.org/publications/publicationdetail.cfm?publicationid=8331>
4. <https://www.zenefits.com/blog/employee-resource-group-5-steps/>
5. <https://hbr.org/2005/03/off-ramps-and-on-ramps-keeping-talented-women-on-the-road-to-success>
6. <https://resources.globoforce.com/globoforce-blog/report-employee-recognition-helps-resolve-retention-and-recruitment-challenges>
7. <https://www.thriveglobal.com/stories/25008-6-trends-driving-cutting-edge-corporate-women-s-networks>
8. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/meghanbiro/2013/01/13/5-ways-leaders-rock-employee-recognition/#3791982347ca>

For more resources  
and blog posts on all  
six ElevateHER™ Challenge  
topics, visit:  
[wliut.com/elevateher-resource-center/](http://wliut.com/elevateher-resource-center/)