



BEST PRACTICES TOOLKIT

Increase the Percentage of Women in Senior Leadership



**WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE**

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WHY IT MATTERS

INCREASE THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Women are underrepresented in leadership. Despite some progress in representation over the last several years, women—especially women of color—are still underrepresented in corporate America. This is especially true in senior leadership.¹

As part of the ElevateHER™ Challenge, the Women's Leadership Institute presents a toolkit of best practices to assist in increasing the number of women in senior leadership positions in your organization.

Some of these suggestions 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](https://wliut.com/toolkit).

1 in 4

Only one in four C-suite leaders is a woman, and only one in 20 is a woman of color.

- Women in the Workplace 2022 McKinsey Report

“For years, fewer women have risen through the ranks because of the “broken rung” at the first step up to management. Now, companies are struggling to hold onto the relatively few women leaders they have. And all of these dynamics are even more pronounced for women of color.”

- Women in the Workplace 2022 McKinsey Report



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THE PIPELINE PROBLEM

1. The Broken Rung is still broken. The biggest obstacle to women’s progress at work is not the glass ceiling keeping women from reaching the top levels of leadership. Instead, research by McKinsey and LeanIn.Org, finds that the biggest obstacle for women occurs at one of the very first steps on the corporate ladder—the first step up to manager.¹

Research shows, for every 100 men who are promoted from entry-level roles to manager positions, only 87 women are promoted, and only 82 women of color are promoted. So men begin to outnumber women in management roles and women never catch up.¹

As companies work to address the broken rung, women will fill a larger volume of leadership pipelines and gain an increased opportunity for senior leadership advancement.²

2. More female leaders are leaving their companies. Due to the shift during the pandemic and post-pandemic workplace, companies have a new pipeline problem. Women leaders are leaving their companies at the highest rate ever seen—and at a much higher rate than men leaders. For every woman at the director level who gets promoted to the next level, two women directors are choosing to leave their company.¹

According to McKinsey research, there are three reasons women are leaving:

- 1. Female leaders want to advance, but they have more challenges than men.** Female leaders are more likely to report that personal characteristics, such as their gender or being a parent, have played a role in them being denied or passed over for a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead.
- 2. Female leaders are overworked and underrecognized.** Forty-three percent of female leaders are burned out, compared with only 31 percent of men at their level.
- 3. Female leaders want a different work culture.** Female leaders are significantly more likely than men leaders to leave their jobs because they want more flexibility or because they want to work for a company that is more committed to employee well-being and DEI.¹



WHAT YOU CAN DO RIGHT AWAY

Assess the number of women at each level of your organization.

What does your current female leadership pipeline look like? How many men versus women at each level? Determining where you are will provide guidance on goals to set and progress to make. Decide what you want your pipeline to look like in the future.

Require a diverse candidate pool for all positions.

The best place to start increasing the pipeline of female leaders is at your organization's entry point. Before beginning the hiring process for any position, require recruiters and hiring managers to deliver a diverse pool of candidates.

If there is only one woman in your hiring pool, statistically you won't hire her. According to a study by Harvard Business Review, **women are 50 percent more likely to be hired by a US company when there are two or more female candidates in its finalist pool. Likewise, there's statistically no chance of hiring a female candidate when only one woman is in the final candidate pool.**³

For optimal organizational performance, it is important for HR to present multiple diverse candidates for positions at all levels, especially positions at the top.

Three tips to help your organization present and capitalize on diverse candidates:

1. **Anonymity:** Have recruiters or hiring managers present candidate resumes/CVs without names.
2. **Up the ratios:** Set a target of finding two suitable female candidate for every two male candidates.
3. **Refuse to begin:** Do not start selection for any position until 30 percent of applicants is diverse.

Be overt about identifying high-potential employees and future female leaders.

Does your company have a leadership development or high-potential employee program? A strong program for your most talented employees can keep leaders in your leadership pipeline. We encourage you to expand your program to include more women.

Additionally, organizations can be more overt about inviting women to see themselves as the next leader. The Women's Leadership Institute knows often women need to be tapped on the shoulder and invited to step up as a leader or run for public office. As a company leader, be quick to mention to women in your organization the potential you see in them. If a job opens that you feel they would be a good fit for, encourage them to apply.



"It's important leadership development and high potential programs in [your] company have a good mix of women in them. And you might have to be intentional. It doesn't mean you have to limit the number of men in the program. Just increase the number of women in the program. Expand your program. With extra women in your program, you can start to develop enough women who can make the decision and be promoted into these [leadership] roles."

Paul Walker, CEO FranklinCovey

WHAT YOU CAN DO OVER TIME

Build the Pipeline in your organization.

Building a pipeline of female leaders can take years but start now. **Begin to build the Pipeline from both a top-down and bottom-up approach.**

TOP-DOWN

As new positions open at the top of the company, don't start the interview process until you have a diverse pool of candidates. Have integrity and transparency in your process as you hire the best candidate.

BOTTOM-UP

Use the same diverse hiring practices for entry-level positions also. If you can't find enough diverse candidates, expand your recruiting efforts. Don't begin to hire for a position until your new diverse hiring metrics are met.

NURTURE THE MIDDLE

Build the strength of the pipeline by investing in your high-potential female employees. Providing them with a clear pathway to the top of the organization and equipping them with the skills and knowledge to pave the way. This includes but is not limited to leadership development programs, sponsors and company champions, and opportunities to network and grow.



"You can't just have women working at your company. They have to be working in leadership roles in your company."

Nate Quigley, CEO & Co-founder Chatbooks

The Women's Leadership Institute believes men are essential allies and advocates in the advancement of women. Men sponsoring women in the workplace is critical to women advancing and building the pipeline.



WHAT YOU CAN DO OVER TIME

Give employees choice in flexibility.

The 2022 McKinsey Women in the Workplace study found, **female employees who can choose to work in the arrangement they prefer—whether remote or on-site—are less burned out, happier in their jobs, and much less likely to consider leaving their companies.** Choice is critical.¹

A “one size fits all” approach to flexible work won’t work for all employees. The data points to the importance of giving employees as much agency and choice as possible.

Make employee recognition important part of company culture.

According to the 2023 Global Culture Report by O.C. TANNER Institute, **highly integrated recognition increases the odds of employee engagement 9 times, decreases the odds of attrition by 29 percent, and employee burnout by 80 percent.**⁴

All employees want to feel valued and recognized, especially women. Studies show women leave when they feel underrecognized. Make a point to make sure your employees are seen and valued

Invest time and resources in female employees.

As you identify your high-potential female employees at various levels in your organization, make sure they have the support they need to grow within your company. Growing them into future leaders strengthens your leadership pipeline.

Here are some ways you can invest in your female employees:

- Avoid unconscious bias when choosing candidates for stretch opportunities.
- Encourage women to apply for leadership positions.
- Add more females to the emerging leader program(s) you already have.
- Create a leadership development program just for women in your company.
- Utilize company mentors, but more importantly, assign sponsors.
- **Sponsor women into one of the Women's Leadership Institute's development programs.** www.wliut.com/leadership-programs/

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Has your company taken the ElevateHER™ Challenge? Learn more about the non-prescriptive, cost-free company challenge and commit to elevating women at all levels in your organization.

[WLIUT.com/TakeTheChallenge](https://wliut.com/TakeTheChallenge)

REFERENCES:

1. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>
2. <https://ewfinternational.com/broken-rung-phenomenon/>
3. <https://hbr.org/2016/04/if-theres-only-one-woman-in-your-candidate-pool-theres-statistically-no-chance-shell-be-hired>
4. <https://www.octanner.com/insights/articles/2022/11/21/effective-employee-recognition>

OTHER RESOURCES:

- <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-management/>
- <https://www.catalyst.org/topics-issues/>

For more resources and articles on all six ElevateHER™ Challenge pillars, visit:
wliut.com/elevateher-resource-center/



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