

Women At Work And Why They Need Your Support?

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2020 and its events has turned workplaces upside down. The highly challenging circumstances emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic has had many employees (men and women) struggling to do their jobs. Most employees are worried about their family's health and finances. Burnout is a real issue. *Women* in particular have been negatively impacted.

In a workplace study done in the USA by McKinsey in partnership with LeanIn.Org (2020), it was found out *women* especially *women* of color are more likely to have been laid off or furloughed during the COVID-19 crisis, stalling their careers and jeopardizing their financial security. The pandemic has intensified the challenges that *women* already faced (McKinsey, 2020). Working mothers have always worked a “double shift”—a full day of work, followed by hours spent caring for children and doing household labor. Now the supports that made this possible—including school and childcare—have been upended. Meanwhile, Black women already faced more barriers to advancement than most other employees (McKinsey, 2020). Today they're also coping with the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Black community. And the emotional toll of repeated instances of racial violence falls heavily on their shoulders. This just but an example of the typical work-life of *women*.

The result of these dynamics is that more than one in four *women* are contemplating what many would have considered unthinkable just six months ago: downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce completely (McKinsey, 2020). This is an emergency for corporates in developed countries. Organizations risk losing women in leadership and future *women leaders*—and unwinding years of painstaking progress toward gender diversity (McKinsey, 2020).

The crisis also represents an opportunity for *women at work*. Organizations are beginning to make significant investments in building a more flexible and empathetic workplace. This is beneficial as they can retain the employees (women included) most affected by today's crises *and* nurture a culture in which *women at work* have equal opportunity to achieve their potential over the long term.

As-is situation for women at work

While women are slowly gaining traction in the workplace, women can only do so much to promote themselves; organizations and their leaders must step in and begin eliminating bias while supporting and empowering *female employees*. From hiring to mentorship, there are myriad ways to support women at work. Organizations have the power to make them feel welcomed, included, and supported (Spencer, 2020). When employees feel empowered at work, they are likely to have stronger job performance, job satisfaction, and commitment to the organization.

HOW TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN WORKPLACES

1. *Having equity as a part of the organization's diversity & inclusion initiatives*

With many organizational leaders prioritizing diversity and inclusion, the equity should be on top of their minds. One cannot create a diverse and inclusive business environment without ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and given equal access to opportunities and advancement (Inc., 2020). Companies must create an environment where individuals are equally recognized and rewarded for their unique strengths and contributions. To achieve this companies can start by creating open lines of communication and feedback across the company to understand how they can do better (Inc., 2020). This includes reviewing historical company data to ensure you're closing gaps and taking the right action to create equitable change.

1. *Accept That Gender Diversity Is a Priority*

Organizational leadership needs to accept that this is a critical issue that needs to be addressed and the rest of the organization is likely to follow in its footsteps (Spencer, 2020). This in turn will enact a sense of urgency to tackle and begin to correct this issue within the workplace. This can be done through completing an analysis of your organization by asking for recommendations on improvements from employees and listening to what they have to say. From the information collected, you can establish business goals for improving gender diversity and dive deeper into where bottlenecks might be for women leaders to move up the ranks (Spencer, 2020). There is a need to educate everyone within the company about these initiatives and make sure your goals are implemented consistently across the board.

1. *Diversify Management*

Having *talented women* in leadership can help foster and grow aspirations for those just coming into the workforce or those looking to move up the ladder (Spencer, 2020). There is a need to encourage women to pursue opportunities at every level. Promoting women at the same rate as men show them that they and their skills are valuable assets to the organization.

1. *Address the current child care burden on working women*

Women at work are struggling to find time for full-time jobs, child care, and education, and, unfortunately, working mothers are taking on the brunt of the burden (Inc., 2020). The pressure and lack of options and support are causing many women to consider exiting the workforce. This could be a major setback for all of the recent advances in women's equality, and corporate leaders must focus on more creative solutions. An employer needs to strike the right balance of showing empathy, allowing for flexibility, and driving productivity in a time of economic crisis (Inc., 2020).

1. *Support Professional Development*

Organizations need to create opportunities for professional development for women.

1. **Mentorship** - when someone new joins the team, or even if you see someone struggling to fit in,

reach out, and be there for them (Spencer, 2020). Having someone to turn to and build a relationship with is a great way to jump-start success within an organization.

2. **Sponsorship** - for women, sponsors – or people in positions of authority who use their influence intentionally to help others advance – are crucial to ensuring career advancement and professional development. They offer visibility, they talk about accomplishments behind closed doors, and they push for stretch opportunities and promotions (Spencer, 2020).

1. Close the Pay Gap

Studies in the U.S. have shown that *women at work* earn about 80% of what men earn. There is a need to close this gap and the best way to begin doing this is to conduct pay equity audits. Organizations need to look for inconsistencies between pay rates and make sure that all employees with equal experience and in a similar role are paid the same as their counterparts. Women are often seen as caregivers, and the pay gap becomes even more noticeable if a woman becomes a mother (Harvard Summer School, 2014).

In a research paper titled “Children and Gender Inequality: Evidence from Denmark,” it was found out that women and men are on relatively equal footing until the birth of their first child when pay for women falls immediately after childbirth, but men’s never changes. The two rates do not converge again in what many call the “child penalty” (Harvard Summer School, 2014).

Women in the Workplace & Workplace Well-Being

According to research having more *women in the workplace* makes an organization a better place to work, for people of all genders (Clerkin, 2020). The results of the research also showed that having a higher percentage of *women in an organization* predicted:

- More job satisfaction;
- More organizational dedication;
- More meaningful work; and
- Less burnout.

It was also found out that having more women in the workplace was also positively related to employee engagement and retention (Clerkin, 2020). These new findings persist regardless of participants’ age, industry, organization size, leadership level, ethnicity, and gender.

Conclusion

Now is the time for leaders to take initiative within their own companies to protect and foster the role of *women in the workplace* for the future. Leaders need to understand that supporting one another does not mean it diminishes themselves. Supporting one another means making each other stronger and in the process making each other wiser. Collectively making each other exceptionally great.

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