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REPORT

2023 SPECIAL REPORT

Creating Equity For Women At Work.



#FINDYOURFORWARD

Introduction.

Not Just A Women's Issue.

As of February 2023, women's employment has recovered to pre-pandemic levels. In fact, women are recouping the jobs they lost or left during Covid at faster rates than men. We can thank inflation and more flexible work arrangements for that.

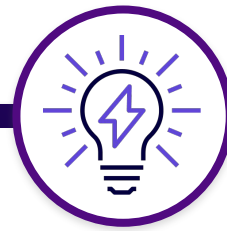
But as they return, the inequities they left persist, greeting them as they step in the elevator door.

Take the gender pay gap. It's nothing if not tenacious. Experts predict we won't close it until 2057.

This is not just a women's issue. Everyone suffers when businesses undervalue, under-represent and underpay women.

- The GDP stands to lose \$12 trillion by 2025 if inequities continue unabated.
- The pay gap shortchanges families, as more than 40% of mothers are breadwinners.
- Companies perform suboptimally when they lack women leadership and diversity.

Leaders are under vice-grip pressure to be profitable or else. That companies still haven't successfully acted on years of research about the ROI of diversity underscores how systemic the problem is.



Diversity Matters.

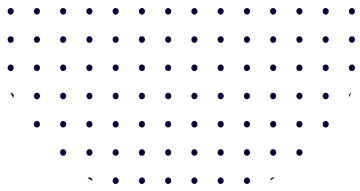
Fully 87% of Fortune 500 companies led by a female CEO reported above-average profits, compared to 78% of companies without a female CEO.

SOURCE: Frank Recruitment Group

When businesses are inclusive, the probability of achieving:

- Increased profitability and productivity is 63%
- Greater innovation is 59%

SOURCE: ILO



Worth noting: The inverse is also true. A 10% increase of women’s workforce participation corresponds to a 5% across-the-board increase in wages.

“Across the board”: That means men, too.

Many people, not just women, want to right these wrongs. But we can’t fix problems we don’t understand.


So we’ve devoted Part 1 of this report to sharing the unvarnished, research-backed truth about the disparities women face.

In Part 2, we cover ways to create workplaces women won’t want to leave (again).

It’s not easy to untangle spaghetti-like problems that are woven into the fabric of a society. But the call for equity — for parity, advancement, psychological safety and wellness — is hardly radical. It’s universal.

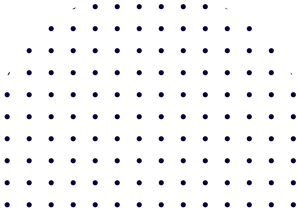
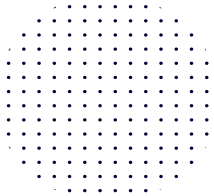
“Everyone wants what women want,” says Teresa Hopke, CEO, North America, Talking Talent. “Until recently, it hasn’t been acceptable to ask. Thankfully, that’s changing. **If we can figure out how to build better environments for women, the future of work will be better for everyone.”**

Read on. You have everything to gain. We all do.



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\$1.6 Trillion.

Earnings women lose annually due to the gender wage gap.

If we closed that wage gap, on average, every working U.S. women would have enough income to cover approximately:



2 yrs

Childcare for two children.



1 yr

Out-of-state public university tuition.



1 yr

Premiums for family health insurance.



15 mos

Food for a family of four.



70%

Of student debt.



1 yr

Rent.



2

Family vacays to Disney World.



1 yr

New baby essentials.

Contents.

Part 1: Deja Vu All Over Again

- For myriad reasons, Covid led women to leave the workforce.
- As they did, people realized: Hey, women really do run the economy.
- But that failed to change the status quo.
- Women are now returning to the same inequities they left.
- And in certain sectors, fresh challenges await.

Part 2: Creating Equity


- It's up to us to build cultures women don't want to leave.
- When we do, everyone wins.
- Here's how:
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Bonus: Women in the Workplace: A Timeline

PART 1

Deja Vu All Over Again.



Covid certainly contributed to the drop in women's workforce participation since 2020, but not just because school closures forced them home. The crisis was also consequential because it led women to reassess what they wanted from work and life.

“For many women, and even more so women of color, Covid was the straw that broke the camel’s back,” says Christy Pruitt-Haynes, global head of talent and performance, NeuroLeadership Institute. “It presented an opportunity and excuse for women to do what they’ve wanted and, in many cases, needed to do for quite some time.”

A minority could afford to break up with corporate America in pursuit of full-time parenting, say, or “van life.” Some women switched companies or started their own. Others left involuntarily, especially in sectors that were vulnerable to shutdowns.

No matter the terms of the breakup, however, many women drove off without so much as a glance in their rearview mirrors.



You Don't Know What You've Got 'Til It's Gone.

The mass departure drove overdue recognition of women's contributions to planet earth — and its continued ability to rotate on its axis.

"This was the first moment in a very long time in American history when we had a collective sense that the economy really is running more on women than ever before," Harvard economist Claudia Goldin is quoted as saying in [The Harvard Gazette](#).

Have companies internalized this? Have they responded by building better cultures for women? Well, not as yet. The status quo is holding fast.

"In my circles, women have reached a breaking point," says Lorraine Vargas Townsend, Chief People Officer, ESO.

"We have to get out what we put in. But I'm hearing so many existential questions: *Does my work matter to the world?* On top of that, women are promoted at a slower rate, and they're valued less."

Women aspire to senior roles as much as men. **But for every 100 promoted men, only 87 women and 82 women of color are promoted.** And women who ask for raises are granted them less often.



What's This About Planet Earth?

Digression of interest: According to Peking University, the Earth's inner core stopped spinning in 2009. Now, it may be spinning in reverse. Minds are boggled, brains bewildered. Many are afraid.

You may be wondering what this has to do with women.

Nothing. Nothing at all. They definitely did not join forces to manifest this cosmic event and show people, once and for all, who's in charge. Why would you even think that?

(No but seriously, don't be afraid: Humans won't even feel the reversal.)



Making Tech Careers More Accessible.

It's never been more important to make tech careers accessible to women. While salary growth has slowed, the sector still offers some of the highest-wage jobs in the U.S. The typical STEM worker earns two-thirds more than people in other fields. And some of the highest-earning STEM occupations, like engineering, have the lowest percentages of women workers ([Pew](#)).

During Covid, women were **1.6 times more likely to be laid off than men**, likely because they had less seniority, per [HBR](#).

Meanwhile, fresh trouble awaits.



Upskilling: The Equalizer.

“Upskilling and reskilling is a great equalizer,” says Maureen Lonergan, vice president, AWS Training and Certification. AWS is lowering barriers to entry by providing [free cloud computing skills training](#) to 29 million people around the world by 2025.

The benefit is twofold: First, when women enter high-wage fields, we inch closer to parity. Second, it could help close the skills gap. Almost 95% of employers seeking tech talent have encountered a skills shortage this year, according to a [2023 survey by Hays](#).

“Offering upskilling and reskilling not only encourages learning and growth,” says Lonergan, “it also cements the fact that your organization is committed to actively investing in a future that supports a diverse workplace.”



Exodus 2.0?

According to research by [Eightfold AI](#), **women are 65% more likely than men to lose their jobs in the current round of layoffs sweeping big tech.**

That's because women comprise the majority of recruiter and marketing positions, or "first to go" roles.

Research also suggests women who fail to see change could decide to leave tech entirely.

Companies have already lost many women aged 50 and up. Since 2020, the retired population outgrew its typical size by [1.1 million people](#). The surge was [led by women](#), who report widespread ageism.

Nearly two of three women aged 50+ say they're regularly discriminated against because of their age ([AARP](#)).

"There is this idea that people time out, if you will, especially in the tech space," says Pruitt-Haynes. "People assume that someone with 20-plus years of experience can't keep up with technology. We need to dispel that myth. It's unfortunate that we forget individuals are lifelong learners."

Researchers say retired women could return, but it's too soon to tell. Given their expertise, if they don't return, companies will scramble to fill those gaps. And they'll contend with a larger dearth of women in leadership.

"What's scary to me is having one well-represented group make decisions, intentional or not, that will ultimately impact the underrepresented group," says Lonergan. "In this case, that means half of the world."



Women in Tech.

57% Burnt out

72% Regularly outnumbered by men in meetings by 2:1 or more

78% Feel they have to work harder than peers to prove their worth

4x More likely than men to see gender bias as an obstacle to promotion

66% See no clear path forward

29% Feel a lack of trust in their ability

Women Of Color In Tech.

37%

Say racial bias was a barrier to promotion. This figure represents a 3X increase from 2020 to 2021

3x

Amount by which the gap in confidence about promotional prospects has widened in one year between women of color and white women

SOURCE: *TrustRadius*

The “Think Different” Industry Fails To . . . Think Differently.

Kellie Wagner, Founder/CEO, Collective, a modern DEI lab, worked in myriad industries over the first decade of her career. None were exempt, she says. But tech in particular was rife with bias.

“For an industry that’s meant to be so forward thinking and innovative, there was an unwillingness to think differently when it came to who succeeded and what success looked like,” she says. **“As a Black woman, I so rarely saw people who were like me, especially in leadership.”**

She found herself doing unpaid DEI and advocacy work in addition to her official role.

“It got tiring. I realized this was always going to be a battle if I stayed in tech,” says Wagner. **She left to fight on her own terms as CEO of Collective.**



The More Things Change?

Read our Q&A with Wagner, who explains how she stays hopeful when change is so slow to come.

Nothing Micro About It.

Historically, corporate cultures have given tacit permission for people to transgress microaggressions against women: to question their judgment, interrupt them, take credit for their work and make comments about their cultures.

The “micro” serves to distinguish these everyday slights from more overt discrimination. But the effect on women’s sense of psychological safety is outsized, particularly because people tend to invalidate them.

“In some ways, I think the breaking point hits harder with microaggressions,” says Wagner. “If someone called you the N word, people would say, ‘That’s unacceptable.’ **Because microaggressions are so-called ‘little things,’ people can say: ‘Oh, that person didn’t mean it that way.’ Or, ‘Are you sure that was about race?’ Until you even start questioning yourself.”**

Wagner says it’s no wonder many women she works with are reluctant to go back in the office if they’re remote — or to rejoin the workforce if they left. They’re scanning the landscape, wondering: *Has anything changed? Because it never felt safe. It felt traumatizing, and I’m not sure it’s worth it for me anymore.*



Credit Theft.

37%

Of women leaders have had a coworker get credit for their idea

27%

Of men leaders have had the same experience

SOURCE: [McKinsey](#)

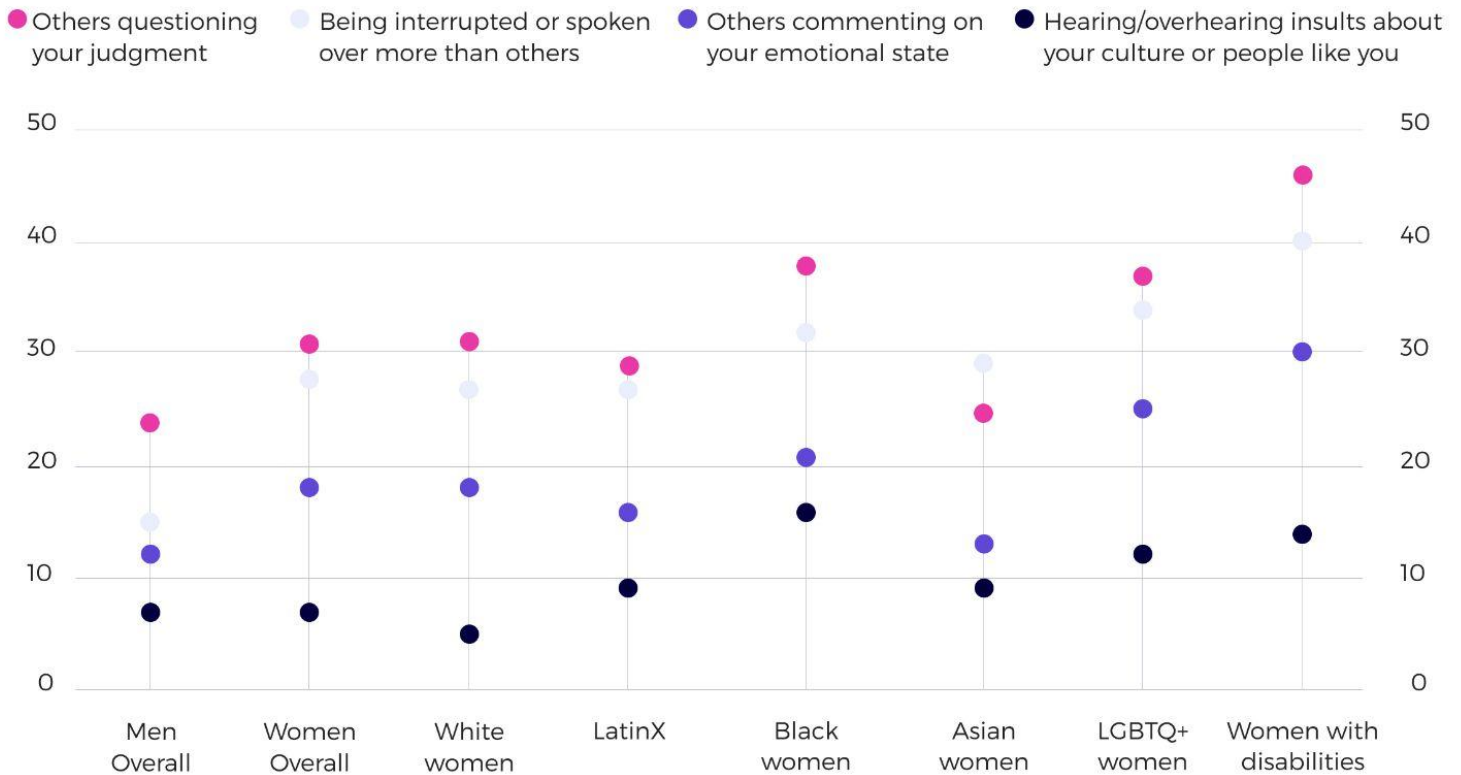


Let Me Finish!

In one landmark study, men interrupted **33%** more often when they spoke with women versus with men

SOURCE: [George Washington University](#)

Microaggressions by type, % of respondents



Above chart and research by [McKinsey](#).


[McKinsey](#) found women with disabilities, Black women and LGBTQ+ women experienced microaggressions most frequently. Specifically, people questioned their judgment, interrupted them and made comments about “people like you” more than with other groups.

“We used to believe that people didn’t leave jobs, they left leaders and managers,” says Julie Kantor, director, enterprise change, ISG, whose leadership in the arenas of training, mentorship and entrepreneurship has been honored widely, including by the White House.

“But for women, I think it’s become more complex. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs shows that humans need shelter, food, water and sleep at the base. Once those needs are met, we need to feel and be safe.”

PART 2

Creating Equity For Women At Work.



There are myriad steps companies can take to attract and retain women — but one-off solutions or Band-Aids won't make lasting change. The approach must be as all-encompassing and systemic as the problems.

“A lot of companies look for a discounted approach,” says Hopke. “They say, ‘I have \$10K and want to give 100 women an empowerment experience.’ Well, that’s not

how it works. **We can’t TJ Maxx our way to women’s equity.** To effect lasting change, we need to fully invest in the business-critical nature of women’s advancement.”

So let go of your Maxxinista inclinations in this regard. Creating equity will save you in the long run.

01

Talk About Money — And Let Money Talk.

“We have to start with talking about pay inequities,” says Pruitt-Haynes, who lauds Australia for amending its Workplace Gender Equality Act, requiring companies with 100+ employees to report gender-based comp disparities. “Unfortunately, many companies have been unwilling to close those gaps or even talk about them transparently.”

Don’t wait for legislation: Every company should tear a page from the playbook down under and conduct regular parity audits.

According to Andrew Monroe, a research director at Veris, **it’s not enough to pay women on par. Pay women well.** Veris data shows women prioritize higher-than-average base salary more than men when deciding whether to accept an offer.

02

Educate To Equalize.

“Upskilling and reskilling is important not only to the tech industry, but to every industry,” says Lonergan. [A study by AWS and Gallup](#) found that advanced digital skills drive global annual economic gains of \$6.3 trillion, as organizations across sectors, from healthcare to retail, seek to close gaps.

Upskilling and reskilling women could begin to address the shortage. Moreover, women want this: 86% of women in a [Skillsoft](#) survey said opportunities for training are extremely or very important. But for 32% of women

seeking to enter tech, a lack of training is a major barrier.

“There is still a lot of work to do to attract female talent in STEAM,” says Lonergan, “and skills building is an important step to getting women situated on the path to success.”



Lowering Barriers To Tech Entry

[Read our Q&A with Lonergan](#) about the power of upskilling.

03

Get Serious About Advancement.

Among the women in a 2022 survey who said they left or intended to leave their jobs, [32% cited](#) a desire for more advancement opportunities. Here are four ways to fix the broken rungs on women’s career ladders:

1 Design Unique Career Paths.

One-size-fits-all career paths fit no one, as every person’s definition of success is distinct and ever changing. Discuss women’s career aspirations as uniquely their own. Get in full alignment on the metrics they need to meet to get where they want to be.

2 Respect Women’s Competencies.

Research shows women outperform men on hallmark traits of effective leadership like empathy, self-control and emotional intelligence. These competencies are shown to increase collaboration, engagement, productivity and conflict resolution.

And yet: “We don’t really select leaders on the basis of their actual potential, talent or competence.” That’s according to an article in [Forbes](#) by author, professor and innovator Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic.

“If we did, then we wouldn’t just have more women leaders, but more female than male leaders. And if we did, then the average performance of leaders would not be as poor as it is today.”

Chamorro-Premuzic continues: **“To the surplus of men who arrived to the top not because of merit, but because of privilege, deception or greed, gender equality is like the Turkey voting for Christmas.”**

Instead of judging these attributes as soft, view them as grounds for promotion.

3 Sponsor Women.

Sponsorship is a fast track to advancement, but men are more likely to be given sponsorship opportunities.

If you create opportunities for women, everyone will benefit: Proteges are five times more likely to be promoted. And sponsors? Six times more likely.

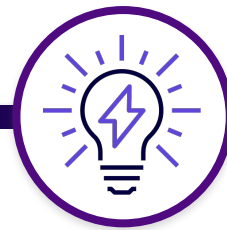
Aside from promotions, the sense of reward that comes from helping someone reach their potential is unquantifiable but profound.

“Self-actualization is the top of Maslow’s hierarchy,” says Kantor, “but after training more than 12,000 mentors, I know there is something higher that we call transcendence. It’s when we help another human being self-actualize. This is purpose at its finest, and we all need purpose to be happy.”



Voting Turkeys? What?

It’s British. Quick explainer. In the U.K., people favor turkey for Christmas dinner. So when British birds vote for Christmas, they’re voting against their self interests.



Women Need Women Leaders.

Women leaders are more likely than male leaders to publicly stand for equity and mentor and sponsor women, particularly women of color.

Black women are less likely than other women to have strong allies at work. Today, 38% of senior women mentor one or more women of color. Only 23% of senior men do the same.

In a world with fewer women leaders, the people who most need mentorship will have even less access to it.

4 Give Women Promotable Opportunities.

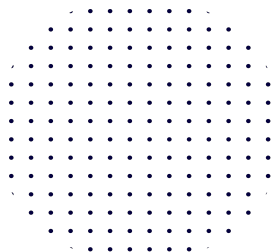
Many employers make the gender-based assumption that women will pick up the unpaid, unpromotable “office housework,” from ordering lunch to restocking supplies.

If you’re not giving women promotable assignments because they’re busy arranging baby showers, you’re holding them back, full stop.

Hire admins for admin work and event directors for events. Empower women to thrive in the jobs you hired them to do.

Similarly, employers also often assume women of color will lead DEI efforts. The best way to make DEI progress? Hire a DEI leader.

But if women do volunteer, pay and promote them for it, and provide support so they can lead DEI efforts while also moving up in their careers.



2021 Pay Gap Estimates.

For every dollar majority men make:

- Women overall earn \$.82
- White women earn \$.79
- Women managers earn \$.77
(compared to male managers)
- Black women earn \$.63
- LatinX women earn \$.58

SOURCE: [GAO](#)

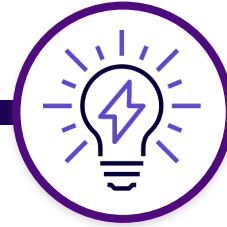
04

Minimize Burnout, Maximize Wellness.

Job stress is one of the most common health issues among women (NIH). If you don't have "burnout benefits" in place, it's time: half-day Fridays, wellness days, no-meeting Mondays, company wide focus blocks and sabbaticals.

Also:

- Align the resources you make available to women with goals you expect them to meet.
- Audit workloads. Does anyone read your team's annual widget report? If its primary function is to collect dust, nix it and other low-impact work.
- Insist your senior leaders model wellness behaviors. Women don't need permission to take a sanctioned wellness day, but leaders can reduce stigma by doing the same.



Support Boundary Setting.

You probably know women struggle to set boundaries, but do you know why?

"Women feel pressure to say yes because they fear a 'no' could eliminate future opportunities," says Hopke. "Often, companies prove them right."

When women accept every bit of scut work that comes over the transom, it leads to exhaustion and overwhelm.

How to make a difference:

- 1 Set the expectation that all people should decline work that interferes with priorities they establish with their managers.
- 2 Prove their fear of "no" is unwarranted. Offer promotable opportunities tomorrow even if "yes" was not possible today.

05

Be Flexible — Equitably.

Of the women in a 2022 survey who said they left or intend to leave their jobs, 31% sought “work from anywhere” opportunities. Leaders who believe a preference for remote stems solely from a desire to work in fuzzy slippers are missing its connection to equity.

1 Flexible work arrangements are particularly valuable for women because work/life balance is harder to come by. In addition to meeting the demands of work, they often arrive at home to start a “second shift.”

Women overall manage unpaid household and caregiving labor disproportionately. But LatinX and Black women are respectively 1.6 times and two times more likely than white women to do all or most of this work.

2 Remote offers a partial reprieve from in-office microaggressions. When people in the numerical minority return to the office, renewed anxieties emerge.

“A trans woman who started working at a company remotely will have built their personal brand virtually,” says Jessica Darke, cybersecurity analyst, Intuit. “But when they know they’ll be interacting in person at an office, they may think: ‘Will I have to dress differently to be read as femme?’ ‘Will I have to worry about passing privilege?’ ‘When I use the bathroom, what kind of looks will I get?’ ”

Warns Darke: People who felt disenfranchised before the world went remote will feel more so on returning. Companies must take into account their unique needs and concerns.

Remote: Beware Unintended Consequences!

Brett Wells of Corebridge Financial coined the term “officism” to describe the possibility that leaders could develop biases in favor of in-office employees. This would represent a replacement form of discrimination against people who finally got a brief hiatus. Fight this, says Wells: Focus on performance, not proximity, and share research about remote productivity.

06

Make Women Feel Safe.

Microaggressions are least often transgressed against men. So it stands to reason that women would experience less psychological safety, or the belief that they can take risks, ask questions and solicit feedback without being ridiculed or retaliated against.

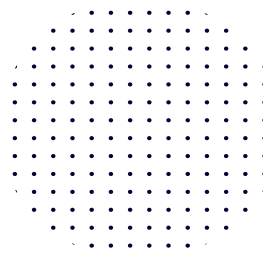
Psychologically safe teams are 76% more engaged, 50% more productive and 74% less stressed. But only 26% of leaders create psychological safety.

Some ways to do so:



- Honor respectful dissent and intellectual bravery.
- Give and ask for feedback; accept it graciously.
- Treat mistakes as opportunities.
- Replace blame with curiosity and empathy.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Normalize mental health conversations.
- Block idea theft: "Actually, that was Tonya's idea."
- Interrupt interruptions: "Actually, Shelly was making a point."
- Recognize team members' contributions often.

As an organization, build allyship through ERGs for parents, women, women of color, members of the LGBTQ+ community and people with disabilities. Conduct listening sessions in which women share their lived experiences if they choose and attendees deepen their understanding.



07

Be Aware Of All “Isms” + Intersections.

Race, gender, age, ability, education, socioeconomic status and other factors intersect and compound to put people, and women, at varied degrees of disadvantage.

While companies are far more aware of discrimination than in decades prior, certain “isms” and intersections are infrequently considered. Ageism and ableism, for instance, tend to come up last in DEI conversations.

Companies that intentionally provide equitable opportunities for women across intersections see tangible benefits.

“You will always arrive at better solutions when you have more diversity of thought,” says Pruitt-Haynes. “Think of a member of Gen Z paired with a Boomer. Together, those two people will come up with a more innovative solution than either would alone.”



08

Offer Women-Specific Benefits.

Some companies offer hyper-targeted benefits that meet women's unique needs, including the needs of women in the LGBTQ+ community.

Childcare Support.

Women take on child and elder care responsibilities disproportionately. Childcare benefits include cost sharing, reimbursement and paid time off.

Elder Care Support.

Dependent care assistance puts aside tax-free dollars for qualified elder care. Partner organizations offer senior care advisors and legal and financial expertise to manage aging parents' affairs.

Fertility Care.

U.S. women increasingly seek [access to fertility services](#) such as IVF and egg freezing. In vitro fertilization is now covered by more than 40% of large U.S. employers ([Mercer](#)).

Parental Support.

Maternity leave is critically important. But benefits that depend solely on physically giving birth are exclusionary. Support adoption, surrogacy, foster parenting, same-sex parenting and single parenting.

LGBTQ+ Benefits.

Audit your policies for heteronormative bias. Select health insurance that covers gender-affirming surgery and hormone therapy, as many providers deny it.

Correct bereavement policies that dictate for whom people can grieve. People have a right to grieve whomever they consider family, chosen or biological.

Travel For Reproductive Care.

Dick's Sporting Goods was among the first of numerous companies to reimburse travel for employees who live in a state that restricts access to abortion care.



Say Your Pronouns

[Read our Q&A with Vargas Townsend](#) to understand how to make LGBTQ+ people feel safe at work.

Conclusion.

Equity For Women, Equity For All.

Ultimately, many of the issues covered in this report are more about essential human needs than gender. Every employee benefits from flexibility, wellness, work/life balance and a sense of psychological safety.

So does your company. Because when you center your culture around these needs, you stand apart. Yes, you'll attract and retain diverse women — and reap the rewards — but you'll also become a sought-after employer for all talent.

As it happens, creating equity for women at work creates equity for everyone at work.



Our Sources.

Meet the experts who shared their perspectives to inform this report.



Jessica Darke (She/Her/Hers)
*Cybersecurity Analyst and Global
Pride ERG Co-leader, Intuit*



Christy Pruitt-Haynes (She/Her/Hers)
*Global Head of Talent and Performance
NeuroLeadership Institute*



Teresa Hopke (She/Her/Hers)
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*Meyers, who penned this report, is a writer,
director of brand and creative at Built In and
a woman in tech.*





Find Your Forward.

You're always searching for skilled professionals to move your company in the right direction.

We think it's time you found them.



**Learn How Built In Can Help
You Find + Hire Tech Talent.**

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