

ELEVATING WOMEN TO NEW HEIGHTS

W O M A N

Executive

Spring 2025



**Meet the
Women
Changing the
(Leadership)
Game**

Increase
Your Earning
Trajectory

TAKE THE LEAD
How to Avoid
the Glass Cliff

Toni Townes-Whitley

Value Proposition

*The SAIC CEO has forged
a remarkable career
by leveraging her core values*

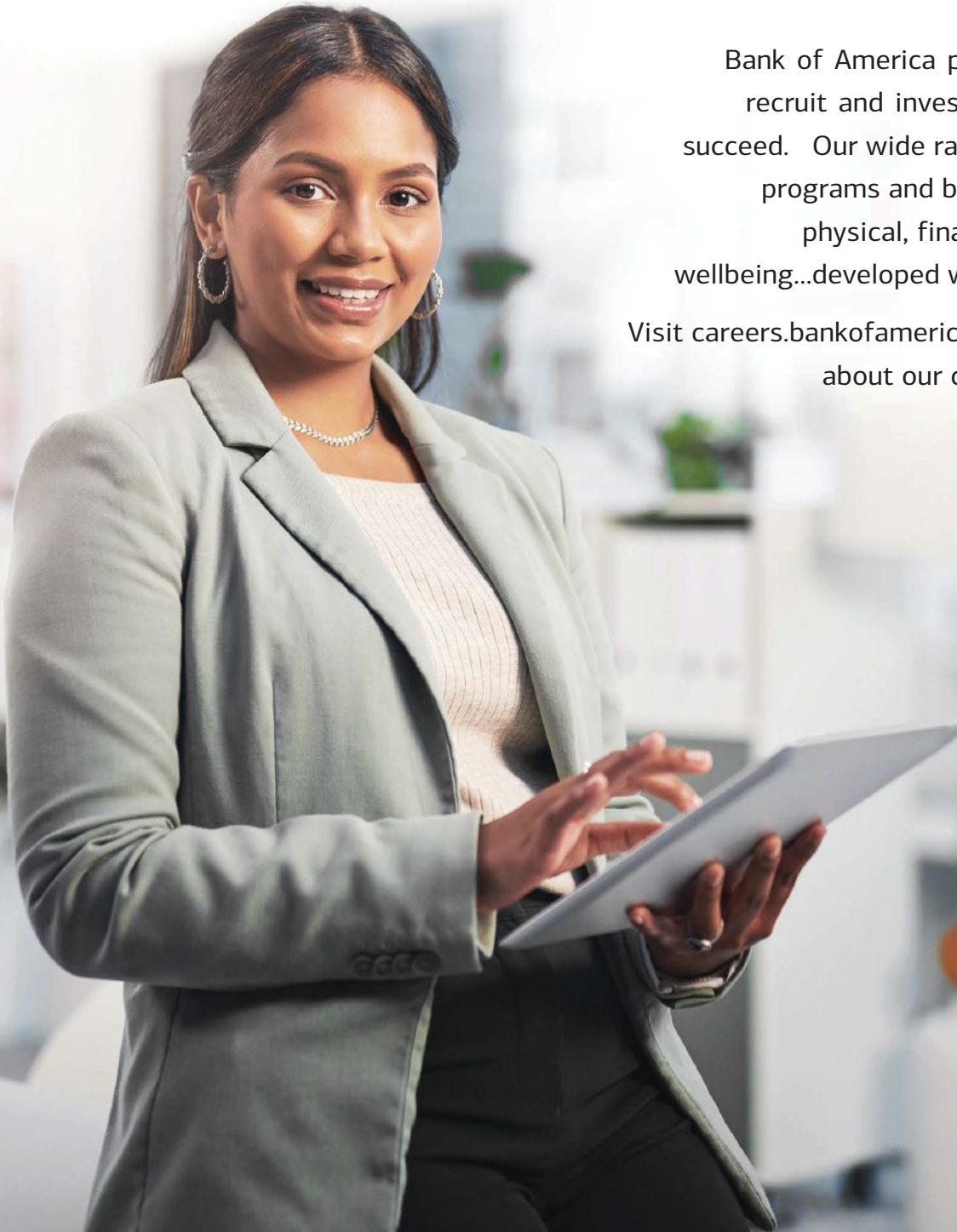


THE POWER TO

create and prosper

Bank of America proudly continues to recruit and invest in helping women succeed. Our wide range of development programs and benefits help support physical, financial and emotional wellbeing...developed with women in mind.

Visit careers.bankofamerica.com to learn more about our career opportunities.



BANK OF AMERICA 



Investing in Diversity & Inclusion at Fidelity



**View the 2023 Diversity
and Inclusion Report**

→ go.fidelity.com/FidelityD&I

© 2024 FMR LLC.

All rights reserved

Fidelity Investments and Fidelity are
registered service marks of FMR LLC.

1138704.1.0



The bridge to possible

Embrace diversity.

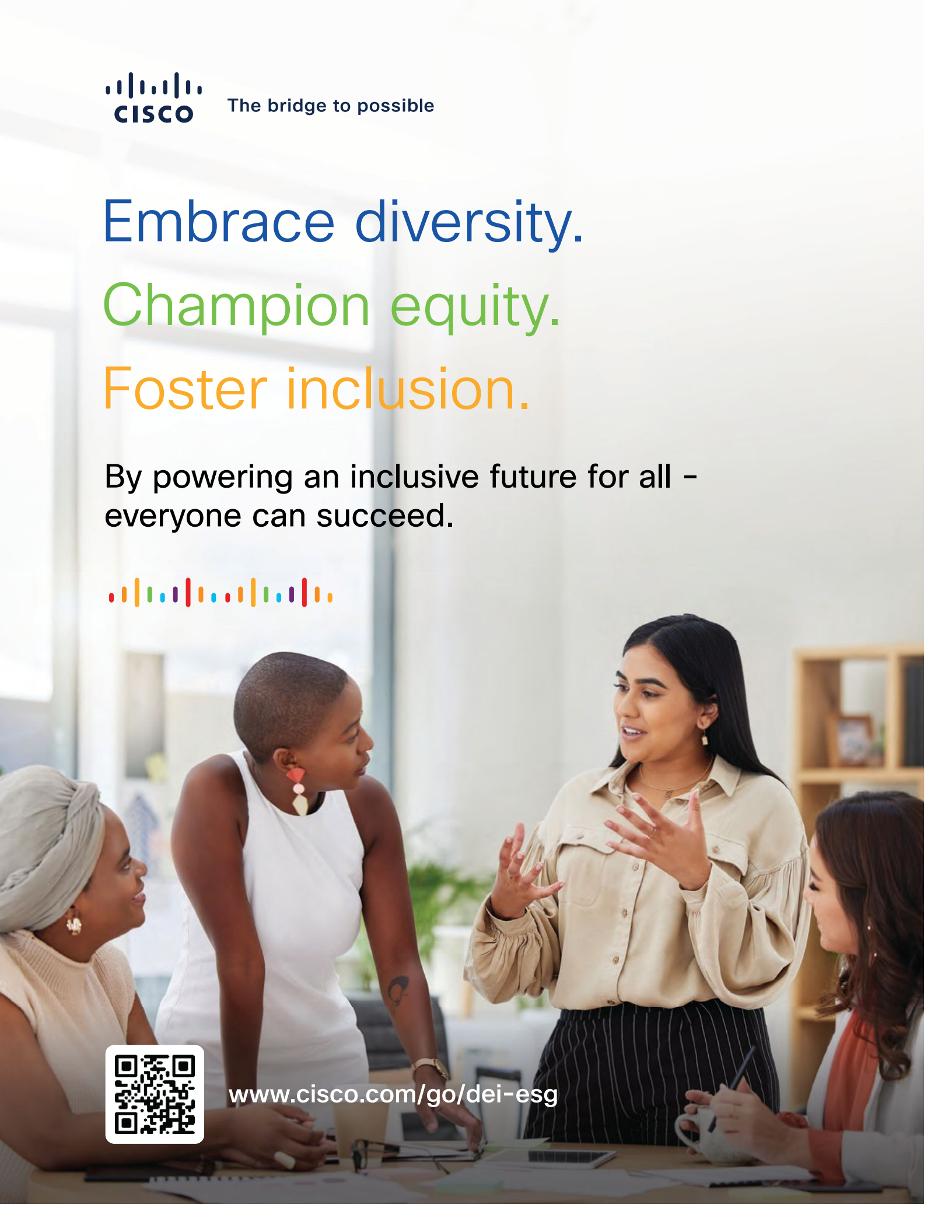
Champion equity.

Foster inclusion.

By powering an inclusive future for all - everyone can succeed.



www.cisco.com/go/dei-esg



Contents

*Elevating
Women to
New Heights*

Spring 2025 • Issue #49



Features

38 SAIC CEO **Toni Townes-Whitley's** life of service.

43 **Game Changers**
Seven trailblazing leaders.

51 **Power 100**
High-impact women leaders.



Upfront

- 11 FOUNDER**
DailiesPods founder **Jessica Shelley** personalizes classroom learning.
- 13 THE OFFICE**
How honest should you be in your **exit interview?**
- 13 DATA DRIVEN**
Will **tech advance equity** at work?
- 15 HOT LIST**
Tough **women bosses in TV and film.**
- 17 SHORTCUTS**
Set **SMART goals** for success.
- 19 ANATOMY OF ... AN IDEA BOARD**
Get visual during team brainstorming.



There's a world where
everyone belongs.
It just has to be built.

Google is proud to support Diversity Woman Media in our shared pursuit to build a world where everyone belongs.





43 Women Changing the Game

Evolutionary leaders who are headed to the top.

ACCELERATE



35

TAKE THE LEAD



31

We Mean Business

- 21 CEO WOMAN**
Gaby Natale finds her own way.
- 25 TECH FORWARD**
Survey Monkey's Robin Ducot.
- 29 MEN AT WORK**
EQ-focused Marion Brooks of Novartis.
- 31 TAKE THE LEAD**
Navigating the glass cliff.
- 35 ACCELERATE**
Career strategies to boost your earnings.

EW Life

- 69 WEALTH MINDSET**
Closing the gender retirement gap.
- 71 BALANCING ACT**
Amid return-to-the-office policies, craft a plan that works for you.
- 75 TRAVEL SAVVY**
Perplexed by tipping? The experts offer some pointers.
- 77 YOUR WELL-BEING**
How to quit multitasking (and why you should).

Point of View

- 37 FRESH INSIGHT**
How mentors can supercharge your career.
- 80 FUTURE OF WORK WITH CATALYST**
Providing menopause support at work.



Always innovating toward an inclusive future.

We know that diverse leadership helps us better improve the health of the diverse communities we serve.

All Cigna products and services are provided exclusively by or through operating subsidiaries of Cigna Corporation, including Cigna Health and Life Insurance Company. 978956 09/23 © 2023 Cigna Healthcare. Some content provided under license.



Contributors

Jennifer McCollum



McCollum is president and CEO of Catalyst, a global nonprofit that drives intersectional gender equity through workplace inclusion from the front line to the C-suite. She is Catalyst's sixth CEO since the organization was founded in 1962.

A nationally recognized speaker, consultant, coach, and author, Jennifer is a thought leader with expertise on closing the gender equity gap and inclusive leadership. She is the author of *In Her Own Voice: A Woman's Rise to CEO*.

Jennifer most recently served for nearly six years as the CEO of Linkage Inc. From 2018 through 2023, she led the transformation of the organization, culminating in its sale and integration

into SHRM. Prior to Linkage, Jennifer spent a decade growing businesses within Corporate Executive Board (now part of Gartner), and Korn Ferry.

Dr. Rosina Racioppi



As president and CEO of WOMEN Unlimited Inc., Rosina leads initiatives to help Fortune 1000 companies cultivate the culture and talent needed to achieve greater growth and profitability. Under her direction, WOMEN Unlimited successfully partners with organizations across a wide range of industries to develop their high-potential women and build a pipeline of diverse talent. Prior to joining WOMEN Unlimited, she held executive management positions in human resources with over 25 years of experience in organization planning and development, compensation and benefits, training and development, safety, quality management,

staffing, and employee relations. Rosina earned her doctorate and master's degrees in education from the University of Pennsylvania.

Pick up a copy of **Executive Woman** magazine at Barnes & Noble booksellers nationwide



Publisher

Dr. Sheila Robinson

Editorial

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Jackie Krentzman

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Cathy Krizik

MANAGING EDITOR

Kimberly Olson

COPY EDITOR

Tam Putnam
Victoria Gannon

PROOFREADER

Sharon Silva

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Eddie Lee

WRITERS

Carolyn M. Brown
Camila Diaz
Terri Huggins Hart
Janet Heit
Tamara E. Holmes
Eddie Lee
Melanie Lockert
Pat Olsen
Kimberly Olson
L'Oreal Thompson Payton
Erica Sweeney

Sales

Dr. Sheila Robinson

publisher@diversitywoman.com

Diversity Woman Media Business Office

1183 University Drive
Suite 105131
Burlington, NC 27215
(202) 809-7775
info@diversitywoman.com

circle™

Three ways to save the most
in store, online and to your door



Target Circle™
Join for free and get
deals automatically*
in a single scan



Target Circle™ Card
Save an extra 5%**
your way, every day



Target Circle 360™
Unlimited same-day
delivery† and more

start
saving



*Terms and conditions will apply to deals. See target.com/circle for more details.

**5% Target Circle™ Card Discount: You will receive 5% off purchases paid for with your Target Circle Card (debit, credit, and reloadable) at Target stores and Target.com, except on prescriptions and other CVS pharmacy products; Target GiftCards; Visa, Mastercard and American Express prepaid cards; Game On, DraftKings and other sports betting gift cards; Starbucks gift cards purchased at Starbucks locations within Target stores; previous purchases; clinic services at Target; Target Optical eye exams and protection plans; Target Circle 360™ memberships; Shipt memberships; alcohol purchases in IN; some independent businesses in Target stores; wireless protection programs and mobile carrier deposits; gift wrapping services; and taxes, shipping, delivery, handling and all other fees or charges. 5% discount applies to eligible purchases minus any other discounts and the value of any promotional Target GiftCards received in the transaction. New cards subject to application approval and identity verification. Additional restrictions apply. See full program rules in store or at Target.com/CircleCard for details.

†Target Circle 360™ membership required. Subject to terms and conditions. Applies to orders over \$35.

Our Time Is Now



“As we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we are excited to unveil this enhanced publication.”

WELCOME TO THE INAUGURAL issue of *Executive Woman* magazine! For two decades, Diversity Woman Media has been dedicated to providing invaluable career and leadership content to ambitious professionals. Now, as we celebrate our 20th anniversary, we are excited to unveil this enhanced publication focused entirely on advancing women into greater leadership roles with increasing responsibility and authority. Like its predecessor *Diversity Woman*, *EW* will be a thought leader while fine-tuning and pumping up our already robust suite of practical, time-tested tools and tips for advancement, delivered by a vast array of experts hand-picked for our audience.

This customization to meet our readers’ needs is key. Most leadership publications and websites paint in broad strokes, presenting information and suggestions that are one-size-fits-all. Diversity Woman Media knows our readers intimately. We have been listening as you’ve described your particular challenges and goals; we have found the common

threads and calibrated our content based on that input for years.

An example of an *EW*-caliber leader and inspiration is this issue’s cover subject, Toni Townes-Whitley. The CEO of Science Applications International Corporation, she is one of just two Black female CEOs of a Fortune 500 company. Here, she explains how her family’s belief in a life of service has been key to her meteoric rise to the pinnacle of her profession.

In our Power 100, we highlight a distinguished group of women on the fast track to the C-suite. In our Game Changer feature, we celebrate seven extraordinary executives who have reached the top and are lighting the way forward. These remarkable leaders share key traits that define success—perseverance, unlimited talent, and strategic thinking—as they continue to transform the corporate landscape.

EW features some of our readers’ favorite departments from the past, such as Accelerate, a deep dive into a particular aspect of career development, and Take the Lead, an in-depth exploration of successful

management. We’ve added new departments, too, like Tech Forward—in which we highlight a female CTO—Your Well-Being, Wealth Mindset, and Travel Savvy. We are also increasing our coverage of the most important topics of today’s business landscape, including how best to leverage AI and machine learning to optimize data-driven decision-making (with a human touch!), to foster deeper connections in an era of virtual work, and to cultivate a lifelong learning mindset.

As a result of our makeover, I am confident that the new *EW* will become your go-to resource for leading us to our ultimate goal of gender parity in the workplace as well for advancing your career—and the careers of those around you.

Thank you for being part of our family, whether you joined us recently or have been with us since the beginning! Here’s to the next 20 years!

Dr. Sheila Robinson
Publisher, *Executive Woman*

We're committed to supporting diversity

As leaders in healthcare, we believe everyone should have the opportunity to thrive. Our main goal is to build a team that reflects the diverse communities we serve and to provide more leadership opportunities for women and people of color.

We also have a program to help empower diverse suppliers — like veterans, those with disabilities, the LGBTQ+ community, minorities and women. It's our mission to address the income and employment challenges that act as barriers to health equity.



Walgreens

FOUNDER

Partnering with Parents in the Education Process

New learning platform DailiesPods matches students with teachers best suited to meet their needs

A S A SCHOOL TEACHER in a rural school district in Oregon, Jessica Shelley noticed that many parents were unsure how to best support their children's academic success.

"I saw how hard it was to engage families in our classroom activities so that they could actually see what their kids were doing on a daily basis," said Shelley, who is a mother of five. She knew that when parents were involved, children performed better academically.

So the 30-year-old came up with a way to bring students, teachers, and parents together.

In 2020, she created a learning platform called DailiesPods that matches students from kindergarten through high school with teachers best suited to meet their learning needs. "We work really hard on personalizing instruction for the kids," she says. Learning takes place both in and beyond the virtual classroom. Parents receive regular updates on what their



children are learning, as well as educational resources to work on with their children after they log off. The parental engagement piece is one of the biggest differentiators between DailiesPods and other learning platforms, Shelley says.

THE EQUALIZING POWER OF TECHNOLOGY

Students work with educators in small pods of four to eight students. Keeping classes intimate works best, Shelley says, because the pandemic showed that students were often overlooked in online classes

teaming with 30 to 40 students. Parents can utilize DailiesPods for tutoring services, academic enrichment programs, or even homeschooling.

The learning platform also leverages the power of technology. Since its services are remote, it allows students of various socioeconomic backgrounds to tap the same resources. In the past, students might have access to a certain science instructor only if they lived in a particular zip code. With DailiesPods, they can access that instructor from anywhere and learn at their

own pace. "It really is a leveler of the playing field," Shelley says.

Shelley was the first teacher on the platform, which scored its first clients via word of mouth. Fast-forward to today: the platform has served more than 15,000 families and currently has a valuation of more than \$5 million.

The biggest challenge for the company has been responding to changes in education policy and keeping up with educational trends. For example, during the pandemic, many universities dropped the requirement that students take standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT for admission. "We're trying to be as responsive as we can to what families are needing without also being overwhelming with information because they're getting it from so many different sources," Shelley says.

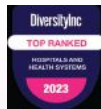
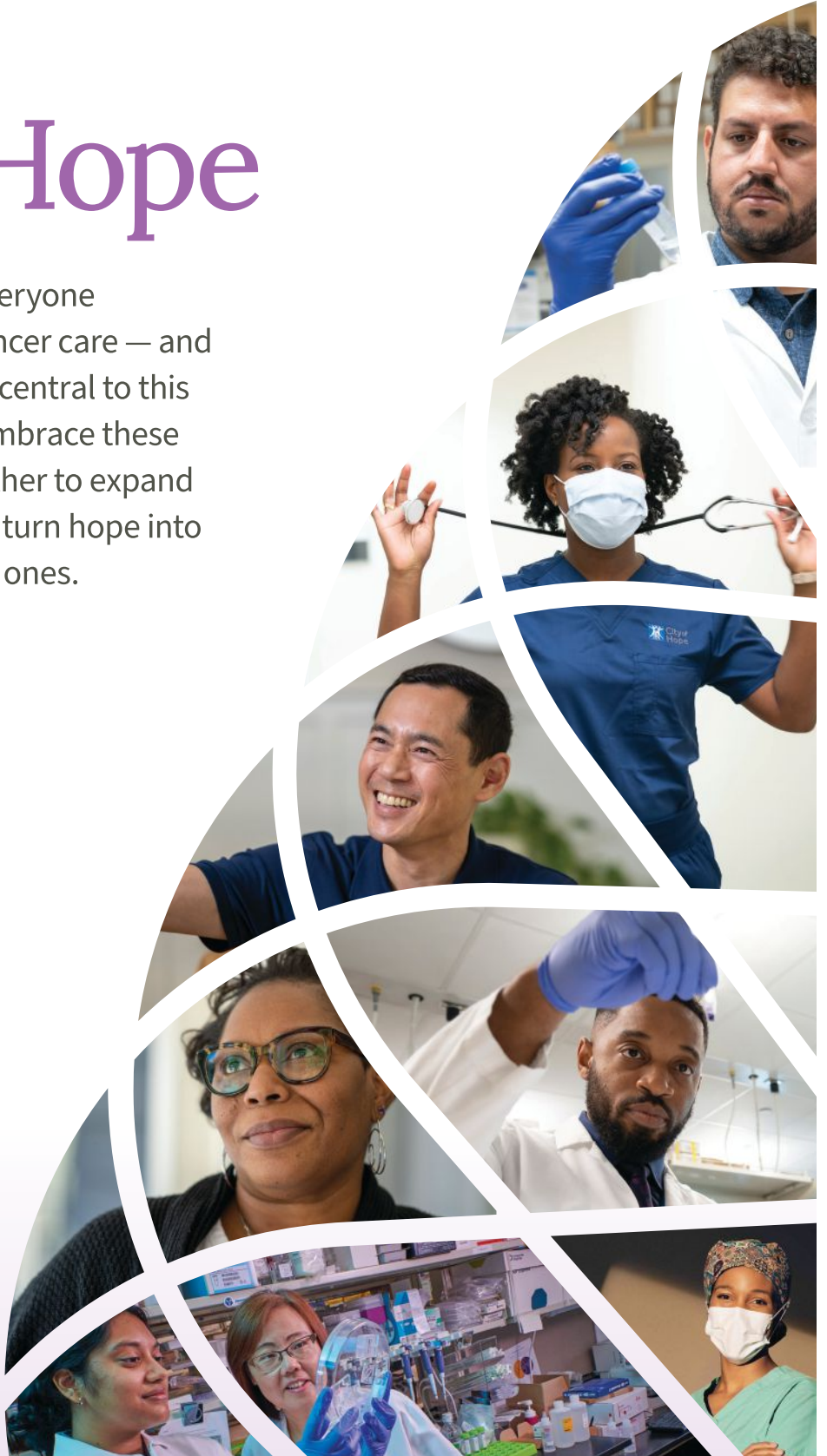
Moving forward, Shelley would like the company to provide more support to schools while maintaining their focus on families. "We're really thinking about how we can help teachers be more efficient and effective," she says. "We're walking alongside families in that parenting and education journey."



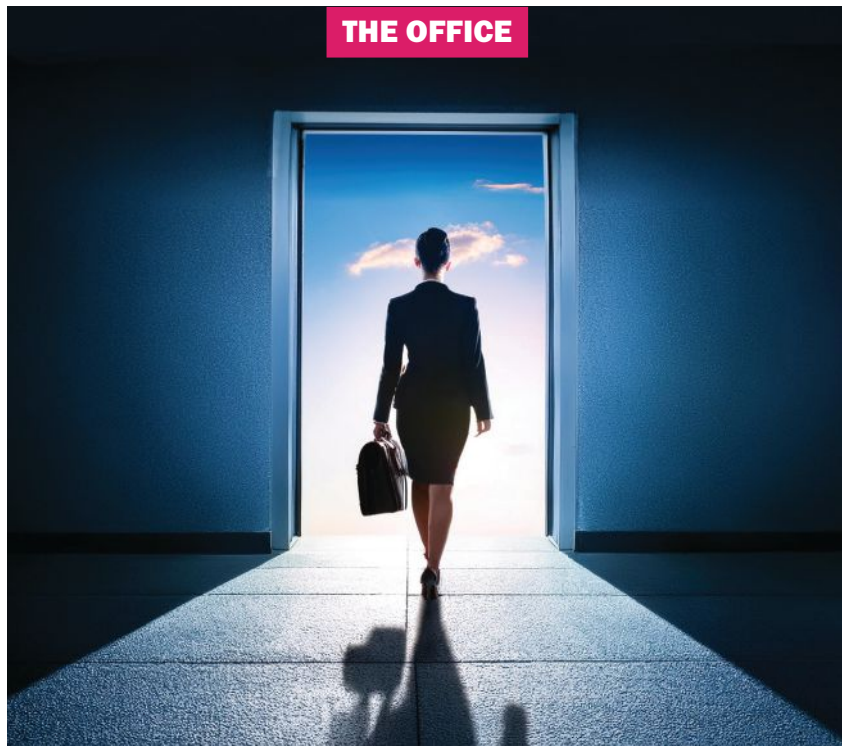
We Are Hope

At City of Hope, we believe that everyone deserves access to world-class cancer care — and diversity, equity and inclusion are central to this mission. Our clinicians and staff embrace these concepts every day, working together to expand access to optimal cancer care and turn hope into reality for patients and their loved ones.

For more information, go to [CityofHope.org](https://www.cityofhope.org).



THE OFFICE



Should I Be Honest in My Exit Interview?

Dear EW:

I'm scheduled to have an exit interview before leaving my job for a new position at a different organization. How honest should I be?

Signed,
Truth or Lie?

Dear Truth:

Exit interviews can be stressful, particularly if a negative experience with the company or a manager has contributed to your decision to change positions.

But striking a balance between providing constructive criticism and maintaining professionalism is important if you want to avoid burning bridges, says Jasmine Escalera, career expert for employment website Live-Career. It's perfectly fine to be honest. "You can talk about the reasons that influenced your decision to leave, framing feedback in a fact-based way,"

says Escalera. "For example, rather than criticizing individual colleagues or the company culture, you could talk about how a lack of career advancement opportunities or misaligned values sparked your decision to leave."

When you're going through the exit interview, Escalera suggests you remember it's ultimately the company's leadership team that is responsible for company culture. It's not your duty to point out—or solve—the company's problems. "Providing feedback is great, but you don't have to carry the burden of organization-wide change," she says. Conclude the interview by expressing that you hope your feedback supports the growth and success of the company, team, and manager. "This approach will allow you to speak honestly and freely about your experiences within the company while maintaining the best relationship moving forward," Escalera adds.

DATA DRIVEN

IS TECHNOLOGY THE GREAT EQUALIZER?

According to a recent study, for every 100 men promoted to manager in 2023, only 87 percent of women were similarly promoted. But change may be coming. The study also suggests that technology can help level the field.

Of the more than 40,000 hiring managers surveyed by global workforce solutions company Manpower Group for their study *World of Work Outlook for Women in 2024*, 65 percent said new technology has made companies more flexible and been a major driver of gender equality. **Specifically:**

61%

said overall gender equality is being improved by advancing technology.

52%

said artificial intelligence is helping companies recruit the best candidates—regardless of gender.

62%

said women are becoming more represented in IT roles, with qualified candidates more diverse than in the past.

The optimism is felt by businesses of all sizes, with 56 percent of small-business hiring managers and 62 percent of large-enterprise hiring managers saying technology is helping promote gender equality in the workplace.



Edward Jones®



Proud to be the #1 employer of women financial advisors in North America.*

Edward Jones is committed to creating a workplace where women can thrive. We provide over 4,500 women financial advisors with the flexibility, choice, and support they need to define their own success.



Discover opportunities at careers.edwardjones.com

*Based on the most recent quarterly earnings results as of 9/30/24, and FINRA registration for producing advisors.

Edward Jones does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information or any other basis prohibited by applicable law.

©2024 EDWARD D. JONES & CO., L.P., ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

HOT LIST

BADASS WOMEN BOSSSES ON THE BIG AND SMALL SCREEN

ANYONE WHO QUESTIONS WHETHER a woman can lead need look no further than films or television. These fictional lady bosses prove that women have the smarts and grit to excel.

BADASS BOSS: Miranda Priestly
MOVIE: *The Devil Wears Prada*

Meryl Streep's Miranda Priestly, the demanding editor in chief of high-fashion magazine *Runway*, has a bark as bad as her bite.

BADASS BOSS: Katharine Parker
MOVIE: *Working Girl*

Katharine Parker, played by Sigourney Weaver, is a high-powered executive in mergers and acquisitions who will do anything to get ahead. Though Parker gets her comeuppance, her assistant, Tess McGill (Melanie Griffith), wins out by borrowing from her boss's take-no-prisoners playbook.

BADASS BOSS: Kathryn Janeway
MOVIE: *Star Trek: Nemesis*

As the commanding officer of the *Starship Voyager*, Admiral Kathryn Janeway (portrayed by Kate Mulgrew) navigates uncharted space to bring her crew home safely.



BADASS BOSS: Debbie Ocean
MOVIE: *Ocean's 8*

Sandra Bullock's character, Debbie Ocean, shows that women can take the helm at criminal organizations, too, as she leads an all-female crew in executing a complex heist at the Met Gala.

BADASS BOSS: Cookie Lyon
TV SERIES: *Empire*

Taraji P. Henson's Cookie Lyon cofounded *Empire* Entertainment with husband Lucious, and not only does she refuse to take a back seat to him, but her business acumen helps catapult the start-up into a family dynasty.

BADASS BOSS: Olivia Pope
TV SERIES: *Scandal*

When the president is in trouble, there's only one person to call: Kerry Washington's Olivia Pope. A crisis manager whose firm fixes political predicaments, Pope calls her employees "gladiators" and motivates them to get out of their comfort zone and do the seemingly impossible.

BADASS BOSS: Claire Underwood
TV SERIES: *House of Cards*

Climbing the ranks from political wife to the first woman president of the United States, Robin Wright's Claire Underwood is unfazed by the ruthlessness of politics and goes toe to toe with any formidable opponent.

DR
NANCY

WHEN WOMEN LEAD, *we all win.*

If you are ready to elevate your career, relationships, and life, you are ready for *In This Together* and *Leading Women*.



Both available on audiobook.
Download your copies today!



Reviews are saying:

"Easily digestible, clear, and direct, the book presents a good overview of a complicated subject, with a strong focus on intersectionality and actionable plans." —**Publishers Weekly** on *In This Together*

"Dr. O'Reilly's new insights, inspiration, practical advice, and innovative solutions give us a pathway to achieving gender equality. Finally." —**Cheryl Benton, Founder/Publisher, The Three Tomatoes** on *In This Together*

"This important and timely book brilliantly details how we as women can inspire and empower one another to build on our strengths and gain success in our workplaces, families, communities, society, and our world." —**Dr. Sheila Robinson, Publisher & CEO Diversity Women Magazine** on *In This Together*

"This book puts it all out on the table and gives power to the notion that women can be successful leaders at all types of work." —**SeattlePI.com** on *Leading Women*

"I grew up hearing that girls didn't do this, and girls didn't do that and did not have a female mentor until I was 55. Dr. Nancy O'Reilly shares many strategies to help women rewind those old tapes and create new ones." —**Judy Hoberman, Author** on *Leading Women*

In This Together will help us to create community, success, and well-being.
—**Gloria Steinem**



@DrNancyOReilly | www.DrNancyOReilly.com

SHORTCUTS

How to Set Clear Goals

You've probably heard of SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely. However, other goal-setting acronyms may be even more helpful. Here are two to consider.



1. Be FAST rather than SMART

Some critics of SMART goals say that they focus too much on individual performance and don't value ambition. MIT Sloan School of Management researchers argue instead for FAST goals, which are characterized by the following:

Frequent discussions in which teams meet regularly to discuss progress and course-correct if necessary.

Ambitious scope, with goals that are challenging but attainable.

Specific measurements, which allow goals to be easily tracked to gauge progress.

Transparency, which ensures that progress made toward reaching goals can be seen by all.

2. Create a PACT for success

PACT goals, a term coined by neuroscientist Anne-Laure Le Cunff, are more focused on the process of achieving a goal than on the end result. PACT goals are these:

Purposeful. By creating goals that are in line with your values, you'll be more motivated to keep going.

Actionable. When setting goals, make sure they are objectives that you can take steps to complete, rather than grand plans that may depend on external forces.

Continuous. You should be able to move forward repeatedly until the task is complete.

Trackable. You should be able to see if you're making progress.

Regardless of what acronym you choose, it's always useful to take a fresh look at goal-setting.



Congratulations to World
Unity for 25 years
promoting diversity,
equality and inclusion.

jobs.merck.com

Juice your team's creativity

COLLABORATION ACROSS AN ORGANIZATION can turn a good idea into a great one. One tool that helps workplaces collaborate is the idea board, a visual representation of the creative thoughts and suggestions of the group.

Idea boards can increase employee engagement, enhance team camaraderie, and improve the culture inside an organization, says Margaret Ricci, founder of

teambuilding consultant firm Cultural Strategies, in Oakdale, Minnesota. "But they can also be time-consuming and problematic if the process isn't set up correctly at the beginning," Ricci warns.

To make sure your idea board does the job you intend it to do, Ricci offers suggestions on steps to take from Day One:



1 Decide the format of the board.

Will it be a physical board that hangs on a wall in a conference room or a spreadsheet on a company drive? There are also group brainstorming software programs such as Creately, Miro, and Mural.

2 Create a board "owner."

Decide who will control the board or be point person for everyone who contributes. This person will let others know how to submit ideas and update the board.

3 Define what an idea for the board entails.

Let employees know if ideas must meet certain criteria, such as adhering to time or cost considerations. That encourages employees to think through the viability of ideas before submitting them.

4 Consider whether anonymity will be allowed.

In some cases, you'll get more honest feedback if you allow employees to submit ideas anonymously. On the other hand, team members' bonds could grow stronger if everyone takes public ownership of their ideas.

5 Decide who will vote on the ideas.

Will company leadership determine which ideas will be implemented, or will everyone who submits ideas be able to chime in?

6 Create a transparent system for vetting ideas.

Let everyone know why certain ideas weren't implemented. "Employees can take it personally when their ideas or the ideas of others are not accepted," Ricci says. Explain the decision-making process and let the entire group know why the chosen ideas got the green light.

And, Ricci adds, block out space on the team's calendar to look for ways to combine ideas and build on the suggestions that come in. "Employees often can't wait to help out their company or team, but whatever team is implementing the ideas will have to lay away extra time to sort through them."



WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

We're reaching across cultures—creating global tech innovations that unite us in new and exciting ways. Amazon creates inclusive technology that connects our diverse world, disrupting the status quo of how we learn, shop, communicate, work, and live.

Come build with us!

To learn more about our robust employee programs and job opportunities, visit: amazon.jobs and aboutamazon.com/workplace.

amazon



CEO WOMAN

Blazing Her Own Path

Embracing the “pioneer spirit,” Gaby Natale is no stranger to setting her own course

BY L'OREAL THOMPSON PAYTON

AS A TRIPLE DAYTIME EMMY Award–winning journalist and the first Latina to be published by HarperCollins Leadership, author and motivational speaker Gaby Natale is accustomed to breaking barriers. She is among an elite group of women in the entertainment industry who not only owns the rights to her media content but owns her own television studio as well.

Her best-selling book, *The Virtuous Circle*, offers readers tangible strategies on awakening the “pioneer spirit” within them and channeling their strengths and talents to work to their advantage.

In addition to being a highly sought-after thought leader and motivational speaker, Natale feeds her entrepreneurial spirit as the president and founder of AGANARmedia, a content development and experiential marketing company with a focus on Latinx audiences. Recently, Natale was named the top speaker for Hispanic Heritage Month 2024 by the AAE Speakers Bureau.

Executive Woman: You often speak about having a pioneer spirit. How do you define it, and how can other women cultivate it in their own lives?

Gaby Natale: I always talk about being a pioneer or embracing the pioneer spirit in contrast to being an emulator. When you emulate, you look around—you see what everyone else is doing, and you want to emulate what they’re doing. There’s nothing inherently wrong with that. You can be perfectly happy embracing an emulator mindset all your life if that’s what you want to do. But if we all emulate what everyone else is doing, our best-case scenario is the current status quo. And we can do better. Sometimes the status quo is not good enough, and we want more. We crave more for our lives and for the world.

The way to embrace the pioneer spirit is to look around, see what everyone else is doing, and set your goal. You look to whatever you want to do even before you have the validation because too many times we want the results that validate that vision. So to embrace the pioneer spirit, you give yourself permission to do something no one else like you has done. Because it doesn’t matter how big or how small that step is ... every time we choose to pioneer, we move the world forward. And that is something we can all do from our own roles.

EW: How did you learn to embrace your uniqueness?

GN: I’ve always felt comfortable in my own skin. I was always one of those people who marched to the beat of



Agreements built for everyone.

At DocuSign, we're building products that are used all over the world, by people from all walks of life. Trust DocuSign to safeguard your agreements, just like countless others from every corner of the globe.



Visit [docusign.com](https://www.docusign.com)

“

“I realized if I wanted to be respected, I had to respect myself first. If I wanted to be valued, I had to value myself first.”

their own drum. But what happened was I'm an immigrant. I came to the United States from Argentina for a fresh start. What I realized is that when I was in Argentina, because I was a woman speaking multiple languages and I was educated, the perception was that I was a young lady with a bright future. And here I was sometimes being stereotyped or looked down upon. So I had a choice: I realized if I wanted to be respected, I had to respect myself first. If I wanted to be valued, I had to value myself first. That's when I really chose to embrace my uniqueness because it was something that was natural at some point, but then it was a deliberate choice that I had to make.

EW: What role does diversity and inclusion play in an ever-evolving media industry, and what actions can leaders take to promote it?

GN: I think it's very important first to educate people that this is not just the right thing to do—this is a smart business decision. A lot of people have a feeling that [DEI] is a charity case, and we're not talking about handouts. We're talking about smart business decisions. We're talking about having leaders who are reflective of the audiences that they serve.

The Résumé

NAME

Gaby Natale

COMPANY

AGANARmedia

JOB TITLE

Founder and president

CITY

Dallas-Fort Worth

FAVORITE QUOTE

“Change the way you look at things, and the things you look at change.” —Wayne Dyer

There are not enough people with diverse ideas. Everybody's seeing the world from the same perspective. The other side of a blind spot is a white space, and in that white space is where opportunity lies and flourishes.

EW: What has been your biggest obstacle thus far, and how did you overcome it?

GN: I don't know if it's the biggest obstacle, but it's been an obstacle that I had this year, and it's taken all of me to overcome it. This year I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I'm healthy, and I'm fine now. I've had successful surgeries, and I'm finishing chemo and radiation, but that's been a tough obstacle. But I thought about how I treated other obstacles in the past: I created my own way out of no way. I created books. I created a conference. I created so many things, and now I'm partnering with Susan G. Komen to raise awareness about early detection because I'm a patient, a survivor, a warrior. I was also a caregiver for my own mom, and this is something that is going to happen to one in eight women. And it looks very different if you have early detection. It's up to us to take action to save those lives. I think this could be a weird invitation from life to have a positive impact.

EW: What advice would you give your younger self?

GN: Don't jump to permanent conclusions based on temporary circumstances. So many times I felt defeated. In Argentina, I spent two years unemployed. I'd graduated with a master's degree in journalism, ready to conquer the world, but the world had a very different plan for me. I graduated at a time when Argentina had one of its biggest crises, with 20 percent unemployment, five presidents in 10 days, and a lot of social instability, hyperinflation, and all of those things.

So I spent two years unemployed, and I was this close to convincing myself that I would never be able to work in media or be a speaker or do many of the things that became a reality later, and it was all because of temporary circumstances. And I wouldn't tell that just to my younger self. This year I had to tell that to myself many times. **EW**

L'Oreal Thompson Payton is an award-winning journalist and the author of Stop Waiting for Perfect: Step Out of Your Comfort Zone and Into Your Power.



**Celebrating
20 years of
inspiring
leadership**

“Nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear, and hopelessness died. Strength, power, and courage was born.”

— **Malala Yousafzai**, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for her advocacy for girls' education and children's rights



The Technologist

Robin Ducot, SurveyMonkey's CTO, on not thinking twice about being the only woman in the room

BY PAT OLSEN

Running the engineering division of a technology company requires the ability to define a product vision and the expertise to lead a team. Robin Ducot, chief technology officer of SurveyMonkey, excels in these skills. Working closely with her company's product, design, and data teams, she's recognized for handling these responsibilities—and more—with savvy, passion, and empathy.

Prior to this role, Ducot served as senior vice president of product engineering at DocuSign and, before that, as vice president of engineering at Eventbrite. In 2017, she joined SurveyMonkey, a company that designs online surveys and forms and measures the resulting data to deliver market insights.

In 2018, Ducot was named one of the top 15 technical executives in companies going public by *Business Insider*, and in 2024, she appeared on the *San Francisco*

Business Times' list of the most influential women in Bay Area business. In 2023, the website Girl Geek X honored her as one of 60 female CTOs to watch.

Executive Woman: What inspired you to pursue a career in IT?

Robin Ducot: I was fortunate in that I didn't know anything different. My grandfather was a technology leader in the San Francisco Bay Area, my dad was an engineer, and my mother ran a large research team at MIT. My high school also offered programming long before it was common, so I started programming young and had an influential female technical role model in my mother. It truly never occurred to me that women weren't "supposed" to be engineers.

My personality also meshes well with this career. I was always comfortable not following the norm and never thought too much about being the only woman in the room. I just wanted to do the work.

EW: What was the best advice you received early in your career?

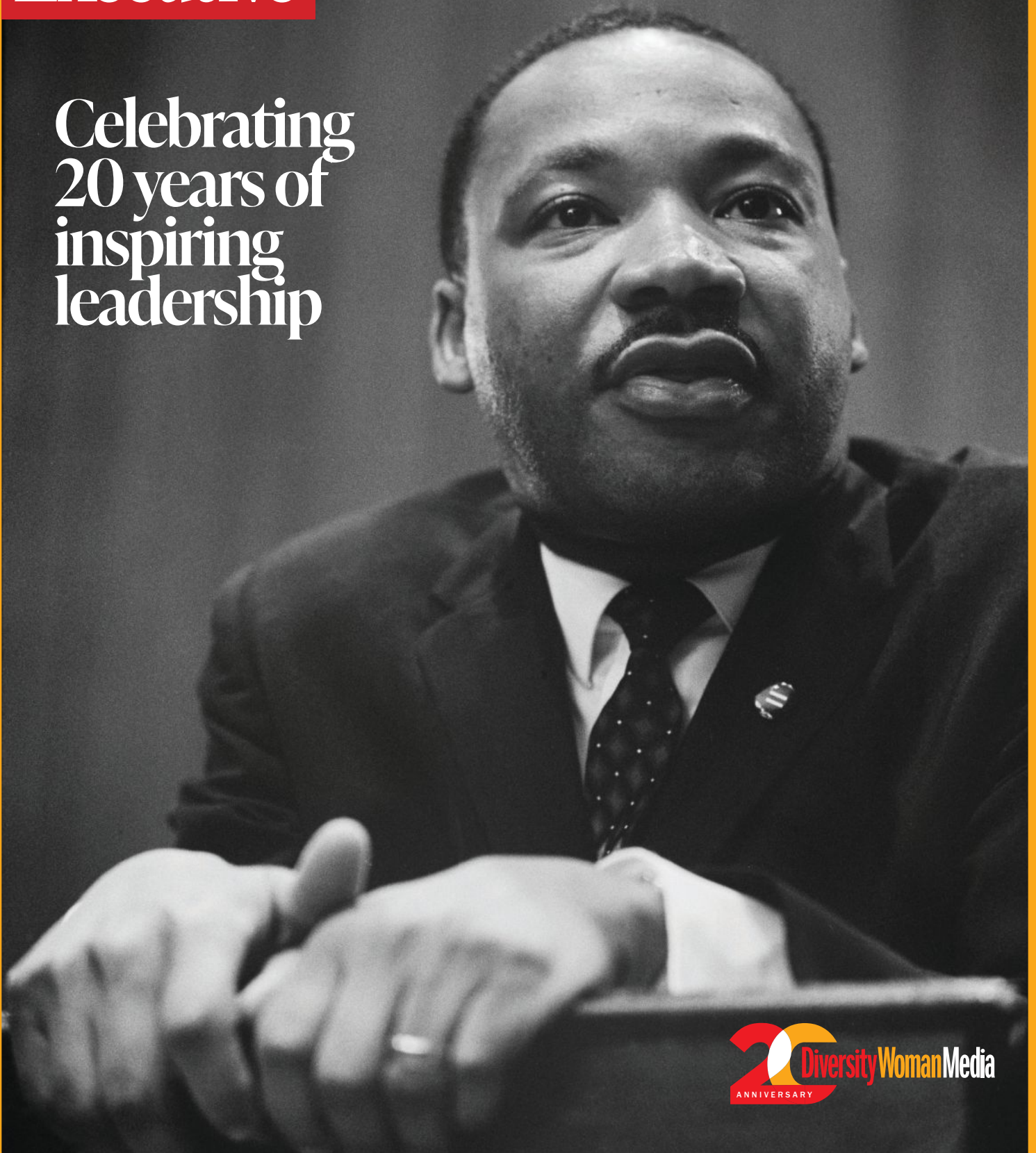
RD: A whole constellation of experiences along the way have brought me to where I am today. One early—and important!—piece of advice I can share is that as a woman in tech, remember to focus on your strengths and be empowered to hire or delegate for your weaknesses. It's far more efficient as a leader. Men don't particularly waste time beating themselves up over their shortcomings.

The value of being resilient is also something that has shaped my journey. You don't have to have a street fight over every little thing, and sometimes being right isn't enough. What you do need to do is commit to showing up even when things don't go your way.

EW: What are some barriers you encountered along the way, and how did you overcome them?

RD: In my experience, you learn much more from failure than from success,

Celebrating
20 years of
inspiring
leadership



“Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

so taking risks is imperative. You're inevitably going to fail throughout your lifetime and in your career.

An example, using my experience, is that I am a systems thinker, and it's sometimes difficult to linearize my thoughts in a way that is easy for others to understand. It took me years of mistakes presenting my ideas, but through experience I've learned to start at the beginning, provide context that's appropriate for the audience or situation, and persuade—especially nontechnical people—the value of an idea. It took a lot of bad presentations and meetings on my part and doing post-event analysis before learning to influence people at all levels became second nature to me.

Also from my experience, the most important piece of it all is, when you fail or run into a roadblock, how you get back up or devise a plan to get past the hurdle so you can continue a forward journey.

EW: How is SurveyMonkey helping women advance in STEM careers within the company?

RD: We support many different employee resource groups [ERGs]. Relevant to this question is our Women's International Network ERG. This group's mission is to empower and support anyone who experiences the challenges of being a woman at work or of being “read” as a woman at work.

The group is focused on promoting gender diversity, providing resources for career development, and creating a supportive network that encourages mentorship, leadership, and personal growth. Through advocacy, education, and collaboration, we aim to break down barriers and drive positive change within SurveyMonkey and the broader tech community.

EW: SurveyMonkey is very focused on AI. How do you see it being applied five years from now?

RD: When I was in university, my area of focus and interest was AI, so

“I believe it is important to spend time and find opportunities to mentor people outside of your organization to widen your perspective, identify your blind spots, and spark new ideas.”

in many ways, I've always been on this path. Back then, the technology was dead simple: program a chatbot to respond to existing or known questions. It's been fascinating to see AI evolve, especially recently.

SurveyMonkey has one of the world's biggest survey datasets. For 25 years—2024 marks our silver jubilee!—the company has been gathering data on survey structure, question content, and respondent behavior. With 84 billion-plus questions answered with SurveyMonkey, 2 million-plus daily survey responses, and 2.4 million-plus daily AI predictions, the depth and breadth of our proprietary dataset is vast.

The AI and machine learning we use in our products are specifically designed to empower our customers to get fast and accurate answers to their critical questions—taking the guesswork out of survey creation and analysis. Our SurveyMonkey Genius offering, a lineup of AI-enabled features available within the product, guides users throughout the survey creation, fielding, and analysis steps.

While I can't definitively say how AI will be applied in five years, I do anticipate the thoughtful and ethical use of data will remain at its core. At

SurveyMonkey, we know that AI is constantly evolving, and we strive to help our customers keep up and get ahead with the help of both our products and research.

EW: What advice do you give young women interested in a career in tech?

RD: One of the things I learned early on is the importance of moving around and trying everything as an engineer. The most successful technical leaders I know have a deep understanding of the whole tech stack—technologies used to develop an application, including programming languages, frameworks, databases, front-end and back-end tools, and APIs—and know how the technology intersects with the business they're in.

In addition, rather than framing things in technical terms, frame them from the perspective of what is best for your business. As engineers, it's easy to

be isolated in a singular obsession for technology. However, the ability to translate technology objectives into business objectives helps elicit buy-in for the technology initiatives you're working on.

Another suggestion is to prioritize relationships. As an engineering leader, I always align myself with the head of the customer support team.

Ensuring that this person understands I am there to help him or her, and vice versa, fosters a mutual relationship that I've found

beneficial over the years.

Finally—and it might sound strange!—cultivate a sense of entitlement. As a third-generation technology leader, I didn't grow up thinking women weren't supposed to have a voice in technology. However, I've noticed that women technologists often fail to advocate for themselves. Speak up! You belong in the room. **EW**

The Résumé

NAME

Robin Ducot

COMPANY

SurveyMonkey

JOB TITLE

Chief Technology Officer

CITY

San Mateo, CA

COLLEGE

BS, Computer Science
from the University of
Massachusetts

FAVORITE QUOTE:

“If you're going through
hell, keep going.”
—attributed to
Winston Churchill

Executive WOMAN

**Celebrating
20 years of
inspiring
leadership**



“I’ve always understood that once you have a tiny bit of power, space, or control, you should do everything you can to share it.”

— MEGAN RAPINOE, soccer champion and pay equity activist

The EQ Leader

Novartis Pharmaceuticals' Marion E. Brooks believes that emotional intelligence is the No. 1 key to success

BY CAMILA DIAZ



MEN AT WORK

AS THE VICE PRESIDENT AND US country head of diversity, equity, and inclusion at Novartis Pharmaceuticals and in his previous roles, Marion E. Brooks has successfully built and led award-winning teams in sales, marketing, training and development, and diversity and inclusion, including a team that generated \$1 billion in annual sales.

He is also an internationally certified executive coach and the award-winning author of *What You Don't Know Is Hurting You: 4 Keys to a Phenomenal Career*. Brooks has over 25 years of experience as an executive in the health science industry. As an expert in emotional intelligence and career development, he has consistently been recognized for outstanding achievements and has won numerous awards, including OnConferences' Business Leader of the Year Award and Top 100 Human Resources Professionals in the World, and Diversity Awards' Top 100 Healthcare Diversity Officers. He holds a BA in marketing and an MBA in management.

Homegrown in Texas, Brooks is committed to people and their development. He stays true to this passion through his volunteer work in the community and with numerous mentoring and development programs. He is also the chairman of the board of directors of Sunshine's Open Door Foundation, an organization focused on supporting foster children.

Brooks considers himself a "girl dad"—he has a young-adult daughter, Morgan, and three nieces, Christian, Montrese, and Henette, whom he has helped raise as his own.

Executive Woman: Describe leadership lessons you learned at a young age, and how your upbringing influenced your career direction.

Marion Brooks: My brother, sister, and I grew up with our grandparents as our primary caretakers, and I watched them make sacrifices not just for our family but for other members of our community. This had a major impact on my decision to launch my career in the health-care industry—I wanted to help people. It also drove my decisions to become an executive coach and to write a book helping leaders navigate their careers.

Two major leadership lessons I learned from my grandparents are the power of emotional intelligence and servant leadership. My grandmother always led with compassion, especially in challenging situations. She and my grandfather had an open-door policy; everyone in our community knew they could always come to our house if they needed support or guidance.

EW: How did you get into the work of being a DEI leader? What propelled you here?

MB: I spent the first 19 years of my career at Novartis on the commercial side of the business. I served in roles as head of marketing, head of sales, and leading training and development. During that time, I was very active in the DEI space. I served as

“

I have always been surrounded by incredible female leaders, so I'm always in disbelief when I hear questions about a woman's ability to lead.

chairman of one of our employee resource groups and on our executive DEI council. In 2019, I was approached about my interest in the US DEI lead role. Until then, each division had set their own DEI strategies and objectives. However, Novartis recognized that to truly weave DEI into its DNA, it needed to be led at the country level by someone with a proven track record of impact in a DEI space who had a strong influence in the business. I was more than happy to take on the challenge.

EW: How has your role as an executive coach informed your leadership style and your work?

MB: When I was working on my executive coaching certification, two of the courses focused on emotional intelligence (EQ). While I was familiar with the concept of EQ, I had never gone deep enough to understand the four quadrants [self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship management] and where I fell in each of them. As I delved deeper into EQ, I learned 80 percent of our success is based on EQ, but most people, including myself at the time, are not aware of our strengths and areas of opportunity.

Enhancing my EQ has enabled me to be an even more empathetic leader and to assess challenging situations more effectively to identify joint solutions—“win-wins.”

I also have my teams work with an executive coach to focus on their EQ, and we follow up with EQ-focused team

sessions to understand how our individual strengths and opportunities impact our team culture and performance. It's been a game changer.

EW: Describe an impactful DEI initiative you oversee at Novartis.

MB: Our Girls in Science and Business Mentoring Program expands Novartis's remit of reimagining medicine together with local communities. Novartis is partnering with young women in New Jersey middle and high schools to pilot a tailor-made introduction to the pharmaceutical industry. Through mentorships and lectures, the program gives girls in grades eight to 11 real-world exposure to research and drug development and commercialization. The program aims to encourage each student to envision new possibilities for the world of medicine by exploring the intersection of science and medicine.

EW: What are some common challenges you've seen when it comes to women advancing into the highest levels?

MB: In my life, I've witnessed stereotypes based on sex, women being over-mentored and under-sponsored, and lack of access to investment in development. In many instances, it's not a lack of aptitude; it's a lack of access and investment—that stops women from advancing.

When I began my career with Novartis 24 years ago, there were not a lot of women in

leadership. Today, 47 percent of our leadership is female, thanks to Novartis's commitment to investing in and supporting women.

EW: You call yourself a “girl dad.” What do you mean by that, and how has it translated in the workplace?

MB: I have the honor of serving in the role of father to four amazing young women, my biological daughter and three nieces. Similar to the way my grandparents raised and supported my brother, sister, and me, I've had the great fortune to do so for my girls, who are all thriving adults today.

I have always been surrounded by incredible female leaders, so I'm always in disbelief when I hear questions about a woman's ability to lead. In the workplace, I judge all individuals on three criteria: kindness, competence, and consistency in being kind and competent.

EW: How best can men support women in their leadership journey?

MB: The best way is through advocacy, allyship, and mentorship/sponsorship. It takes more than words—it requires action. The great bell hooks once said, “Feminism is for everybody.”

I am grateful to work for a company with inclusion role models at all levels. I've learned from women mentors and sponsors throughout my career, and I certainly would not be the leader I am today without them.

EW: What advice would you offer women seeking to rise?

MB: I recommend the following:

- Invest in your personal and professional development
- Advocate for yourself
- Seek out informal mentors and sponsors
- Leave big footprints for women behind you to step into
- Mentor men, as this creates allies and advocates like me—and together, we are unstoppable! **EW**

The Résumé

NAME

Marion Brooks

COMPANY

Novartis
Pharmaceuticals

JOB TITLE

Vice president and US
country head, DEI

CITY

Los Angeles

FAVORITE QUOTE

“I never lose, I either win or learn.” — Nelson Mandela



The Glass Cliff

Many women shatter the glass ceiling only to face a corporate crisis. Here's how to safeguard your career.

BY KIMBERLY OLSON

IN JANUARY 2014, MARY Barra became CEO and chairman of General Motors, shortly after the company admitted that faulty ignition switches in some GM vehicles caused crashes and deaths.

In 2018, JCPenney was struggling to compete against big-box stores and e-retailers. It had lost 95 percent of its market value in a decade and was \$4 billion in debt. Jill Soltau was

appointed CEO to save the department store chain.

In 2023, after Twitter's earnings fell by 40 percent within two months of being acquired by Elon Musk, he tweeted, "I will resign as CEO as soon as I find someone foolish enough to take the job!" Linda Yaccarino stepped up to join a mere handful of women who helm a large tech company.

TAKE THE LEAD

In 2024, Stephanie Pope was promoted to CEO of Boeing, two months after a door panel flew off a Boeing 737 MAX 9 jet mid-flight, leading to investigations by several federal government agencies.

"These women were all more than capable," says Rose Fass, cofounder of fassforward Consulting Group. "But they were taking over companies that unfortunately needed a lot more transformation than possibly they banked on initially."

You're likely familiar with the glass ceiling, an invisible barrier that makes it difficult for women to advance into

top leadership positions. And when they do manage to break through, they may face another challenge.

Women in high positions are more likely than men to find themselves perched on a precarious “glass cliff” from which they might tumble.

The organization may be facing a major crisis, for example, such as a product failure, poor financial performance, or a scandal.

When Utah State University researchers Alison Cook and Christy Glass analyzed the Fortune 500 over a 15-year period, they found that white women—and people of color—are more likely than white men to become CEO at weakly performing companies.

But why?

During troubled times, organizations may switch their mindset from “think manager, think male”—tending to associate desirable leadership qualities with men—to “think crisis, think female.” This is especially likely if the crisis calls for traits stereotypically associated with women, like shared leadership and emotional management. Putting a woman in the top spot also signals that the organization is moving in a fresh direction.

Women on the glass cliff often face pressure to solve the crisis quickly. And if they can't turn things around, they might be blamed—and inadvertently reinforce the perception that women can't lead.

“It's not easy for women,” Fass says. “Very often, the stakes are a lot higher, and they're in situations where they have to prove themselves. They not only have to prove themselves to themselves, but they have to prove themselves to the street. And they have to prove themselves to the employees who have doubts.”

The glass cliff is one reason that women CEOs don't last as long as their male counterparts. In 2023, male CEOs of Fortune 500 companies ran their firms for 7.2 years, on average, compared to just 4.5 years for women CEOs in the Fortune 500, according to executive intelligence firm Equilar.



So when accepting a glass cliff job, it's best to proceed with eyes wide open and take self-protective steps.

SCHOOL YOURSELF

During negotiations, get a clear picture of what lies ahead. “Do your due diligence by talking to people at all levels,” suggests Kemi Akinsanya-Rose, COO of Cambium Learning Group in Dallas. “In my current role, it took me asking, ‘Tell me about the budget.’”

It's important to pinpoint the core issues that led to the organization's troubles. Get a clear understanding of what your predecessor did, which may help you chart a better path forward.

Akinsanya-Rose recommends exploring informal channels—what she calls the “back channels”—to gather

information. So instead of relying solely on the recruiter who's in charge of the search, she casts a wider net. “I'll contact executive recruiters who I've had a good relationship with and say, ‘Tell me about the organization,’” she says.

GET CURIOUS ABOUT THE CULTURE

Akinsanya-Rose says that women of color, in particular, may have a hard time understanding an organization's unwritten rules.

That's something she experienced firsthand when she transitioned from New York City's Department of Education to a small nonprofit. “Coming from a board of education where we had a mayor-elected board to a nonprofit, I didn't understand that you need to be close to your nonprofit board as peers and not let your boss tell your whole story,” she says. “He didn't know what I did. If you asked the board, they would have said, ‘We couldn't live without her.’ This is the structure. I underestimated the power of the board.”

ASK FOR HELP

No leader succeeds alone. “Ask for what you need upfront,” Akinsanya-Rose advises. “I think women of color, especially, tend to be very self-sufficient and are used to going it alone. It's very difficult to ask for help because it's a sign of vulnerability. We wear the mask of a person who's independent and in control. Everybody puts their mask on, but especially women of color.”

Be thoughtful about what you'll need to succeed. Are there certain roles missing? Maybe consultants could help you. Will you need moral support? “I asked for [resources] to join a national women's network,” Akinsanya-Rose says. “I also asked for a six-month executive coach to transition.”

Women on the glass cliff often face pressure to solve the crisis quickly. If problems arise, they get more blame than a male leader would. And if they can't turn things around, it reinforces the perception that women can't lead.

SET CLEAR GOALS

Before signing on, establish clear performance goals and metrics. Ask, for example, how the board intends to measure your success.

Protect yourself against unrealistic expectations. “Have an honest conversation about how long it’s going to take to turn things around and ask for the time to do it,” Fass advises. “You want in writing that you have two years to turn this around [for example] and that there will be a mission bonus attached to what you’re doing—because what you’re doing is hard—and that mission bonus will extend to your team, so there’s a feeling of camaraderie. If they don’t want to give you those kinds of boundaries, walk away, because that kind of failure can kill your career.”

HARNESS YOUR TEAM'S STRENGTHS

Be realistic about what resources and team skill sets you’ll need to achieve your goals on target and on budget—and ask for them.

Then look for ways to flip setbacks into opportunities. “I’m a big believer in redefining a team’s purpose with these glass cliff jobs,” Akinsanya-Rose says. “Organizations have lost their way. It’s not about changing the business plan but reorienting your purpose. What are we doing this for? What can this team do that no one else can do?”

“Work hard to create a collective leadership model so [team members] feel like they are worthy colleagues on almost a peer level with you, exchanging ideas, so you win hearts and minds,” Fass adds.

HAVE IMPACTFUL CONVERSATIONS

“You have to be able to read a person and a room as well as you read a spreadsheet because leadership happens in the conversation,” says Fass, author of *The Chocolate Conversation: Lead Bittersweet Change, Transform Your Business* and *The Leadership Conversation: Make Bold Change, One Conversation at a Time*.

Fass advises leaders to be real. “When you don’t know something, have the vulnerability and courage to say, ‘I don’t have a good answer for that right now. I’d be interested in your perspective.’” That reframing, she says, invites others to engage and shows that you’re trustworthy and authentic.

In *The Chocolate Conversation*, Fass explains that conversations occur in three layers, like layers of a cake—the top layer is your worldview, the middle layer is the expectation that you set for yourself and others, and at the bottom is the concern layer, often expressed through frustration or complaining. When solving problems, Fass urges leaders to address the concern layer first.

As an example, she points to a history-changing conversation in the film *Hidden Figures* when Mary Jackson, hoping to become a NASA engineer, tells a judge she wants to take advanced classes at a white school in segregated Virginia. “He had been first in his family in a number of things,” Fass says. “She said, ‘One hundred years from now, of all the cases you’re going to hear today, which one is going to matter a hundred years from now?’ And that’s what got her the classes. Knowing how to position conversations is an art.”

PULL OTHERS UP BEHIND YOU

Being in senior leadership gives women the power to make changes—including changes to help mitigate the glass cliff for those coming up next. “How do you build a pipeline of women leaders and women leaders of color?” Akinsanya-Rose poses.

She advocates for sponsorship programs that invite underrepresented individuals—perhaps high-potential, up-and-coming leaders or women—saying, “That builds the relationships they need and allows them to add to the culture. Then when you ask them to take on a role, they’re ready.”

KNOW WHEN TO SAY NO

Glass cliff positions can be exciting and lead to tremendous growth. But think hard before you leap. “The red flag is when your brain is saying, ‘This is a great title, this is great money,’ but your gut is telling you there’s danger,” Akinsanya-Rose says. “Pay attention to your intuition. Get with your mentors and coach friends and unpack that before moving forward.”

“Sometimes the risk isn’t worth it,” Fass adds. “Ask, is it realistic to believe that I can do it? It might be a stretch—I can deal with that—but am I putting myself in harm’s way because I’m dazzled by the opportunity? Will I end up in a situation where I fail? You really have to assess the risk.”

As women ascend into the upper echelons, it’s important to enter any new position clear-eyed. “I don’t think [the glass cliff is] going to go away anytime soon,” Akinsanya-Rose says. “But there are companies that have done extraordinary things to help.”

At Cambium, for example, women can join employee resource groups to connect and offer mutual support.

If you make the leap, get what you need to succeed—including support inside and outside the organization—before signing on. Only then can you transform a challenging situation into a rewarding adventure. **EW**

Introducing...

Executive Woman's Most Powerful Women in the C-Suite 2025 List

Executive Woman magazine is proud to launch a groundbreaking feature celebrating powerhouse executives in CFO, CTO, CHRO, CMO, and other senior leadership roles. If you know a visionary woman redefining corporate leadership and championing inclusive and equitable practices, innovation, and mentorship, nominate her now to be featured in the Summer issue of *Executive Woman*.

Eligibility

- Must hold a C-Suite title (excluding CEOs) at a U.S.-based organization
- Outstanding business growth and transformation achievements
- Innovation leadership and strategic vision
 - Industry thought leadership and influence
 - Active mentorship of rising women leaders
 - Meaningful community and philanthropic impact

Nomination Deadline:
February 28, 2025

Administration Fee: \$249

Visit diversitywoman.com/nominations to submit your nomination today.



Executive WOMAN

Most Powerful Women *in the* **C-Suite**

Principles to Grow by

In the quest for pay parity, here are five steps women can take to increase their earning trajectory

BY JANET HEIT

WHEN MARILYN LODEN COINED the term *glass ceiling* in 1978, American women

earned, on average, 60 cents for every dollar earned by white men. By 2022, that had increased to 82 cents for white women and 80 cents for Asian American women. Black and Latina women lagged behind, at 64 cents and 58 cents to the dollar, respectively. The situation has not improved since then. According to the US Census, the gap between men's and women's pay grew in 2023, the first time the gender pay difference worsened since 2003. And need we mention the microaggressions that Catalyst, the women's workplace-equity nonprofit, termed an "emotional tax" on people of color in the workplace?

Still, against often formidable odds, women, including women of color, are taking charge of their career trajectories by assessing their worth and actively seeking their next step. It's not easy, and not always successful on a desired timetable, but these best practices can increase the odds of turning goals into achievements.

ACCELERATE

1 Build your network and visibility

"Growing up, were you told to just keep your head down and do the work?" asks Cynthia Pong, founder and CEO of Embrace Change, on her blog. "For many professionals of color,

those words will place you on the fast track to career stagnation." Pong coaches clients to build "career insurance," which she defines as "a range of skills, networks, and strategies that provide security and opportunities throughout your career journey." She suggests taking advantage of volunteer opportunities in the office and the community to hone leadership skills, and using social media strategically to share insights of thought leaders, as well as your own.

If you're working remotely, connect through video chats. If you're an introvert, or uncomfortable with public speaking, consider working with a mentor or coach to help you ace group situations. For women of color, Pong writes, find "mentors or sponsors who understand what it's like to be a woman of color in your workplace. Join professional organizations to connect with those in your field, and join organizations that focus on supporting professional women of color. We need safe spaces where we can put the masks down and get real about some things!"

2 Release perfection

"I hate the idea of promoting myself," said a client to Analiza Quiroz Wolf, an executive coach and CEO of Women of Color Rise. "But if I want to



move up, I need to toot my own horn.” After growing up in an Asian American family, Wolf realized as an adult that certain cultural values embedded during her earlier years, such as avoiding public disagreements and striving for perfection, ran counter to workplace expectations of being ready for promotion into a leadership position. “We don’t raise our hand, and then we wonder why we don’t get the opportunity or promotion,” Wolf explains that “to let go of the swamp of perfection is to let go of what has helped us feel safe.” But for ambitious women in middle management seeking to move up, perfectionism becomes a trap. “Smart women still feel like no one can do it the way they know it needs to be done, but the inability to delegate is hurting you.”

If you’re uncomfortable with presentations, Wolf recommends this trio of affirmations: “First, I pause and make a deliberate decision that I’m going to put in my time and effort, and it’s going to be OK. Second, I’m going to put together the presentation a few weeks in advance, and I’m going to block off 30 minutes to practice again the day before. And then right before the presentation, I’ll spend five minutes looking at my topic. And third, I remind myself that whatever happens, I’m just going to lean in, and it’s going to be OK.”

3 Upskill your technical and emotional intelligence

As the pandemic lockdown made abundantly clear, ambitious women, especially women of color, can’t afford to back-burner skill building. Remote and hybrid work created new pathways and challenges to promotion. Julie Thue, an employee relations consultant at University of California, Davis, says employers seek a combination of both hard and soft competencies for senior-management-track positions. Hard skills demonstrate your tech know-how, while soft “people” skills could include taking initiative, feeling comfortable working with remote and

“Don’t let people bully you—and they will try, especially when you’re a woman. Don’t be afraid to be your best advocate.”

hybrid teams, and handling difficult workplace situations, including everyday microaggressions. Your ability to handle these challenges—to not “take the bait,” so to speak—is where upskilling your emotional intelligence can serve you well. Consider working with a coach, attending workshops offered by professional associations, or taking advantage of your company’s in-house training if available.

Furthermore, Thue says, you may be assessed for “how open you are to the realization that not everyone’s experiences are your own. As an old supervisor of mine used to say, ‘You’ve got to come in, park your passions at the door, and do the work.’”

4 Focus—it’s a win-win

To keep her followers’ eyes on the prize of promotability, executive coach and author Marti Fischer has proposed “A Rule of Three for Getting Promoted” in her monthly newsletter: “Client: How does this project connect to or improve client experience? Company: How does this project connect with the organization’s business goals? Career: How does this project elevate my skills or career goals?” The reasoning behind the three questions, writes Fischer, is that “work tied to customer or client experience is the most visible to managers as it directly impacts their performance goals and has a direct line to promotability for you.”

5 Take (strategic) risks, and lead with integrity

What happens if you’ve made it clear that you’d like to move up, but the opportunity isn’t offered to you? If you aren’t able to advance where you are, consider changing companies. Trini E. Ross, the US attorney for the Western District of New York, mentors many women of color in mid-career. “I think for Black women especially, there’s a lack of understanding of us in the workplace. My advice to those I mentor is, you can’t be afraid of the unknown. People get into situations where a company wants to keep them, and promises things, and a year later hasn’t acted on that promise. I tell them to go to the person who promised and remind them you were told you were going to get a promotion. Ask for a timeframe, and if it’s too long, let them know, because you’ve been waiting. Then, when the time comes, if you still don’t get [the promised promotion], be polite, don’t burn bridges, and move on.”

Ross says, “Do the right thing, even when it’s the hard thing. I’ve led my life and career with the guiding light of integrity.” She adds, “Don’t let people bully you—and they will try, especially when you’re a woman. Don’t be afraid to be your best advocate.”

According to the 2024 *Women in the Workplace* report compiled by McKinsey and Lean In, companies are increasingly taking steps to reduce bias during hiring and in structuring performance reviews. Diversity at the top is good for business, and more women than ever are headed in that direction. Let these time-tested remedies be your North Star, guiding you ever upward.

EW

Janet Heit’s most recent article for *Diversity Woman* was “*The Art of the Apology*” (Summer 2024).



FRESH INSIGHT ROSINA RACIOPPI

Mentors: The North Star of Career Growth and Development



“A good mentor fully understands that for anyone to achieve success in business, relationships matter.”

As president and CEO of WOMEN Unlimited Inc., Dr. Rosina Racioppi leads initiatives to help Fortune 1000 companies cultivate the culture and talent needed to achieve greater growth and profitability.

AS PRESIDENT AND CEO of WOMEN Unlimited Inc., I run an organization that has been helping corporations develop their female talent for over 30 years. We’ve worked with more than 200 major companies and more than 18,000 women in programs that emphasize the value of mentoring relationships. Mentoring is critical to our learning framework and, in fact, is part of our name: the *M* in WOMEN is for mentoring.

One developmental setback that shows up continually, especially for early-career women, is a focus on doing a good job without understanding the importance of developing relationships. As we often say, “Doing a good job alone will keep you in that job.”

Additionally, we have found that companies often struggle with creating strategies to support women’s growth and development and can lean toward a one-size-fits-all approach. In doing so, they fail to capture the value of diversity to corporate growth and profitability.

A good mentor fully understands that for anyone to achieve success in business, relationships matter and will counsel women to create

individualized career strategies accordingly. Mentors can both assist women in developing career-advancing relationships and help companies leverage the diversity that characterizes women in the workforce.

Here are other examples of the power of mentors:

- Mentors point mentees in the direction of successful risk-taking, the kind that positions them in the eyes of corporate leaders as organizational contributors.
- Mentors guide women in developing relationships that help them gain insights they would not have come to on their own.
- With their firsthand knowledge of how the organization works, mentors help women forge strategies that mesh career goals with corporate ones.
- Mentors shine a light on their mentees’ unique talents and encourage them to grow those talents.
- Mentors lead mentees away from career-stalling attitudes toward behaviors conducive to growth and development.
- Mentors advise mentees to interact with the diverse populations that make up today’s workplace, widening both their perspectives and their contributions.

Guidelines for forging a successful mentoring relationship

- Have more than one mentor. Include men and women from diverse populations. Go beyond those who look like you.
- In seeking out women mentors, find those who have successfully navigated the corporate landscape.
- Be proactive with both current and potential mentors. As the saying goes, “If you don’t ask, they can’t say yes.”
- Have an agenda for when you meet with your mentors so they will view you as well organized and respectful of their time.
- Realize your mentoring needs will change as you advance. The right mentors for supervisors are not the right mentors for department heads or VPs.
- Always be open to suggestions from your mentors. You don’t have to follow them all or agree with them all, but listen to them all. Companies are changing at breakneck speed, with opportunities and challenges happening faster than ever. This unrelenting pace requires women to simultaneously develop competencies for their current roles and for future ones. Mentors who have successfully weathered changes that impact both careers and organizations are ideal advisors for guiding women in uncertain and fast-paced times. Ignoring or underutilizing these experienced allies is a career-sabotaging mistake. **EW**



Service First

SAIC CEO **TONI TOWNES-WHITLEY** was raised to prioritize service. Today, that includes serving as a role model and guide for aspiring women leaders.

BY JACKIE KRENTZMAN

WHEN THE \$7.5 BILLION TECHNOLOGY and defense contracting firm Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) named Toni Townes-Whitley as CEO in 2023, she became the first Black woman to lead a Fortune 500 defense industry corporation. For those who know Townes-Whitley, this shattering of multiple glass ceilings came as no surprise. As the daughter in a family of firsts, the former Microsoft executive prepared for this opportunity her entire life.

Townes-Whitley grew up in Virginia, the daughter of an elementary school principal and a three-star general. Her father, Lieutenant General James F. “Cash” McCall (ret.) was the first African American comptroller of the United States Army. Townes-Whitley’s parents held high standards for her and her brother. They were expected to be the very best they could be, with the full understanding that their academic, athletic, and social efforts would impact their parents’ high-profile careers, and that the playing field (relative to their peers) was far from even.



“The idea of serving has always been critical to me. It was part of our faith and our family’s foundation. There was no question that you were going to serve—it was just a matter of where and when.”

“Everyone in my family was the first to do something,” says Townes-Whitley. “Even my grandfather, Reverend Lester Kendall Jackson, born in 1899 into a sharecropper family, applied to Harvard multiple times just to challenge the system. He worked with Martin Luther King Sr. to desegregate beaches across the South, finally landing in Gary, Indiana.”

Her family instilled in their children the expectation that the family legacy was to fight injustice, everywhere and for everyone.

“As a result, the idea of serving has always been critical to me,” she says. “It was part of our faith and our family’s foundation. There was no question that you were going to serve—it was just a matter of where and when.”

After graduating from the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, Townes-Whitley was poised to jump on the fast track to the pinnacle of whatever profession she set her mind to. But her path included a strategic detour—two and a half years serving in the Peace Corps in Gabon (Central Africa). Remember, first and foremost: service.

Townes-Whitley eventually rose to president at CGI Federal, a federal government IT consulting firm, then

spent nearly eight years at Microsoft, reaching the position of president of its US regulated industries, where she had a vast remit. She was responsible for a \$16 billion fast-growing portfolio, and also contributed to such major initiatives as reducing the company’s carbon footprint and building an ethical framework for Microsoft’s emerging artificial intelligence solution portfolio. Notably, she secured a \$10 billion cloud-computing contract with the Pentagon in 2019.

SAIC, which provides engineering, digital, and artificial intelligence mission support to the Department of Defense, intelligence and space agencies, and other branches of the federal government, came calling in 2023 when its CEO, Nazzic Keene, announced she was stepping down. Townes-Whitley’s background in a military family that prized leadership and patriotism and her impressive track record in technology, with significant experience interfacing with the defense technology sector, made her the perfect fit.

“Toni brings a clear vision for the company’s future and has not only launched a powerful enterprise growth strategy but is leading it with relevancy, innovation, and

differentiation,” says Donna Morea, SAIC board chair. “She is a leader who energizes the entire company and creates an environment that runs on respect and trust, listening, being nimble, and anticipating our customers’ needs while having the courage and experience to disrupt and create value.”

Today, as one of only two Black female CEOs for a Fortune 500 company (TIAA’s Thasunda Brown Duckett is the other) and one of only a handful of women in the upper echelons of the defense and technology sector, Townes-Whitley is acutely aware that she is a standard-bearer. She embraces this role and its platform for increasing women’s representation in the highest reaches of Corporate America.

“We have a very little table,” she says. “People ask me what it feels like to be among this group. And I tell them—it feels lonely.”

Over the years, she has cultivated a finely tuned philosophy on leadership development and advancement to turn that loneliness into community. Women tend to get caught up in impostor syndrome, she says, which can only hold them back. She recommends they read Rebecca Shambaugh’s book *It’s Not a Glass Ceiling, It’s a Sticky Floor: Free Yourself from the Hidden Behaviors Sabotaging Your Career Success*.

“The book is for any woman on the corporate track who is wondering if you’re an impostor, or is preoccupied or intimidated by glass ceilings,” she says. “Do not keep yourself on the floor. Do not self-select off the path. Move horizontally at times, stretch yourself with vertical moves, trust your instincts, go to organizations that need you. Get comfortable with uncomfortable decisions.”

That can be easier said than done. But Townes-Whitley has done it and, over the course of her career trajectory, has learned a number of valuable lessons that she is determined to pay forward.

It begins with formulating a set of core values and writing them down. “I have 10 that I developed 25 years ago,” says Townes-Whitley. “I encourage you to develop yours before you encounter a crisis. If you wait until the crisis, these important values will be shaped by the environment or the situation instead of by who you are.”

Next, she counsels, develop a growth mindset which, while a necessity for all leaders, is especially critical for women because the approach can help overcome societal barriers to thriving in leadership roles in which women tend to face more scrutiny or doubt.

“Carol Dweck’s research on the ‘growth mindset’ illustrates that people who believe their abilities can be developed through effort and learning are often more resilient, embrace challenges, and achieve greater success than those with a ‘fixed mindset,’ who believe their abilities are innate and unchangeable,” Townes-Whitley explains. “This



Townes-Whitley receiving an honor at the Thurgood Marshall College Fund CEO Impact Awards in 2024 for her dedication to HBCUs.



Townes-Whitley and SAIC executives presenting a donation to Building Homes for Heroes, which gifts mortgage-free homes to wounded veterans.

resonates with me, especially as it relates to embracing challenges and taking risks, stepping outside my comfort zone, seeking continuous learning and development opportunities, and embracing feedback.”

Another of Townes-Whitley’s priorities is recruitment and retention of diverse talent, especially women in the tech and defense industries.

“Retention of women in the defense industry involves creating an environment where they can thrive and grow,” she says. “While the industry can talk about how women play an integral role in fostering digital innovation and bringing unique perspectives to technology solutions, at SAIC we’re passionate about also ‘walking the walk.’”

That means making sure that the women at the 24,000-person company are in a position to be heard. (Perhaps not surprisingly, one of Townes-Whitley’s favorite songs is “The Room Where It Happens” from the musical *Hamilton*.) Half of SAIC’s executive leadership team are women, as are nearly half of its board of directors, including the chair. The difference in pay for women at SAIC compared with men is less than one percentage point on a role-to-role basis. Its AcceleratHER Women’s Leadership Academy, a nomination-based program that aims to grow the pipeline of future women leaders, has graduated more than 142 aspiring women leaders, with more than 90 percent of graduates moving into leadership roles within SAIC.

Another priority is developing future female leaders by supporting the educational aims of girls and women pursuing

STEM careers. For example, in 2022, SAIC made a \$1.5 million commitment to the Alabama School of Cyber Technology and Engineering, to go toward its mission of educating the future cyber-technology and engineering workforce; the high school’s most recent incoming class was 38 percent female. SAIC’s employee resource groups also support Girls Inc., a program focusing on girls’ STEM exploration, establishment of healthy relationships, and comfort with using their voices to advocate for themselves and others.

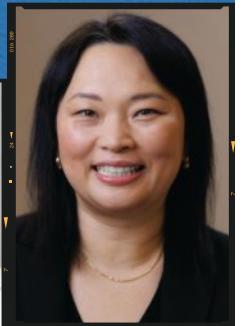
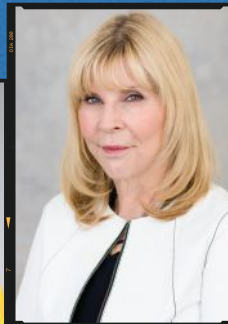
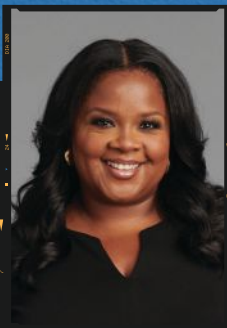
Of course, you can grease the wheels and put all the support systems in place, but Townes-Whitley is a realist. She understands that even with support, the path for rising women will be full of potholes. A company can do its best to pave the way, but ultimately, women will need to take charge of their own destinies, learn the rules of the career advancement game, and make those rules of engagement work for them.

“It starts with level setting,” she says. “You can’t play or change the game if you don’t know what the game is. Early and mid-career women sometimes say, ‘I’m just not going to play the game. I’m not that person.’ That’s super naive because you are on the chessboard, and moves are happening around you, whether you like it or not. Career advancement requires a plan, making moves, being aware of situations and opportunities, and building relationships. If you understand there is a ‘game,’ you can make informed choices about changing the game by playing differently. But stepping out of the game is a choice that will not change the game.”

Townes-Whitley appreciates her many career achievements and honors. But they do not alone define her. One of her 10 core values is “source of joy,” which she uses to remind herself that the job she does is not who she is. No job is the “source of her joy.” That emanates from her Christian faith.

She tells the story of her one-year anniversary as CEO, when SAIC had its highest stock return in 10 years on the same day that one of her grandsons developed a high fever. “And as thankful as I was about the company news, the only conversation I remember from that day was about the baby’s well-being with my daughter-in-law,” she says, emphasizing that it’s important to understand your priorities in life. “As well as you want to do in your day-to-day job, I hope it is not your source of joy. Knowing the difference between what you do and who you are is critical. People will make you feel like what you do is who you are. To that, I say no.” **EW**

Women Changing the Game



**IN 2025,
LEADERS LIKE
THESE ARE
SHOWING
THE WAY**

The quest of women leaders to reach higher leadership positions, including the C-suite, has been a process of slow and steady over the decades.

However, in recent years, that progress has, at least temporarily, stalled. According to a recent study by financial analytics firm S&P Global, the growth in women's representation among all senior leadership positions in the United States declined in 2023 for the first time in two decades. As a result, forecasts for parity have moved from 2033 to 2042.

There are many ways to reverse this trend, perhaps none more important than visibility. The seven executives in our “Women Changing the Game” feature

are shining examples of what it takes to achieve your loftiest goals.

The women—SVPs, EVPs and C-suite members in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors—each took a unique path to the top. But they share several traits like perseverance, unlimited talent, and strategic thinking.

These women of all races, cultures, identities, and backgrounds have demonstrated innovative approaches to business challenges and social change, made a measurable impact on revenue and profit or fundraising, and have proven to be strong team leaders—and as a result have been widely recognized in their industry for their contributions.

Like these über-successful women, we all can rise beyond the glass ceiling. And in the process, we will become the models for those coming up behind us, and workplace gender parity will be in our grasp at last.



Kristin Bertell, City of Hope

Executive Woman:
What advice would you give a rising woman leader who aspires to the C-suite and beyond?

Kristin Bertell: I would first ask about their personal and professional goals, then help them map out the pathway to success. There are many pathways to leadership that don't end in the C-suite. Leadership is a journey, and there is not just one path.

But what differentiates someone in the C-suite is leadership. A good leader must think beyond their subject-matter expertise and ask themselves, "How do I add value as a leader, and what does my value add to this organization?"

EW: What have been the keys to your ability to rise into greater leadership positions?

KB: During my 35 years of professional growth, I have

"Obstacles are opportunities for growth. Any time you look back at smooth sailing in your career, you weren't growing a lot during that time period."

been truly fortunate to have both mentors and sponsors. A mentor is someone ahead of you in the field who can provide coaching to help you overcome challenges or develop professional skills. A sponsor takes a deeper interest in your professional and personal development, coming alongside you and asking, "Where do you want to be five years from now, and how can I help position you at the right tables?"

Second, choose your partner well. I was very fortunate to have a spouse who is also a partner in my professional life.

And lastly, you've got to put in the work. You have to understand that leadership is not an aspiration. It's an invitation. You've got to really put in the work.

EW: How did you overcome the obstacles you faced?

KB: Obstacles are opportunities for growth. Any time you look back at smooth sailing in your career, you weren't growing a lot during that time period. Professional or personal challenges are moments when your sponsors and mentors can help provide valuable perspective. When you're in the thick of it, it's not fun,

FACTOIDS
Name: Kristin Bertell
Company: City of Hope
Job Title: Chief philanthropy officer
Education: BA, history, UCLA, and MA, communications management, Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at University of Southern California
City: Duarte, CA

but when you look in the rearview mirror, you'll see it was an opportunity that really helped you grow.

EW: What encouraging signs do you see for the future of women in leadership? What signs give you confidence and hope for the future of women in leadership?

KB: When I started my career, I always looked at the women ahead of me, and what I found was that women were trying to fit into a man's world.

Thirty-five years later, we are happy to show up as women in the workplace. We are proud to bring the authentic female voice and leadership style to the table. We know we offer something unique.

We've learned that diversity in the workplace is a strength, and we're embracing the innovation that comes with having a diverse workforce. I think that is something to be celebrated.

Kelli Clark, Emerson

Executive Woman: How did your upbringing influence your life and work today?

Kelli Clark: I grew up in Minot, North Dakota—a place where most people look, believe, and identify the same way. When I moved to Scotland to complete my master’s degree, for the first time in my life I was part of a global community. Fascinated by the backgrounds, perspectives, interests, and experiences of people from around the world, I found that the experience ignited a curiosity within me and an understanding that there is more than one “right” way to do many things. That perspective ultimately shaped the career path I took and the work I do today.

EW: What advice would you give a rising woman leader who aspires to the C-suite and beyond?

KC: Speak up and take up space. Early in my career, I would sit quietly or refrain from sharing a thought or idea in a meeting—primarily because I didn’t want to offend a colleague by interrupting them. It was much later that I realized we all—and women in particular—have a way of processing, understanding situations, analyzing data, and thinking about solutions that is not only needed but critical for our businesses and organizations. Take your seat at the table, own your space, and share your ideas like the world depends on it—because it does!

EW: How does your LGBTQ identity inform your work?

FACTOIDS

Name: Kelli Clark

Company: Emerson

Job Title: Vice president, culture, employee experience, and employee

Education: BS, communication, Missouri State University, and MS, international business, Robert Gordon University

City: Chicago, IL



“The best leaders are curious, about themselves and the people and world around them.”

KC: I didn’t identify as part of the LGBTQ community until I fell in love with my now wife, a bit later in life. Almost immediately, I realized all that I had previously taken for granted—from the plans I had for the weekend, conversations about my family with new colleagues, answering interview questions, wondering if I would be accepted by a new team—essentially became a process of coming out over and over and over again.

I realized quickly I had a choice to make about how I was going to show up. I knew I couldn’t keep tap dancing and tiptoeing around the things that make me, me. I have

always wanted and needed to live fully as I am—and proudly. So I did.

As my leadership influence has grown, the reason for doing that has also grown. While it started out as a decision I was making for myself, I now feel a sense of responsibility to show up as my full self to hopefully affirm those who might be wondering if they will be accepted or experience a sense of belonging.

EW: What are the key attributes that great leaders must possess?

KC: The best leaders I know are curious, about themselves and the people and world around them. They are compassionate, are voracious learners, and are continually growing. They are clear and steadfast about the vision of where they are going, with enough humility to change their mind along the way.

Nicole Dye-Anderson, Wells Fargo

Executive Woman:
What are some obstacles you faced and how did you overcome them?

Nicole Dye-Anderson:
Throughout my professional career, I've often been the first or only woman of color in various professional settings. I've felt the pressure to be perfect to prove my worth, leading me to work harder and longer than my colleagues. Adding to the pressure of these situations, I was often a team of one, navigating these obstacles without the support that others might have.

In response, and it didn't happen overnight, I bet on myself. I sought out mentors, sponsors, and advocates through relationship building; I strengthened my voice and proved my worth by generating results.

EW: What encouraging signs do you see that give you confidence and hope for the future of women in leadership?

NDA: The list is long. In my professional world, my volunteer roles, and at home, I'm surrounded by smart, confident, and savvy women of all ages who are leading change in their organizations, who are taking on bigger roles, who advocate for other women and are looking for ways for their organizations, nonprofits, and teams to be more inclusive. As I look at the opportunities that our daughters have—I have one on the cusp of her career—I've never been more hopeful.



“The power of the relationships you form and nurture will pay off in ways you won’t even expect.”

EW: What advice would you give your younger self?

NDA: I recently spoke to a large group at a NextGen professionals conference, and I told them this: Your presence is needed and valuable. You deserve

to be in the room. This isn't luck. You are needed and valuable.

I'd also say: It's all about relationships. The power of the relationships you form and nurture will pay off in ways you won't even expect. Relationships can give you insight into an opportunity in the workplace, they can help you navigate a challenge, and they can raise your profile without your having to ask.

EW: What is a key initiative at your company that has helped women advance?

NDA: One initiative is our partnership with The Female Quotient (TFQ), which aims to advance women in the workplace. We conducted a research study, *Our Secret Numbers: Women, Men, and the Taboo Nature of Financial Health*. As women, we are conditioned to believe that talking about money is rude.

This mindset ends up restricting women's financial growth, investment opportunities, and earning potential.

We're also showing up with TFQ at major industry events like SXSW and Advertising Week to elevate women's voices where they often haven't been.

FACTOIDS

Name: Nicole Dye-Anderson

Company: Wells Fargo

Job Title: Senior vice president/managing director, head of corporate communications, experiential & influencer strategy—cards and merchant services

Education: BA, public relations, Delaware State University

City: Wilmington, DE



Valerie Grillo, Google

Executive Woman:
How did your upbringing influence your life and work?

Valerie Grillo:

Learning was always a strong and cherished value in my family. My grandmother went to college in her early 40s and went on to earn her master's degree in teaching. She became an elementary school teacher at a time in her life when most would traditionally be preparing for retirement.

She reinforced education as an important way to better oneself and to use that education to do well by

others. As a result, I have always gravitated toward career opportunities that promoted the most growth. Her example also taught me that learning comes from everywhere; one of the most rewarding parts of my career has been what I've learned from those around me—my team, my clients, and my peers—on a daily basis.

EW: What advice would you give a rising woman leader who aspires to the C-suite and beyond?

VG: Share your aspirations with your managers, mentors,

"I see women speaking up more now than ever before. I see less hesitation from women in sharing their perspectives, particularly when their view veers from the majority."

and others who touch your professional life. Oftentimes, women are hesitant to share their ambitions, as they fear it will be viewed as a negative. However, without your being clear about your aspirations, others can make assumptions about what

you want. Sharing your ambitions allows you to ask for specific feedback on the skills you should develop to better prepare you for the roles you want.

EW: What are the key attributes that great leaders must possess?

VG: Great leaders show up with curiosity, empathy, and authenticity. A leader's job is to unlock the potential of their team. This is done best

when leaders ask questions to understand team members' motivations and challenges. A leader must be able to put themselves in the shoes of their direct reports and understand their perspectives. Lastly, it is important to lead with candor. A leader should be authentic, sharing feedback in a way that supports and develops the team.

EW: What encouraging signs do you see for the future of women in leadership?

VG: I see women speaking up more now than ever before. I see less hesitation from women in sharing their perspectives, particularly when their view veers from the majority. This is so needed—we need more women sharing their voices and challenging the status quo.

EW: What advice would you give your younger self?

VG: Don't shy away from the "messy" projects or work that others may be hesitant to take on. The projects may seem daunting at the time, but they come with big rewards. Throughout my career, my greatest growth and learnings have come from difficult, challenging projects.

FACTOIDS

Name: Valerie Grillo

Company: Google

Job Title: Vice president, human resources

Education: BA, psychology, Brown University, and MA, organizational psychology, Columbia University

City: New York, NY



Edna Kane-Williams, AARP

Executive Woman:
What advice would you give a woman leader who aspires to the C-suite and beyond?

Edna Kane-Williams:

Choose mentors, champions, and sponsors carefully. Each can serve a different role in your career—people whom you admire and from whom you can seek advice and discuss almost anything.

Read books on leadership principles and books by or about women and men who have climbed ladders to successful leadership.

Be wise in choosing your relationships of all sorts. Be sure they are compatible with your aspirations and ideals.

Choose a field that you are passionate about, something

FACTOIDS

Name: Edna Kane-Williams

Company: AARP

Job Title: Executive vice president and chief diversity officer

Education: BA, Yale University, and MA, George Washington University

City: Washington, DC

“Great leaders must be attentive to the morale and needs of people working under their leadership.”

you enjoy so much that it will keep you focused.

Never forget self-care—not only regular medical checkups but good mental-health care such as taking vacations, spending time with family and friends, and engaging in restful activities you enjoy.

EW: What are some key initiatives at your company that have helped women advance? And how have those helped you personally?

EKW: Even as many major organizations and corporations

have diminished their diversity efforts, AARP remains laser focused on and has strengthened our vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion. In March 2021, our then CEO Jo Ann Jenkins announced the creation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion group. She promoted me from senior vice president of multicultural leadership to executive vice president and chief diversity officer to lead the new group. While the promotion was a professional accomplishment, for me it also affirmed my personal diligence, consistency, and adherence to the righteous principles of equality over the years. In this role, I have striven to increase

our support for groups that advocate for issues enhancing the lives of women. We host a yearly Women’s Summit, which has been especially helpful to staff.

EW: What are the key attributes that great leaders must possess?

EKW: Great leaders must be able to recognize their strengths and talents and operate within them. But they must also recognize their weaknesses, and delegate to people who augment those weaknesses in order to maximize their ability to meet corporate goals.

Great leaders must be attentive to the morale and needs of people working under their leadership. For example, they must never be afraid to elevate and celebrate other people, including applauding coworkers on their team.

Finally, great leaders must have a vision and a plan that’s adjustable when necessary.

EW: What advice would you give your younger self?

EKW: It may sound trite, but I would encourage my younger self to not be afraid of failure. One of my favorite quotes is, “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better” [Samuel Beckett].

Dr. Nancy D. O'Reilly, Women Connect4Good

Executive Woman: What are some obstacles you faced, and how did you overcome them?

Nancy O'Reilly: A lack of support. Having three daughters challenged me, and I studied hard to earn a degree for each one. When I was working on my doctorate, people asked, "Why aren't you at home with your family?" I have no regrets for one simple and important reason: I had a profound need to show women we could have it all if we kept pursuing our dreams and goals.

EW: What would give you confidence and hope for the future of women in leadership?

NO: Once the Equal Rights Amendment is published in the Constitution, men

and women will be truly equal under the law, and sex discrimination in employment and wages, reproductive rights, insurance, Social Security, education, and more will not be tolerated. It would, instead, be a violation of our constitutional rights. That will change the narrative and open doors that have been closed to us for far too long.

EW: How have your nonwork activities—such as personal passions—helped you advance in your career?

NO: In my 60s, I fell in love with horses. Riding turned into showing and winning, breeding, and, finally, buying the Southern California Equestrian Center. My relationship with horses has taught me about connection and trust. I've learned that accomplishing important things is easier with honesty and authenticity, which allow each of us to explore and use our talents in our own unique way.

EW: How did your upbringing influence your life and work today?

NO: Growing up, I was inspired by my namesake, my grandmother Mama Nancy.



"Get a mentor. No one gets anywhere alone—we all need someone who believes in us and guides us."

Though petite, she had a commanding presence, always insisting on the best table in any restaurant. If the waiter had other plans, she'd confidently point to her desired spot, where we'd sit. Watching her taught me the power of self-assurance and clear intentions. I knew that if I embodied her confidence, I could succeed at anything I pursued.

EW: What advice would you give a rising woman leader who aspires to the C-suite and beyond?

NO: Get comfortable being uncomfortable. Many women feel they need one more degree or promotion before stepping up, but that's not true. I've been the only woman at so many tables that I'm used to it, but I

wasn't always. Remember, it's about the job, not whether you're a woman or not. Also, get a mentor. No one gets anywhere alone. We all need someone who believes in us and guides us. Behind every successful person is someone who showed them the way.

EW: What are the key attributes that great leaders possess?

NO: Empathy is the number-one quality in a great leader. We all want to work in a place where we feel valued, connected, and motivated to make a meaningful impact. A great leader understands this, listens deeply, and develops supportive relationships that benefit everyone and drive the best results.

FACTOIDS

Name: Dr. Nancy D. O'Reilly

Company: Women Connect4Good

Job Title: Founder and president

Education: BA/BS, sociology and psychology, Drury University, and PsyD, Forest Institute of Professional Psychology

City: Santa Barbara, CA



Jenny Kim Park, Bank of America

Executive Woman:
What is a leadership lesson you learned early in life?

Jenny Kim Park:

Many times I received constructive feedback from managers and mentors who wanted me to succeed. I didn't always appreciate it, especially earlier in my career. I've since learned that not listening to feedback held me back. I've learned that feedback can be an invaluable glimpse of what is being said about you when you are not in the room during conversations about career mobility.

Taking time to understand the feedback can help improve your ability to progress faster in your career. It also provides a level of respect between yourself and the person who took the bold action to share it with you.

FACTOIDS

Name: Jenny Kim Park

Company: Bank of America

Job Title: Chief diversity and inclusion officer

Education: BA, journalism, San Francisco State University

City: New York, NY

"The greatest leaders create inclusive environments where our teammates' talent can be drawn out, and an appreciation for what everyone can bring to the table is welcomed."

Feedback is not meant to be agreed with or disagreed with, but understood. It is our responsibility as leaders to be clear.

EW: What are some key initiatives at your company that have helped women advance?

JKP: In addition to a robust employee network group called

LEAD for Women, which is utilized by over 50,000 employees, we think about how to support employees' continued career advancement during different phases in their lives. We are seeing more women entering and staying in the workforce than ever before.

Having access to child-care benefits, 16 weeks of paid parental leave, and menopause benefits are some ways we think about women holistically.

EW: What are the key attributes that great leaders must possess?

JKP: Great leaders demonstrate strong listening skills, are empathetic, show humility, are great communicators, and are thoughtfully decisive.

The greatest leaders tap into these skills and create inclusive environments where our teammates' talent can be drawn out and an appreciation for what everyone can bring to the table is welcomed.

We call it being a great place to work—where our employees feel they can bring their best, whole selves to work and find long, fulfilling careers. To be a great place to work we have to foster an inclusive culture for all of our employees. This starts with the leadership.

EW: What encouraging signs do you see that give you confidence and hope for the future of women in leadership?

JKP: I am extremely optimistic about the future of women in leadership. Women are graduating at higher rates from college; they are entering the workforce at higher rates and staying in the workforce at higher rates.

Inside our company, more women are taking on senior roles than ever before.

It takes time and effort, but I remain positive and am grateful for the allyship of so many who are doing great work to continue to advance women. **EW**

Female Leadership Making an Impact

THE 2025

POWER
100

*Meet 100 exceptional
women leaders who are
making their mark*

BY EDDIE LEE & CAROLYN M. BROWN

THE 2025 POWER 100

Executive Woman is shining a light on talented, high-potential women leaders with this fourth annual Power 100 list. The list highlights 100 extraordinary women on the fast track to top executive ranks and the C-suite. This Power 100 cohort, which is just a small sampling of the multitudes of women making their mark at their companies and in their industries, represents leaders in finance, technology, retail, health care, transportation, and more.

McKinsey and LeanIn.org's *Women in the Workplace 2024* report reveals that women's representation has increased at every level of corporate management. Most notably, women today make up 29 percent of C-suite positions, compared with 17 percent in 2015, thanks to companies taking steps to support the advancement of women and make the workplace more equitable. Nevertheless, gender parity continues to be a long-term goal. Therefore, it is critical that we always celebrate the wins and, as in this issue, showcase some of the many thousands of women leaders blazing a trail and making what may seem like unreachable goals achievable.

How we compiled the Power 100

To create our Power 100 list, *Executive Woman* selected immensely capable, high-potential women across all races, cultures, identities, and backgrounds. These women, ranging in roles from manager to senior vice president, have been identified by their organizations as future (and current!) stars. They have also demonstrated a track record of increasing responsibility throughout their careers, leading successful teams, delivering notable initiatives, leveraging talent and innovation, and making an impact at their companies and within their communities.

Join us in honoring these 100 amazing women leaders, inspirations to us all.

Note: All titles and companies are accurate as of November 2024.

SARAH AIOSA SVP and President of Latin America for MSD (Merck Sharp & Dohme) | Merck



Since early 2022, Aiosa has set the strategic direction and managed the P&L for Human Health across Merck's Latin American region, encompassing 5,000 employees in more than 30 countries. Previously, she was managing director of MSD Sweden, certified among the Best Places to Work under her leadership. Aiosa is the president and chair of Fifarma (the Latin American Federation of the Pharmaceutical Industry), and chair of the US-Colombia Business Council. In 2023, she was named one of the 50 Most Powerful Latinas by the Association of Latino Professionals for America.

"In five years, I will leverage my C-suite position to foster a positive culture of belonging, driving lasting impact for our company, communities, and patients. I will use my role to sponsor and advocate for more bold, qualified women and diverse leaders who belong at tables of transformation."

VEMITRA ALEXANDER Office of STEM Engagement Program Specialist | NASA



Alexander serves as a program specialist for both NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama, and NASA's Stennis Space Center in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. In these roles, she is activity manager for the agency's Human Exploration Rover Challenge and the Minority University Research and Education Project Space Technology Artemis Research program. Additionally, she is on temporary assignment with the NASA Science Mission Directorate Bridge Program, working as the program liaison for program evaluation and community engagement.

"Over the next five years, I aspire to lead NASA's commitment to empowering women and minorities within the STEM landscape by focusing on impactful educational initiatives and crucial partnerships and [by] mentoring emerging talent. My aim is to remove

barriers to ensure students, regardless of their background, can pursue and excel in STEM careers with confidence."

ARICA ALLEN VP, Hospitality and Innovation, Global Aviation, Sodexo Live! | Sodexo



Allen is a trailblazing leader in customer experience and team development, responsible for globally scaling a world-class e-learning system, a holistic guest experience strategy, and a state-of-the-art training center in Atlanta. She has led teams in the health-care, business and industry, and travel and leisure sectors and has had progressively increasing responsibility for global, diverse, and high-achieving teams. Allen's previous work experience includes positions at Boeing, Yale University, New Haven Healthcare, United Airlines, JPMorgan-Chase, American Express, Merck, and Delta Airlines.

"Externally, our team places an emphasis on developing a diverse candidate pipeline for the segment, leveraging employee referrals and proactive sourcing. Coupled with our internal approach focused on succession planning and the coaching and development of our minority leaders, we ensure a clear diversity, equity, and inclusion candidate pool to close the leadership gap."

SHILPA ARORA General Manager | DoorDash Canada



Arora oversees holistic cross-country business strategy, growth, operations, and employee development. With an international career spanning nearly two decades and several distinct industries, her leadership across financial advisory, mergers and acquisitions, corporate strategy and innovation, and digital transformation underscores her breadth of strategic insights. She is a resilient leader in technology and an advocate for diversity and inclusion and intersectional representation in the workplace.

"Beyond actively participating in DoorDash's Women@ ERG, I developed mentorship programs to provide women

with clear opportunities for growth—regardless of their career stage. I established *She the North* for DoorDash Canada, a community for women’s empowerment, where I host DashTalks to provide women leaders an opportunity to share candid workplace experiences. I have ensured pay equity and elevated women to oversee strategic functions and join Canada’s leadership team.”

CRYSTAL ANDREWS BANKS
Global Head, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging | Kraft Heinz



Banks is a dynamic DEI&B leader driving transformative change at Kraft Heinz. With over a

decade of experience in the D&I field, she’s a proven change agent, crafting innovative solutions that foster inclusion and equity. At Kraft Heinz, Banks oversees the company’s DEI&B strategy, consulting with teams and spearheading initiatives across the organization. Recognized by *Essence* magazine and *Crain’s Chicago Business* for her impactful work, Banks also serves on the boards of Girls in the Game and the Kraft Heinz Company Foundation.

“At Kraft Heinz, we’re shattering glass ceilings and paving the way for a more equitable future. We’ve implemented comprehensive initiatives to empower women, including targeted development programs, mentorship opportunities, enhanced employee benefits, and flexible work arrangements.”

LAURA BARRÓN-LÓPEZ
White House Correspondent, PBS News Hour | WETA



In addition to being the White House correspondent for WETA-produced *PBS News Hour*, Barrón-López

is a CNN political analyst. She was part of the *News Hour* team honored with a Peabody Award in 2024 for its

coverage of the Israel-Hamas war. Previously, Barrón-López was a White House and national political reporter at Politico.

“One of News Hour’s co-anchors is a woman, and so many of our executive and senior producers across PBS News Weekend and Washington Week are women. Out of all the newsrooms I’ve worked in, it’s the one with the most women in leadership positions and is an empowering place to be.”

THERESA BAZAN
SVP, Director of National Sales Enablement | Comerica Bank



A seasoned professional with 35 years of banking industry experience, Bazan spearheads strategic

initiatives for Comerica’s consumer and small business banking segments, driving growth through innovative strategies, partnerships, and comprehensive banker readiness programs. Her leadership extends to developing processes and support tools to ensure the attainment of company objectives while excelling in incentive and performance management. She is committed to community empowerment, notably having served as president of Dress for Success Houston Women’s Corporate Guild.

“Comerica is closing the gender leadership gap by (1) requiring diverse candidate slates and holding leaders accountable via a DEI scorecard; (2) offering programs like Leadership Development, Emerging Leaders, and DEI Talent Pathways partnering with Inforum and HACE [Hispanic Alliance for Career Enhancement]; and (3) conducting annual pay equity analysis to ensure fair and equitable pay for all.”

FAYLENE BELL
Senior Director, Digital Marketing | Nvidia



Bell is a distinguished digital and product marketing executive with over two decades of experience in

advertising, financial services, and high-tech industries. In her current role at tech giant Nvidia, she oversees website strategy and operations, enhancing customer performance and engagement. Bell’s expertise spans digital strategy, product development, and analytical marketing, driving significant revenue growth and customer acquisition. Her career includes impactful roles at AT&T, American Cancer Society, Digitas, and American Express. She is a change agent recognized for delivering flawless marketing campaigns with precise road maps and media plans to drive millions in increased revenue and acquisition of customers.

“In five years, I aim to lead groundbreaking marketing technology initiatives and assume a more influential executive role, driving significant industry transformation. By leveraging rapidly evolving AI and advanced technologies, I’ll spearhead cutting-edge solutions that revolutionize marketing practices and address critical challenges. Concurrently, I’ll amplify my voice to inspire and advance women and minorities in tech careers, fostering diversity and innovation in the field.”

JEWEL BELL
Assistant Chief Transportation Officer for Bus | Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)



Bell is a dedicated transportation pro with 26 years of experience at WMATA. In her role as assistant

chief transportation officer for the bus department, she is responsible for eight bus divisions across the Department of Motor Vehicles, with

oversight of approximately 2,600 bus operators and an on-street bus operations management team of over 100 personnel who monitor daily service. She is also responsible for a shuttle team and a signs and shelter team. Bell manages a budget of more than \$300 million.

“At WMATA, we’re closing the gender leadership gap by fostering inclusivity, providing leadership development opportunities, and actively promoting women at all levels. We’re committed to creating pathways for women to lead and ensuring diverse voices shape the future of transportation.”

LISHA BELL
Head of Economic Opportunity Fund | PayPal Ventures



With decades of experience in fintech innovation, Bell has been at the forefront of the field, leading

teams that revolutionized the consumer payments industry. She launched the first Near Field Communications contactless wallet in 2011, which later became Apple Pay and Google Pay. She joined PayPal in 2019, spearheading the launch of Venmo’s commerce platform. She has crafted a framework at PayPal for developing a comprehensive fund strategy to promote diversity and inclusion in venture capital. Bell is a member of Pipeline Angels, an angel investing network, and cofounder of BLXVC, a syndicate of angel investors.

“Black women are a powerful force in entrepreneurship, yet their ventures receive less than 1 percent of venture capital—a narrative I’m determined to change. I invest in Black and Brown women founders and emerging fund managers, inspire more women to become angel investors, and champion their journeys on the Sisters with Ventures podcast. My vision is to build the first women-of-color-led fund of funds.”



ANDREA BERTELS
VP, Corporate Citizenship | Nielsen



Bertels and her team lead Nielsen's environmental, social, and governance (ESG)

responsible practices and reporting efforts, including the company's ESG report. They also work to deepen employee engagement through Nielsen's global volunteer and environmental programs, and drive meaningful community partnerships through its Data for Good pro bono projects. Bertels also serves as president and executive director of grant making for the Nielsen Foundation, whose mission is to power and advance inclusive innovation and representation in the media and technology industries, especially through data and research.

"Throughout my career, I've worked with people I admire and respect to solve hard problems ranging from effective philanthropy to reducing emissions. I want to keep working with great people and ingrain responsibility and sustainability into an organization's core strategy so we can make a positive impact on people and the world."

BEVERLY BLAN
Business Development Executive and China Practice Coleader | Moss Adams



Blan coleads Moss Adams's China Practice, guiding both US and Chinese clients in

their goals to implement best-in-class financial and operating practices. She is highly knowledgeable about the breadth of the firm's technical expertise across tax, audit, and

advisory services. The firm's China Practice has experienced robust growth since she joined the leadership team, significantly expanding the number of clients served. In 2020, Blan was recognized as one of *San Francisco Business Times's* Most Influential Women.

"In five years I aim to be an effective advocate for women in business, actively boosting female representation on boards and in crucial finance leadership roles."

NATASHA BRINEGAR
VP, Category Management, Center Store | Food Lion



Brinegar provides strategic direction and oversight for center store category management,

merchandising, and pricing. She is responsible for total sales, profitability, and vendor relations for multiple categories, including dairy, frozen items, general merchandise, seasonal and everyday candy, health and beauty care, and home care. With more than 30 years at Food Lion, Brinegar began her career as a sales associate across the front end. She also serves as vice president of the Food Lion Feeds Charitable Foundation.

"Today and throughout my career, I want to continue supporting Food Lion's brand promise of nourishing families and setting them up for success in life. Our customers trust us, and the work I lead and support every day gives me great meaning and purpose."

MARISSA BROOKS
VP, Drama Development | CBS Studios



Joining CBS over eight years ago as an executive assistant, Brooks quickly rose through the ranks. She

now works with writers and producers to identify and develop emotionally satisfying and character-driven

stories. An advocate for new stories that have yet to be told and voices that haven't been heard, she also serves on the board of the CBS Studios Culture and Inclusion Council. She has championed such titles as the critically acclaimed *Elsbeth* starring Carrie Preston and *Matlock* starring Kathy Bates.

"I want to continue growing within my department and the company while simultaneously discovering new BIPOC talent and holding the door open for those climbing the corporate ladder behind me. Impact is important, and while small incremental changes don't always feel like much, they accumulate over time."

BRIANA BROWN
Senior Sourcing Manager—Sales and Operations Planning | GE Aerospace



Brown is a seasoned supply chain operations and program management professional with a decade of

experience in aerospace and defense. At GE Aerospace, she leads sales and operations planning, ensuring efficient supply chain management and risk mitigation. A certified project management professional with a proven track record and a positive attitude, Brown is committed to creating more equitable communities through access, innovation, and social investment. She has championed DEI initiatives and supported collegiate scholars through her leadership roles in GE's Women's Network and her nonprofit, the BNB Foundation.

"In five years, I aspire to be leading innovative and strategic initiatives where I can leverage my expertise in data analysis, stakeholder management, and problem-solving to drive positive change and innovative solutions and foster collaborative, inclusive work environments."

CARRON BROWN
VP, Brand Strategy, Planning, and Operations | Warner Bros. Discovery



Brown creates authentic, award-winning strategies and campaigns that reach, influence,

and expand audiences across global regions, cultures, and demographics. In her role, she assists in crafting and managing the company's corporate brand narrative and creative brand strategy. A seven-time collegiate All-American and NCAA national champion in track and field, Brown leads with high energy, a competitive spirit, and a drive to help others shine. She builds high-performing teams by identifying the unique strengths of individuals and putting them in positions to excel.

"Five years from now, I would like to greenlight major business initiatives and develop strategies that closely align the positive outcomes with audiences who can benefit most."

GENEVA BROWN
VP and Global Head of Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion | Cigna



Brown leads sustainability and inclusion efforts for the Cigna Group, impacting approximately 72,500 colleagues and 189

million customers and patients. She is responsible for the development and execution of enterprise strategies to transform the workplace and the broader health ecosystem into one that is functioning properly, sustainable, accessible, and equitable for all. Brown is also the lead attorney and corporate secretary for the Cigna Group Foundation, providing counsel for charitable giving and community engagement initiatives.

“Looking to the future, I see myself instrumental in evolving and maturing the Cigna Group’s purpose- and performance-driven sustainability and inclusion platforms. By increasingly driving measurable impact in the ESG and DEI space, we can more successfully advance better health and vitality for each individual and every community.”

LAVONNE BURKE
VP, Security, Resiliency, and IT Legal | *Dell Technologies*



Burke is an executive, attorney, speaker, author, and transformative leader. She leads a global legal

team at Dell focused on cybersecurity, IT, privacy/data protection, product and application security, supply chain security, corporate/physical security, crisis management, insider threat, enterprise risk management, fraud/security investigations, and AI compliance. Additionally, she provides direct legal support to Dell’s chief security officer, chief digital/information officer, and chief information security officer.

“My legal focus sits at the convergence of several of the most complex and intriguing areas of technology law—cyber and product security, IT, data, and AI. I deal with novel issues that aren’t addressed by a robust body of law. There is not a great deal of diversity amongst lawyers who practice in these areas. In five years, I hope that story will be different, and that I will be a senior legal executive who has helped to bring more diverse attorneys into these fields.”

TAWANA MURPHY BURNETT
Head of Top Accounts and Agencies, APAC | *Meta*



Burnett leads teams that provide strategic advice to chief marketing officers, business

leaders, and agency partners on the optimal use of mobile advertising and

commerce solutions to expedite brand growth. Throughout her 25-year career, Burnett has been an integral part of organizations that have influenced some of the world’s largest brands and advertising agencies across the United States, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and, most recently, the Asia-Pacific Region (APAC). Prior to joining Meta, she led brand and product teams at Intuit, LeapFrog, Johnson & Johnson, and Pfizer. Burnett supports diverse founders as a member of Pipeline Angels, an angel investing network.

“I’ve enjoyed being a part of a company like Meta, where I’ve contributed to scaling growth of our platform and democratizing access to tools, resources, and technology for small companies, large businesses, and talented creators. Over the next five years, I intend to support more women in workplaces and communities—potentially through storytelling, investing, and building something new.”

KECIA T. CAFFIE
President | *Signet Jewelers*



A 13-year veteran at Signet Jewelers, Caffie has held various leadership roles at the parent

company of Kay Jewelers, Zales, Jared, and others. Caffie now leads the 100-year-old Zales brand through a product and marketing transformation designed to attract a younger, more diverse customer base. She previously led Banter by Piercing Pagoda to multiple years of store growth. A member of the Pipeline Angels investing network, Caffie has invested in six female-founded start-ups, from apparel to tech to farming.

“In five years, I would like to be in a position where I am able to dedicate more of my time to support and mentor entrepreneurs and young leaders. I plan to continue working with Pipeline Angels and the Institute for Entrepreneurial Leadership to discover and support underestimated founders who have the potential to change the world.”

JOAN HANAWI CARLOCK
Chief of Staff to the CEO | *Lyft*



Carlock started her journey at Lyft as a founding member of the Social Impact team, where she

helped create, launch, and scale LyftUp, a suite of initiatives concentrated on increasing transportation access and equity for low-income communities. In her time at the company, she has focused on making sure the tech world is infused with humanity. Prior to Lyft, Carlock spent time advising some of the top tech and Fortune 500 companies as a social impact consultant through her tenure at the media company GOOD.

“Empowering women is core to what Lyft does. We trust the women leaders we have and elevate them; half of our executives are women. With gender diversity at all levels, women’s voices help drive our innovation. We obsess over our customers and launch products, like Women+ Connect, that make Lyft even more accessible to women and nonbinary folks.”

ANKANA CARPENTER
Head of Consumer Technology | *TD Bank*



Carpenter grew up in Libya in a multicultural, multinational, multilingual environment. With over 20 years of

experience working in the United Kingdom, Asia, Spain, Portugal, and the United States, Carpenter has learned how to converge the best of different worlds. Her team at TD is responsible for the technology strategy behind the deposit-product customer journey. As the executive lead for Women at TD US, she provides mentorship and coaching while also lobbying for changes in policies that support working mothers.

“TD offers well-established programs that support women at all of life’s stages while also building ally accountability. Through sponsorship,

safe spaces, pipeline development programs, and much more, we meet women along their career journey vs. force fitting into a mold. TD also empowers women to propose programs that meet their needs.”

MONIQUE CARSWELL
Director, Walmart.org Center for Racial Equity | *Walmart*



The center was created in 2020 through a five-year, \$100 million philanthropic commitment from Walmart

and the Walmart Foundation to address the root causes of gaps in outcomes experienced by Black and African American people in education, health, finance, and criminal justice systems. Under this umbrella, Carswell conceived and currently leads the center’s economic mobility work through the lens of financial inclusion. Her professional background includes marketing communications, strategic planning and partnerships, and civic engagement. Carswell previously led corporate social responsibility at Comcast NBCUniversal.

“Unlocking resources to enable individuals and entire communities to thrive is paramount for me. Five years from now, I would still love to be investing in the dreams of others—employees, entrepreneurs, women, students, and the like. As someone who currently has access to opportunities as a result of others seeing my potential, I am passionate about ensuring that the communities I come from receive support.”

DEBBIE CHAMKASEM
VP, Enterprise GenAI Programs | *Experian*



Chamkasem is a seasoned executive with over 19 years at Experian. In her current role, she specializes in

leading strategic planning and execution of generative AI initiatives across the global enterprise. Her passion for and commitment to



advancing technology position her as a key driver of AI advancements across Experian.

"In five years, I hope I'm making a positive impact advancing technology, whether it's forging paths for more women in STEM leadership roles, creating new tools, or bringing financial power to all. Bolstering Experian's commitment to inclusion is critical to our continued innovation in the workplace and our communities."

JEANNETTE CHANTALAT
VP, Innovation and Sustainability Accelerator | *Kimberly-Clark*



A commercial transformation leader, Chantalat is currently responsible for speeding global growth through

innovation and sustainability, bringing superior solutions to consumers through advantaged technologies while caring for people and the planet. She began her career at Johnson & Johnson, where her experience spanned innovation, marketing, research and development, and venture business development for global brands, including Neutrogena, Aveeno, and Clean & Clear. Chantalat is also an inventor who holds two issued patents.

"In five years, I plan to celebrate our high-performing, cross-functional teams across the company because our consumer-loved innovations are driving brand and business growth sustainably. This will be possible by leading inclusive, high-trust teams that realize their full potential and apply their collective genius toward some of our biggest innovation challenges. I will be fostering

and strengthening our innovation culture to learn fast, scale big, and drive growth."

JENNIFER LUBRANI CISNEROS
Communications Strategy Director | *AARP*



Cisneros's unwavering commitment to inclusivity positions her as a driving force behind initiatives that foster empowerment and access. Through strategic partnerships, community outreach, and advocacy, she actively works to dismantle barriers and to enhance opportunities for individuals from diverse communities. Having previously served as strategy director of multicultural audiences at AARP, Cisneros believes true progress stems from elevating every voice, ensuring that all perspectives are represented in shaping our collective future.

"In five years, I aspire to become an executive and serve on a corporate board where I can leverage my experience and leadership skills to mentor and open doors for the next generation of diverse leaders. By fostering inclusivity at the highest levels of decision-making, I will continue to create and build a more equitable future."

ANAHITA CRAWFORD
Senior Director, Global Head of DEI | *Arm*



Crawford champions a people-first approach to enhance organizational effectiveness and leadership

development, seamlessly aligning DEI strategies with the leading technology company's overarching goals. She is dedicated to creating a workplace where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute their best. With over 15 years of experience in DEI, Crawford has consistently developed impactful

strategies, optimized processes, and cultivated an inclusive workplace culture. Her extensive experience spans renowned companies such as Nike, Daimler, Laika, and Under Armour, and she has consulted for a diverse range of industries, including consumer goods, construction, automotive, technology, media and entertainment, finance, and energy.

"I aim to continue shaping business strategies that drive sustainable growth and innovation. My focus will be on leveraging technology to create impactful solutions, aligning organizational success with societal progress, and inspiring talent to be future global leaders and catalysts for transformative change within their industries and communities."

SABREEN DHILLON
VP, Sales Operations | *Toyota Financial Services*



Dhillon oversees dealer funding, national accounts, fleet operations, and sales

training functions. She also leads the Kinto car-share program. Dhillon joined Toyota in 2008 and has held leadership roles in the areas of finance, analytics, strategy, marketing, and voluntary protection products. She is an energetic contributor to the North American Advisory Council for Women Influencing and Impacting Toyota employee resource group, where she previously held the roles of vice chair and cochair.

"Toyota is successfully employing a multipronged approach to address the leadership gender gap. The company achieves stronger performance thanks to its diverse team, which values a culture of inclusion. We understand it's not sufficient to simply put women in leadership roles—we need to ensure they are prepared for success. We created sponsorship programs, leadership development programs, and an employee resource group dedicated to the growth, empowerment, and engagement of women."

PRAJU DOSHI
VP, Capital Markets | *Mutual of Omaha*



Doshi began her career more than 20 years ago, initially working in investment banking at HSBC. Today,

she leads the capital markets, rating agencies, and investor relations strategy for Mutual of Omaha, where she also spearheaded the successful funding agreement-backed note program and the surplus note issuance after a 10-year hiatus. Doshi also serves on the board of directors at Chess in the Schools, a nonprofit organization bringing chess education to low-income youth in New York City.

"Mutual of Omaha is deeply committed to inclusivity, starting with diverse representation among leadership. Beyond mentoring programs, employees have a strong voice through employee resource groups. This is evidenced in how the company has embraced hybrid and remote working, creating an environment where everyone can bring their best to work."

SIMONE DRAKES
Managing Director of Technical Operations Safety | *United Airlines*



A native of Barbados and a highly regarded avionics engineer, Drakes is a dynamic leader with

over 20 years of experience in the aviation industry. Her extensive background includes spearheading over 100 Federal Aviation Administration and global civil aviation administration Supplemental Type Design Certifications—approvals of major modifications to aircraft—and contributing to the design, manufacturing, and installation of advanced avionics systems on over 11,000

aircraft. Drakes is focused on enhancing the safety management systems within airline operations while driving strategic initiatives to improve safety culture and risk management.

“United is dedicated to closing the gender leadership gap through a skills-based approach to career growth and advancement. The company’s strategy is centered on targeted programs that calibrate skills development for maintenance technicians, navigate career pathways for dispatchers, innovate technological advancements for digital technology teams, and aviate for pilots. This structured framework ensures that individuals have the right tools, training, and support to excel in their fields.”

TANESHA DUNCAN
VP, Global Total Rewards | Amgen



Duncan leads a team on the development and implementation of compensation and benefits solutions at

Amgen to attract and retain talent. Additionally, she oversees quality of life, health and welfare benefits, and equitable living wages for approximately 27,000 global employees. With over 20 years of experience, Duncan is passionate about diversity, inclusion, and belonging at Amgen. She is an advocate for creating equitable and psychologically safe workplaces where diverse perspectives are valued and every voice is heard.

“In five years, I envision returning to my roots in finance. I’ve been fortunate to have mentors and sponsors provide guidance and advice, including the concept that feedback is a gift. As a beneficiary of paying it forward, I am committed to helping advance diverse and next-generation talent and providing opportunity for everyone to have a seat at the table.”

COURTNEY DUPHORNE
Senior Managing Director,
Complex Director | RBC Wealth Management



A 30-year veteran of RBC, Duphorne served previously as a wealth management consultant

supporting financial advisors and their clients in the Texas region. She has a passion for helping financial advisors in all stages of their careers and was instrumental in creating new opportunities for next-gen financial advisors to connect, learn from one another, and grow their practices. Duphorne oversees 64 financial advisors and 118 employees across six branches in North Texas.

“My appointment to this leadership role is just one example of how RBC shows its commitment to promoting women in the financial services industry and recognizing those who have risen to the challenge. In this role, I can be an even bigger advocate, especially for younger women starting out in the industry, which is something I’m really excited about.”

LEI DURAN
VP, Strategy, Planning, and Media | Lowe’s



At Lowe’s, Duran leads a global team of strategic and analytical experts driving brand and customer

strategy forward and developing breakthrough audience-first media strategies to accelerate growth. Her team works cross-functionally to execute disruptive, omni-channel customer experiences across mass and targeted media to drive the highest level of brand engagement. Duran has more than 20 years of experience as a marketing and merchandising expert and previously held roles at Kantar and Walmart.

“Over the next five years, I expect the rate of change within the marketing landscape to accelerate in almost all aspects of the ecosystem. This truly excites me!

I believe my experience now will position me well to lead a team in these new marketing-commerce realities in five years.”

NICOLE DURHAM-MALLORY
VP, Sales Administration | Dine Brands Global



Durham-Mallory is an exceptional leader with over 22 years of industry experience. She has played an

instrumental role in the success of IHOP’s restaurant portfolio and is dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and community service. Durham-Mallory’s commitment to supporting franchisees and her problem-solving abilities make her a vital member of the Dine Brands teams.

“I appreciate that Dine Brands actively nurtures talent and champions internal growth. While some [team members] have missed out on promotions in the past, the company is determined to empower women and other team members by offering pathways to leadership roles, igniting a brighter future for us all.”

KATHY-ANN EDWARDS
Trust Solutions Partner | PwC



Edwards has over 30 years of experience at PwC delivering audit, accounting, and advisory services

across the insurance industry spectrum, including life, annuities, property and casualty, health, and mortgage insurance businesses. She is the lead engagement partner on two large insurance companies in the Midwest and is the leader of the regional Insurance Trust Solutions Team. Edwards is vice chair of the board of directors of Messmer Catholic Schools and has served as a board member of America Scores and the University School of Milwaukee and on the finance committee of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Milwaukee.

“My career aim in five years is to leverage my knowledge to drive PwC’s strategic goals, mentor our

future leaders, and contribute significantly to the firm’s growth and success. In addition, I want to remain committed to community outreach and philanthropy aligned with the firm’s values and contribute to social impact for marginalized communities.”

TIFFANY EDWARDS
Senior Director, Strategic Advisory and Enterprise Solutions | Linkage, a SHRM Company



Edwards is a senior-level business professional with more than 15 years of experience in

full life-cycle recruiting, business development, talent acquisition, and global leadership development. She focuses on key Linkage accounts to help integrate the full suite of offerings into their overall talent management programs. Edwards has deep expertise across several of Linkage’s offerings, working regularly to design and structure effective solutions in the broad field of competency modeling, assessments, leadership development, talent selection, and coaching.

“In the next five years, I aim to establish myself as an executive leader designing and implementing transformative programs that empower emerging leaders worldwide. Personally, I seek to cultivate a balanced life, enriching my skills and nurturing meaningful relationships while making a significant impact in this field.”

NIESHA FOSTER
VP, Global Health and Social Impact | Pfizer



Passionate about advancing health equity, Foster is a dynamic leader in Pfizer’s global health

and social impact efforts. She leads a team that addresses patient affordability challenges, creates last-mile product access solutions, and drives community engagement.



Foster is accountable for Pfizer's US patient assistance program, including the International Trachoma Initiative. She also coleads Pfizer's Multicultural Health Equity Collective, an initiative focused on achieving health equity across ethnic groups and other underrepresented communities in the United States facing significant health disparities.

"Creating pathways for others to live their best lives motivates me every day. In five years, I will be in an executive leadership position responsible for directing resources and creating partnerships that result in community-led solutions that spur an educational and health revolution for the underserved globally."

JOHANNA WESSMAN FRESNEL
Senior Director and Head of Global Account Team | Radisson Hotel Group



Fresnel, based in Stockholm, has been with Radisson Hotel Group for more than 15 years.

Since late 2023, Fresnel has led Radisson's team dedicated to enhancing partnership on a global level. She manages a diverse team across countries, cultures, and languages. One of her key focus areas is driving product development within the Meeting and Events department to adapt to a changing business landscape and evolving customer needs.

"Radisson Hotel Group remains committed to achieving balanced leadership by supporting more women to take on leadership roles within the company. Leadership currently consists of 32 percent female leaders, representing a 16 percentage point increase since 2018, with a goal of 50 percent by 2030."

MARIA GALAINENA-JOHNSON
International VP, Channel Transformation, Latin America | Boston Scientific



At Boston Scientific, Galainena-Johnson has ascended through numerous influential general

management positions across Latin America, including tenure as president of Boston Scientific's Brazilian subsidiary in São Paulo. As the company's first female general manager to manage an international subsidiary, Galainena-Johnson has been instrumental in blazing a trail for the advancement of women, leading to the appointment of three additional female country-level directors in Latin America. Galainena-Johnson, a founding member of Boston Scientific's Hispanic employees resource group, currently coleads EmpowHER, its employee resource group for women.

"Boston Scientific sets aspirational goals to increase leadership opportunities for women and multicultural talent and offers targeted development programs. Through these programs, the company provides immersive experiences, executive coaching, and focused development planning to support inclusive advancement in the workplace."

VANESSA GARCIA-BRITO
Chief Impact Officer | Nike



Known for her people-first, purpose-driven approach to leadership, Garcia-Brito is committed

to moving the world forward through the power of sport. A lawyer by training, she began her career as an advocate for human rights, with a focus in international and intellectual property law, and then continued her journey at Nike with highlights that include leading Partnerships and Strategic Communications for the Girl Effect and creating Nike's first-ever

Purpose Communications. She supports women-led start-ups as an angel investor through Pipeline Angels.

"The power of sport is real—it inspires joy and fosters unity. It lifts us up. At its very best, it is a celebration of human potential and possibility. And in the next five years we will be creating even more opportunities for youth, leading with girls, in our communities, so everyone can enjoy those benefits. I'm looking forward to celebrating this next generation of athletes as they make their dreams real."

ALTHEA E. GARVEY
Chief Claims Officer | Palomar



Garvey is responsible for claims management at the specialty insurance company. She is a

seasoned attorney and business leader with over 20 years' experience in claims management, regulatory affairs, and strategic planning. Previously holding leadership roles at LifeCare Assurance Company and AIG Insurance Company, Garvey has a proven track record in enhancing claims quality and driving growth. A recognized thought leader, Garvey speaks at industry events, fostering professional development. She supports diverse start-ups through Pipeline Angels, an angel investing network.

"I'm committed to advancing women by mentoring emerging leaders and sharing my experiences in claims and strategic management. Through my work on advisory boards like University of California Santa Barbara's Women in Leadership Program, I help shape initiatives that empower women to grow professionally at all career stages. I also speak at industry conferences, aiming to inspire and equip women in insurance with the tools they need to thrive and lead in their careers."

KRISTINE R. GATESMAN
SVP, Fidelity Institutional Wealth Management Technology | Fidelity



Gatesman leads a global technology organization that delivers innovative products and experiences

enabling financial advisors to grow their wealth management businesses and investors to achieve secure financial outcomes. Her roles throughout her 23 years at the firm include product strategy, product management, and technology delivery across Fidelity's retail, workplace, institutional, and start-up businesses. Gatesman is also global cochair of Fidelity's Women's Leadership Group, with over 15,500 members across the company's US and international sites, including India and Ireland.

"The most important work I do is enabling others' success, both one-on-one and at scale through groups like Fidelity's Women's Leadership Group. Five years from now, I envision myself leading a broader organization, surrounded by leaders who not only deliver extraordinary results but who also lead selflessly."

AICHA GILLESPIE
Director of Enterprise Workforce Management End to End and Staffing Integration | Citi



Gillespie has over 25 years of professional and leadership experience. She has an extensive

background in global business services, strategic planning, business intelligence, and operations and technology. Gillespie joined Citi in 2014 as the global head of productivity and reengineering for Citi Shared Services. She previously held leadership roles at JPMorganChase, Bank of America, Nielsen, and General Electric.

"In five years, I aim to be creating greater value for Citi by driving strategic advancements and fostering a culture of innovation and inclusion. I am passionate about empowering women and will continue to lead efforts that inspire them to pursue their career aspirations and achieve their full potential."

PAOLA GONZALEZ
VP, Global Financial Planning and Analysis | The Clorox Company



Gonzalez has been with The Clorox Company since 1997. In her current role, she provides financial

leadership across all Clorox businesses and business development efforts. From 2018 to 2023, she served as vice president and treasurer, with responsibility for treasury, investor relations, and real estate matters. Her career at Clorox reflects a wide range of financial and operational profit and loss experience and a demonstrated track record of financial leadership and shareholder value creation. In 2021, Gonzalez was elected to the board of directors of Abbott Laboratories.

"Clorox is committed to ensuring the female leaders of tomorrow have equitable opportunities to grow. Half of our board and executive committee are women, including our CEO. We offer mentorship programs, diverse experiences, and rotations to foster growth and conduct annual pay equity analyses to help achieve pay equity."

CLAUDINE GORDON
Senior Manager of Sales Force Automation | DHL Express



With a career spanning 24 years at DHL, Gordon began her journey in Jamaica as a customer service rep.

This served as the foundation for her growth, propelling her into various

roles at the company, including sales executive, sales and customer support manager, and commercial manager. Currently, she leads the deployment of global sales tools and processes across the US. As a passionate leader and advocate for diversity and inclusion, Gordon proudly serves as the chair of DHL's first United States employee resource group, BLAZE (Black Leaders & Allies Zest for Equity).

"I aspire to hold a leadership position where I can spearhead initiatives that empower diverse talent, promote inclusivity, and contribute to the company's continued success in the global marketplace. Additionally, I aim to serve as a mentor and advocate for the professional growth and development of my colleagues."

AMITA GUPTA
VP, Business Management Home Care, I&I, and Industrial Formulators | BASF



Gupta's 20-plus year career has been refined in the chemicals industry, including the last 12 years

with BASF. She previously worked for Infineum and General Chemical, holding a range of positions, including operations, marketing, product management, controlling, procurement, and business management. As a champion for DEI, Gupta serves as an executive sponsor of the Women in BASF group and an executive committee member for the company's Diverse Leaders Program.

"BASF aspires to have women holding at least 30 percent of leadership roles globally by 2030. North America has reached this goal, thanks to investments in women through programs like FLAME (Female Leaders Advancing Manufacturing Excellence), apprenticeships, and our Women in BASF group. BASF also requires diverse candidate slates and interview panels."

KINA GUYTON
VP, Experience Strategy | RAPP Worldwide



At global marketing agency RAPP (a division of the Omnicron Group), Guyton is a seasoned marketing

professional and brand strategist, specializing in delivering experiences and consumer products that exceed company goals. She has crafted brand strategy for not only recognized brands like Colgate and Walgreens but also innovative, emerging, or start-up consumer brands in consumer, fintech, and productivity spaces. Her commitment to social responsibility is evidenced by her volunteer work with women-led nonprofits. In 2023, Guyton joined Pipeline Angels, an angel investing network that supports women and gender diverse people.

"In five years, I plan to further immerse myself in investing in social entrepreneurship, fostering a more inclusive and equitable landscape. My background in strategy and growth, combined with my passion for supporting diverse entrepreneurs, affords me the opportunity to focus on the best ways to bring new ideas and untapped innovation to life through a more inclusive investment community."

TONYA WHITE HALLETT
VP, Human Resources | Amazon



In her current role, Hallett's focus is on integrating an HR strategic agenda of talent and inclusion with

a clear cost-to-serve return on investment framework for 1.5 million hourly workers globally. Her scope extends to leading the HR strategy for Amazon's general and administrative functions: finance, legal, security, mergers and acquisitions, and communications public policy. She is also an executive sponsor for Women at Amazon, the global affinity group for women, nonbinary employees,

and allies, and a member of the Black Employee Network (BEN).

"In five years, I hope to still be in a space where I am learning, leading, inspiring, and, most importantly, making a positive impact for others. I will be leading in an organization whose mission and values mirror mine. My persistence to be better and do better will be my reward."

ROSALIND HARDMAN
Director, Customer Service | Kohl's



Hardman's responsibilities include Kohls.com, Kohl's Card, and Y2Y rewards-related customer

service. Her team supports the seasonal hiring process for store and e-fulfillment centers and distribution center associates. A 20-plus-year veteran, Hardman began her career with Kohl's in 2002 working as a store care coordinator in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin, before relocating to the Dallas area in 2006 to help open a call center in Corsicana, Texas. She opened another call center in San Antonio in 2010.

"Kohl's has strong female leadership representation thanks to devoted resources that mentor and uplift women. The company's robust mentorship program includes support from women in senior leadership roles who coach, educate, and advocate for growth. Kohl's also has a Women's Business Resource Group that promotes leadership exposure and development opportunities."

NICOLE HAWTHORNE
Director, Corporate Brand | Allstate



Hawthorne has held communications and leadership roles across several departments and business

units at other Fortune 100 insurance carriers. She also serves as the chair of AVETS, an employee resource



group that supports military veterans and their families, and is on the board of KodiakCare, a nonprofit dedicated to saving the lives of dogs at risk of economic euthanasia.

"In the next five years, I want to see women I've supported and inspired continue climbing the corporate ranks, navigating challenges, and busting roadblocks. I've been empowered by amazing women mentors along my own path and am grateful to pay it back in some small way."

JENISE HIGHT
VP, Single-Family Credit Risk Policy | **Fannie Mae**



Over the past 17 years at Fannie Mae, Hight has been dedicated to developing and servicing the policies

and supporting the loan workout strategies that drive Fannie Mae's mission to facilitate equitable and sustainable homeownership. She leads the team responsible for efforts to update underwriting and eligibility policies that encourage more lenders to participate in programs providing increased access to credit for low- to moderate-income homebuyers. She led critical policy initiatives that made a positive impact on the housing environment during the 2008 financial crisis and the recent global pandemic.

"Fannie Mae's Women's Employee Resource Group promotes diversity in leadership roles by [encouraging] inclusive events to facilitate networking, providing information and counsel on career development and advancement, enabling mentorship opportunities, educating employees on socioeconomic factors that impact women, and fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment for all."

MARY HOR-LAO
Director, Engineering | **Abbott Laboratories**



Hor-Lao brings over three decades of experience to medical technology innovation. Her

relentless pursuit of cutting-edge solutions has propelled Abbott to the forefront of the neuromodulation industry. With a background in software development and engineering leadership, Hor-Lao was instrumental in spearheading transformative projects in pain management and movement disorder devices for patients. Her passion for creating products that empower individuals and expand access to care for all is reflected in a prolific portfolio of over 140 patents filed worldwide.

"Abbott is actively driving gender parity by cultivating an environment where women are empowered to excel and lead. With a longstanding history of women supporting the advancement of technologies across the health-care spectrum, we remain committed to prioritizing diversity through mentorship programs and networks, employee recognition, and inclusivity policies to support everyone to be their true selves."

MONICA HUBBARD
SVP, US Stores | **PetSmart**



Hubbard leads all store and field teams in the United States and Puerto Rico at the leading

pet retailer. Long dedicated to advancing careers within the company through mentorship, she expresses this passion beyond her immediate teams by serving as the executive sponsor of the women-led associate resource group Women Inspiring Strength & Excellence, which empowers women in the organization to grow their skills and

careers. She extends her commitment to animal welfare through her pet rescue efforts and promotion of responsible pet ownership.

"Approximately 70 percent of PetSmart associates are women, so we have a real opportunity to uplift women across our organization. In addition to providing mentorship and development through our women-empowerment associate resource group, we have a goal to provide 40,000 associates with upskill training to help them grow in their careers. I hope to be an example that allows our female associates to see a path and future here at PetSmart."

AME IGHARO
Senior Director, Sustainability Strategy | **Ulta Beauty**



Igharo develops and executes Ulta Beauty's strategy for environmental sustainability while managing

Conscious Beauty at Ulta Beauty, the retailer's innovative way to provide transparency and education as guests seek and discover products aligned to their personal wants, needs, and values across five pillars, including clean ingredients and sustainable packaging. Before transitioning into working with food and agriculture companies on climate, she worked in marketing. Igharo currently sits on the board of the Sustainability Consortium.

"Five years from now, I hope that I'll be able to continue playing a role and collaborating with others in redesigning consumer goods products and their supply chains. It will take time to transition our large and complex supply chains to ones that not only provide our favorite foods, beverages, and products but also provide benefits environmentally and socially throughout the full value chain."

ABRIELL JACKSON
Director, Investor Relations | **American Airlines**



Jackson began her career with American Airlines in 2014. She currently leads the investor

relations team, which is responsible for sharing the company's current financial targets and long-term strategy with external analysts and investors. Over the years, Jackson has played a leading role in recruiting and retaining diverse talent within the finance organization at American, living out her passion for people and finance.

"In five years, I plan to continue growing my skill set by taking on new leadership experiences that drive a positive impact to customers, team members, and shareholders. No matter the role, I'll focus on serving others by being a champion for DEI, creating an inclusive space that fosters success."

GITIKA JAIN
VP, Product, Growth Portfolio | **Pitney Bowes**



Jain is driving innovation and leading growth product strategy for Pitney Bowes globally. In this role, she

strives to foster an environment in which technology serves as a catalyst for both growth and a great customer experience. Previously, Jain was country head for the Pitney Bowes India office, where she led engineering teams across different company businesses and oversaw all country operations, from finance, risk management, and compliance to infrastructure. She is also a champion of women in tech initiatives, both inside and outside the company.

“Pitney Bowes has been committed to addressing the gender leadership gap for many years. Notably, women have held senior-level positions within our company for over three decades. This includes women serving as independent directors on the company’s board, with the chair of the board being a woman. Our workforce comprises over 43 percent women, and 36 percent of our global managers are women. The Pitney Bowes Women’s Inclusion Network plays an integral role in fostering the professional growth and advancement of women.”

SHARON A. JEAN-BAPTISTE
VP, Transportation Growth
Director, East Central US |
Jacobs



Jean-Baptiste is a civil and environmental engineer with deep experience in operational, program delivery,

technology and innovation, and sales leadership roles. In her current role, she drives the multiyear growth priorities for a 13-state regional business unit. This global champion for equity, inclusion, and diversity has fiercely advocated for and led organizational change within her industry. She is the global cochair for the Jacobs Women’s Network and is past global chair for Harambee, the Jacobs Black Employee Network.

“Five years from now, I see myself in the C-suite driving a global platform focused on achieving inclusive and equitable outcomes for communities. I am committed to playing a meaningful part in changing lives and transforming communities through sustainable infrastructure and innovation, global resource networks, and shared thought leadership. I will also be lending my expertise, experience, perspectives, and personal and professional community relationships to broadly invest in accessibility and persistence of high-quality education, economic empowerment, and overall well-being.”

NIA M. JENKINS
VP, Legal Affairs and Deputy
General Counsel | Surescripts



Jenkins boasts 20 years of experience in public and private sectors at companies operating

in heavily regulated industries such as health technology. She is regularly tapped by leadership to help design, drive, and deploy initiatives for revenue growth, product development, risk management, process improvement, and operations. Since 2021, Jenkins has been with Surescripts, a health information technology company. In her current role, she oversees a team of experienced attorneys and directly counsels C-suite leadership and their respective teams on product strategy and development, data sourcing, and other matters requiring cross-product and cross-segment knowledge. Jenkins also is a member of the angel investing network Pipeline Angels.

“Five years from now, I would like to continue to be a driving force in helping businesses scale and grow, all while continuing to learn and grow as an individual.”

NYRA JORDAN
Associate VP, Community and
Social Impact | American
Family Insurance



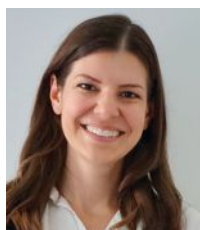
A founding director of the American Family Insurance Institute for Corporate and Social Impact,

Jordan partners with and supports enterprises that are working to build resilient communities in the wake of environmental and social inequities. She amplifies the voices of experts and founders focused on people-centered solutions for those impacted by the justice system. During her 20-plus years of career experience, she has been dedicated to spearheading initiatives that empower underrepresented communities. Jordan currently serves on the boards

of two community-based nonprofits driving systemic change, Safe Communities of Madison-Dane County, and The Road Home Dane County.

“American Family Insurance is actively addressing the gender leadership gap through various initiatives. We prioritize diversity and inclusion in leadership roles through mentorship programs, embedded equity principles, and more. By fostering an inclusive culture and providing equitable access to opportunities, we empower women to excel in leadership positions, narrowing the gender gap and creating a more equitable workplace for all employees.”

KELLEY KAHLER
Director and General Manager,
Money Canvas Program |
Thrivent



Kahler is responsible for program growth, strategy and operations, the digital product, and engineering

road maps. She is a human-centered designer with a passion for tackling complex problems at the intersection of people and businesses. Since joining Thrivent in 2021, Kahler has scaled Money Canvas, an incubated start-up within the financial services organization, from 10 team members to nearly 60 employees today, inclusive of financial coaches. Prior to joining Thrivent, Kahler managed strategy and innovation teams at the global innovation firm Doblin.

“We have a Women’s Leadership Network, which empowers women to reach their full potential by supporting efforts to advance their skills and leadership. Thrivent also has a hybrid, flexible work environment, which allows us to hire diverse talent nationwide. I’m personally committed to opening doors for women and diverse talent, and I enjoy mentoring emerging leaders on my team.”

JAY ADEJUMOKE-JAGUN KAO
SVP | D. E. Shaw Group



Kao first joined the firm in 2012 as a member of its legal and compliance department, where she

advised on a range of transactions for the firm’s alternative investment strategies, including swaps, securities lending, and prime brokerage. After a brief stint as general counsel at AlleyCorp, a start-up incubator and venture fund, Kao rejoined D. E. Shaw in 2023, working across functions to address some of the largest and most important strategic challenges facing the global investment and technology development firm. She is a founder of D.E. Shaw’s Black affinity group, Black@DESCO, and a member of the company’s women’s affinity group. She also is giving back as a member of Pipeline Angels.

“I would like to be recognized for leading groundbreaking technology initiatives that help people work more effectively and efficiently. By collaborating across diverse teams, I aim to rethink and unlock opportunities to harness generative AI for strategic growth. I also hope to inspire and uplift other women and Black professionals through mentorship.”

JOAN KING
SVP, Digital | Discover
Financial Services



King has spent over 30 years building award-winning digital experiences. She currently leads the team at

Discover responsible for the customer experience across all digital touchpoints, including the mobile app, website, and communication channels. Prior to Discover, King held various positions in e-commerce at Crate & Barrel Holdings, working to innovate the online customer experience and ultimately serving as executive vice president of digital and international growth, responsible for strategy and operations of the retail



chain's websites and apps, which have grown to deliver over 60 percent of total company sales.

"Discover intentionally designs diversified hiring pipelines for new talents and creates strategic succession plans to elevate women and people of color into positions of leadership. We take everyday measures to empower our employees to pursue their ambitions at each stage of their career."

NATALIE KING

Medical Science Liaison, Associate Director, Neuroscience | Novartis



King, who holds a PhD in neuroscience, is a neuroscientist and beauty entrepreneur. As a medical

science liaison (MSL) in neurology, she is contributing to cutting-edge health-care strategies at Novartis. Her work in STEM mentorship and advocacy in science and health disciplines includes roles with organizations like Girls 4 Science and Black Girls Do STEM. Her passion extends beyond the lab. As founder of Florae, a science-backed beauty brand, she is helping women of all hair textures embrace their natural beauty while addressing overall health.

"In five years, I see myself advancing in my role as a medical science liaison, moving into a leadership position where I can shape medical strategy and mentor new MSLs. My focus will be on driving impactful collaborations between research and clinical practice to enhance patient outcomes in neuroscience. While continuing to support women's health through beauty and wellness as CEO of Florae, I'll remain committed to empowering women globally!"

AMANDA VELA KRAEMER
SVP of Stores | Target



Kraemer is a successful executive with 25 years of retail leadership experience, the last 20 of which she

has spent at Target, where she currently leads all store operations in Target's southern region. She began her career with Target in 2005 as an executive team leader of HR in San Antonio, Texas. She holds a leadership role on the Target Regional Stores Diversity and Inclusion Council and is a member of NEW (Network of Executive Women), Big Brothers Big Sisters, the Texas Women's Foundation, and the Target Foundation board. Kraemer has participated on the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility's Latina Empowe(h)er panel.

"As I envision the next five years, I am committed to both personal and professional growth. My ambition is to reach a C-level position and expand my contributions on various boards. I also look forward to cherishing the early years with my two twin boys. While I'm excited about what lies ahead, I am equally determined to enjoy the journey along the way."

CRYSTAL LAURENCE
Director of Sales and Marketing, the Plaza, A Fairmont Managed Hotel | Accor



Laurence is a leading figure in luxury hospitality. Orchestrating commercial strategy for the Plaza, she helps

drive top-line revenue, business development, and customer experience strategy. Her leadership extends across a diverse team, where she crafts innovative strategies to maximize revenue, forge influential campaigns, cultivate partnerships, and foster unwavering brand loyalty.

"Accor [the owner of Fairmont] is dedicated to diversity and inclusion. Much like the city that developed around it, the Plaza is a melting pot of diverse talent. The property truly leads by example with its Executive Committee team being 45 percent female and its leadership team being 55 percent female."

ALICE LEE
VP of the Product Regulatory Office at American Honda | Honda



Lee oversees US regulatory compliance activities for Honda's automobile, power sports, and power equipment

products and represents Honda on product regulatory matters to US government agencies. She joined the company in 2002 as an analyst in sales and production planning before leaving in 2005 to pursue her law degree and MBA. Lee returned to Honda in 2010 and was promoted to her current role as vice president of the Product Regulatory Office in 2023.

"Honda has done extensive internal benchmarking that led us to develop targets for women in leadership by 2030. But setting the goal is half the battle. To help us succeed we've implemented diverse interview panels and placed accountability with business units to get all levels of Honda engaged."

GRACIE LOZANO
VP, Senior HR Business Partner, Insurance | USAA



Lozano is accountable for management and delivery of HR strategies, issues, and needs of

C-suite executive council members and their organizations, comprising over 18,000 employees, or 50 percent of USAA. She serves as a key advisor to the senior leadership team to advocate, champion, and execute the HR solutions to acquire, develop, and retain talent. Lozano is also a strategic business partner who

provides thought leadership to influence and enable the business to serve members, deliver its plans, and execute on its strategic priorities.

"USAA creates opportunity for all employees to succeed with diversity business groups like Elevate, which focuses on increasing female participation in leadership through awareness and education."

SHARON LYNCH
General Manager at Slalom Build | Slalom



Lynch has a 25-year career focused on helping clients around the world build the right

technology products to meet their needs. Her passion is delivery methodology based on high-performing cross-discipline teams. Lynch previously led the Slalom West Coast Build Centers, along with the Solution Ownership and Quality Engineering capabilities. She is currently responsible for the Slalom Build organization in North America.

"At Slalom, we believe in creating a diverse and inclusive workplace where everyone can be their best selves. We have a pay equity policy and mentorship and sponsorship programs to promote women into senior leadership positions, and we are proud of our efforts to close the gender gap and empower women in our technology-focused industry."

JULIANA MARQUES
Senior Tax Principal | Airbnb



A seasoned tax executive navigating complex international tax matters, Marques is responsible at Airbnb for

leading international tax planning, provision, and compliance, as well as supporting mergers and acquisitions. With a career spanning over two decades, she previously served as a senior associate at Baker & McKenzie, where she advised leading tech companies on cross-border taxation and authored several publications. She is an active angel

investor with the Pipeline Angels network, which focuses on underrepresented founders.

“My goal is to expand a diverse team that fosters both business and personal growth. I aim to serve on the boards of growing technology companies, contributing my expertise and ensuring a seat at the table where strategic decisions are made. I’m committed to continuing purposeful work in my community while growing my family’s real estate and interior design business.”

GABRIELLE A. McCLAIN
Senior Director, Chief Compliance Officer | **ALSAC/ St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital**



With 20-plus years of diversified legal and business expertise, McClain is a skilled

advocate and counselor, specializing in nonprofit law and governance. At ALSAC, the fundraising and awareness arm for St. Jude, McClain has served in various leadership roles overseeing ALSAC Legal’s bequest portfolio and forecasting. As chief compliance officer, she is responsible for planning, organizing, and directing the organization’s culture of compliance. Her strategic insights and collaborative approach have been instrumental in driving ALSAC’s mission forward.

“ALSAC/St. Jude has a legacy of compassion and innovation, consistently pushing the boundaries of what’s possible, until no child dies in the dawn of life. I strive to adapt, grow, and reinvest in myself and my work by developing cutting-edge compliance strategies that protect the organization and inspire ethical excellence. I will continue to foster a culture of integrity and innovation, leading transformative initiatives that empower employees and drive organizational success.”

ADRIENNE MITCHELL
Lead, Senior People Operations Partner | **DuckDuckGo**



A strategic human resources and DEI leader, Mitchell brings unparalleled insight into

company culture, career progression, people operations, and leadership development. From shaping the people strategies of Fortune 500 companies to steering the people initiatives of nimble, high-growth start-ups, she has ensured that her expertise resonates across industries. Driven by an unwavering passion for nurturing talent, fostering leadership, and fortifying the foundations of thriving enterprises, Mitchell brought her expertise to DuckDuckGo three years ago to support a scaling People Operations team and lead diversity and inclusion initiatives.

“I am grateful to have a career built on leadership and a holistic approach to building engaging cultures. In the years to come, I’m excited to continue taking on challenges to scale and build inclusive, equitable people-ops strategies while seizing opportunities to develop myself and those around me.”

OKEOMA MORONU
Head of Global Aviation Regulatory Affairs | **Zipline International**



Moronu works alongside regulators, policymakers, and experts in emerging technologies

to unlock safe and reliable autonomous operations to realize Zipline’s mission of creating the first drone logistics system serving all humans equally. She is a leader in developing new regulatory frameworks that enable high-volume drone operations in national airspaces around the globe and currently serves as vice chair on the board of the Commercial

Drone Alliance. Moronu has also served on the US Department of Transportation Advanced Aviation Advisory Committee and is paying it forward as a member of Pipeline Angels.

“In five years, no matter the role, I aspire to still be leveraging my skills and expertise to contribute to mission-driven endeavors that have a meaningful impact on our communities, the environment, and our planet. No matter where my career takes me, I am committed to creating a more equitable future.”

NEGELLE MORRIS
SVP, US Cardiometabolic Sales | **Novo Nordisk**



Morris leads the field-facing commercial business for Novo Nordisk’s diabetes, obesity, and

cardiovascular portfolio. Over her 25-year career in health care, she has served as a leader in direct patient care, payer access, and sales and marketing strategy. She is known for her business impact and deep appreciation for the inherent value of people. As a national executive board member participating in various employee network groups, Morris champions leadership, diversity, and inclusion while focusing on the development of others. She also serves on the board of the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives and other nonprofits, focusing on health-care disparities.

“In five years, I aim to be a leader who remains dedicated to my passion for people. I envision leveraging my clinical and commercial background to address evolving health-care dynamics and to drive transformative change for people living with chronic disease. Today and into the future, I hope to bring out the best in others by nurturing an environment where people feel valued and can be their authentic selves.”

ANNE MARIE NELSON-BOGLE
VP, YouTube Ads Marketing | **Google**



Nelson-Bogle leads the YouTube Ads team, which works to elevate advertiser and industry perceptions

and empower customers to drive meaningful business outcomes. As a culture-shifting exec, she served in many leadership roles in the beauty industry prior to Google, allowing her to develop transformative brand strategies that delivered sustainable growth for top beauty brands like L’Oréal Paris, Maybelline, and La Roche-Posay.

“Aligning my passion with purpose in my work has enabled me to create opportunities for empowering future leaders and spaces to bring diverse voices to the table to drive transformation. With YouTube’s mission of giving everyone a voice, I am devoted to continuously fostering inclusive cultures that inspire innovative thinking and collaboration to unlock ‘the magic’ to bring this mission to life.”

CATHERINE ORDUN
VP, Office of the CTO | **Booz Allen Hamilton**



Ordun is a vice president in Booz Allen’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer, where she leads AI

tech transfer and advanced prototyping efforts designed to integrate and scale AI solutions. Prior to joining Booz Allen, Ordun worked in both the private and public sectors, including as a research analyst at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She is also currently an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Information Systems at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.



“Booz Allen empowers female leaders through several employee-led networks, including our Women’s Employee Community, Women in AI, and Women in Engineering and Science. Our DEI Strategy and Action Plan has been in place since 2020 to ensure representation in senior leadership is consistent with our workforce and to foster an equitable and inclusive environment.”

RAGESHREE PARAB
VP, Enterprise Architecture, Business Intelligence, and Digital Engineering | *Rite Aid*



In her role at Rite Aid, Parab is responsible for delivering innovative solutions to drive the company’s

technology strategy, architecture, business intelligence, and data and cloud services. She is also a board member of Rite Aid Healthy Futures, a nonprofit that supports community health and wellness initiatives.

“Five years from now, I plan to grow in my leadership position and be globally known for technology transformation. I want to continue empowering individuals, mentoring aspiring technologists from diverse backgrounds, and providing guidance, support, and access to opportunities to help them thrive in their careers.”

JULIA POLLAK
Chief Economist | *ZipRecruiter*



Pollak heads the economic research team at ZipRecruiter, analyzing data from its platform to assess the

health of the labor market, identify hiring trends, and equip employers

and job seekers for the future of work. Before joining ZipRecruiter, she served as an assistant policy analyst at the RAND Corporation and was an adjunct instructor in economics at Pepperdine University. From 2011 to 2022, she was also a drilling reservist in the US Navy.

“Five years from now, my team will have turned ZipRecruiter data into an indispensable source of actionable insights for labor market policymakers, workforce development programs, and talent acquisition teams at businesses of all sizes. Our work will continue to inform the development of AI-driven products that make hiring a faster and more pleasant process for job seekers and employers alike.”

MATHANGI RAMANATHAN
VP, Product Management | *UKG*



Ramanathan has over two decades of experience in the software industry. Now at UKG (Ultimate Kronos

Group, offering HR, payroll, and workforce management solutions), she continues to be widely recognized for her strategic vision, business acumen, customer-centricity, and excellence in product management. Ramanathan has held several prominent leadership roles and has worked at such industry giants as Microsoft, Oracle, and Zuora. Her inclusive leadership style and unwavering dedication to championing diversity and inclusion have set her apart as a transformative leader in the technology sector.

“In the next five years, I am excited about enabling every organization to become a great place to work for all through people-centric technology, empowering customers to create equitable opportunities, unlock true drivers of engagement and performance, and make informed decisions on diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.”

ROSELL R. RINKINS
VP, Transformation and Organizational Effectiveness | *W.K. Kellogg Foundation*



Rinkins is responsible for business process reengineering, quality improvement, and organizational

performance initiatives at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, which focuses on funding health and education programs and race-based causes. She leads strategic development, quality improvement programs, and the company’s internal and external racial equity and community engagement grant-making portfolio work. She has 20 years of experience in operations management, logistics, and strategic sourcing, honing her skills at leading companies such as Apple and Procter & Gamble.

“Helping to advance women directly correlates to contributing to the overall success of an organization. According to research from McKinsey & Company, organizations in the top quartile—those with more than 30 percent representation of women—were 25 percent more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the bottom. I support the advancement of women by sponsoring and mentoring women both within and outside my organization and investing and creating capital for women entrepreneurs through my membership with Pipeline Angels.”

RHONDA ROBINSON
VP, Enterprise Risk Management | *Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey*



Robinson is responsible for developing the risk framework for Horizon and ensuring that the business is

appropriately assessing and monitoring risks. In her current role, she leads a team that designs and implements policies and procedures to promote risk management across the organization. Having held various roles in medical cost management,

operations, and payment integrity, she has taken on several leadership positions at Horizon and other health plans during her 30-year career.

“Five years from now I envision myself continuing to work with young adults and sharing my personal career development experiences and how important it is to capitalize on opportunities early and often. I am a firm believer that the biggest risk is not taking any risks at all. I am fortunate to work for an organization that not only supports my career but the important work of its employees in the community.”

LYNSAY ROGERS
General Manager, Salty Snacking | *Kellanova*



Rogers began her career at Kellanova more than two decades ago as a supply chain intern before

rising through the ranks and eventually leading the company’s Portable Wholesome Snacks unit. Under her direction, the unit took over share leadership, and Pop-Tarts was set on track to become Kellanova’s next billion-dollar brand. Today, she leads Kellanova’s Salty Snacking business unit, where she’s breaking new barriers, including putting Cheez-It on pace to become a \$2 billion brand.

“My career moves have been defined by the unexpected, and I find that to be rewarding, personally and professionally. My 13 different roles throughout my 20-plus years at Kellanova have each given me new challenges to conquer. Our evolution into a global snacks-led powerhouse is my next [challenge].”

LATOYA ROSE
SVP, Diversity, Equity, and
Inclusion | *Macmillan*
Publishers



Rose is a change agent and accomplished leader known for bringing people together to

develop highly effective diversity, equity, and inclusion programs aligned with business priorities and strategic initiatives. Prior to her role with Macmillan, she led strategic brand campaigns for a wide range of global clients across some of the most innovative, progressive communication agencies. Rose's specialties include digital strategy, crisis management, corporate and public affairs, and consumer branding.

"In five years, I hope to pioneer DEI strategies that tackle the challenges of hybrid workplaces and AI biases. I aim to lead efforts integrating DEI across digital and physical work environments, ensuring equitable access to emerging technology, and setting new standards for inclusive workplace cultures."

VALENE SAMUELS
Principal Cloud Solution
Architect | *Microsoft 365*
Copilot

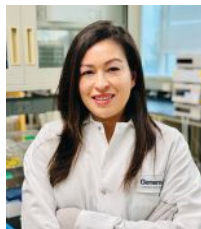


Since joining Microsoft in 2018, Samuels has held various positions, showing expertise in strategic

technology consulting and sales success. She is currently responsible for leading AI adoption strategies for clients across multiple industries in Fortune 100 enterprises. Prior to Microsoft, she succeeded in various roles at Accenture, where she led technology strategies, change management, and program management for business and technology integration in Fortune 100 enterprises. Samuels is passionate about global community giving, digital literacy, learning, and people development.

"Aligning purpose and passion is one of my leading principles to advocate for, empower, connect, and/or create opportunities that enable people to achieve their greatest potential. I envision my role at Microsoft evolving to further elevate my leadership in people development and representing and contributing to diverse leadership in technology, influencing the next generation of leaders while continuing to guide clients in embracing the next wave of technology."

LINDSEY SILVA
Director, Microbiology Global
QC Technology | *Genentech*



Silva and her team are responsible for driving analytical innovation and quality control microbiology

solutions, including end-to-end microbial oversight of a growing small molecule parenteral portfolio. She is one of the founding members of the SACNAS professional chapter at Genentech, a national, inclusive organization dedicated to fostering the success of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in attaining advanced degrees, careers, and positions of leadership in STEM. Silva was also a recipient of the 2023 Genentech Women Professionals Emerging Leader award.

"Genentech acknowledges that to deliver groundbreaking innovation, our company must reflect the diverse world around us. Genentech Women in Science and Engineering (gWISE) seeks to develop and retain first-class talent in careers where women remain underrepresented. We focus on leadership, influence, and networking, so all leaders achieve their career aspirations."

REBECCA SMITH
VP of Talent Acquisition | *MGM*
Resorts International



Smith has worked for MGM Resorts for 17 years and in human resources for over 24 years. Her

experience includes labor and employee relations, employee engagement, and talent acquisition. She serves on the board of the College of Southern Nevada Foundation and the University of South Alabama's hospitality and tourism program. Smith is also a proud US Air Force veteran and certified organizational effectiveness and change management coach.

"MGM Resorts has a long-standing commitment to addressing the gender gap by prioritizing internal mobility and equitable access to advancement opportunities. Our talent management processes identify high-potential individuals for targeted development and succession planning. In addition, we offer a wide range of professional development programs available to all employees."

KATARINA STANISIC
VP, Sales, Marketing &
Revenue Management |
Aramark Destinations



Stanisic joined Aramark in 2024 to support the company's National Park Service and Forest

Service clients and lodging, conference centers, attractions, and tours assets. She leads Aramark's commercial sales, marketing, revenue management, and central reservations teams. She previously worked at BWH Hotels overseeing brand marketing and the member marketing service group to support hoteliers and their property marketing efforts. She has also led digital advertising efforts for WorldHotels and boutique brands Glo, Vib, Sadie, and Aiden.

"I'm inspired by our female hoteliers who expertly manage their properties, resulting in transforming family legacies through hospitality leadership and business success. At our corporate offices, I'm fortunate to partner with remarkable women whose professional talents are developed and leveraged to drive brand awareness and revenue growth."

JENAI ST. HILL
Senior Director, Global Support
Operations | *LinkedIn*



A recognized operations and strategy leader, St. Hill focuses on the delivery of high-quality service and

support for an enterprise B2B product. An accomplished strategy and operations leader, she enjoys coaching and mentoring others, helping to create supportive spaces based on trust and belonging. She previously served as legal counsel at Hewlett Packard Enterprise, providing strategic counsel on IT outsourcing transactions, and as a commercial litigation associate focusing on commercial and pharmaceutical litigation. St. Hill is also helping increase founder diversity through Pipeline Angels.

"In five years, I envision myself leading a purpose-driven organization. I am thankful to currently focus my career on driving strategic insights and mobilizing collective purpose to catalyze business growth. My passion is unlocking others' potential and helping them recognize their own power and leadership abilities. I aim to cultivate teams where everyone thrives, creating lasting impact for both the organization and its people."



SALEEMA SYED
VP, Field and Partner Marketing
| *Webex by Cisco*



Syed plays a pivotal role in orchestrating marketing strategies that extend the reach of Webex solutions to

diverse markets through various partner channels worldwide. Her responsibilities encompass a wide array of activities aimed at maximizing brand exposure, driving customer engagement, and fostering strategic partnerships. She oversees business and revenue operations, and project management office and finance operations, driving cross-functional data and budget product alignment programs that accelerate growth for Webex marketing at Cisco.

“Transitioning from tech to leadership, my journey emphasizes empowering women by ‘sending the elevator down.’ In the next five years, I aim to dismantle STEM stereotypes, making it accessible and engaging for the younger generation. My goal is to mentor and uplift, ensuring women not only have a seat but a strong voice at the table, reshaping the future of tech.”

JHAYMEE TYNAN
Principal, Health Services |
Korn Ferry



Tynan provides executive search and leadership advisory services for senior executives

of health-care services, pharmaceuticals, and life-sciences organizations. Prior to Korn Ferry, she was enterprise assistant vice president, Integration, at Atrium Health (now Advocate Health), where she led multibillion-dollar post-merger

integrations for health system mergers and acquisitions across the Southeast. She is the founder of a global career initiative, 100x2030, which aims to increase representation for women of color at the senior executive levels of health-care organizations globally.

“Five years from now, I’d like to have successfully sponsored 100 women of color in health care. I made a pledge to do so by 2030. It’s an important initiative to help increase diversity and representation in leadership. Women of color continue to be over-mentored and under-sponsored. It takes active, engaged, and courageous sponsors—men and women—to put words into action and elevate the next generation of senior leaders in health care.”

ASHLEY D. VARNADO
Managing Director,
Philanthropic Market Executive
| *Bank of America*

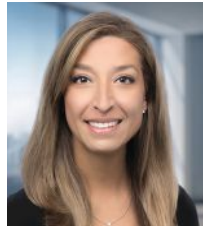


Varnado leads a national team responsible for the acquisition and retention of \$12 billion

of investable philanthropic assets across 12 markets, working closely with philanthropic individuals, families, and nonprofit institutions on all aspects of giving. She serves as an executive sponsor for key initiatives in alignment with enterprise objectives and is engaged in mentoring underrepresented teammates who are females and people of color. Her commitment to local and global communities is demonstrated through her board membership and involvement in several nonprofit organizations.

“Over the next few years, no matter the role, I hope to continue evolving as a positive disrupter and lifetime learner within the industry. I hope to continue driving both innovation and transformation for the benefit of our clients and key stakeholders while breaking barriers for women leaders to come.”

ANA VAZ
Global Development Leader |
Eli Lilly and Company



Vaz leads a diverse team that provides regulatory strategy and leadership for late-phase clinical

development programs in immunology and neuroscience. Her team works to accelerate the delivery of innovative new medicines with a focus on helping people. With more than 17 years of drug development experience, she has held several leadership roles at Lilly. Vaz is passionate about diversity and inclusion, actively participates in employee engagement opportunities, and invests in helping others through development, advocacy, and mentorship.

“Lilly looked at the challenges hindering women from getting into higher positions. We then created new programs, education, and awareness to build cultural literacy and understanding for women at work, leading to greater gender diversity in our talent pools and pipelines for management positions. Women now make up 50 percent of Lilly’s US and global workforce and 49 percent of all management positions.”

ATHENA VILLARREAL
Manager, Diversity, Inclusion,
and Belonging Programs,
CSR, Strategy and Business
Optimization | *Navy Federal
Credit Union*



Villarreal is an innovative, strategic leader who has more than 20 years of employee programs

and communications experience across various industries. Throughout her career, she has leveraged diversity, inclusion, and belonging strategies for employee experience programs that enhance belonging and company culture. She is passionate about building inclusive communities in the workplace. At Navy Federal, she leads and sustains employee resource groups for the credit union’s 24,000-plus employees.

“In five years, I aspire to uplift Latinas and others to thrive in their careers. I hope to continue building communities that drive meaningful change for all employees. I want Navy Federal to stand out as an inclusive, people-centric place that showcases how representation and community connection make an impact.”

SHAYNA WALKER
Global Head of Equity,
Diversity, and Inclusion (ED+I) |
Tripadvisor



Walker has been a human resources professional for 17 years. In her current role at

Tripadvisor, she helps advance the ED+I strategy by championing a truly equitable, diverse, and inclusive work culture and business product. Prior to Tripadvisor, Walker spent nine years at Horizon Media, where she created and led the agency’s diversity, equity, and inclusion practice. She was named one of AdAge’s 2020 Women to Watch and was an honoree for Cynopsis’s 2020 Top Women in Media.

“In five years, I’d like to be spearheading advanced DEI strategies at Tripadvisor in a more senior capacity and having the outcomes foster a diverse workplace culture that seamlessly integrates inclusive principles into our products, services, and marketing. This will ensure that Tripadvisor reflects and supports the needs of our global travelers.”

CAROLYN WARE
Head of Wealth Advice and
Experiences | *TIAA*



In her current role, Ware is responsible for the end-to-end omni-channel wealth client and advisor experience at

financial services company TIAA. She is focused on driving client growth, retention, and engagement through fully integrated and optimized experiences across web, mobile, and planning capabilities. Ware serves as

a national cochair for TIAA's Empowered (Black associates and allies) business resource group and is a member of Blacks in Tech and a mentor with Girls in Tech.

"TIAA prioritizes gender equality from the top down. Our CEO, Thasunda Brown Duckett, says, 'It's a we thing.' We all have a part to play in addressing inequalities, and we believe it starts with casting the widest net possible to offer opportunities and to clear roadblocks so women can realize their full potential."

WENDI WHITMORE
SVP, Unit 42 | Palo Alto Networks



Whitmore heads Unit 42, a unique team that blends threat intelligence, incident response, risk

management consulting, and managed services to help organizations tackle complex cyberthreats, from ransomware to state-sponsored espionage. Her team is responsible for combining threat intelligence and security consulting expertise to help organizations proactively navigate cyber risks, strengthen security approaches, and efficiently respond to incidents. Whitmore is chair of the industry advisory board for Duke University's master of engineering in cybersecurity program and a member of the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Cybersecurity.

"Palo Alto Networks is committed to championing contributions of women change-makers and trailblazers in the IT industry and continues to launch programs and initiatives to inspire and amplify its mission for women empowerment in technology. Through these efforts, Palo Alto Networks fosters an inclusive and diverse culture where talented women thrive to continually create innovations needed in the dynamic IT sector."

DENISE R. WILKINS
Division Client Relationship Executive | Merrill Lynch



A member of the division leadership team, Wilkins has responsibilities that include driving

client-centric strategic business initiatives and supervising overall service and operation plans while appropriately balancing organizational risk. She oversees more than 14 markets with 2,500 employees across the West Coast. She began her 25-plus-year career at Merrill Lynch in 1994 as an administrative assistant in the New York office and held various support roles before joining the firm's Leadership Training Program in 2010.

"Five years from now, I plan to be successfully continuing to create a diverse organization of leaders in the field of Wealth Management Client Service, ensuring that our employees represent the communities we serve and support while continuing to close the wealth gap related to women through a series of education programs and access to both career- and wealth-building opportunities."

LAUREN D. WILLIAMS
SVP, Organizational Culture and Change Management | SiriusXM



Williams is building a world-class organizational culture that creates shared practices, processes,

beliefs, and behaviors in support of business transformation. She leads diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and influences how SiriusXM engages with employees, communities, and partners. Williams previously served as chief of staff to SiriusXM's chief executive officer, acting as a trusted advisor to the CEO and her direct reports. Williams joined SiriusXM in 2019 with the acquisition of Pandora, where she held a variety of sales strategy roles.

"At SiriusXM, we want to shape the future of audio where everyone is effortlessly connected to voices, stories, and music they love. In five years, I hope to see this vision realized through our social impact work. With diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging core to our company, we will have created an organizational culture that inspires all."

GRACE YEE
Senior Director, Ethical Innovation (AI Ethics and Accessibility) | Adobe



Yee is a keen reader of the dynamics of an organization, its people and culture. She currently leads global

organization-wide work to help ensure that Adobe's industry-leading innovations, which millions of creators rely on every day, are developed in alignment with the company's core values and ethical principles. Yee also helps advance Adobe's commitment to building technologies, including generative AI, responsibly, centering ethics and inclusivity in the company's approach to product development.

"In five years, I'm excited to see how AI continues to evolve to democratize creativity and transform how we work, play, and learn. I am also hopeful that the recognition in having diverse human oversight over AI paves the way for more women to pursue careers in STEM, especially as we realize the power and potential of this technology."

ANGELA YEN
VP, Data and Computational Sciences | Vertex Pharmaceuticals



Yen leads the team developing and applying advanced analytics across all research programs at

Vertex, using data and computational sciences to derive insights and drive experimentation. Through this work,

she and her team advance the discovery and development of transformative therapies through quality data-driven decision-making and efficiency of speed and scale. Yen has also led key off-target evaluations for the development of Casgevy, Vertex's therapy for sickle cell disease and transfusion-dependent beta thalassemia, which was the first approved CRISPR therapy in the world.

"I love that Vertex is making the business case for inclusion, diversity, and equity [ID&E] to close the gender leadership gap. Diversity initiatives can sometimes be framed as a sacrifice that businesses make to do something morally right. While I believe in the inherent value of ID&E, the conversation at Vertex is framed around how it benefits the business and everyone at Vertex."

MELISSA MILLER YOUNG
Team Leader | Women Connect4Good



As team leader for the nonprofit Women Connect4Good (WC4G), Young works to foreground

issues pertinent to gender equality and helps women lead empowered lives. Her work with the WC4G team is a dream come true for her, as it allows her to connect with thought leaders, share their insights, and move the conversation forward. Over her 25-year career, first as a journalist, then as a marketing and communications pro, Young has worked across corporate, organizational, and freelance settings, always focusing on making a positive impact.

"We are making connections, raising awareness, and taking action. From advocating for the Equal Rights Amendment to supporting the passionate, powerful women driving meaningful, positive change—and the programs that strengthen their efforts—we are fully committed to achieving gender equality and empowering women to lead."

**Celebrating 20 years of
inspiring leadership**



“Experience has taught me that you cannot value dreams according to the odds of their coming true. Their real value is in stirring within us the will to aspire.” — Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor

ANGELA GREEN URBACZEWSKI ALWAYS knew saving for retirement was important and made it a priority. But her progress got derailed after a divorce. At the time of her separation, her two children were young, and she wanted to give them stability by remaining in the family home. So she ended up spending a third of her retirement savings to buy her ex out of their home. After that, she got back on track and continued to save for retirement. But paying the mortgage by herself while saving for her kids' education made it difficult.

Flash forward to years later. Urbaczewski had remarried and could catch up on some of the retirement savings she'd lost. After being able to build up again for six years, she learned that her sister had been diagnosed with brain cancer. Urbaczewski committed to helping with caregiving duties. Then a year later, she was laid off from her job. She has since started her own company, RevOppAI, but launching a business on top of managing family matters has meant putting retirement savings on pause again.

Urbaczewski's story highlights the twists and turns in life that impact women's retirement savings. Her tale, far from unique, is an example of the types of things women experience when saving for the future, developments that result in major retirement disparities between women and men.



WEALTH MINDSET

Solving the Retirement Gap

The disparity in retirement savings between women and men is significant—but it can be bridged

BY MELANIE LOCKERT

RETIREMENT GAP

When you look at women's retirement savings compared with men's, the difference is clear. According to the 2023 *T. Rowe Price Retirement Savings and Spending Study*, women had an average retirement account balance of \$154,800, compared with \$248,200 for men.

Paychex, a payroll services company, found that women and men have similar participation rates when it comes

to saving for retirement, according to the company's report *The Road to Retirement*. However, the report illustrates major differences in portfolio balances despite similar participation rates. The company reviewed portfolio balances across generations, from generation Z to the silent generation, and showed that the average portfolio balance for females is \$42,420—less than two-thirds of males' average portfolio balance of \$68,753. The retirement disparities between women and men are greater for older generations, while millennials and generation Z have the smallest gap.

Though there may be progress for younger generations, the gap persists. So what's behind the retirement disparity between women and men?

THE PAY DISPARITY

One big factor is that women get paid less than their male counterparts. The 2023 *T. Rowe Price Retirement Savings and Spending Study* found women had an average annual income of \$62,600, while men had an average annual income of \$78,200.

Data from the US Department of Labor (DOL) shows similar trends, with women making 84 percent of what men make for full-time work. This gender wage gap occurs across racial and ethnic groups, according to DOL data. Bureau of Labor Statistics

data shows Black and Hispanic women have the lowest median weekly earnings. Needless to say, reduced earnings over a lifetime lower how much women can save for the future.

“Women have historically been paid less than men, and the more we go back in history, the worse that it is,” explains Jacqueline Schadeck, a certified financial planner, CEO and founder of Golden Wealth Strategies, and host of *My Money Mentors* on PBS. “So for women who are retiring now, they’ve had a lot of experience with that wage gap. Unfortunately, their savings are typically not as much as men’s.”

CAREGIVING

Women tend to take on unpaid caregiving duties for aging parents, a spouse, and children at higher rates, which has short- and long-term consequences for retirement.

“We’re doing most of the work during our childbearing and -raising years and typically that means that our income takes a hit. So when we’re saving for retirement, we’re noticing that we have a lower Social Security income as well, and that’s not helpful,” says Schadeck.

The Department of Labor estimates that unpaid caregiving by mothers reduces earnings by 15 percent, which results in an average of \$295,000 in employment-related costs over a lifetime.

DIVORCE OR LOSS OF A SPOUSE

Getting a divorce or losing a spouse can also have a substantial effect on a woman’s retirement. In both cases, it means moving from a two-income household to one, which can be a tough adjustment. In a divorce, splitting assets and paying for legal costs can be expensive.

Older women who are divorced or widowed have higher rates of poverty compared with their married counterparts. And losing a spouse can be devastating in more ways than one if

Retirement resources for women

- Women’s Institute for a Secure Retirement [Wiserwomen.org](https://www.wiserwomen.org)
- **Women and Retirement Savings**, by the US Department of Labor’s Employee Benefits Security Administration
- Social Security benefits estimate [SSA.gov/prepare](https://ssa.gov/prepare)



the deceased didn’t have a life insurance policy.

LIVING LONGER

Women’s life expectancy is longer than men’s. According to 2022 data from the US Centers for Disease Control, women’s life expectancy at birth is 80.2 years, while men’s is 74.8 years. Those additional years mean women need to save more for retirement. Not preparing for this reality can lead to financial insecurity or poverty.

HOW TO CLOSE THE GENDER RETIREMENT GAP

Though systemic issues are at play with the gender retirement gap, there are some things you can do to take control.

Make retirement contributions a priority

Judith Ward, a certified financial planner and thought leadership director at T. Rowe Price who authored its retirement study, suggests women take advantage of what’s readily available, such as a 401(k) plan with a potential company match.

If you don’t have access to an employer-sponsored plan, don’t let that stop you from saving for retirement. You can look into IRAs: a traditional IRA, Roth IRA, or spousal IRA.

That last one helps women who are focusing on childcare or other caregiver duties save for retirement.

“For people who may not be investment savvy, usually there’s a choice-of-target-date solution [in which the person chooses a target retirement date],” Ward says.

Increase income

One way to combat the gender pay gap is to focus on increasing your income. “A lot of people have [already] cut their spending,” says Ward.

She says with the rise of remote work and greater flexibility, you have more options to increase your income. In addition to the usual moves—getting a higher-paying job or asking for a raise with your current employer—you could also start a side hustle or take on freelance opportunities.

Create a comprehensive plan

Start where you are and create a comprehensive plan for the future. “Know what your income sources are going to be, what your Social Security benefits are going to look like,” says Pamela J. Sams, a chartered retirement planning counselor and financial advisor at Jackson Sams Wealth Strategies.

Consider life expectancy, lifestyle, and location when determining how much you need to save for retirement. “Are you going to relocate? That really has an effect on how much you need to start saving toward retirement,” Sams says.

To protect yourself against the event that your spouse passes away, make sure they have a life insurance policy in place. And above all, continue to learn about finances and consider seeking the advice of a financial professional. **EW**

Melanie Lockert is the author of Dear Debt, which chronicles her journey out of \$81,000 in student loan debt, and has a decade of experience writing about personal finance.

Create Your New Blueprint



With many companies now setting return-to-office policy, employees are charting a new normal

BY TERRI HUGGINS HART

SUE EDINGER, CHIEF OF operations at Inns of Aurora, did the seemingly impossible—she kept the business afloat and morale high throughout the transition to in-office work as the COVID-19 pandemic waned. And she did it without laying off any resort employees during that time. How? By intentionally utilizing technical resources, staying flexible, and leaning into employees' personal strengths and incorporating

them in new ways throughout the resort.

Edinger's mastery of the shift out of remote work exceeded her company's expectations to such a degree that it helped earn the Inns of Aurora recognition as one of the best places to work in New York.

Her inspiration? "I was fortunate to work with men who got it and offered me a partner position with flexibility while pregnant in the '80s," she says. They offered flexible hours, limited mandatory meetings, and gave her the

ability to be present for her children without guilt. "I did that for 16 years. And I don't think that season of being home with my kids a bit more harmed my ability to step into [other roles] when the time was right for me or my career."

Looking to that experience as a blueprint, Edinger felt it was important to maintain a high morale at Inns of Aurora to enhance employees' ability to be present in all aspects of their lives, regardless of what phase the company was in regarding in-office work.

It's rare for managers to execute the dream of improved company culture while being productive and moving back to in-office work as seamlessly as

BALANCING ACT

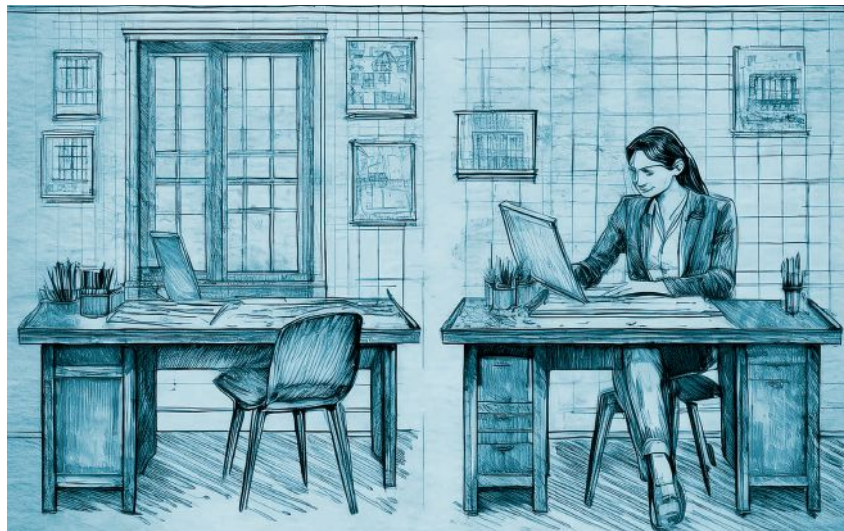
Edinger did. Despite the widespread belief that in-office teams improve productivity and company culture, some studies have in fact shown the opposite, finding that return-to-office mandates have resulted in weaker morale and talent loss, according to 45 percent of employees.

SHOWING UP WHEN IT MATTERS

Women still show their commitment to their career growth by being present physically and mentally. They also remain committed to their families and social networks. However, their power to control their own calendars has to some degree lessened. Two separate surveys conducted by Gartner in 2023 found that most employers had increased their expectations of in-office work. Meanwhile, nearly half of employees surmised that company mandates favor employers' needs over what employees need to thrive. Another survey revealed employers prefer mandatory in-office work to better track their employees' activity.

"When employers have more power, they tend to be less concerned about people's well-being, or they seem to be more concerned about productivity because they're also under economic pressure," says Leslie Forde, CEO and founder of Mom's Hierarchy of Needs. "Presenting your needs wrapped in the context of what is good for the organization helps women execute where it matters."

The McKinsey report *Women in the Workplace 2023* disclosed that one in five women says flexibility has helped them stay in their job or avoid reducing their hours. Remote work has allowed employees to tend to doctors' appointments and family concerns, take care of their own well-being, and complete timely work-related tasks at their convenience. Now, having to sacrifice showing up for important personal matters for in-office visibility has raised tension among employees. Forde suggested that women can counter the guilt of deciding what to show up for in person and where to direct their



Women can counter the guilt of deciding what to show up for in person and where to direct their attention by setting realistic expectations, assessing their values, and finding their own sense of fulfillment.

attention by setting realistic expectations, assessing their values, and finding their own sense of fulfillment.

One glaring problem is the disconnect between the long list of duties women manage personally and professionally. A Bank of America report found that 81 percent of employers believed they offered comprehensive support to caregivers, but 61 percent of caregiver respondents were unaware of any available support. There are also discrepancies in the quality of the support when offered and available.

Thanks to lobbying, greater support for caregivers—including a comprehensive benefits package encompassing wellness reimbursements and mental health coverage—is an emerging strategic trend that allows all parties to feel whole. More than half of employees rank access to paid time off for vacations, illness, and mental health reasons highly, according to Pew

Research. In contrast, those with paid time off are reluctant to use it for fear of losing their job or being passed over for promotions.

An American Psychological Association study found that there's been a slight increase in employee satisfaction with mental health support and benefits in comparison to previous years. Additionally, the Mercer Survey on *Health & Benefit Strategies for 2024* found that 64 percent of employers planned to improve their well-being-related benefits in 2024. Based on employee need for flexibility and support, benefit enhancements are instrumental in retaining employees and demonstrating that companies care about the many facets of their lives.

INCREASING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Empathy is also increasingly important for employee satisfaction. "What I've noticed is that having empathy helps name the elephant in the room," says Jenny Woo, PhD, MBA, an emotional intelligence researcher and founder and CEO of Mind Brain Emotion. "It helps employees say what they're feeling, advocate for themselves, and enable their leaders to actively listen to understand team needs. There's more cohesion and less need to fight fires or put out fires."

AI Tools That Help Streamline Your Life

When life demands get overwhelming, AI can help reclaim balance

RescueTime: It offers AI-enabled timesheets to help with time blocking and project timelines.

Ohai.ai: The AI personal assistant syncs calendars, delegates tasks, and identifies scheduling conflicts for work or home life.

Otter.ai: The transcription software summarizes meeting notes and generates corresponding action items.

Mailbutler: This tool helps you streamline email management tasks such as composing, replying to, and summarizing emails.

Grammarly: One of the oldest and most used AI tools, Grammarly fixes your grammar and spelling mistakes in real time.

Of course, the responsibility is not just on the company to figure out what employees need. Employees need to find appropriate ways of letting their managers know what they need to be productive. Knowing where to show up and how is about being strategic, explains Dr. Angela Garretson, chief of public and government affairs at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. “Let them into your process when you need to step away [by providing] documentation, deadlines, and what you need to be effective,” she says.

MANAGING COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD

For employees, having the ability to show up as their whole selves at work and at home is a priority. That can't be done with around-the-clock

notifications from multiple communication platforms. Women are overwhelmed with excessive apps and constant communication and yearning for a better way to manage it all.

Parents receive over 17 messages per week about children's activities, with women feeling the brunt as the likely primary caregiver, according to a mental load report conducted by Skylight. Additionally, more than half of survey respondents in a survey by GoodHire said their managers either communicate too much or not enough virtually and digitally. Meanwhile, those in leadership roles are using up to 10 apps to manage daily tasks, which isn't the most efficient.

Now the focus on work-life balance is moving toward improving processes and setting boundaries around the amount of communication. When that meeting that should have been an email becomes multiple emails, and demands from home are affecting executive functioning, artificial intelligence becomes an essential management tool.

AI has gone from a tool that employees were afraid made them look lazy to one that, when used within reasonable guidelines, can help with productivity. You can't use AI to do the work for you, but you can use it to help conceptualize, plan, and execute your tasks, Forde suggests. “If you're at the epicenter of making it all happen and ensuring that it's done well or done on time, that's still a lot of emotional and cognitive labor.”

HONORING ALL IDENTITIES

For some, the definition of ambition has shifted post-pandemic. Ambition was long measured in job titles and salary. But today people aspire to jobs that allow them to be involved within their household and social life.

“As more women seek careers that allow for freedom in their personal lives, traditional titles aren't as much of a focus for the reasons we're used to,” Woo explains. “They are looking at it

as part of their growth and freedom to explore their identity.”

During work-from-home orders amid the pandemic, workers were reluctant to share their passions, advocacy, and side hustles, fearing criticism. However, research suggests the empowerment from pursuing side hustles spills over into full-time work and strengthens an employee's productivity and engagement. With this expanded understanding of the workplace and how to succeed, women now have more freedom to bring their multiple identities and skills to their jobs.

For example, if they are mentors or have a side hustle as an executive coach, these related skills can be leveraged in the workplace, particularly when they're vying for upward mobility. In most cases, it's a big benefit for all. “Every one of my team members has different passions that they bring,” says Edinger. “If you can find a way to allow them to add their signature to the organization with those passions, you create an incredibly unique organization.”

Side hustles also allow women to be on the receiving end of respect they may not typically experience in their day-to-day jobs. Microaggressions, lack of credit for ideas, and assumptions about their role and emotional state continue to be concerns for women in the office.

“In these environments, especially as women of color, we are often not seen as the contributors in the room,” says Garretson. “So a part of the strategy and one of the things that I'm a huge proponent [of] was just exposure. Growing through my career, I was always really involved in a lot of [environments] and professional development.” **EW**

Terri Huggins Hart is a journalist, tireless researcher, dancer at heart, and fervent supporter of disability rights who successfully advocated for an inclusive community park as well as paid leave in New Jersey.

Calling all high-performing, high-potential women!

Join Executive Woman Network and receive the following benefits:

- Career and Personal Development Courses
- Access to Executive Coaches
- Connection With Other Professional Leaders
- Meaningful conversations
- Thriving Thursday Recordings
- Expert Advice

EXECUTIVE
WOMAN Network

diversitywomannetwork.com



20 Anniversary
Diversity Woman Media

Join today!



TRAVEL SAVVY

Tipping Tips

Tipping is more confusing than ever. Here's expert advice for navigating today's service culture.

BY ERICA SWEENEY

WHEN CHECKING OUT AT a clothing store recently, Mariah Grumet was unexpectedly prompted to tip the sales associate. She decided to give \$5 because she says she received “wonderful service.”

Still, it was an unusual request, says Grumet, founder of Old Soul Etiquette in New York City. “I typically wouldn’t have thought to tip her or felt that it was technically necessary if the prompt didn’t show up [on the payment terminal], but I was happy to give because she was extremely helpful.”

While Grumet is always willing, she says, to show appreciation for someone’s hard work and great service, she feels that tipping culture is changing, and consumers are increasingly being asked to tip in new situations. She’s not alone in feeling this way.

Nearly 75 percent of Americans said they believe tipping has gotten out of control recently, according to a 2024 WalletHub survey. Sixty-four percent think you should tip when you “feel like it” instead of it being something you always have to do, and half of those surveyed leave tips out of social pressure rather than because of good service.



While you likely expect to tip at a restaurant or hair salon, hospitality and etiquette experts say new tipping expectations are emerging, and it can be confusing to know when to tip and how much. They have some explanations for the expansion of the culture of tipping, and a few pointers.

WHY DOES TIPPING SEEM SO COMPLICATED NOW?

Tipping isn’t new, of course, but there are several reasons why it seems to be more complex than ever, says Amanda Belarmino, associate professor of hospitality management at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

One is that businesses are looking for ways to increase their employees’

wages without increasing costs, she says. Millions of workers, particularly women and people of color, rely on tips as part of their income, and many consumers, concerned about workers earning a living wage, have a desire to help them. However, more than 37 percent of people surveyed said they feel businesses should pay their staff better and not rely on tips, according to a 2024 Bankrate report.

At the same time, consumers are feeling the pinch of inflation and a pressure to tip in instances in which they previously haven’t been asked to, Belarmino says. Americans spend \$454 a year on tipping on average, according to Talker Research.

Touch-screen payment terminals with tipping prompts are also becoming more common, which Grumet says “has contributed to creating this new expectation and level of pressure that did not seem to be there before.” That pressure can make it difficult to know when it’s necessary or expected to tip, and tipping norms can vary by location, she says.

HOW TO DECIDE WHETHER TO TIP

Despite the confusion, it’s always a good idea to tip when a service has been performed, especially when it’s good or outstanding, says Lisa Mirza Grotts, an etiquette consultant known as the Golden Rules Gal. Services include manicures, haircuts, massages, and dining out.

Another appropriate occasion for tipping is when someone relies on it as part of their income, Grumet says, or if they’re doing a task that makes your personal life easier—such as bringing your bags to your hotel

room or fetching your car from valet parking.

“If you don’t know whether or not you should tip in a certain situation,” she says, “give what you can when the service you are receiving is well done.”

But don’t feel obligated if it’s an instance in which you wouldn’t normally tip and you don’t feel there was a high level of service, Belarmino says.

WHEN AND HOW MUCH TO TIP

Businesses often recommend tip amounts when you pay, especially on touch-screen monitors.

But Belarmino says not to feel obligated to give suggested amounts.

Instead, tip what you think is fair. If you’re not sure what amount that should be, says Grotts, 15 to 20 percent of a total bill is a good general rule in most instances, such as restaurants, bars, salons, and spas. Here are some specific guidelines.

RESTAURANTS, BARS, AND COFFEE SHOPS

You likely tip at sit-down restaurants, where it’s customary to give 15 to 20 percent (or more when the service is exceptional), Grumet says. In some instances, a gratuity has already been added to your bill, so Bankrate recommends checking before deciding whether or not to add to it. Waitstaff typically depend on tips as part of their pay.

It gets a little more confusing at counter-service or grab-and-go eateries. Grumet says, “If you’re ordering at a counter and food is being brought to you, you may want to consider tipping a few dollars.” A gratuity isn’t necessary, however, if you’re grabbing food or drinks yourself and bringing them to the checkout, Grotts says. “The only service being performed is by you.”

Tipping for takeout is a personal choice. Some people tip, but Grumet says it’s usually not necessary.

At bars, \$1 per beer or glass of wine is a good rule, according to Bankrate, but 18 to 20 percent for cocktails, which take time to make. Tip baristas at coffee shops or cafés 15 to 20 percent.

SALONS AND SPAS

Nail techs, hairstylists, massage therapists, and aestheticians should be tipped 15 to 20 percent of the cost of the services, Grotts says. You can leave more or less based on the quality of the service.

These services are also usually customized for you, which Belarmino says you should consider when you tip. Also, tip the same amount even if your hairstylist or manicurist owns the salon or spa.

“I don’t think you should penalize them for being an entrepreneur,” she says. “They would appreciate it, and they’re providing a service for you.”

HOTELS

Most people don’t tip hotel housekeepers. But Belarmino says you should, as these staff perform strenuous work in keeping your room tidy. It’s recommended to tip housekeeping \$3 to \$5 a day for up to three people per room or \$10 at a luxury hotel, according to Bankrate, which suggests tipping daily, as housekeeping staff rotate.

Between \$2 and \$3 per bag (or \$5 at a luxury hotel) is recommended for someone bringing your bags to your room, and \$5 for a concierge who helps you get tickets to an event, makes a restaurant reservation, or fulfills another request.



DELIVERY DRIVERS

These days, we’re getting more and more things delivered: food, groceries, alcohol. “Delivery drivers often rely on tips as a significant part of their income, similar to workers in other service industries,” Grotts says.

When ordering via a restaurant delivery platform, delivery fees aren’t the same as tips for the drivers, according to Grubhub. The company suggests tipping at least \$5 or preferably 20 percent of the meal’s cost. For grocery delivery, tip 15 to 20 percent of the total bill, according to Bankrate. The same goes for alcohol delivery.

“If the service was exceptional or if the delivery required extra effort—such as carrying heavy items up several flights of stairs—you might consider tipping on the higher end of the scale,” Grotts says.

TRANSPORTATION

Rideshare apps, like Uber and Lyft, may suggest tip amounts, such as a few dollars, to make it easier for users. But AAA recommends considering the total price of the ride and tipping 10 to 20 percent of that amount. For taxis, tip 15 to 20 percent of the total fare, AAA says. It’s also recommended to tip shuttle drivers that carry people to the airport, for example, about \$3 and more for a ride.

The bottom line with tipping is that it’s always appreciated, so give what you can, Belarmino says. But it’s also a barometer of a service or experience, so she says not to feel obligated to overtip in situations that you feel don’t measure up.

“Tipping is a way to show your appreciation,” Grotts says. “Kindness and generosity are a match made in heaven. When in doubt, make someone’s day.” **EW**

Erica Sweeney is a freelance journalist whose work appears in the New York Times, Men’s Health, Business Insider, HuffPost, Reworked, and many other publications.



YOUR WELL BEING

One Thing at a Time

Why you should stop multitasking—and four simple habits that can help you quit

BY BEV LUCAS

HAVE YOU SEEN MY keys? I can't believe I missed the meeting—I thought it was next week! His name is on the tip of my tongue. Where are my glasses? (Hint: Check the top of your head.)

If you keep forgetting things, you're not alone. Although typically associated with aging, forgetfulness is a common problem that can affect adults of all ages. Well-known culprits include stress, depression, lack of sleep, thyroid problems, and, of course, early signs of Alzheimer's disease or other dementia. (See "When to Get Help for Memory Concerns" on page 41.)

But one surprising cause of memory meltdown is multitasking. That's right. If your life is more demanding and hectic than ever before and you're constantly trying to juggle multiple tasks at once, it might be adversely affecting your memory.

WHAT IS MULTITASKING?

Most people think that multitasking means doing two or more things at the same time, such as catching up on emails during a virtual meeting. But that's not true. "What we're actually doing when 'multitasking' is shifting our attention back and forth very quickly between two or more tasks," says Marisa Menchola, PhD, associate professor and director of neuropsychology training at the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Tucson.

Experts caution that this task switching comes at a cost. "The brain has attention systems that allow us to focus on a task. However, in order to shift back and forth, the brain must disengage its attention systems from the current task and then shift to the other task. Then it has to engage in that task, and then disengage from that task and reorient to the first one," Menchola says. "When this process happens over and over, the brain has to work harder than it does when it can focus on just one task at a time."

HOW MULTITASKING AFFECTS MEMORY

Short-term memory allows a person to remember a small amount of information for a very limited amount of time (for example, recalling someone's name when you've just been introduced). But when our brains are bombarded with information from multitasking, our short-term memory becomes overloaded and doesn't work as well as it should, explains Gloria Mark, PhD, an informatics professor at the University of California, Irvine. "This information overload can lead to forgetfulness," she says.

In addition to its impact on the brain's working memory, "rapid switching can create confusion, which can lead to mistakes," Mark adds. "This process is reflective of our memories not working the way they should." Another issue of concern is that too much switching can lead to stress and



There are multiple strategies that can help you cut down on multitasking, improve your focus, and boost your chances of remembering things you don't want to forget.

fatigue. "When we're stressed and fatigued, our memories don't work as well," she notes.

THE PRODUCTIVITY MYTH

Does multitasking make you more productive? The answer, surprisingly, is no. In fact, rapid task shifting makes you less productive. "We think that by shifting our attention, we're accomplishing more because we're able to work on multiple things," says Mark, who is the author of *Attention Span: A Groundbreaking Way to Restore Balance, Happiness and Productivity*. "But there's a switch cost every time. As a result, it actually takes

longer to do the individual tasks when we're switching our attention between them than it would if we focused on a single task," she explains.

Multitasking isn't always a bad idea. "When one of the things being done is automatic and doesn't take a lot of cognitive effort but the other one does, multitasking can work and save some time," says Menchola.

One example is listening to music while working. "I work in an open space that I share with several other colleagues, and it can get noisy," says Tia Cusanelli, principal systems engineer at Northrop Grumman in Baltimore. "To cut down on the noise when I'm writing code, I put on my headphones and listen to music without vocals. This allows me to focus on writing the code," she says. "The key is that the music doesn't have lyrics, so I'm not concentrating on the words to the song"

YOU MUST REMEMBER THIS

The good news: There are multiple strategies that can help you cut down

on multitasking, improve your focus, and boost your chances of remembering things you don't want to forget.

1 Say no to notifications. “When it comes to cognitive efficiency and attention, [cell phone] notifications are the enemy,” says Menchola, who is the author of *A Brain-Friendly Life: How to Manage Cognitive Overload and Reduce Glitching*. “The whole point of notifications is to capture our attention to get us to shift. Turning notifications off is a very effective strategy, especially when you're focused on a cognitively demanding, difficult task.”

The easiest way to silence alerts and notifications is to turn the sound off using the Ring/Silent toggle switch. The shortcoming of this method is that you can still be distracted by the phone vibrating or lighting up when you receive a call or notification.

Another option is to selectively silence notifications using the phone's

Focus mode settings, Cusanelli says. Introduced in response to growing concerns about the adverse impacts of technology overuse, Focus mode helps users fine-tune notifications. “You can set up one Focus for work so that you're not getting spam calls and other notifications during the workday, and one for sleep so that you're not awakened after you go to bed,” she explains. “With Focus mode, you can also allow important notifications to get through. That way you can still be contacted if there's an emergency, but you won't be disturbed by the hundredth notification of the day.”

2 Cut down on email checks. “Research shows that people check their email on average 77 times a day, and that's too much,” says Mark. “It's better to set up a schedule that works for you. One option might be to check it in the morning, then before or after lunch, and again at the end of the day,” Menchola agrees. “It's best to check your email or voicemail inten-

tionally,” she says. “This way you're not constantly having your attention hijacked.”

3 Identify logical break points. When dealing with complex tasks like those at work, the best thing for our brains is to focus on one thing at a time and try to complete it before moving on to something else, Mark advises. If that's not possible, the best thing is to stop at a logical break. “If you're writing a long report for work, for example, stop at the end of a section. When you pick up the task again, you don't have to try to reorient and recreate the work that you've done.” Another tip: “Look ahead and plan to work through until the next break point. Then stop and take a break or pick up another task,” says Mark.

4 “Outsource” brain tasks. To reduce demands on your brain, Menchola suggests keeping a to-do list and checking off tasks as they're completed. If you can't do a task as soon as you remember it, add it to your to-do list. Set alarms to remind yourself about important tasks, such as joining a virtual meeting or taking medication. Even a good old-fashioned Post-it note that you stick somewhere you'll see it can be an effective way to avoid overloading your brain with information.

Don't be afraid to use technology to outsource simple brain tasks. “I take notes in the Notes app on my phone because I typically have it with me, unlike a physical notebook,” says Cusanelli. And one way to avoid worry about finding your keys: don't use them. “More and more cars now have apps that allow you to go keyless,” she says. “You can also get smart locks for your home that identify you biometrically, so there's no need to remember a code or password.” **EW**

Bev Lucas is a freelance writer in Columbia, Maryland.

When to Get Help for Memory Concerns

Fortunately, not all memory lapses are a cause for alarm. However, if you notice your memory getting worse, or if a family member or friend is concerned about your memory, you should make an appointment to see your health-care provider.

“One cause for concern is when memory issues begin to affect your ability to perform daily activities—for example, when you make mistakes on things that are very routine,” says Marisa Menchola, of the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Tucson. “These are things that you typically would not make mistakes on because



you can do them almost without thinking.”

Even if a medical cause for your forgetfulness is not found, an evaluation by a health-care specialist in diagnosing and treating memory issues can identify factors that might be at play. “Evaluations help

us look at all of the factors, such as anxiety or depression, sleep deprivation, stress, medication, even perimenopause or menopause, that can drain our cognitive resources,” she says. “Even if there is nothing more serious going on, we can provide strategies to control the factors that are draining our cognitive resources so that we can function better in daily life.”

FUTURE OF WORK WITH CATALYST JENNIFER McCOLLUM

Breaking the Silence on Menopause



It's time for employers to take action to support women during this life stage.

Jennifer McCollum, president and CEO of Catalyst, is a thought leader with expertise in closing the gender equity gap and in inclusive leadership.

WHEN I TURNED 50, I was at the peak of my career as the first woman CEO of a global leadership firm. At the same time, menopause symptoms began to affect me, often during critical moments like client presentations or board meetings. The hot flashes were distracting and embarrassing, but I stayed silent at work, fearing what my colleagues would think. Even after years of advocating for gender equity, I struggled to talk about menopause in the workplace. My experience highlights an issue millions of women face: menopause remains largely stigmatized and hidden at work.

And yet, menopause is a natural life transition, much like having children or caring for aging parents.

It shouldn't be a secret. We've come a long way in normalizing conversations about other life events, such as parental leave or eldercare, but menopause is still too often met with silence. This needs to change—both for the well-being of employees and for the success of businesses.

A recent Catalyst report reveals that although 91 percent of respondents going through menopause have experienced at least one moderate to extremely severe symptom, 72 percent have hidden them at work at

least once. More than a third (37 percent) say these symptoms negatively impact their work performance. Despite all this, workplace support remains scarce.

For companies focused on inclusion and retaining top talent, ignoring menopause can be costly. I've seen firsthand how stigma can drive talented women away at the peak of their career. Nearly 84 percent of respondents in the Catalyst survey believe workplaces need better support for employees experiencing menopause, and some are even turning down opportunities or leaving jobs due to a lack of support.

In the United States alone, menopause-related productivity losses are estimated at \$1.8 billion annually, but having the right support could make a world of difference. It's time for employers to take action to support women during this life stage. It isn't just the right thing to do—it's a smart business decision.

Employees say they want concrete support from their employers. And our data backs this up.

• Education and awareness: Forty-two percent of employees want broader education about menopause, but only 19 percent of companies provide training.

- Time off and flexible work arrangements:** Sixty percent of employees want these policies, but only 25 percent of organizations provide them.
- Adequate health-care coverage and access to menopause health professionals:** Nearly half (48 percent) of employees expect insurance to cover menopause-related care, but only 22 percent of organizations provide adequate coverage or access.
- Improved work environments:** Employees ask for cooling rooms or ergonomic adjustments, yet just 21 percent of companies offer these.

These simple steps can improve the lives and performance of the roughly half of the global population who will experience menopause. Normalizing the conversation would have made my own experience at work easier. When I eventually sought treatment, it improved my mood, my ability to think clearly, and my overall quality of life at home and in the workplace. Imagine the impact if companies treated menopause like any other life transition, with practical support and understanding.

Menopause may still be a quiet topic in many workplaces, but it doesn't have to be. By building awareness and offering real solutions, companies can create more inclusive, supportive environments where employees feel empowered to bring their whole selves to work. **EW**

SAVE THE DATE

NATIONAL
**WOMEN'S
BUSINESS
LEADERSHIP**
CONFERENCE

*The New Rules of Leadership:
Transcending Power,
Presence & Prominence*

November 6–7, 2025

(opening reception November 5th)

National Gaylord Resort & Conference Center, Washington, DC





Leading the way for diverse women.

At AARP, we know that true strength comes from embracing diversity. Our commitment to an inclusive workforce means we support women from all walks of life to lead, innovate, and succeed. By celebrating unique voices and experiences, we pave the path for a future where every woman can thrive.

**AARP is proud
to fuel change
through inclusive
leadership.**



Discover more today at careers.aarp.org/dei