



Driving Equality in the Workplace

Practical Solutions to Some of the Business
World's Most Persistent Issues of Inequality



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Introduction

At Ellevate Network, we've cultivated a community of people who are interested in bringing about a more equal world. We work with leaders in the space of diversity and inclusion because we believe that using the power of community is the most effective way to learn from one another, share best practices, and problem solve for the world's biggest issues.

This White Paper provides practical solutions to some of the business world's most persistent issues of inequality, including:

- Getting Buy-In for the Business Case for Diversity
- Struggling New Managers and the Challenges for Women (Inclusive Manager Series)
- Advancing Women of Color
- Building Confident Women Leaders Within Your Company
- The Journey to an Inclusive Culture

The content in this document is derived from a series of roundtable discussions facilitated by Ellevate Network staff, with key contributions from some of our most valued corporate partners and leaders in business who value innovation, generating higher returns, and providing equal opportunity. It functions as a complimentary resource for those who would like to guide their business culture toward an environment of equality — in turn driving positive returns, contributing to employees' overall satisfaction at work and thereby decreasing employee turnover, contributing positively to the global economy, and acting as leaders in their industry.

Ellevate Network [works with companies committed to diversity and inclusion](#) and regularly brings together leading businesses across industries to share best practices. If you'd like to participate in the next roundtable discussion and be a part of the [movement toward equality](#) in business, please [join us for the next one](#).



Getting Buy-In for the Business Case for Diversity



The business case for diversity, although not universally understood and accepted, is in fact clear — [companies with diverse leadership teams are more successful](#), and diverse teams lead to better innovation, more employee engagement, greater returns and greater client focus. In order for organizations to experience the full benefits of diversity, though, they must make sure that there is buy-in from senior leadership. According to [Harvard Business Review](#), “gender diversity relates to more productive companies, as measured by market value and revenue, *only* in contexts where gender diversity is viewed as ‘normatively’ accepted.” Normative acceptance, in this case, refers to a “widespread cultural belief that gender diversity is important.”

The health of a company is so dependent on this normative acceptance of gender diversity. Becoming an inclusive organization in this way is a process that takes time and deliberate action, and may involve a shift in corporate culture. Though this can be a long process, there are actionable steps organizations can take to ensure there is buy-in throughout every level of the company:

- **Make D&I a Collaborative Effort.** Create working teams and build a framework for employees to have a voice and express their ideas and solutions instead of telling them what they need to do. Be clear on what’s in it for them.
- **Communicate Consistently with Clear Messaging.** Hearing from the CEO and leaders at a company is important, but organizations see more buy-in when people from all levels have a voice at the table. Create a forum where employees can share, where people from all levels can speak to what diversity means to them.
- **Make it Easy to Participate.** For key times throughout the year, such as Women’s History Month, Black History Month, or Pride Month, create playbooks for managers and leaders to use with their teams. Include meetings-in-a-box, event ideas, conversation starters, and other ways to educate and engage employees around these important moments. This takes time, but the payoff is high, the content’s value lives on, and you can lean on Ellevest for resources.
- **Invite Everyone.** Women’s groups shouldn’t just run events that are open to women. While there may be a desire for a safe space for women, excluding certain others does not contribute to an environment that encourages diversity — sometimes it can facilitate divisiveness. Employee Resource Groups should make a concerted effort to invite all types of people, from every level and every department, to meetings and events. Everyone should have an opportunity to contribute and feel comfortable asking questions, and everyone should leave these events learning something new.

Ultimately, encouraging a culture of widespread belief that diversity is important involves every aspect of the business, including hiring, training, and daily activities (See [Journey to an Inclusive Culture](#)). Companies that are the most successful live this culture of diversity and take action to show that diversity is a core value. These steps can help make sure that the push for diversity is shared at every level of the organization, ensuring genuine buy-in, which in turn shows true business results.

Struggling New Managers and the Challenges for Women



Having an excellent manager can really boost your career, helping you to achieve your goals and rise through the ranks.

The opposite is true of a bad manager, especially for women, who benefit significantly from having an effective advocate within their organization. Unfortunately, new managers are often promoted without proper training, having watched and learned from previous managers and sometimes having picked up bad habits that set themselves and their team up for failure. Often, managers have trouble managing others who are different than they are. Even if your team actively recruits diverse talent, new hires are unlikely to feel that the work environment supports their development if their manager struggles to set them up for success. Ultimately, if your company doesn't invest resources in making sure managers are effectively supporting their team members, you risk losing some of your best people, many of whom will be women.

Because bad management can have such an adverse effect on women in business, part of working towards gender parity is properly training those who are promoted to managerial positions. **It is important for managers to have an understanding of their personal leadership styles, their strengths and weaknesses, and the internal culture of the organization.** It is also crucial that all managers go through an implicit bias training. For women, minorities, and other traditionally marginalized groups, a manager is the first line of defense and can be the advocate that clears the way for a leadership path. **Equipping new managers build and hone the skills needed to help support those they manage can make all the difference.**

Organizations have the opportunity to make a big difference for women by training managers to better support them, advocate for them, and encourage them to step outside their comfort zone (i.e., accepting stretch projects, taking the lead on initiatives, practicing effective self-promotion). The relationships between managers and employees and how they communicate with one another are key, especially since it's in your company's interest to see these women **emerge as leaders themselves.**

*Part of the problem seems to be the fact that **managers offer less support to women than they do to men—and again, even less support to women of color.***

*As the Lean In report states
—“This is a problem because manager support is tied to positive outcomes like higher promotion rates and a stronger desire to stay with a company.”*

Advancing Women of Color



Though the business world has made some strides when it comes to inclusion, bias is still a very real problem in the corporate world, disproportionately affecting women of color, especially in traditionally white- and male-dominated industries.



STEPHANIE LAMPKIN

CEO of [Blendoor](#), was told by Silicon Valley recruiters that she was not "technical enough" after graduating from Stanford with an engineering degree and earning an MBA from MIT's Sloan School of Business. She was told to look for a position in sales or marketing instead of engineering. She then went on to found Blendoor, a tech company, and build a job-matching app that reduces bias in the hiring process. The problem here is that Stephanie's skills and talent for engineering were undermined by her race and her gender. Recruiters couldn't see her as a talented coder because she didn't look like the engineers they were accustomed to. Bias like this exists at all levels of recruiting, hiring and on the job — Stephanie's story is just one example of what women of color face at work every day.

To mitigate this problem, all employees, and especially those in recruitment and hiring, should go through **unconscious bias training**. Organizations should consider implementing programs that facilitate blind recruitment and resume evaluation. It is important to educate employees and implement practices within organizations to mitigate the kind of bias that Stephanie faced when trying to enter an overwhelmingly white and male industry. If we hope to lift women up, especially women of color, we must value them for their contributions and their skills, not for their race or gender.

Another way to help advance women of color is to help facilitate mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, which can be difficult to find within many organizations. While training managers to recognize and effectively support high-potential women of color is ideal, this sort of mindset change can take time. It may be necessary to facilitate mentorship, sponsorship, and peer-to-peer relationships in a more formal way through Employee Resource Groups or through programs provided by an outside organization like Ellevest Network. These key relationships often mean the difference between women of color moving up in your organization and leaving for a more appealing employer — so don't minimize their impact, and be sure to make them a priority.

Building Confident Women Leaders Within Your Company



There are many barriers for women within the typical corporate structure, and we've already learned that effective managers are key to women's advancement (and your company's long term retention of them). The opportunities with the highest potential to attract, retain, and develop women at your company lie within programs and initiatives dedicated to **developing them as leaders**. The effect of leadership development initiatives are twofold: with women in leadership, the perspectives and expertise of your diverse employees contribute to the bottom line of the business, and your organization is able to send the message that there are pathways to leadership for women within your particular organization, which helps with retention. Developing confident women leaders is crucial to the development of successful organizations, but what are the best ways to accomplish it?

Mitigate the challenge of self-promotion for women. We can encourage women to “go for it,” even if they don't feel completely prepared, but we must first create a culture of acceptance. We can strive to create a culture within our organizations where failure is not only accepted but is seen as a key part of innovation. If we can mitigate the perceived consequences of failure and the fear of seeming too self-promotional, we can create an environment where persistence, resilience, and ingenuity are prized over perfection, and we can open the door to a different leadership ideal — one that is more accepting of all.

Consider providing managers with the framework to discuss these things directly with women employees, including:

- Talking about money
- Negotiation
 - Flex time
 - Benefits
 - Roles within the organization
- Framing yourself as an expert/ Taking credit for your work
- Reframing risk-taking (this disproportionately affects women of color and single moms, who take fewer risks because more is at stake for them)

Encourage women to build themselves a personal board of directors. Having a group of mentors and sponsors to lean on and learn from can be instrumental in helping equip women to tackle some of the biggest challenges they face in the workplace. Sometimes the best place to find a support system like this is in an external group — a local event for young professionals, or a group of professional women like [Ellevate Squads](#). A personal board of directors is a great place to practice having the courageous conversations that help women build the confidence they need to get ahead.

Equip managers to create an environment where allowing women to take on stretch assignments is the norm. Discourage them from passing up an opportunity because it brings them out of their comfort zone. By taking on stretch projects, women expand their networks within their organization, build confidence in themselves, and ensure that they are top of mind when the next project or promotion becomes available. It may be intimidating, but stretch assignments are a great way to show confidence and skill in a way that feels more natural to women, as opposed to the self-promotion that is common in men's advancement at work.

Build more leadership training programs that provide a clearer pathway to leadership for women, especially women of color. The issue of few women in leadership is *not* a pipeline problem — according to [Catalyst](#), women represent 44.7% of the professional jobs in S&P 500 companies, but occupy only 26.5% of senior management roles and 4.8% of CEO positions. As women ascend at work, we are losing them. This means the issue is a pathway problem, and the responsibility lies with business leaders to make a conscious effort to change that. Provide [leadership training for women employees](#) and unconscious bias training for those already in leadership, and continue to build an environment where women in leadership is the norm.

Support women's networking events and conferences through sponsorships and pay for your women employees to attend. According to a recent [Harvard Business Review](#) study, in the year after connecting with peers at the Conference for Women, the likelihood of working women receiving a promotion *more than doubled*.

The study looked at 2,600 working women across functions and industries attending Conferences for Women in several U.S. states, and used a control group of women who signed up for a conference but had not yet attended. In the control group, 18% received a promotion that year, compared with 42% of women who had already attended the conference.

In other words, the women who made connections with other working women and who were exposed to engaging sessions and industry leaders as role models were more likely to achieve career-boosting milestones. Companies can make it easier for their women employees to attend women's conferences by covering the cost of a ticket, or by sponsoring events to help make them more available to working women. Ellevest hosts networking events all over the US throughout the year, including the [Mobilize Women Summit in NYC](#) each June, and there are many conferences across the country that touch on the issues most relevant to women in business. By supporting events like this, organizations support women in business and help to give them the opportunities they need to build the relationships that are proven to make a big difference to their career development.

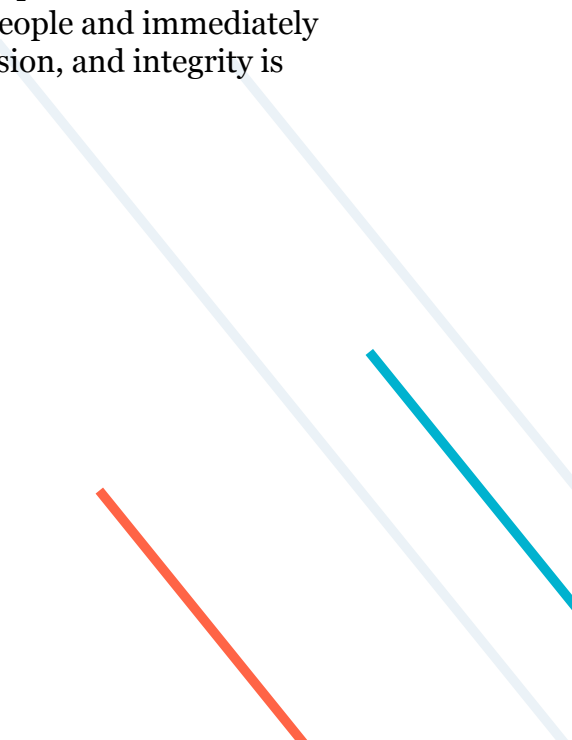


The Journey to an Inclusive Culture

Becoming an inclusive organization is a process that takes time and deliberate action. In many cases, it involves a change in corporate culture. Changing how employees feel about the company and one another, and how they interact, can be time consuming, but there are some steps that organizations can take to direct the process.

To promote a culture change within a company, organizations can start with cultural training for the CEO, other C-Suite executives, and senior leadership. Though the ultimate goal is commitment to inclusion on every level of the organization, training for leadership is a great place to start to make sure that they are all on board and on the same page. Once trained, senior leadership's mission is to tap "cultural ambassadors" at all different levels and from all lines of business. These "cultural ambassadors" will also go through the inclusion training, so that they can pass the knowledge on to their teams and coworkers and encourage participation throughout the company.

For real organizational change it's important to speak to the everyday challenges in people's lives and incorporate a culture of diversity, and inclusion into everyone's roles and responsibilities. In order to maintain this commitment, inclusion must be considered in every aspect of an organization — hiring, training, daily activities, operations, client relations. For inclusion to be a lived value, it must be a constant commitment, something that everyone pledges to uphold and practice, something that leadership promotes and considers with every business decision. Hiring the right people and immediately incorporating them into your culture of acceptance, inclusion, and integrity is how you enact change.





Contact Us

Interested in how Ellevate works with companies to drive equality in the workplace?

[Fill out this form](#) to request more information. We're on a mission to change the culture of business from the inside out, and your company can be a part of that change.
