

Top 4 Ways to Inspire Inclusion in the Workplace This Women's History Month

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March is Women’s History Month. And while inclusion in the workplace should always be a priority, this month is the perfect time to review your company culture and organizational norms—and see what you can do to create a more equitable, supportive, and safe environment for your female employees.

What does that look like in practice? In honor of Women’s History Month, let’s take a look at four different ways to inspire inclusion in the workplace—and create a better environment for women in the process:

Contents

- 3 Make Gender-Pay Equity a Priority**
- 7 Build an Inclusive Leadership Team**
- 13 Offer Family-Friendly Benefits**
 - 14 Child Care Benefits
 - 14 Parental Leave
 - 15 Flexible Work Hours
- 17 Collect Employee Feedback**
 - 17 Executing a Culture Audit



1



**Make
Gender-Pay
Equity a
Priority**

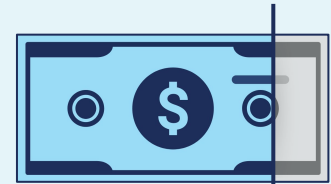
Make Gender-Pay Equity a Priority

A workplace can't be considered diverse, inclusive, or equitable if women aren't making the same amount of money as men in similar positions—which is why organizations need to promote pay equity.

Unfortunately, there's a long way to go. According to [Pew Research](#), as of 2022, for every dollar earned by men, women only earned 82 cents. And that pay gap is even larger for women of color, with Black women only earning 70 percent as much as white men—while Hispanic women only earn 65 percent. And according to The Muse's 2024 Women's History Month survey conducted in partnership with [RecruitmentMarketing.com](#), approximately 50% of female employees are unsure if they are being compensated equally to their male counterparts.

This pay gap has an ongoing negative impact on women. With lower wages, women have less money to support themselves and their families. They have to spend time and energy figuring out how to stretch their dollars in a way that covers their expenses—which has become increasingly challenging amidst rising inflation. And because women have less money to work with, they also have less money to invest (for example, in retirement accounts, the stock market, or real estate)—which sets women back financially on a larger, more long-term scale.

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Pew Research Center, 2022

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The Muse, 2024

The pay gap also widens as women advance in their careers. According to [McKinsey's Women in the Workplace 2023 report](#), for every 100 men promoted from entry-level to manager, only 87 women were promoted—and, at 72 women per 100 men, that number is even lower for women of color. (The Muse's data backed up those statistics, with 67 percent reporting that women in their profession and/or industry have a difficult time getting promoted.)

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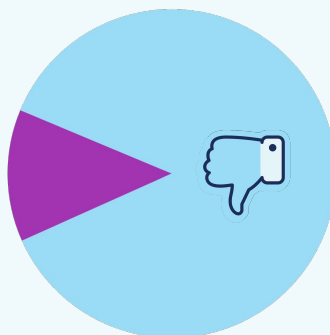
The Muse, 2024

And because men are more likely to advance than their female counterparts—even when they have similar experience—that pay gap just continues to grow over time.

Even when women are promoted, they often have a challenging time negotiating salary increases—particularly because of how organizations view women who ask for higher compensation. According to our survey, when asked whether women and men received the same reaction from management or company leadership when negotiating salary increases, a whopping 87 percent of people surveyed said “no.”

Do you believe women and men receive the same reaction from management or company leadership when negotiating salary increases?

13%
Yes



87%
No

The Muse, 2024

How Companies Can Do Better

If organizations want to create a better environment for women, they need to make gender pay equity a top priority.

How companies do that will vary; for example, some may perform a pay equity audit to determine which positions have significant pay disparities—and then change the salaries to be more equal between male, female, and non-binary candidates with similar backgrounds and experience levels. Others may consider hiring a pay equity consultant to manage their change in pay structure.

But one thing that all companies can do to promote pay equity is to embrace transparency.

Gender wage gaps flourish because so few people feel comfortable openly sharing their compensation packages—and because no one knows what others are making, they

can't determine whether they're being compensated fairly or equitably. (In fact, according to The Muse's survey, **nearly half of all female employees said they were unsure whether they were being compensated equally to their male colleagues.**)

As such, companies should take a transparent approach to compensation. This might include adding salary ranges to job descriptions and/openly sharing the process of how salaries are calculated.

By combining more equitable pay structures with pay transparency, organizations can help to minimize the gender pay gap—and ensure that women are being paid competitively, fairly, and in line with their male colleagues.



2



**Build
an Inclusive
Leadership
Team**

Build an Inclusive Leadership Team

Another major barrier to creating supportive, inclusive workplaces is a lack of representation—particularly when it comes to the representation of women on leadership teams.

The Muse's report found that 55 percent of employees feel that there's not enough female representation in their organization's leadership team—which makes sense given the statistics; according to the Women in Workplace report, as of 2023, women represent roughly 1 in 4 C-suite leaders—while women of color represent just 1 in 16.

But inclusive leadership doesn't just benefit employees; it also directly benefits companies.

For example, The Muse's survey found that, when looking for a new job, nearly 80 percent of team members reported seeking out companies with equal representation of women in managerial and leadership positions. And because diversity is such a priority for so many candidates, female representation in leadership can help organizations attract top talent.

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The Muse, 2024

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The Muse, 2024

Inclusion leadership also offers a host of other benefits for organizations, including:



Increased engagement.

When female employees see women in leadership roles, it signals that the organization is committed to promoting and supporting women—which can make them more engaged with their jobs and the organization.

More diverse voices.

Diverse voices are a huge asset to company strategy and decision-making. When you have different types of people in leadership, you have more diverse opinions when making decisions—which can help prevent blind spots or biases from coming into play (and, ultimately, harming the organization).



Better ideas.

Similarly, diverse employees also have diverse opinions, leading to more creative ideas and innovation within the organization, which is key to an organization thriving. For example, a [report from PwC](#) found that companies that prioritize innovation grow at a 16 percent higher rate than their less innovative competitors.

Easier to attract diverse talent.

Inclusive leadership doesn't just attract top talent; it also attracts top female talent specifically. Why? People want to see themselves represented in a company. So, when women see other females in positions of power, it shows them that the organization is invested in promoting, supporting, and listening to women—which can help that company rise to the top of top female candidates' "where I want to work" list.



How Companies Can Do Better

If companies want to build more inclusive teams, it starts with more diverse hiring.

While it's not uncommon for leadership candidates to be recruited outside of the organization, often, leadership roles go to employees who have worked their way up through the company. In order to ensure that there are more women up for these jobs when they become available, companies need to prioritize inclusive hiring practices that get more amazing female talent in the door.

For example, companies may set benchmarks for more equitable sourcing, interviewing, and hiring, as well as require women to hold a certain percentage of positions or titles—which is particularly important for roles and industries that are historically male-dominated, like STEM. (The Muse's survey found that 38% of respondents hesitated to apply for a job due to gender-related biases, while more than 40 percent encountered biased or inappropriate gender-related questions during an interview—so improving the hiring process is a must.)

But it doesn't stop there. If companies want more women in leadership positions, in addition to hiring more female talent, companies need to be willing to promote more female talent at each level of the company hierarchy—for example, from entry-level to manager, from manager to director, and from director to VP.

A great way to set women up for successful promotions? Creating a mentorship program. Identifying top female talent and offering them mentoring at work can not only help them grow professionally, but can also help them develop the skills they need to rise within the company and step into leadership roles.

38%

of people reported that they have hesitated to apply for a job due to gender-related biases.

Creating a mentorship program at work will depend on your company's structure. Some things to consider:

- ◆ **Pair employees with the best mentors.** While it's preferable to partner female mentees with female mentors—not to mention common; The Muse's survey found that nearly 60 percent of employees have had a female mentor—if there aren't a high volume of women in leadership roles (or female mentors who would make sense for a particular candidate), pairing women with male mentors can also be beneficial.

- ◆ **Set aside company time for mentorship meetings.** Mentorships work best when mentors and mentees have time and energy to devote to the relationship. Companies should allow leaders and employees time to meet on a regular basis, and during work hours.

- ◆ **Offer shadowing.** One of the biggest benefits of mentorship is for employees to get the opportunity to better understand positions they hope to one day grow into. Shadowing—where mentees spend time with their mentors to understand their job duties and get a sense of the day-to-day—can help female employees grasp how they want to grow professionally (and make decisions accordingly).

- ◆ **Use goals to create mentorship frameworks.** Everyone has different goals for their mentorship relationships. And if you want mentoring at work to contribute to female employees' success, you should use their individual goals to drive the actual program. Ask mentees about what they hope to get out of the mentorship relationship—and then use that information to lead the mentorship program strategy. (For example, if an employee wants to get on a track for a promotion, that would be a different mentorship program than an employee who wants to better understand various departments and decide which to pursue.)
- ◆ **Regularly assess the program.** For mentorship programs to be successful, they need to be beneficial to mentees. Consider regularly assessing the program (for example, every 3 or 6 months) to ensure that mentees feel like the program is adding value—and, if it's not, figure out what you can do to improve the program to better serve their needs.



3



Offer

Family-Friendly
Benefits

Offer Family-Friendly Benefits

Benefits are important. In fact, some sources have found that **78 percent of employees say they would stay with a company just because they like the benefits—** and if they aren't happy with their benefits package, about half (49 percent) are likely to look for a new job because of it.

But while benefits are important to most employees (and play a critical role in employee retention), they're arguably even more important for women—with some benefits being more paramount than others.

Benefits that can help create an inclusive workplace include:



Child Care Benefits

As mentioned, women are much more likely to be in charge of childcare responsibilities. Because of this disparity, having access to childcare benefits—for example, on-site childcare or a stipend to cover daycare costs—is a huge priority for many women. (In fact, 22 percent of the women McKinsey surveyed for their report named child care as the single most important benefit.)



Parental Leave

Women feel similarly about parental leave—with another 22 percent citing this type of leave as the most important benefit an employee can offer. Parental leave gives new mothers (whether by birth, adoption, or fostering) the opportunity to bond with a new addition to their family—rather than try to balance new motherhood with work demands.



Flexible Work Hours

Flexibility is a critical benefit for women. The Muse's report found that 68 percent of women named control over where you work as the most important benefit a company can offer.

And flexibility isn't a priority because women would prefer to work from home; it actually offers support that not only makes their lives easier, but also makes them more effective at their job. For example:

- **Less burnout.**

Women are at higher risk of burnout than men (for example, according to the [Future Forum Pulse Winter 2023 report](#), 46 percent of women reported being burned out—while only 37 percent of men reported the same). But flexible work can help women lower their risk of burnout (and avoid suffering the consequences that go with it). For example, McKinsey's report found that 65 percent of women experience less work burnout or fatigue when working hybrid or remote.

- **Higher productivity.**

Along with lower burnout, work flexibility also allows women to get more done—with the McKinsey report finding that 73 percent of women reported higher productivity and efficiency when working remote or hybrid.

- **More job stability.**

Having more flexibility with their jobs can also help women stay employed—which can help them avoid catastrophic setbacks for themselves and their families. (According to the Women in the Workplace 2023 report, nearly 1 in 5 women said that flexibility helped them stay in their jobs and/or avoid reducing their hours.)



Flexible Work Hours (continued)

- **Less pressure about appearance.** Society places significant pressure on women to look a certain way—and that pressure can have a negative impact on their job performance. Working remotely can help alleviate that pressure—and allow women to focus on the job at hand without worrying about their appearance. (53 percent of women surveyed for the McKinsey report said that working remotely reduced pressure around managing their personal style or appearance).
- **More flexibility for caregiving responsibilities.** Women are disproportionately responsible for caregiving. For example, one [2021 study](#) found that during COVID, 45 percent of women report being the sole provider of care for their children—compared with just 14 percent of men. Having flexibility allows women to better balance their caregiving and work responsibilities (for example, for starting work after they drop off their children at school).

How Companies Can Do Better

In order to create truly inclusive work environments, companies need to prioritize women when building their benefits packages.

In addition to “standard” benefits, like retirement accounts and health insurance, organizations should also offer benefits that make work easier and more equitable for women—including flexible work options, childcare benefits, and paid parental leave.

Not sure what benefits your female employees want or need? Ask! Surveying employees to get a sense of their satisfaction with your current benefits package—and what they feel is missing—can give you key insights into how to improve that package in a way that better serves women in your organization.

4



Collect
Employee
Feedback

Collect Employee Feedback

Employee feedback plays a critical role in inspiring inclusion in the workplace. Because your employees experience your culture each day, they're also the best option for sharing insights into what the organization is doing well and where there is room for improvement to foster more inclusivity. Although getting authentic feedback can be challenging at times depending on the organization, a culture audit is sure to help.

Executing a culture audit

Company culture can play a major role in whether women feel included—or excluded—in the workplace. And unfortunately, in many companies, women's experience falls more in the latter category. For example, according to the Women in Workplace report, women identified multiple microaggressions they faced at work—many of which had a negative impact on their performance, job satisfaction, and well-being. This may take a few different forms, including others taking credit for their work (21 percent), having their judgment questioned (23 percent), or being interrupted or spoken over more than other colleagues (22 percent).

Microaggressions have a negative impact on women's:

- Performance at work
- Job satisfaction
- Overall Well-being

Microaggressions include:

- Getting credit taken for your work
- Having your judgment questioned
- Being interrupted or spoken over more than other colleagues

With things like this regularly happening in the workplace, it's important for organizations to regularly conduct culture audits to identify where their culture is failing—and, more importantly, figure out how to fix it and foster a more inclusive environment.

A culture audit involves surveying employees for their insights into their experience with the company's culture—and, through the lens of inclusion, whether they feel the organizational culture is one that fosters and values inclusivity.

Executing a culture audit (continued)

While culture audits may vary based on factors like goals and company size, some areas to review may include:

Alignment with company values.

Often, companies will say that inclusivity is a value—but then employees' experience of the culture is extremely different. Asking employees about their experience of the company culture can help you determine whether said culture actually aligns with stated organizational values.

Psychological safety.

A big part of inclusivity is feeling safe at work. A cultural audit can be an opportune time to assess psychological safety within the workplace—and understand how safe marginalized employee groups, including women, feel at work (for example, how willing they are to share ideas or contradict someone in a meeting).

Success of DEI initiatives.

If your company is already invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), a culture audit offers an opportunity to get direct feedback from employees on the success of those programs—and whether they feel they're contributing to creating a more inclusive culture overall.

Identifying areas of opportunity—and developing strategies to address them. The entire point of a culture audit is to identify what about your culture isn't working—and create a plan to address those issues. So make sure to ask employees what, from their perspective, can improve about the culture—particularly when it comes to building a more inclusive and equitable workplace.

Executing a culture audit (continued)

Another survey opportunity is to connect directly with female employees to ask them what they need to feel more included. Create a survey for women in your organization. Ask them where they're struggling—and what, as a company, you can do to create more inclusivity for them at work.

For example, if women report having a hard time getting promoted, you might design a professional development program aimed at putting more women on promotion tracks toward leadership. Or, if women feel siloed in their departments, you might create employee resource groups made to bring together female employees across the organization—and give them the support they need to thrive.

How Companies Can Do Better

In order to improve company culture and create a more inclusive work environment, **organizations need to ask for employee feedback—and do so regularly.**

Develop a feedback strategy with multiple ways to submit comments, including:

- ◆ one-on-one meetings with management
- ◆ quarterly company culture surveys
- ◆ surveys on specific company issues, like inclusion

—and then take that feedback and use it to improve your organization.

Make Fostering and Supporting Female Talent a Priority Year-Round

Women's History Month offers a keen opportunity for companies to review their policies and culture—and ensure that both are supportive and inclusive of women. But to inspire real change, organizations need to prioritize women all year-round, giving them the support, tools, and environment they need to thrive at work.



About Us



The Muse is the go-to destination for the next gen workforce to research companies and careers. More than 75 million people each year trust The Muse to help them win at work, from professional advancement and skills-building to finding a job. Organizations use our platform to attract and hire talent by providing an authentic look at company culture, workplace, and values through the stories of their employees.

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