



Inspiring Inclusion on International Women's Day: 10 Ways to Empower Women in the Workplace

Insights

3.01.24

The theme of International Women's Day this year is "Inspire Inclusion." While it is important to consider the inclusivity and diversity of our workplaces year-round, IWD — which takes place annually on March 8 — is a perfect opportunity to assess and enhance your efforts to foster a work environment that includes and empowers women. Here's an update on the most recent trends regarding women in the workplace and your 10-step plan to bolster women in your organization.

The Current State of Women in the U.S. Workforce

Women make up nearly half the U.S. workforce but remain underrepresented in management roles and continue to earn less than men on average across all industries.

According to 2023 data from [Pew Research Center](#), women make up 47% of the civilian labor force and now outnumber men in the college-educated workforce, making up 51% of those workers who are 25 and older.

There is some good news to celebrate: Women's overall employment has recovered to pre-pandemic levels. In fact, the labor force participation rate for women between the ages of 25 and 54 has exceeded its 2019 levels by reaching 77%, according to Department of Labor data analyzed by the [Center for American Progress](#).

Despite these positive trends, women are still paid less than men. Women earn approximately 76 cents for every dollar earned by men, per data from the [U.S. Government Accountability Office](#). Notably, the [wage gap for women of color](#) is even greater. Women also bear a [disproportionate burden](#) of caregiving responsibilities at home and [lag behind men](#) in top leadership positions in business and government.

How Can Employers Improve These Numbers?

Here are 10 ways your business can work to advance the fair treatment and representation of women in the workforce.

1. **Prioritize Equal Pay** – To recruit and retain women, it is crucial that your organization prioritize pay equity and transparency, conduct regular pay audits, and address any disparities promptly.

The concept of pay equity encompasses not only salary or wages, but also includes overtime pay, bonuses, and benefits. If you decide to conduct a pay audit, we recommend you work with counsel so that the results of the audit are protected by the attorney-client privilege.

2. **Foster an Inclusive Work Environment** – Women who feel included are less likely to quit and are more likely to promote their companies to others. Review your company's diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, and implement training programs that equip employees with the tools to create an inclusive culture.
3. **Create and Support Affinity Groups** – Affinity groups focused on women and women of color can provide a supportive network for employees to share professional experiences, receive valuable feedback from others, and experience a sense of community with coworkers. Additionally, affinity groups can promote an inclusive, non-discriminatory work environment, as these groups can help employers identify and fill potential gaps.
4. **Establish Reward and Recognition Programs** – Most employees enjoy receiving positive feedback or praise for above-average performance, but women's contributions are more often overlooked when it comes to kudos. It is important to establish recognition programs that celebrate *all* employee achievements within your business. Pay special attention to ensure that women receive due acknowledgment for their contributions.
5. **Offer Flexible Work Arrangements** – Where at all possible, implement more progressive work policies, including long-term flexible work arrangements that will allow women to work schedules that accommodate their often greater burden of unpaid labor. You can consider permitting remote work, compressed workweeks, flexible hours, or job-sharing programs. Such policies improve work performance and job satisfaction and can improve your business' retention of female employees.
6. **Create Mentorship/Sponsorship Programs** – You should be intentional in how you structure mentorship and sponsorship programs within your organization. Women frequently receive mentorship, where mentors provide them with advice and guidance, but they less often receive sponsorship. Sponsorship is more action-oriented than mentorship, whereby sponsors (leaders in the company) are matched with junior or mid-level employees with the express goals of advancing their careers and advocating for their professional opportunity. Facilitating these programs can ensure your female employees reach their full potential.
7. **Provide Leadership Training and Development** – Implement programs and policies aimed at empowering women within your business to seek out and secure leadership roles. Ensure that women are aware of the existing pathways for career progression that are available to them — and that there are transparent and measurable ways for them to get there.
8. **Support Work-Life Balance** – Take a look at the culture of your business more broadly. Are your programs, policies, and unspoken expectations in the office conducive to work-life balance? Thinking through these less-measurable aspects of your workplace can improve your recruitment and retention of women and employees more generally.

9. **Create a Wellness Program** – Consider developing a wellness program that lets your employees know that you value their health and well-being. Do you offer an onsite yoga class or membership to a nearby fitness center? Even virtual activities could prove beneficial in improving employee morale. Contributing to your employees' health savings accounts (HSAs) is a positive way to lighten the financial burden of medical costs your employees may have.
10. **Communicate** – Ensure that you always have open lines of communication with your employees. Pay attention to the women in your company and assess where changes need to be made. For example, perhaps working mothers in your organization or others with caregiving responsibilities do not feel supported by certain policies or aspects of your workplace culture that could be easily altered. Something as simple as listening to the women in your workforce can make a huge difference in their job satisfaction.

IWD is a powerful reminder to celebrate the achievements and contributions of women, even as we acknowledge the growth that is still needed to achieve gender parity. By implementing these ten steps, employers can contribute to building a more equitable and inclusive future, where women of all backgrounds thrive and lead in their workplaces.

Conclusion

If you are reevaluating your approach to managing your workforce and are focused on recruiting and retaining a more diverse candidate pool, contact your Fisher Phillips attorney or the authors of this Insight to brainstorm and carry out effective strategies. We will continue to monitor developments and provide updates on this and other workplace issues, so make sure you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips' Insight System](#) to gather the most up-to-date information.

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