

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
WOMEN LEAD

“If you could ask 200 powerful women to share their secrets of career success, what would they say? The answers are at your fingertips in *Women Lead*.”

—Linda Rottenberg, Cofounder and CEO, Endeavor

“This book provides the advice and insight one would expect from an experienced mentor. It’s not to be read and shelved but referred to often for guidance and affirmation as we navigate the unique challenges of our careers.”

—Nancy Paris, President and CEO, Georgia Center for Oncology Research and Education

“You could search through a hundred articles to learn how women will define the course of the 21st century—or you could read this smart, well-researched thesis.”

—Jenna Goudreau, Staff Reporter, *Forbes*

“This book shows not only how far women have come as a force in today’s business world, but also how much that world relies on their innovation and drive.”

—Jennifer McNelly, President, The Manufacturing Institute

“I want my daughter to read this book as she embarks on her career.”

—Debbie Mandell, Vice President of Performance Improvement, U.S. Bank

“The women represented in this book illustrate the remarkable courage necessary to lead change in today’s evolving business environment, leaving a legacy that inspires others to pursue leadership.”

—Dr. Dawn Bazarko, Senior Vice President,
Center for Nursing Advancement at UnitedHealth Group

Women Lead

How Women Are Making Companies More Profitable, Innovative, and Equitable

Women leaders are coming into their own. In just the past several years, we've seen:

- women become the CEOs of companies that are household names, including IBM, Hewlett-Packard, PepsiCo, Kraft, DuPont, WellPoint, BJ's Wholesale Club, Campbell's Soup, KeyCorp, Neiman Marcus, Williams-Sonoma, newspaper group Gannett, and TJX (parent company of T.J. Maxx and Marshall's)
- a woman become the first African American CEO of a Fortune 500 company (Ursula Burns of Xerox) and other African American women run such companies as BET Holdings, Johnson Publishing, Mechanics and Farmers Bank, IMAN Cosmetics, the Oprah Winfrey Network, Intelli PharmaCeuticals, and ACT•1 Personnel Services
- the first female head of a major oil company (Lynn Elsenhans of Sunoco)
- women lead such Fortune 1000 energy, scientific, technological, and manufacturing firms as Archer Daniels Midland, Sempra Energy, Puget Sound Energy, International Game Technology, Hawaiian Electric Industries, Schnitzer Steel Industries, and electric company PNM Resources

- two women run for president and one be nominated for vice president, 15 states elect female governors, 11 women hold cabinet positions (including two secretaries of state), and two women be named Supreme Court judges. In 2010, the largest number of women ever ran for election or re-election to the Senate.¹

These women represent just the tip of the pyramid. Millions more women are primed for leadership positions. Women now hold 51.4% of managerial and professional jobs and almost half of all banking and insurance jobs, and are 45% of associates in law firms. They are earning bachelor's degrees at a far faster rate than men, and are now receiving the slight majority of advanced degrees.²

Women are ideally suited to the leadership positions of the future. We're moving into a globally interconnected world where innovation can mean the difference between business success and failure, a world supersaturated with data that will take the talents of many to mine. Leaders will need to work differently in this new world: They'll need to foster innovation by encouraging others to work to the best of their abilities and giving them the freedom to think differently, to put ego aside and implement new ideas no matter what their source, to take the needs and desires of diverse communities into account, and to mold very different individuals into teams.

Women are just the people to do that.

New Times Call for New Leaders

Not very long ago, business leaders took their cues from the military. They gave direction from the top down, without soliciting input from the people they led, and expected their directives to be unquestioningly carried out. They set clear parameters for tasks, rewarding subordinates for success and punishing them for failure. They maintained a clear hierarchy in which everyone knew his place and what was expected of him, and focused on the mission rather than the people who were carrying it out.

This style of leadership originated with men who served in World War II and brought the principles they'd learned on the battlefield home with them: command-and-control, or authoritarian, transactional leadership, which views leadership as a form of exchange. For decades, these principles were appropriate and effective. They made sense for workplaces in a time when companies were smaller and less complex, faced less competition, and dealt with fewer international organizations or customers. They were a better fit for a more homogeneous and stable workforce. After all, if you plan on working for one company for decades, you can come to appreciate a clear chain of command. It lets you know where you stand and what you need to do to advance.

But technology has changed that landscape with startling speed. Now, companies exist in a global landscape, serving customers and working with partners in many countries, and facing heavy competition from abroad. Instantaneous communication is possible with people around the world, and vast amounts of data are available for the sifting. Disruptive technologies can change industries seemingly overnight, forcing companies to continually innovate or risk obsolescence. Organizations and the problems they solve have both become more complex, while the workforce has grown much more mobile and diverse.

What's the best way to lead in such an environment? A Center for Creative Leadership study provides an important bellwether. Researchers asked 389 business leaders from the United States, Europe, and Asia to chart their organizations' approach to leadership now and five years ago, and to predict the approach their companies would take five years in the future.

The results? Five years ago, respondents said, the command-and-control approach was still paramount. Leaders gained authority from their titles and directed organizations from the top down. They made decisions on their own, were rewarded for their individual achievements, and pursued conservative "stay-the-course" strategies.

Flash forward five years and all that changes. Leadership now is conceived of as a collaborative, team-based process. Hierarchy has softened and leaders are found throughout the organization. Leaders make decisions with the help of others, and everyone shares in the group's success. Knowledge, not title, is what gives leaders their authority, and the strategies they use are flexible and responsive.³

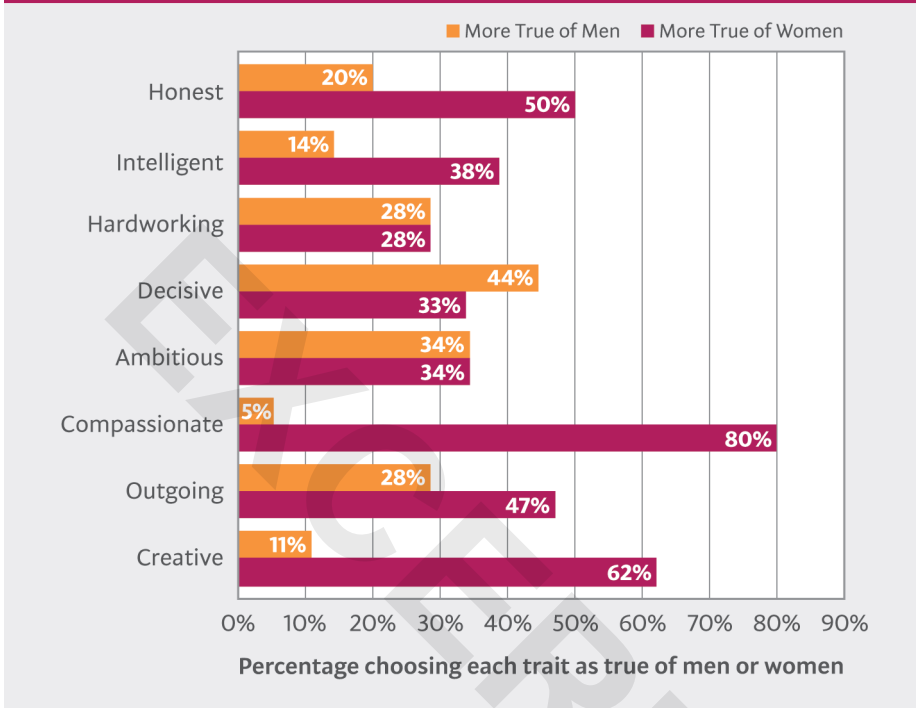
And here's where women come in.

Women Lead Like Coaches

If the old paradigm of the leader was the general, then the new one looks a great deal like the coach. Picture a winning NCAA basketball coach. She recruits the best talent for her team, then gets to know each of her players' strengths and weaknesses so she can best deploy them against opponents who throw different challenges at her. She trains her players to reach their fullest potential, and encourages them to work together for the good of the team. She inspires confidence in them by trusting them to do their job, and motivates them with visions of victory—both in regular-season games and when gunning for the conference championship. And she does this all while managing yearly change as her players graduate.

We say "she" for a reason, even though the most well-known coaches are male: Women are more likely to use this coaching or transformational style of leadership.⁴ In our interviews, women told us time and again about how they developed their

Figure 2.1: Women Have More Leadership Qualities



Source: Paul Taylor, Rich Morin, D’Vera Cohn, April Clark, and Wendy Wang, *A Paradox in Public Attitudes. Men or Women: Who’s the Better Leader?* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2008), 1, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/files/2010/10/gender-leadership.pdf>. Respondents were asked whether they thought each trait was more true of men or women. “Not sure” and “Equally true of both genders” responses are not shown.

employees while trusting them to follow through. Women like Debbie Mandell, vice president of performance improvement at U.S. Bank, who says, “I lead by giving others the opportunity to demonstrate their talents and contribute to the good of the whole team. I learn what motivates others and I help them feel empowered to benefit a larger cause.” Or like Angie Mannino, senior vice president of human resources at Inova Health System, the largest not-for-profit healthcare provider in northern Virginia, who describes her style by saying, “I manage by letting other people run the ‘circle of responsibility’ that they own. I’ll stay out of their circle, but still remain close enough to develop them and remove barriers for them.” Or Bonnie Fetch, director of people and organizational development at Caterpillar, who says, “I share

my desire to be a good coach with my team, and then have them hold me accountable. That’s how I measure my success as a servant leader: by whether I foster leadership in others, and promote people from my team to other parts of the organization to better the enterprise and their careers.”

Sugar and Snails

Here’s an exercise. Researchers evaluated men and women on a variety of leadership traits and characteristics. Read through the list below, then predict which gender came out ahead on each item:

- Empathy
- Sociability
- Risk taking
- Empowering others
- Assertiveness
- Shaping strategy
- Building organizational relationships
- Ambition
- Fostering open dialogue
- Visionary thinking
- Influencing and negotiating
- Abstract reasoning
- Interpersonal sensitivity
- High-impact delivery

If you’re like most of us, you guessed that women would excel in the areas having to do with people, communication, and relationships, and that men would have the upper hand when it came to boldness and strategic thinking. But in fact, on many leadership assessments—instruments that take both “hard” and “soft” skills into account—*women outscore men on every item on the list.*⁵ Consider:

- In a 360-degree performance study by the Society for Human Resource Management, women outscored men on 42 out of 52 executive competencies, including adaptability, driving execution, shaping strategy, and visionary thinking.⁶
- A Caliper study of leaders in the United States and United Kingdom found that women performed better than men on eight out of 15 personality traits associated with leadership, and tied men on one.⁷

- In an Australian study using the Hogan Personality Inventory, women executives scored higher than men on six of eight categories—including strategic drive, risk taking, people skills, innovation, and “hot buttons” or motivators—and tied men on one (emotional stability).⁸

Why are these results so surprising? For one thing, for several years now, we’ve been hearing that women leaders’ emotional intelligence is their greatest asset. Women, it is said, are more communicative, empathetic, and team oriented than men, enabling them to excel in situations where relationships are paramount. Need a diplomat, a mentor, someone to smooth the waters or get to the heart of what stakeholders value? Enlist a woman.

This theory is popular, and for good reason. Research has shown, time and again, that women have stronger interpersonal skills than men. The Caliper study referenced earlier, for example, found that women outscore men in empathy, flexibility, and sociability.⁹ In the Australian study, women ranked higher on such traits as sociability, interpersonal sensitivity, and colorfulness (being lively and expressive), and lower on reserve.¹⁰

And women perceive themselves and their fellow women as empathetic leaders. “Women have the ability to read people and are skilled at listening to others and making them feel that their concerns are heard,” says Kelly Dolan, executive director of The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Georgia Chapter. Women’s listening skills give them access to a vital commodity—information—says Paula Sellars, principal at consciousness training firm Phoenix Possibilities Inc.: “Women’s ability to listen helps them uncover the inner workings of an organization.”

These interpersonal skills will be vital in the future workforce. To work well within teams, employees will need to know how to communicate well, share knowledge, defuse or prevent conflicts, and mesh their style and goals with their teammates’. As the workforce becomes more mobile and diverse, talent management skills will be increasingly prized. Sensitivity to the needs, motivations, and cultural beliefs of others will also be crucial as business, and customer bases, grow more global.

But there’s also a danger in valuing women largely for their relationship skills. The idea of “woman as empathizer” can conform too closely to still-potent gender stereotypes. It allows us to put women and men into safe little buckets, women’s labeled “heart” and men’s “head,” much like the nursery rhymes that assign sugar and spice to little girls and snips and snails and puppy dog tails to little boys.

That’s why this research is so tantalizing. It confirms what many people already suspect—that women are great at relating to other people—but shows women excel at the “hard” stuff, too: strategizing, innovating, using data, and taking risks. Women are bold, this research says. They’re ambitious, they’re imaginative, they’re assertive. In other words, they’ve got the sugar *and* the snails.

Women Leaders Improve Companies' Profit and Performance

In 2001, Dr. Roy Adler of Pepperdine University discovered something fascinating. He and his team tracked the profits of Fortune 500 firms, and found that the companies with the best track record of promoting women were far more profitable than their industry counterparts. The top 25 companies for women had 18% higher than average profits as a percentage of assets, 34% higher profits as a percentage of revenue, and 69% higher profits as a percentage of stockholders' equity.¹¹ Among the top 10 firms for women, the effect was even more pronounced: 41% higher profits as a percentage of assets, 46% higher profits as a percentage of revenue, and 116% higher profits as a percentage of stockholders' equity.¹²

Intrigued, the team repeated its study in 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007, and got the same results every time: Companies that promoted more women reaped higher profits. In 2008, they changed their methodology, assessing the outcomes of the 100 most desirable employers of women MBAs as chosen by *Fortune*. Again, more women at the top translated to more profit.¹³

Other organizations have obtained similar results. Catalyst determined that companies with more women board members have a 53% higher return on equity, a 42% higher return on sales, and a 66% higher return on invested capital.¹⁴ McKinsey found that companies with three or more women in senior management outperform their sectors on earnings before interest and taxes (48% higher), return on equity (10% higher), and stock price growth (17% higher).¹⁵ Researchers from Columbia and the University of Maryland have also established a link between female leadership and increased revenue.¹⁶

What's causing this startling phenomenon? Statisticians caution that correlation does not imply causation, and it may be true that healthier and more profitable companies feel freer to break with established practice and promote more women.

But evidence does suggest that women's approach to leadership may be what's driving increased profitability. Corporate boards with women on them are more likely to practice good governance. As one Canadian study shows, boards with three or more female directors are much more likely to ensure effective communication with stakeholders, set objectives to measure management performance, identify criteria for measuring strategic outcomes, and partake in other best practices. In some cases, the differences were mind-boggling: Only around 29% of all-male boards regularly reviewed customer satisfaction, compared to over 60% of boards with two or more women. A little over 30% of all-male boards reviewed employee satisfaction, versus slightly over 50% of boards with two or more women. Ninety-four percent of boards with three or more women explicitly monitored the

implementation of strategy, compared to 66% of all-male boards.¹⁷ Similarly, McKinsey has found that companies with three or more women directors perform better on all nine of its indicators of organizational health.¹⁸

Women leaders may also be more in tune with their companies' customer base. Claims that women control 80% of consumer spending may be overstated,¹⁹ but companies have reaped great rewards from paying more attention to the needs of customers, as Best Buy did when it implemented WOLF teams. Then-vice president Julie Gilbert started the WOLF, or Women's Leadership Forum, initiative after she observed that the company wasn't engaging its female customers. In WOLF teams, female employees and customers meet to share, implement, and test ideas in areas ranging from store layout, web design, and call center efficiency to marketing, hiring, and training. Since the launch of WOLF, Best Buy has seen a \$4.4 billion increase in revenue from its female customers, and has hired 18% more female employees, including 60% more female operating managers, and 300% more female district managers.²⁰

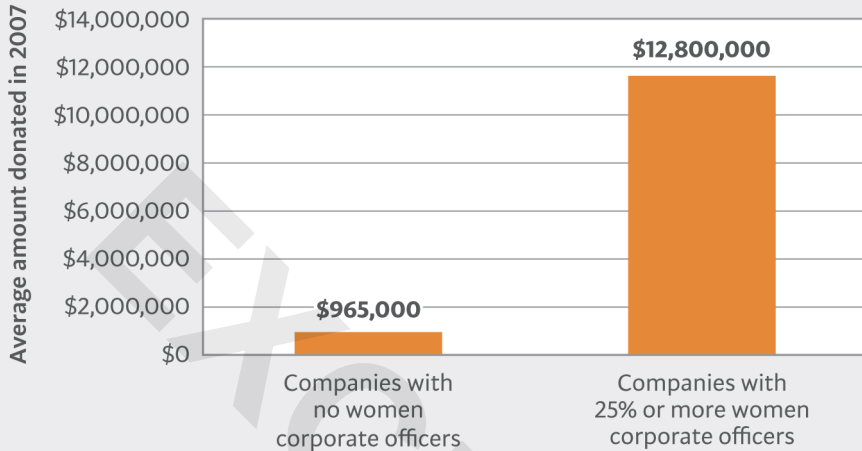
Women Leaders Make Companies—and Societies—More Ethical

These results alone are an argument for more women in positions of power. But there's another, less concrete, but equally compelling, reason why women leaders make organizations better: Women in power are more likely to behave ethically.

The evidence from the business world is intriguing:

- A startling new study found that women-owned private firms were 25% *less* likely to lay off workers during the 2008 recession. Publicly owned companies with a majority of women on their boards were also less likely to lay workers off.²¹
- Women-owned firms pay a larger share of their revenues in payroll, this same study found. They are less likely to outsource business functions, hire contingent workers, or outsource work to other countries. These results hold true even when controlling statistically for size, industry, and profitability.²²
- Companies with three or more women board directors give *27 times* more money to charity than do companies with no women directors—an average of \$27.1 million versus \$969,000 (see Figure 2.2). Each additional woman director represents an increase of \$2.3 million in giving.²³

Figure 2.2: Companies with More Female Leaders Give More to Charity



Source: Rachel Soares, Christopher Marquis, and Matthew Lee, *Gender and Corporate Social Responsibility: It's a Matter of Sustainability* (New York: Catalyst, 2011), 2, http://www.catalyst.org/file/522/gender_and_corporate_social_responsibility_final.pdf.

Viewed as a whole, women in politics may also be more ethical than their male counterparts. Research groups, including the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University and the Women and Politics Institute at American University, have found that women are more inclusive leaders who have a broader concept of public policy, incorporate diverse viewpoints into their decision making, work past differences, and ensure that disenfranchised communities are given a voice.²⁴ And if a Pew study is any indication, the American public agrees with these findings: Respondents ranked women in public office higher than men at working out compromises, keeping government honest, representing constituents' interests, and standing up for what they believe in (see Figure 2.1).²⁵

Many of the women interviewed for this book described taking a democratic approach to leadership. "Women practice an inclusive, collaborative style of leadership," *Forbes* staff reporter Jenna Goudreau says. "When solving problems, they solicit input from many people and draw upon the strengths of their team members to solve it." Linda Wiley, senior director of organizational development at a multinational company that provides business process outsourcing solutions, says,

“I build consensus by giving everyone a voice. Because I’ve heard their input, I’m conscious of what their needs and objectives are before making decisions.”

Others described being driven by values beyond wealth and ambition, and using those values to effect change. Dr. Dawn Bazarko, a nurse and the senior vice president for the Center for Nursing Advancement at UnitedHealth Group, believed that there were opportunities for nurses to lead genuine, transformative change in healthcare. Yet she saw that nurses across the industry often lacked access to the advanced education they needed to excel in today’s healthcare landscape. Bazarko felt there was a direct correlation between limited educational and professional development opportunities and the high levels of stress and turnover rates among nurse professionals industry-wide. In response, she co-founded UnitedHealth Group’s Center for Nursing Advancement to provide training, coaching, and mentoring, and recognition for nurse professionals and develop nurse leaders. UnitedHealth Group, one of the nation’s largest employers of nurses, was the first company to launch this type of enterprise-wide initiative.

Since the inception of the Center, nurse satisfaction and engagement rates at UnitedHealth Group have risen while turnover has decreased. The Center continues to launch new programs, including a mindfulness-based stress reduction initiative, an intensive training program for nurse leaders, and a master’s degree program for select employees.

“I saw there was an opportunity within my organization to try something innovative that made smart business sense and could also boost engagement among our nurses,” Bazarko says. “Through the programs offered at the Center, we’re helping to create a more highly educated and effective nursing workforce, which benefits everyone.”

“It shows that caring and creativity work,” she adds, “and that nurses are uniquely positioned to bring about innovation and make the health system work better, both in clinical settings and within larger organizations.”

Americans Are Ready to See More Women Leaders

Negative stereotypes about women leaders have long kept many women from attaining positions of power. In the past, some employers worried that women would be too weak for life at the top; women, in their turn, sometimes restrained their ambition for fear of being perceived as aggressive or mannish.

But if recent surveys are any indication, these stereotypes have lost their grip. A 2007 GfK Roper poll found that a large majority of Americans—some 89%—are comfortable with women as leaders. This comfort level has increased considerably from 2002, when it stood at 77%. Three-quarters of Americans would accept

the idea of a woman president, and over 90% are comfortable with women as members of Congress or leaders of corporations, universities, charities, newspapers, film and television studios, or law firms.²⁶ When Pew tested for hidden gender bias by giving subjects profiles of hypothetical candidates for Congress, in which only the names of the candidates were changed to conceal gender, voters proved equally likely to vote for women as for men.²⁷

Does Gender Still Matter?

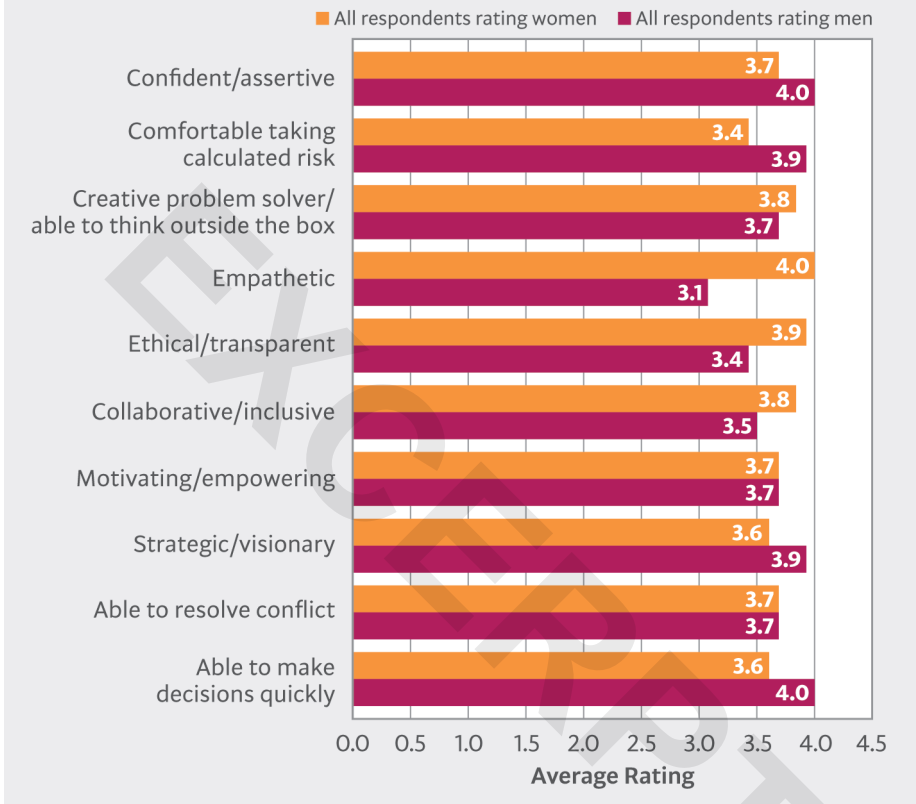
In fact, we may be reaching a point in time when, in questions of leadership, gender ceases to matter. About 20% of the women we interviewed said they saw no difference in the way men and women lead; good leadership, they implied, knows no gender. Alicia Mandel, vice president of organizational development at the Apollo Group, perhaps best encapsulated this view when she said, “I never think about myself as a woman in leadership unless somebody stops and says, ‘Hey, you’re a woman in leadership’ or asks me to speak on the topic. I would just like to think of myself as a leader.” Roxanne Joffe, president of marketing firm CAP Brand Marketing, had a similar outlook. “I don’t see leadership as differentiated by gender,” she said. One woman we approached declined to be interviewed because she wanted to speak from the perspective of an executive, not a woman. Her view may become more prevalent as women make greater strides into leadership and gender becomes less relevant.

Mars and Venus in the Boardroom?

Our leadership survey results, however, suggest that people do see distinct differences between the ways men and women lead, and view members of each gender as stronger in certain aspects of leadership than the other. We asked male and female managers to rate male and female leaders on 10 attributes and 10 skills needed for effective leadership, using a five-point scale in which 1 stood for “novice,” 2 for “advanced beginner,” 3 for “competent,” 4 for “proficient,” and 5 for “expert.”

In general, women were rated higher than men on transformational and interpersonal skills and attributes, such as communication and empathy, whereas men were rated higher than women on strategic and agentic leadership skills and attributes, such as confidence and being strategic or visionary (see Figures 2.3 and 2.4). Respondents rated female leaders higher than male leaders on three attributes—empathy, ethics/transparency, and being collaborative/inclusive—and four skills: communication, mentoring/coaching, professional networking, and organizing people. They

Figure 2.3: How Do Managers Rate Female and Male Leaders on Key Leadership Attributes?

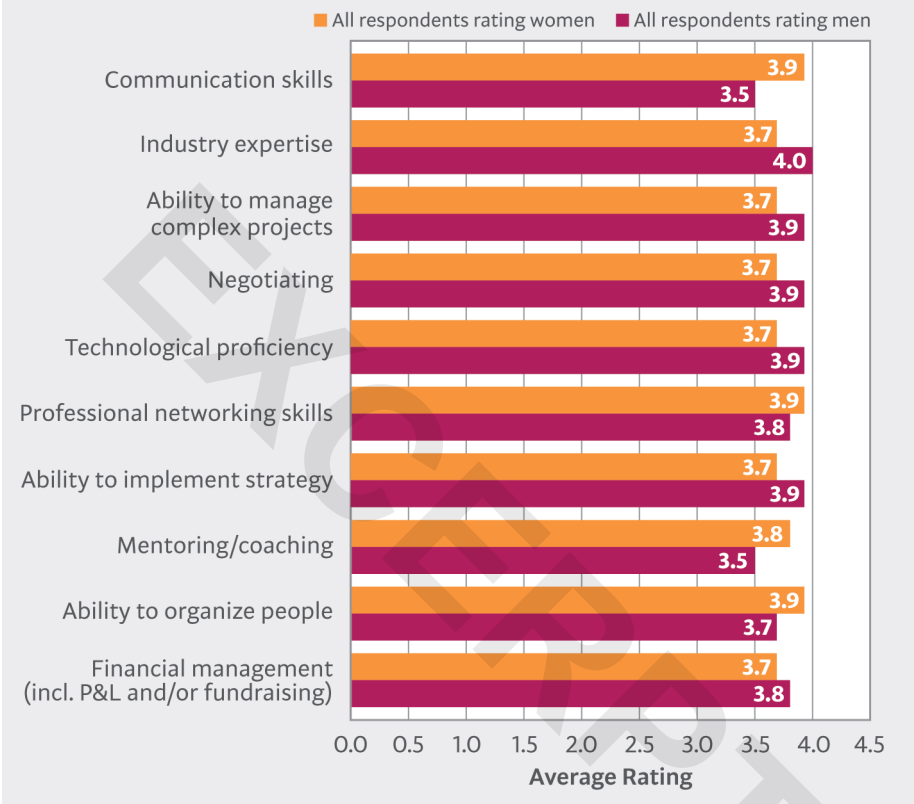


Source: Apollo Research Institute, 2012.

rated male leaders higher than female leaders on six attributes—confidence/assertiveness, comfort with taking calculated risks, being motivational/empowering, being strategic/visionary, ability to resolve conflict, and ability to make decisions quickly—and six skills: industry experience, ability to manage complex projects, negotiation, technological proficiency, ability to implement strategy, and financial management.

In certain cases, the differences between male and female leaders' ratings were pronounced. For instance, 73% of all respondents rated female leaders a 4 or 5 ("proficient" or "expert") on empathy, but only 34% rated male leaders a 4 or 5 on that attribute (see Figure 2.5). Sixty-nine percent rated women a 4 or 5 on ethics/transparency, versus 47% who rated men a 4 or 5, and 64% rated women a 4 or 5 on collaborativeness/inclusiveness, compared to 53% who rated men that highly.

Figure 2.4: How Do Managers Rate Female and Male Leaders on Key Leadership Skills?

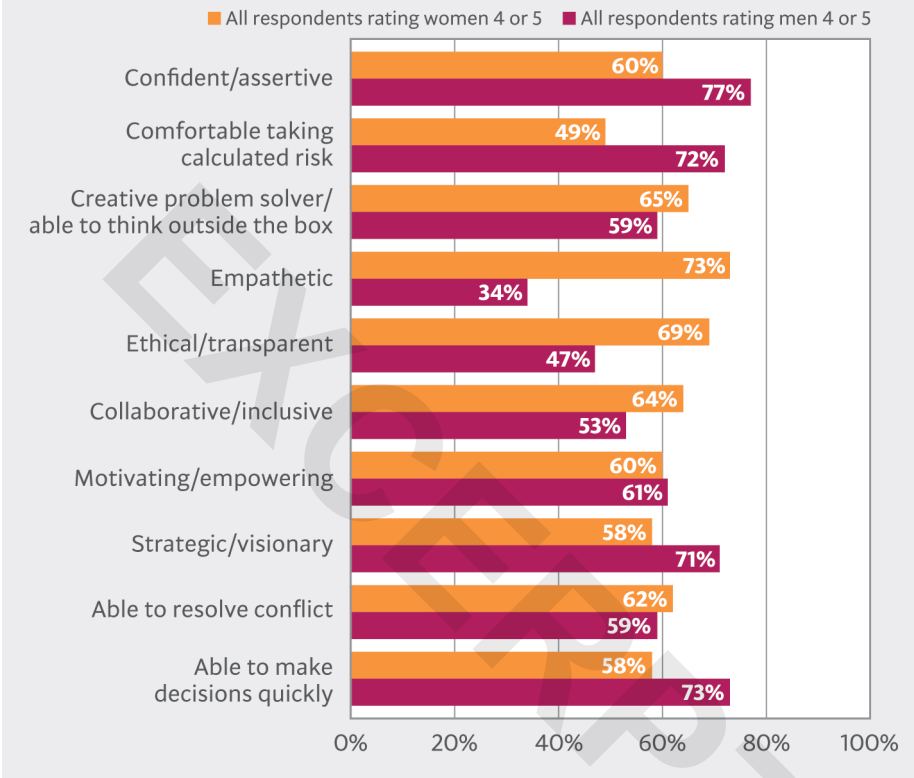


Source: Apollo Research Institute, 2012.

In terms of skills, 72% of respondents rated women leaders a 4 or 5 on communication, but only 51% rated male leaders a 4 or 5 on that skill (see Figure 2.6). Sixty-four percent rated women a 4 or 5 on mentoring/coaching, versus 51% who rated men a 4 or 5.

Men were also rated markedly higher than women on certain attributes and skills. Seventy-two percent of respondents rated men a 4 or 5 on comfort with taking calculated risk, but only 49% rated women a 4 or 5 on that attribute. Seventy-seven percent rated men a 4 or 5 on confidence/assertiveness, versus 60% who rated women a 4 or 5; 71% rated men a 4 or 5 on being strategic/visionary, compared to 58% who rated women a 4 or 5; and 73% rated men a 4 or 5 on ability to make decisions quickly, versus 58% who rated women that highly. In terms of

Figure 2.5: What Percentage of Managers Rate Female and Male Leaders Proficient or Expert on Key Leadership Attributes?



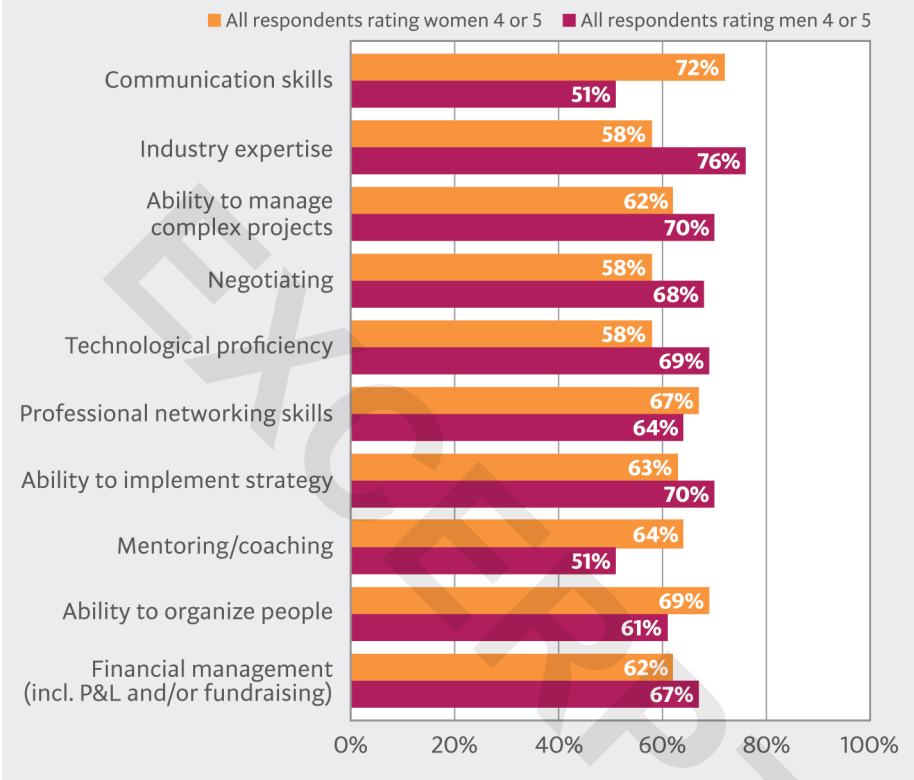
Source: Apollo Research Institute, 2012.

skills, 76% of respondents rated male leaders a 4 or 5 on industry experience, versus 58% who rated women leaders a 4 or 5; 69% rated men a 4 or 5 on technological proficiency, versus 58% who rated women a 4 or 5; and 68% rated men a 4 or 5 on negotiation, compared to 58% who rated women that highly.

Yet in global terms, men and women were seen to perform about equally well as leaders. Respondents rated women an average of 3.73 and men a 3.70, or between “competent” and “proficient,” across all 10 attributes. They rated women an average of 3.76 and men an average of 3.78 across all 10 skills.

These results were consistent with the findings from our interviews with women leaders. The majority of women we spoke with described their leadership style as transformational, discussing ways in which they developed employees, built

Figure 2.6: What Percentage of Managers Rate Female and Male Leaders Proficient or Expert on Key Leadership Skills?



Source: Apollo Research Institute, 2012.

consensus, and ensured others' voices were heard. In the quantitative study, all respondents rated women higher on the types of attributes and interpersonal skills necessary for transformational leadership, such as empathy, ethics/transparency, being collaborative/inclusive, communicating, and mentoring. The study's findings were also consistent with interviewees' high opinion of women as leaders: Women respondents ranked women leaders higher than male respondents did on all 10 attributes and all 10 skills.

The quantitative study findings were not consistent with other studies mentioned in this chapter, which found that women leaders outperformed men on many agentic and strategic qualities as well as interpersonal skills. Respondents in our study rated male leaders higher than female leaders on several strategic attributes and skills,

including comfort with taking calculated risks, confidence/assertiveness, being strategic/visionary, and the ability to make decisions quickly, manage complex projects, and implement strategy. However, women were not rated poorly on any of these agentic and strategic attributes and skills; their average scores ranged from a low of 3.4 to a high of 3.7 in these areas, or between “competent” and “proficient.”

Every Reason for Confidence

As leaders, women exhibit many positive traits: intelligence, creativity, drive, flexibility, empathy, and dozens more. But one positive characteristic may hold them back: humility. As several interviewees remarked, women are too reluctant to promote themselves, either out of modesty or a lack of confidence. When women don't speak up, their achievements and the wealth of skills and knowledge they possess can go unrecognized. Here's one thing women can learn from the guys: Never be afraid to assert yourself. As we hope this chapter has shown, women have every reason for confidence.

Advice and Perspectives on Leadership from Women Leaders

Commit to Your Vision

“I operate on internal vision and revel in creativity,” says Carol Evans, president of Working Mother Media, the nation's largest multimedia company focused on diversity and the advancement of women and CEO of Diversity Best Practices Bonnier Corp., an organization for diversity thought leaders. “I am able to synthesize relationships between disparate properties and create a vision that others can follow, and I allow that vision to change to accommodate the realities of business. My vision drives everything that I do.”

People Matter

“Oftentimes, my people work long hours during crunch time and I ask them to do the impossible,” says Sherry Gunther, founder and CEO of Masher Media, a company that produces online entertainment for children. “To get the loyalty and commitment I need I let everyone know I'm in the trenches with them and am willing to do the same things I'm asking them to do. I've known a lot of leaders in the entertainment industry who take the attitude that ‘if you don't show up to work on Saturday, don't bother to show up on Sunday.’ And that's something I would never do. I believe in work-life balance and that happy employees make more productive employees.”

Build Followership

“I roll up my sleeves and act as a utility player—filling the gaps and doing whatever it takes, working alongside the team and getting things done,” says Erica Frontiero, senior vice president at GE Capital Markets and president of a non-profit organization that provides disadvantaged women with professional attire and career development skills. “Recently, the nonprofit organization I work for executed its largest fundraising event to date, a two-day pop-up shop. In addition to leading the overall planning and execution of the event, I worked a bit on each team from cleanup crew to greeting people to actively recruiting shoppers. I got to interact directly with multiple team members, learn from them, and share in their experience.”

“I get to know everyone personally and build trust with them,” says Cheryl Slomann, vice president and corporate controller at The Cheesecake Factory. “I help people get to a place where they feel comfortable talking about things they want to change without fearing what they said will be held against them. I create an environment where I can solicit advice from my departments, and, in turn, determine what would make their job easier. I find that when you build trust with people, they tend to go the extra mile.”

Showing your commitment to your people can break down cultural barriers, as Lisa Gutierrez, managing partner at LG Strategies, LLC, found when she was working in China. “I was involved in a program I helped design called the Affirmative Development Project, which brings together leaders, middle managers, supervisors, and employees from different cultures to help employees unleash their talents and realize their career dreams. Oftentimes, these cultures are hierarchical, so my goal is to give people a voice regardless of their position. In China, at one point a young woman came up to me and told me I had been pronouncing a Chinese word wrong for the past three days, and she did so directly in a very American way. When I asked her what had shifted, she replied, ‘I realized how much you really care about us.’”

Take Your Team's Pulse

“Once a month, I ask my team very general questions, such as ‘What’s working well? What’s not working well? What areas do you feel you need to improve in?’” says Theresa Valade, CEO of consulting firm Success Trek. “And I also ask these questions of myself, because I’m not perfect either, and because I want to know how I can better support everyone.”

Attain Alignment

“I always talk about alignment and not consensus,” says Tracy Lorenz, president of Western International University, “because when you aim for consensus, the majority ends up winning, and that’s not always the best outcome. At the end of the day, we, as a team, need to decide what’s best for the organization, and that sometimes means I, as the leader, have to make the final decision. But I ensure everyone’s aligned with that decision by giving them the opportunity to voice their opinion and discuss how it will affect them. That way, people walk out of the room feeling they have ownership of the decision that was made and are more likely to support it.”

Manage Change with Empathy

Cindy Ireland, vice president of IT for DoctorDirectory.com, Inc., a marketing solutions and information resources company for physicians, patients, and clients, used listening and transparency to steer her team through a \$10 million software implementation while working for another company. “Some senior managers hadn’t bought into the change, and people were afraid of losing their jobs, or that their jobs would change,” Ireland says, reflecting on the obstacles she faced. “So I made sure to consult with those people and ask them about their role and how they thought it would change, and what we could do to make them successful. I made them subject matter experts so they could feel part of the new process. That’s what got us to the end game. I think having a dictatorial style wouldn’t have worked in this situation, because people would have felt they were being told what to do, and they would have been resistant.”

Acknowledge Employees’ Lives Outside Work

“I want my staff to be people first and lawyers second,” says Mary Hart, lawyer and owner of the Asheville, North Carolina–based Hart Law Group. “Many of them are mothers who take on a lot and don’t always have time to exercise, so I brought a treadmill desk into the office and am encouraging everyone to use it. My employees are loyal because they know I want them to have good work-life balance and will give them the flexibility to pursue the things they need to pursue.”

Hire the Right People

“I put a lot of emphasis on the beginning of the hiring process, and I trust my gut on whether someone shares our institution’s values or not,” relates Beth Lewis, vice president for academic affairs at Northeast Lakeview College,

located near San Antonio, Texas. “The two times I didn’t listen to my gut I regretted it very, very quickly, and neither of those people is still with us. I do a lot of pre-screening up front. I ask situational questions so people can’t give me a prepared standard answer. You really get to see who they are when you ask them those questions.” Dr. Jo Peterson, director of Minnesota’s Future Doctors, a nonprofit that helps young Minnesotans from underrepresented communities prepare for medical school, likewise believes organizational fit is crucial. “I spend a lot of time on the front end asking people about their educational philosophy and what questions they had about our mission and vision,” she says. “We hired people who we felt shared our core values, and didn’t hire those who weren’t curious about who we were as an organization, even though they may have looked good on paper.”

Help Others See New Perspectives

“Whenever you look at something from the larger context, the specifics of what you’re dealing with start to look different,” says Jean Tully, organizational change consultant at organizational consulting company Creating Clarity. “Once an administrative assistant told me she was frustrated because her boss was always changing things and giving her last-minute directions. I helped her see it from his perspective, and what we discovered was that he had changed roles and was trying to do too much and not delegating enough. For example, he was spending a lot of time in meetings he could have sent someone else to attend. We met with him and helped him lighten his load, and everyone won.”

Future-Forward Leadership

In the tech industry, interviewees say, authority is based less on who you are than the ideas you present and the things you make.

“Creating things is how you earn your reputation,” says Ariel Waldman, founder of Spacehack.org. “That could mean anything from writing thoughtful pieces that help people navigate new areas to running an event to inventing a product to designing an app. People are judged on what they make, not who they work for, which is something I welcome because I don’t like the idea of my identity being tied to one company.”

“I have to earn my authority every day based on my ideas and my ability to convince others they’re valuable,” says Marina Gorbis, executive director of the Institute for the Future. “We have a natural hierarchy. It isn’t imposed; it emerges. My title isn’t particularly relevant. I have a lot of authority, but I can’t unilaterally impose a decision.”

Patricia Begley, executive vice president at global performance improvement company GP Strategies, notes that leaders must keep abreast of trends in their industry. “I foresee trends, and discuss those trends with my team to determine how we can adjust our portfolio to meet future needs,” she says. “Leaders need to be proactive in anticipating what their clients will want, but also in continuing to help their companies evolve.”

Be a Straight Shooter

“Sometimes, people are reluctant to give a straight answer to a difficult question, or, as I say, take the mail to the right address,” says Regina Phelps, executive director for nursing practice, education, and research at Mission Health System, a group of hospitals and healthcare providers in North Carolina. “When there’s an issue, I prefer to go to the person involved and discuss it in a very clear and open manner. Women tend to play the peacemaker role, but there are times when we need to be direct.”

See Yourself as a Leader

“I’ve always been one of the youngest people at the table,” says Jennifer McNelly, president of The Manufacturing Institute, the leading research, education, workforce, and services group supporting US manufacturers, “but I never asked permission to be a leader. I just assumed that it was my responsibility to be active, to be engaged, and to be vocal. Leadership’s not about age; it’s about commitment to the cause and questioning the status quo, about asking questions to get better answers.”

Empower Others

Liz Lanza, a communications consultant, coach, and trainer, empowers her team members by encouraging them to take responsibility. “When I’d be asked to present at an operational review meeting, for example, I’d have my team members come in and present different portions so they could take accountability for what was being done, but also so they could get credit for it,” she says.

Kathleen Kirkish, director of learning and development at the Gap, is mentoring an employee who is trying to decide whether to pursue generalist or learning and development HR functions. “I’m helping her understand the value of learning and development by allowing her to take on work that is not part of her job description,” Kirkish says, “and showing her how she can assist others in their own careers. She has taken co-ownership of an e-learning development project which she finds enormously satisfying.”

The Labyrinth of Life

How Women Are Reshaping Work, Family Life, and Retirement

After 21 years of marriage, attorney Mary Hart was blindsided by a divorce. She was raising three children, had no income, and had recently moved to a new city. “It would have been easy to fall apart,” she remembers, but she didn’t. Instead, she started her own law firm. She now employs eight other women, some of whom are also single mothers, and invests in real estate. “I never would have done any of that had I not gotten divorced,” she says. “What I thought was going to kill me ended up being one of the best things that ever happened to me.”

Ann Michael was working for a small pharmaceutical logistics company when she discovered she had breast cancer. “I remember sitting on the couch, not feeling very well, and thinking, ‘I’m tired of working for other people because there’s so much else I want to do,’” she says. She went to her boss with a plan: She’d offload some of her tasks and do the others as a consultant. “I wound up making the same amount of money working 20 hours a week, and using the other 20 hours to build a business,” Michael says. She now is president of publishing and media consulting firm Delta Think.

Kathryn Bowsher was out on maternity leave from the consulting firm she ran when she received a phone call about a company that needed a CEO with her precise skill set. After talking things over with her husband, Bowsher decided to take the job, started as a consultant for the new company when her daughter was four months old, and became its CEO four months later. “We increased the nanny’s

hours, and adjusted our home responsibilities so I could spend more time at work,” she says. “It was complicated at first, but we figured it out, and it’s been great. Life’s like that: You figure out what feels like the right thing to do in the moment, and work the rest out later.”

Jean Tully worked for a Fortune 500 hardware and software company for 30 years, starting off as an engineer on a manufacturing site and branching out into several different areas of the company, moving into positions of greater and greater responsibility. In 2002, she took early retirement and launched a second career as owner of Creating Clarity, a consulting firm focusing on organizational development. Tully, who calls herself a “recovering engineer,” says, “Though I loved my experiences working for a technology corporation, I discovered what I’m really passionate about is learning and helping other people learn.” A recent experience project-managing the construction of a friend’s courtyard has her contemplating yet another career shift. “That project played to my strengths from both a design and an aesthetic perspective. I’m trying to figure out how to build aesthetics into the learning programs I run so I can have the same kind of wonderful experience I did working on that courtyard,” she says.

These four women represent a sampling of the winding, serendipitous paths many women take through their careers. Hart and Michael didn’t climb the corporate ladder in any traditional sense. Instead they turned adversity into opportunity, using it as a signal to redirect their working lives in a direction of greater freedom, control, and balance. Bowsher made a major career move at a time of personal transition, and achieved great success. Tully chose to stay active following her retirement from a major corporation by pursuing an encore career. None of them progressed in a straight line from an internship to the C-suite, but all of them defined success on their own terms.

In doing so, they’re like many women today. If a job doesn’t square with their values or is interfering with their ability to take care of the ones they love—and if they have the means to do so—many women feel free to strike out on their own, change industries, take time off, or negotiate new working conditions. In the complex social and economic terrain of the 21st century, where longevity and shifting gender roles are reshaping the family and the life course, employees of both genders may need to adopt this “female” approach to customizing careers and life.

Labyrinths, Not Ladders

Women’s career paths are rich, complex, and highly varied—in a word, labyrinthine. For most women, work and life are not isolated spheres but overlapping realms that profoundly influence one another.¹ Women carefully consider how their career

decisions will affect their families, friends, and coworkers as well as their own sense of balance, meaning, and purpose while assessing the impact of their life and values upon their work.²

As a result, women's career paths are flexible and tend not to follow predictable patterns. In one study, 58% of highly qualified women described their careers as "nonlinear";³ in another, only half of women reported following traditional, upwardly mobile career paths, while the others had varied career trajectories.⁴ Rather than ladders, many women's career tracks resemble "zigzags." Many women opt to start their own businesses, become self-employed, change industries, take time off, work part-time, or pursue education or credentials during the course of their careers. Men, in contrast, have much more linear career paths. They are less likely to have interrupted careers, work part-time, or change industries than women,⁵ and are more likely to draw firm boundaries between their work and nonwork lives.⁶

Women Have a New Definition of Success

Raising children and caring for family members are primary reasons why women have such fluid career paths.⁷ Forty-one percent of women, versus only 21% of men, have made changes in their career for family reasons, and 29% of women change jobs or careers to achieve greater work-family balance, compared with 14% of men.⁸

But women have many other reasons for charting their own career courses. For instance, many women define success in terms of personal satisfaction rather than objective criteria like status and wealth. In one survey, 46% of women described success as "personal fulfillment or happiness." This definition was the most popular choice, coming in ahead of recognition and financial considerations.⁹ Another study found that women preferred working with people they respected (82% chose this option), having the freedom to be themselves at work (79%), collaborating with others (61%), and giving back to the community (56%) to holding a powerful position.¹⁰ Even women who receive lower salaries after temporarily leaving the workforce report being happier with their more balanced lives.¹¹

Women are also likely to view their careers holistically, as just one facet of very full lives. Rather than seeing life and work as separate domains, most women balance the demands and pleasures of work against their own desires and those of their families, friends, and communities, and consider the consequences of their career decisions on the people who are important to them. In one study, half of the women surveyed described the relationship between their personal and professional lives as "integrated," while another 39% said they were "moving towards integration."¹² Organizational dynamics, such as policies, procedures, and workplace culture, and societal factors, such as gender roles and economic conditions, also impact women's careers.¹³

Women also want their work to be congruent with their values. Though they are dedicated workers who put in long hours, if their current jobs are not meeting their needs for balance, integrity, and fair treatment, as well as for achievement and challenge, they often make career moves.¹⁴ In fact, women are more likely than men to change jobs in search of greater balance and simplicity *or* greater challenge.¹⁵

Diane Sakach is one woman who defined success on her own terms—and adjusted her career path accordingly. She attained a position as managing director with a major financial services company, but discovered something was missing. “I felt like I was always running at 150 miles an hour, without stopping to consider my health and what I wanted out of life,” she recalls. “Though I was very successful, I wasn’t defining my life the way I wanted to define it. I had very little balance; my tank was getting depleted, and I wasn’t filling it up.” Sakach resigned and became an independent contractor. After five years, her mentor offered her a job at an organization focused on leadership development. “I did some soul searching, and decided that if I was going to reenter the mainstream, I wanted to use my 25 years of business experience to help other women,” Sakach says. Her position as executive director of *Leading Women Executives* enables her to do just that.

Tamara Strand likewise found that getting off the fast track was the right move for her. She once worked 70- and 80-hour weeks in an IT position for a Fortune 500 retailer. “I was starting to burn out, but my bosses told me that, to become an executive, I’d have to get used to it,” she says. “I had a high position and many people were reporting to me, but I was miserable because I didn’t have freedom.” She took a break from climbing the corporate ladder by taking a job as a senior project manager with U.S. Bank. “Now, I’m surrounded by incredible, strong women, and I don’t feel like I’m running myself into the ground anymore,” she says. “I feel such immense peace. That was what I’d been seeking, and I didn’t know it.”

Both of these women chose to make their careers suit their lives, not the other way around. They developed definitions of success in which service, balance, personal well-being, and good working relationships mattered more than status, and adjusted their situations accordingly. Sakach and Strand are hardly alone in crafting their own careers; in fact, such customized career paths are becoming more and more common.

In the Future, Everyone Will Have a Woman’s Career

Women are leading the way to a new conception of the career. In an era marked by high worker mobility, low job security, economic instability, corporate mergers, and downsizing, more and more people are opting for a “female” career model.¹⁶

New theories of career development emphasize flexibility, customization, and work-life balance. The boundaryless career model, for instance, posits that many of today's employees have a high degree of physical and psychological career mobility. People who view their careers as boundaryless feel very free to change employers and even industries.¹⁷ They define themselves by their skill set and experience, not their employer. They don't subscribe to traditional notions of career advancement and are willing to reject career opportunities for personal or family reasons. Such employees are self-directed and in control of their own learning and development. They take jobs after careful consideration of how each will build their skills and experience and increase their marketability.¹⁸

The related theory of "protean careers" involves workers using their personal values and definitions of success to guide their career paths. People with protean careers seek work that allows them to contribute to society and achieve work-life balance. They value lifelong learning and view their careers as never-ending quests for development.¹⁹ Women who take charge of their careers in this way reap many benefits. Compared to women who follow traditional career paths, they are more likely to achieve both personal and conventional measures of success. They attain greater work-life balance while nearing income equality with men, and they reach top management positions.²⁰

The "kaleidoscope" career model was, in fact, developed to describe women's career paths, though it's been applied to men as well. According to this theory, the values of authenticity, balance, and challenge drive women's careers, with different values predominating at different life stages. Women, the theory states, continually assess whether what they're doing fits their values, and will make career moves when a greater need for one of the three values emerges.²¹

Upward Mobility: Women in Early Career

Though, as we've seen, women's career paths are mutable and individualized, some generalizations can be made about women in different career stages. Women in the early phase of their careers (about 24 to 35 years of age), for instance, follow more traditional career paths than older women. Sixty-four percent describe their careers as "orderly," meaning they've carefully planned their moves as they've progressed upward through a career hierarchy.²² Women ages 24 to 35 tend to be ambitious and idealistic. They see themselves as being in complete charge of their careers, and they seek challenge and advancement. Scholars Deborah O'Neil and Diana Bilimoria, in fact, deem this early phase the "idealistic achievement" stage of a woman's career.²³ Early-career women need stimulating assignments and opportunities for skill development, and can benefit from good mentors and careful management.²⁴

Younger women name their parents and spouses or significant others as the people outside work with the greatest impact on their careers. In one study, 100% of young women said they took their parents' beliefs and advice into account when planning their work lives.²⁵ Although many women in this early stage do not yet have children, most are contemplating how starting a family will affect their careers.²⁶

Endurance and Reevaluation: Women at Midlife

At midlife, or roughly during ages 36 through 45, many women start reconsidering the place career holds in their lives. As many women raise children during these years, work-life balance becomes a greater priority, as does personal fulfillment.²⁷ Midlife often marks a transitional phase when women evaluate their values and life course. They develop greater perspective and a different, more relaxed view of time, and some strengthen their self-image and reduce their need for control over all aspects of their lives. Many dedicate more time to family, friends, or hobbies.²⁸ Dawn Goldberg, a CPA and president of Coaching for Women in Accounting, captures the midlife mindset well when she says, "I'm in my mid-40s and have finally come to a point where I have balance. I don't take everything so seriously and I try to live in the present."

Women in midlife are very committed to their careers. Eighty-six percent of women in this cohort say they want to be successful at their jobs, and three-fourths report that productivity and working hard are important to them.²⁹ Two-thirds say they are satisfied with their jobs, and only one-tenth are dissatisfied.³⁰ But, at midlife, work often becomes only one of a woman's many priorities. Only a quarter of women in this stage of life say that having a successful career is their most important goal.³¹ For many, work is valued more for the economic security it brings than personal fulfillment, and compensation and benefits matter more than opportunities for advancement.³² Consequently, O'Neil and Bilimoria have termed this phase in a woman's career "pragmatic endurance."³³

At midlife, women's career paths become less predictable. Women in this stage are more likely to have "emergent" career trajectories: paths marked by unexpected career moves, interruptions, or accommodation of nonwork aspects of life.³⁴ Often, women at midlife make career changes for family reasons. Half of women at midlife say they have made career moves with their children in mind.³⁵ Thirty-four percent describe it as "difficult" or "very difficult" to balance work and home, and three-fifths say they would leave their jobs if an opportunity for greater work-life balance presented itself.³⁶

Leadership Begins at Midlife

Most respondents in our leadership survey said that men and women become effective leaders between the ages of 30 and 45. More male managers than female managers stated that men become effective leaders in their 30s; 41% of male managers chose this age range, compared to 31% of female managers. Most respondents also said they became (or think they will become) effective leaders between the ages of 30 and 45, with both men and women selecting their 30s as the age within that range when they became effective leaders.

Pivot Points: Off-Ramps, Part-Time Work, and Other Career Shifts

Conventional wisdom holds that raising children is the major reason women have nonlinear careers. But, while having children is a major reason women leave the workforce, it's far from the only reason. When Deloitte surveyed female executives who had recently resigned, it found that 90% hadn't left the workforce—they were working for other companies.³⁷ And “opting out” or taking time away from work is hardly the only way women veer from a traditional career path. Many choose such strategies as part-time work, self-employment, or entrepreneurship, while others change jobs or industries. One study of highly qualified women found that 35% had worked part-time to better balance work and family life, while 25% had reduced their hours and 16% had declined promotions.³⁸

Women are very apt to consider career shifts, especially once they reach midlife. A *Fortune*/Yankelovich study of female executives and managers at midlife found that 87% had made or were planning to make a career change. Forty-five percent had started their own business or changed jobs or were seriously thinking about doing so, and almost 40% had either continued their education, taken a sabbatical, or were considering doing so.³⁹ Women give varied reasons for such career shifts. Some are dissatisfied with their jobs or want to pursue opportunities for advancement in another company or industry. They feel bored, burned out, understimulated, or disillusioned.⁴⁰ Other women seek work that is more congruent with their values, and look for jobs that will enable them to be more ethical, creative, or altruistic. Rather than “opting out,” they have reinvented themselves.

Certainly many women do reorder their careers to meet the needs of family. Forty-four percent of women who leave the workforce cite taking care of family as a reason. But only 35% of women who take time off give childcare as their *sole* reason; “push” factors, such as being unsatisfied with their jobs, can contribute to

women's decisions to take time off.⁴¹ Moreover, the vast majority (93%) of women who leave the workforce want to return.⁴² Work remains an important part of their identities even when they take time off, and they miss the personal satisfaction and opportunity to contribute to society that it provides.⁴³ Most women return to work after a relatively short period of time: an average of 2.2 years, or 1.2 years if they work in a business setting.⁴⁴ Some mothers “opt in-between” rather than leaving the workforce altogether by working part-time or reduced hours, working from home at least part of the time, becoming self-employed, or choosing to work for family-friendly organizations.

Entrepreneurship is one option for women who want to balance family and career, says Linda Rottenberg, cofounder and CEO of Endeavor. “One of the great things about being an entrepreneur is that you can create your own schedule,” she says. “I run an organization with over 250 employees and offices in 17 countries, but I’m also the mother of seven-year-old twin girls, and I’m able to be a class mom and a soccer mom. It’s great to be able to do something that has so much impact while having control over my work hours.”

Landscape designer Lisa Parramore chose to leave the corporate world and start her own business so she could have more time for her family while putting her love for Japanese design into practice. Parramore had a demanding job in the international department of a financial services company when she went on maternity leave. When she returned, she received the same salary, but her job description changed. “I was still working on important projects, but I wasn’t as intellectually stimulated as I was working with people from overseas,” she recalls. “I thought, ‘If I’m going to be away from my children, I don’t want it to be at such a boring job.’” Parramore was inspired by a woman who landscaped her garden, who had changed careers in her 40s, to launch her own business, Hanabié Japanese Garden Design. She deliberately keeps her business on the smaller side to meet her goals of intellectual stimulation, part-time income, and control over her schedule. “My work is flexible enough that I can do things like volunteer at my children’s school system,” she says, adding that fields like landscape design are good options for women who seek work-life balance because there are few barriers to entry.

The important thing is that women make the best decisions for themselves and their families, says Carol Evans, president of Working Mother Media and CEO of Diversity Best Practices Bonnier Corp. “Be aware of your choices and enjoy the choices that you do make,” she says. “You have to decide what’s right for you at every stage, which might be taking a career break or choosing not to make a strategic move at a certain time. There are role models for every kind of motherhood—you just have to know what you are comfortable with. I know a CEO who has eight children, and she is happy with that situation and excited about her career.”

Others find that adjusting their mindset makes it easier to juggle work and family. They let go of guilt, perfectionism, and the belief that they must strike a precise 50/50 balance between work and home life.⁴⁵ As Tracy Lorenz, president of Western International University, says, “People always think of balance as 50/50. But I’ve reframed it to mean being at peace, knowing at some times my personal life is going to need a lot of my attention and then the pendulum is going to swing the other way and my work is going to take precedence.” Lorenz attains greater balance by integrating her home and work lives. “My husband and children are supportive of my career,” she says. “My kids know the people I work with and what I do, and I remind them each and every day how grateful we are that I have a job and that they’re able to do things other children can’t do.”

Evans also ensured that her children were aware of her career and the satisfaction it brought her. “I worked through all the issues my children might have had about my working,” she says. “I told them about my job and all the exciting things I was doing, and when they were older I brought them into my office where they could see what I did. I had company picnics at my house so all the kids could see that their parents were working with a group of people they enjoyed.”

Relaunching After a Career Break

Women who take time off from working naturally have concerns about rejoining the workforce. Carol Fishman Cohen knows what it feels like to return to job seeking after years without paid employment. She and her colleague Vivian Steir Rabin successfully reentered the workforce after spending years as stay-at-home mothers, Cohen returning to the financial field and Rabin joining an executive search firm.

“We both had this experience of feeling very isolated and without any kind of guidance on how to return to work after a multi-year career break,” Cohen says. “We understood what it was like to go on an interview after feeling completely professionally disconnected, or to try to put together a résumé when you have to account for years outside the paid workforce.” The women wrote a book, *Back on the Career Track*, which led to speaking engagements and programs on getting back into the workforce. Eventually Cohen and Rabin decided to start a company, iRelaunch, which hosts conferences and runs programs for people looking to rejoin the workforce.

“Women who want to get back into the workforce are a huge untapped pool of talent and energy and experience that the business world should pay attention to,” Cohen says. “At iRelaunch we try to hire reentry professionals whenever we can. We get top talent and can offer them interesting work that is also flexible and can be done remotely.”

Cohen and Rabin suggest that women looking to relaunch their careers follow seven steps:

- *Decide whether you're ready to return to work.* “Readiness is different for every person,” Cohen says. “Ask yourself what your appetite for work is, what your family or other commitments are, and whether you have enough support from your family and those around you.”
- *Learn confidence.* “Practice talking about your background and interests with nonjudgmental friends and family and get their feedback,” says Cohen. “Then, move the discussion to social circles, and, ultimately, professional circles. Think of these casual conversations as interview rehearsals.”
- *Assess your career options.* Determine whether your skills and interests have changed since you were last in the workforce. “You may find you were not originally on the right career path and you need to relaunch your career in an entirely new direction,” says Cohen.
- *Update your professional and job search skills.* If you’ve become out of touch with your industry, or the industry you want to enter, start doing your research. Read up on it online and learn what’s happened recently in the field and what trends are current. You may want to consider certificate programs or programs with a field study component.
- *Network and market yourself.* Let your friends and family know you plan to reenter the job market, but also broaden your circle of contacts until you meet someone in a position to get you an interview. Try meeting people by taking courses, attending events, volunteering, and going to job fairs. (Also, see the personal branding advice in Chapter 9 and the networking tips in Chapter 10.)
- *Channel family support.* “Let your family know that your interest in returning to work is not a rejection of your life with them but an opportunity to focus on a part of yourself you’ve had on the back burner for awhile,” says Cohen.
- *Handle the job or find another one.* “If the first relaunch doesn’t work out, you should immediately go to plan B to find out how else you can be working,” Cohen says.

Further Advice for Women Looking to Relaunch Their Careers

Beth Steinberg, vice president, talent and organizational development at Sunrun, recommends that job seekers focus on specific companies or sectors. “Learn as much as you can about companies that you’re passionate about and you’ll interview

better,” she says. She also suggests continuously learning. “Build the skills that you need for the kinds of jobs you’re looking for, perhaps by taking classes,” she says. “Staying active will keep you motivated.”

“Take care of your health,” says Carmella Gutierrez, president of Californians for Patient Care. “There’s a connection between physical health and mental and emotional well-being. When you feel better, you’ll think more clearly, perform better, and present a better face on the job market.”

“Be confident,” Gutierrez adds. “Perform a realistic assessment of your skills and strengths and be able to convey those in a short elevator speech. Write good, compelling cover letters that are individualized to match the organization you want to work for.”

Margaret Jackson, owner of Kool Reign Productions, a provider of film and television content; owner of coaching firm Business on the Edge; and host of the radio show *Money 2.0: Business on the Edge with Margaret Jackson*, suggests that women out of work create jobs for themselves. “When I lost my first company during the recession, I found it hard to land a job,” she says. “So I did freelance work and wrote service-level agreements for companies. I didn’t wait for someone to give me a job. I created value around myself, and found that people were seeking opportunities to work for me.”

Stay-at-Home Dads and Breadwinner Moms: Revising Gender Roles for the 21st Century

We think of the 1970s as an era of disco and decadence, but families of that decade remained remarkably traditional. Forty-five percent of families in 1975 consisted of a housewife mom, a breadwinner dad, and their children.⁴⁶ In that same year, only 10% of women ages 40 to 44 had never had a child,⁴⁷ just 39% of mothers with children under 6 were in the workforce,⁴⁸ and 42% of Americans did not think working mothers could have as strong a relationship with their kids as mothers who stayed at home.⁴⁹

Things have changed dramatically in the past 30 to 40 years. Today, only 20% of families fit the “nuclear” pattern of a married stay-at-home mom and working dad with children.⁵⁰ High rates of divorce and unmarried births have led to a rise in single parenthood: One-quarter of all households with children under 18 are headed by single parents, 85% of whom are mothers.⁵¹ More women are choosing not to have children. Twenty percent of women ages 40 to 44 have never had a child, and that percentage rises to 27% among women with graduate or professional degrees.⁵² And almost three-quarters of Americans say working mothers can relate to their children as well as moms who stay home.⁵³

Perhaps the biggest change, though, is the contribution women are making to household income. Sixty-four percent of mothers with children under age 6 now

work outside the home,⁵⁴ and 80% of all married or partnered employees are in dual-earner households.⁵⁵ In 2008, women in dual-earner couples contributed 45% of annual family income—39% more than they did in 1997. Twenty-seven percent earned at least 10% more than their partners or spouses, while 14% earned a similar amount.⁵⁶

Women's new earning power has led to a softening of gender roles. Today's men, especially younger men who were raised by working mothers, expect that their wives and partners will be as ambitious and well educated as they are, and that that they may outearn them. Men have responded by doing a greater share of the housework; fathers now perform 40% of household tasks.⁵⁷ Fifty-five percent of men say they do an equal or greater share of cooking for their families, and 53% say the same about cleaning.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, women are doing fewer chores: In 1965, they spent 32 hours a week on housework; by 2008, they spent 18.⁵⁹

Men have also discovered the joys of hands-on fatherhood. They no longer want to be breadwinner dads whose main role is to bring home a paycheck; instead, they're actively nurturing, mentoring, and spending time with their kids. Over 80% of fathers say their role involves both caring for their children and providing for them financially; less than 5% view themselves as pure breadwinners.⁶⁰ Fathers say loving and supporting their children, being involved and present for them, and serving as their teachers, guides, and coaches are significantly more important than disciplining them or providing them with financial security.⁶¹ Millennial men spend much more time with their kids than young fathers did in 1977: 4.1 hours per workday versus 2.4 hours.⁶² Seventy-seven percent of dads say they'd like to spend more time with their children on workdays, and 94% say they would consider how taking a new job would impact their ability to care for their kids.⁶³

The result? Personal preference and family needs, not gender, are determining how families divide labor and arrange childcare. No longer are women automatically expected to stay home or alter their career paths when children are small; now, more and more couples are making these decisions based on such criteria as their salary, benefits, workplace flexibility, and job satisfaction. Judith Rinearson's husband became a stay-at-home dad after becoming burnt out at work. "He decided to leave his law firm and for five years he was a PTA member and Little League coach," says Rinearson, a partner at New York City law firm Bryan Cave. "It made a huge difference in the amount of time I could spend on my career guilt free, and it's worked out well for us all."

It's recently become more acceptable for men to stay home with their children. Fifty-three percent of fathers say they would consider staying home if their spouse made enough money to support them.⁶⁴ There are an estimated 147,000 stay-at-home dads in the United States, though this estimate is likely low because it does

not include the many stay-at-home fathers who work part-time.⁶⁵ The number of stay-at-home dads has increased threefold in Canada over the past 30 years.⁶⁶ Like working mothers, stay-at-home fathers find many creative ways to balance work and home lives, such as working part-time or becoming self-employed. They typically reenter the workforce once their children are old enough—Rinearson’s husband is now an elected official—and may alternate time off with their spouses. Some mothers, for instance, stay home for their babies’ first year of life, after which they return to work while their husbands take care of the children.⁶⁷

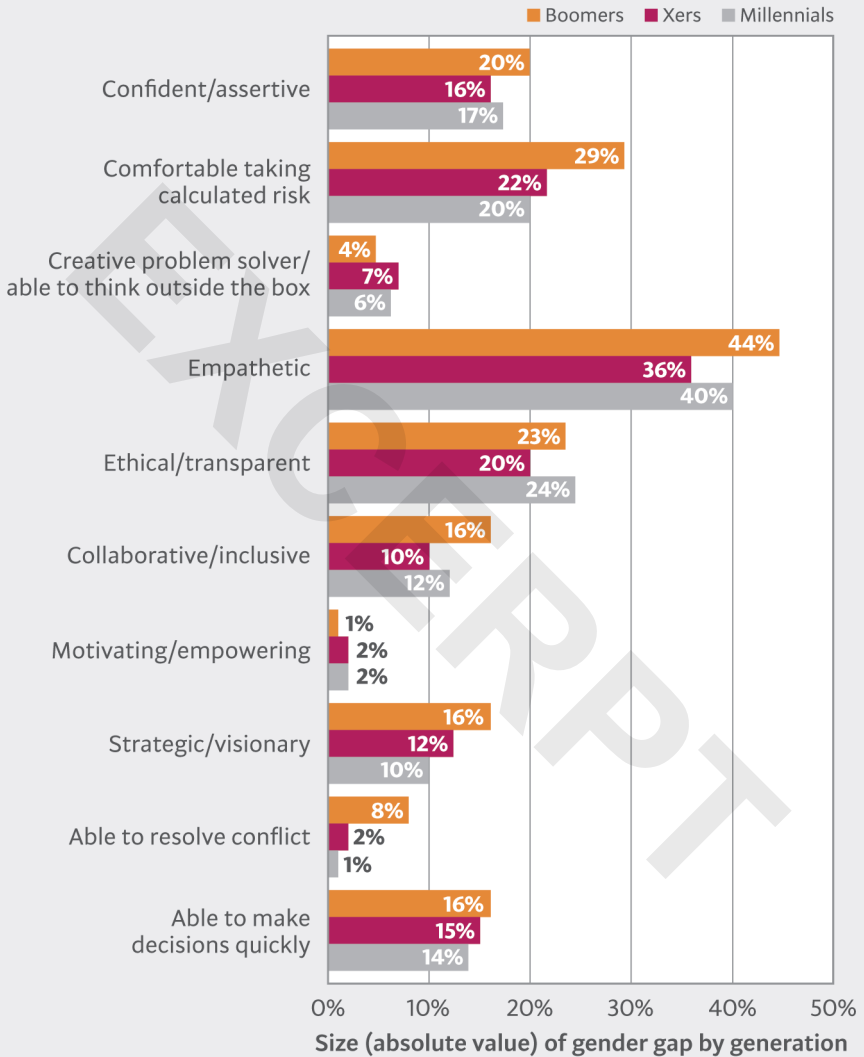
Younger People See Fewer Gender Differences in Leadership

Our leadership survey also provides evidence that gender roles are softening. Younger people, according to our survey, see fewer differences between the ways men and women lead than older people do. Respondents from the Baby Boom, Generation X, and Millennial generations all rated women leaders higher, on average, than male leaders on empathy, ethics/transparency, collaborativeness/inclusiveness, and creative problem solving/thinking outside the box, and rated male leaders higher than female leaders on confidence/assertiveness, comfort with taking calculated risks, being strategic/visionary, and making decisions quickly.

However, there were telling differences in the percentages of Boomers, Xers, and Millennials who rated men and women 4 or 5 (proficient or expert) on leadership attributes. Boomers tended to rate women 4 or 5 on certain attributes far more often than they rated men 4 or 5, and vice versa (see Figure 8.1). Xers’ and Millennials’ ratings of men and women showed less dramatic differences. For instance, 72% of Boomers rated men a 4 or 5 on comfort with taking calculated risks, but only 43% rated women a 4 or 5 on comfort with taking calculated risks—a 29-percentage-point spread. But 71% of Xers rated men a 4 or 5 on comfort with risk, and 49% rated women a 4 or 5, for a 22-point spread. For Millennials, only a 20-point spread separated women’s and men’s 4- and 5-point rankings on comfort with risk. These results suggest members of younger generations see fewer differences between men’s and women’s propensity for taking calculated risks than Baby Boomers do.

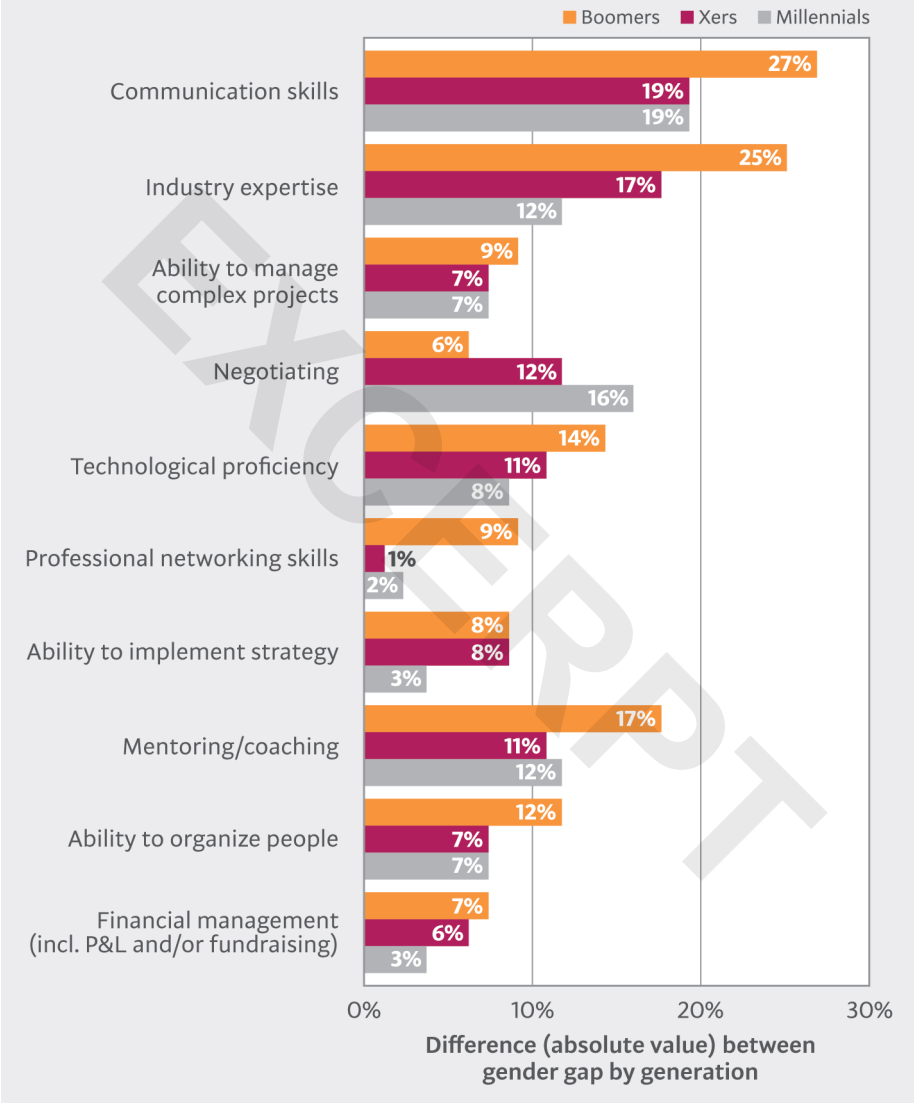
Xers showed a smaller percentage-point spread between men’s and women’s 4- and 5-point ratings than Boomers did on 6 of 10 attributes, and Millennials showed a smaller percentage-point spread between men’s and women’s 4- and 5-point ratings than Boomers did on 9 of 10 attributes. On ethics/transparency, however, Xers and Millennials had a *higher* percentage-point spread than Boomers did, rating women as more ethical/transparent than men.

Figure 8.1: How Do Different Generations Rate Women and Men on Key Leadership Attributes?



Source: Apollo Research Institute, 2012. Graph shows difference.

Figure 8.2: How Do Different Generations Rate Women and Men on Key Leadership Skills?



Source: Apollo Research Institute, 2012.

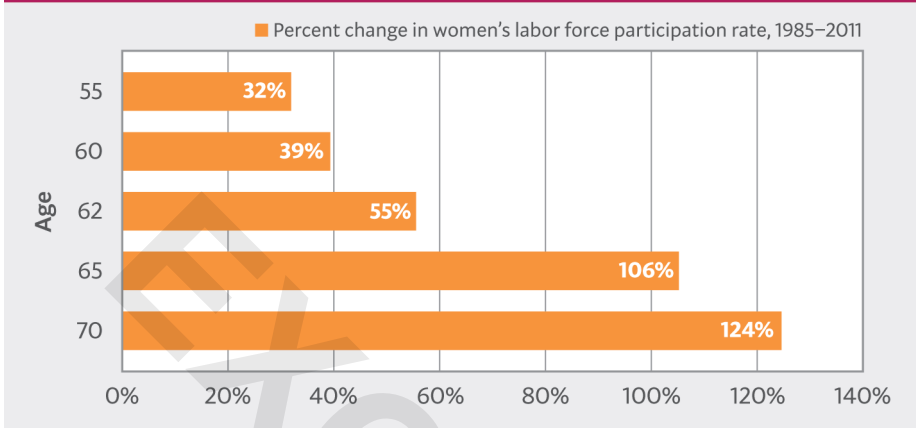
Younger respondents also found fewer differences between men and women when it came to most leadership skills. Respondents from all three generations rated female leaders higher than male leaders on communication, mentoring/coaching, and organizing people, and rated male leaders higher than female leaders on industry expertise, managing complex projects, negotiation, technological proficiency, implementing strategy, and financial management. Again, though, on most skills, there was a greater difference between the percentage of 4- and 5-ratings Boomers gave men and women than between the percentage of 4- and 5-ratings Xers and Millennials gave men and women (see Figure 8.2). Xers showed a smaller percentage-point spread between men's and women's 4- and 5-point ratings than Boomers did on 8 of 10 attributes, and Millennials showed a smaller percentage-point spread between men's and women's 4- and 5-point ratings than Boomers did. The exception was negotiation, on which Xers and Millennials had a *higher* percentage-point spread than Boomers did.

In short, younger generations see fewer differences in how men and women demonstrate leadership skills and attributes than Baby Boomers do. One possible explanation for these results is the fact that many Baby Boomers entered the workforce at a time when it was more unusual for women to do so, and when gender roles were more strictly defined than they are today. Most Xers and Millennials, however, grew up seeing their mothers or other important women in their lives work, leading them to see the sexes as less strongly differentiated. Younger women leaders, too, may feel more comfortable than older women leaders with exhibiting skills and characteristics once considered traditionally “masculine,” and respondents from younger generations may have more experience working with or for these less “traditional” female leaders.

Authenticity and Leadership: Women in Late Career

Classic models of career development depict the typical career trajectory as an arc: rising through exploration and engagement in early career, plateauing at midlife, and declining after the age of 60. These models, which were based on the working lives of men during the mid-20th century, have little relevance for many women—particularly women in their 50s and 60s. Rather than sinking into “decline,” many women in their fifth and sixth decades demonstrate renewed vitality for work. Women who deemphasized career in midlife, particularly those who were raising now-grown children, often recommit to work during this stage of their lives.⁶⁸ Angie Mannino, senior vice president of human resources at Inova Health System, observes, “I know several women who are just coming into leadership roles in their fifties. In each situation, they put things on hold during their childbearing years. Once their kids were older, they felt liberated to devote themselves to their careers and took on higher-level positions.”

Figure 8.3: Women Over 55 Increasingly Important in the US Workforce



Source: Joseph F. Quinn, “Work, Retirement, and the Encore Career: Elders and the Future of the American Workforce,” *Generations* 34, no. 3 (2010): 4.

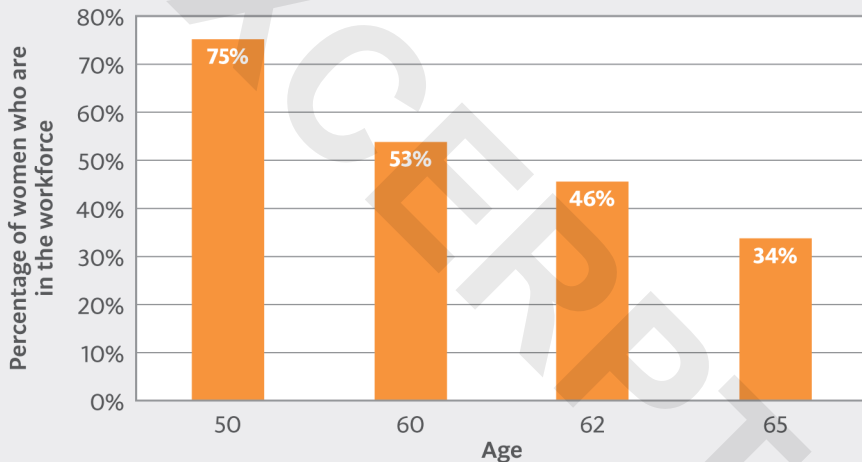
Authenticity becomes a touchstone for women in this phase,⁶⁹ which O’Neil and Bilimoria term “reinventive contribution.” Women in late career view their work as a way to serve others or make a difference, and seek recognition, respect, and integration of the various facets of their lives.⁷⁰ Most have achieved balance: Only 19% of women in later career find it difficult or very difficult to meet the demands of work and family life, and they are the cohort most likely to say they do an “excellent” job of balancing work and home.⁷¹ They express greater satisfaction with life than women of any other age group.⁷² Their careers are more stable than those of younger women. They are more likely to say they can see themselves spending the rest of their careers with the same company,⁷³ and 59% report having an “orderly” career pattern.⁷⁴

These women have plentiful work and life experience and are well positioned to coach and mentor others. They continue to learn and grow, are hungry for challenge, and are ready to give back. Women in their 50s and 60s also make excellent leaders. As *Forbes* staff reporter Jenna Goudreau points out, “Most of the women on the *Forbes* 100 Most Powerful Women list are in their fifties, with the average age being around 57.” Athena Palaras, corporate vice president of education at Fresenius Medical Care, says, “Women in their fifties are a triple threat. They have confidence, education, and professional experience. It does take that long for someone to become a leader: Like fine wine, leadership takes time to develop.”

Living Longer, Working Longer: Longevity Leads to Opportunity

Americans are living longer than ever. Between 2010 and 2030, the number of Americans over 65 will increase almost 80%.⁷⁵ Life expectancy has risen by four years for men and five years for women since 1950, and is projected to rise by another two years by 2050.⁷⁶ This increased longevity is not without its problems. The aging population is putting a strain on the healthcare system, and 6 to 7 million working adults now have significant eldercare responsibilities.⁷⁷

Figure 8.4: Many Women Ages 50–65 Participate in the Workforce



Source: David F. Warner, Mark D. Hayward, and Melissa A. Hardy, “The Retirement Life Course in America at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 29 (2010): 905, doi:10.1007/s11113-009-9173-2.

But living longer—and staying healthier longer—also means opportunities to do more with one’s life. As Erica Frontiero, senior vice president at GE Capital Markets, says, “Having a longer career gives you more possibilities and more time to reinvent your career, or to recommit to a career if you’ve taken time off.” Women are excited about these possibilities. “Longevity has taken away the date stamp,” says Angie Mannino. “People are going to retire when they feel ready instead of when they reach a specific age.” Cindy Ireland, vice president of IT for DoctorDirectory.com, Inc.,

says, “I love my day job, but I’m also an artist. I’m looking forward to having more time in life to pursue my craft. If things work out right, I could have thirty years to just make art and enjoy life.”

People today are staying in the workforce longer—a positive trend, for both them and the economy. The population of Americans ages 20 to 64 will only grow by 10% by 2030, which could lead to a shortage of workers if too many older employees retire.⁷⁸ Fortunately, older workers are retiring later. Over the past 15 years, the labor force participation rates of people in their 60s and 70s have risen. This is especially true of women 65 and older, whose participation in the workforce has almost doubled in the past 25 years (see Figure 8.4).⁷⁹

Societal and economic shifts have led to later retirement. In the mid-20th century, mandatory retirement ages, the automatic adjustment of Social Security benefits, and the growth of defined-benefit pension plans enshrined retirement as a normative phase of life.⁸⁰ But in the last few decades of the century, most pensions and mandatory retirement ages were abolished.⁸¹ Americans began expecting to live longer, and realized they’d need more money to maintain the same standard of living for the remainder of their lives. Changes in the workplace also made it possible for older people to work longer: Technology made jobs less physically demanding, and having more education enabled older people to refresh their skills and keep current with workplace trends.⁸²

Older workers are also reluctant to give up the intellectual stimulation and sense of purpose work provides. A 2004 survey of Baby Boomers found that over three-quarters intended to earn money in retirement, and two-thirds listed mental stimulation and challenge as the top reasons why.⁸³ Many women have a difficult time even picturing retirement. “The sales industry is not a job for me; it’s a lifestyle, it’s what I do,” says Nancy Bogart, CEO and owner of Jordan Essentials, a company that sells bath, body, and spa products. “So I don’t plan to stop working. I think work is a very healthy part of life.” Theresa Valade, CEO of Success Trek, says, “I don’t want to ever stop working if I don’t have to. Whether it’s consulting or moving into professional speaking and inspiring other women, I want to work as long as I’m able.”

Leadership Survey: Most People Plan to Retire Before Age 70

In our leadership survey, however, the majority of respondents stated they planned to retire in their 60s, with ages 65–69 the most commonly given answer, ages 60–64 the second most common, and 70–74 the third most common. Altogether, 77% of respondents indicated they planned on retiring before age 70. These results

were unexpected, given that much of the academic literature and news media we examined for this chapter suggests people are retiring later.

Respondents from younger generations in our survey were more likely than Baby Boomers to state they planned to retire before age 70: Only 22% of Xers and 15% of Millennials, compared with 33% of Boomers, said they planned to retire after 70. These results may indicate that younger people are more optimistic about being able to save more money for retirement, or that Boomers, who are closer to retirement, believe they will need to work longer to build up their retirement funds.

When asked when 21st-century leaders will retire, the majority of respondents of both genders most commonly gave ages 65–69 as an answer. Ages 60–64 was the second most commonly given answer, and 70–74 was third. These results suggest that people don't plan to retire in their 60s simply because their circumstances will allow them to, but because they believe that the 60s are the ideal decade in which to retire. More women than men, however, indicated that 21st-century leaders will retire between ages 70 and 74.

Redefining Retirement

A 50-year-old woman can expect to spend the next 11 years of her life working and 18 years retired—and that's only if she lives until 79, an age many people are surpassing.⁸⁴ Given this new longevity, it's not surprising that late career and retirement, like every other career phase, have become flexible and individualized.⁸⁵ Retirement no longer consists only of shuffleboard and watching the grandchildren; today, it may involve part-time work, formal phased retirement plans, encore careers, a return to the workforce, or community service. As Kathleen Kirkish, director of learning and development at the Gap, says, "I think we're seeing the traditional notion of retirement being redefined. People want to stay more active and intellectually challenged late in life, and don't want to let go of the standard of living to which they're accustomed."

Retirement has become less of an event than a process. In fact, only half of all employees will have "traditional" retirements in which they go directly from full-time work to not working. Many—anywhere from 25% to 33%—will return to work at least part-time after formally retiring.⁸⁶ About half will take phased retirement, which may involve a part- or full-time "bridge job" or working on a temporary or project basis, often with their previous employers.⁸⁷

Some companies have invented creative ways for retired employees to stay involved. They maintain "pools" of retirees who come into work temporarily during periods of high demand, assign retirees to special projects that full-time workers are too busy to manage, or bring in former employees as mentors, coaches, or trainers.

Third-party employers also keep lists of retirees whom companies can hire on an as-needed basis. The consulting group YourEncore, for instance, offers the services of over 4,000 retired engineers and other experts on a short-term, project basis.⁸⁸

Other employees embark on “encore careers” later in life: purpose-driven second careers, often in fields that allow them to give back to their communities, such as teaching, healthcare, social work, and nonprofits. The MetLife Foundation found that between 5.3 and 8.4 million people between ages 44 and 70 are in encore careers. Fifty-six percent of them are women.⁸⁹ Older workers derive great satisfaction from their second careers: 84% find them extremely fulfilling, and 94% say they know they are making a difference.⁹⁰ The encore movement is poised to grow: Half of older workers not currently in encore careers want to have them.⁹¹

The encore movement is growing so fast that businesses and nonprofits have emerged to assist older employees looking for volunteer opportunities or encore jobs. One such organization is ReServe, a nonprofit that matches older professionals with nonprofit organizations that can use their expertise and skills. ReServe identifies qualified people who have finished their primary careers and matches them with either ongoing or time-limited service opportunities in nonprofits or the public sector. ReServists, as such workers are called, work as event planners, financial planners, HR generalists, mentors for underserved high school students, educators in adult learner programs, or in many other capacities.

Mary Bleiberg, executive director of ReServe, definitely sees the encore movement as growing. “In 2007,” she says, “the majority of ReServists were retired people over 65 who felt bored and invisible. Now half of them are under 65, and many are looking at ReServe as a pathway to an encore career. We’re working on ways to help that happen.”

Misalignment can be a problem for many people who want to move into encore careers, Bleiberg says. “The workplace is changing rapidly and many job functions are becoming obsolete,” she says. “People are not quite sure how to move into the next position. They need to start marketing themselves not as what they were but in terms of job functions that are still relevant today.”

Bleiberg advises women to start thinking about their encore careers early. “I think you have to start in your late 40s asking yourself, ‘At 50, what am I going to do with the next 25 years of my life?’” she says. “You cannot wait until you’re 55 or 65. People don’t start thinking early enough about this evolution, and too often they get blindsided by being laid off or finding their energy level diminishing.”

Jean Tully suggests women engage in deep reflection to determine what they might like to do in their encore careers. “Go back over your career and life to date and do some deep-dive reflection on what you’ve been successful at that’s brought you liveliness and energy and satisfaction,” she says. “When I stepped back and looked at my history with HP, I saw that in every single job there were shifting paradigms

that required new learning. And what brought me the most satisfaction was finding new ways to teach whoever needed to learn the new ways of doing things. As soon as I saw that as a pattern it opened up all kinds of possibilities for me.”

Research and pragmatism should also be a part of any encore career plans. Pat Deasy, technology director for a medical school at a major research university, who is in her mid-60s, is looking forward to working for at least another two decades. To be able to do that, she’s researching gerontology degree programs and future job opportunities that will allow her to leverage her years of IT experience along with her gerontology studies.

“As Baby Boomers like me grow older, we’ll need more products and services, and not just healthcare-related ones,” Deasy says. “There will definitely be a need for alternative living models that take into account varying communal and mobile lifestyles, as well as alternative work models that can draw on the enormous knowledge and talent of older workers while allowing them to make money and contribute to society.”

Women Lead the Way

Throughout the life cycle, from first jobs to retirement, women are taking charge of their own careers and lives. They’re willing to buck convention and devise creative strategies to craft working lives that meet their needs for balance, authenticity, and personal fulfillment. And they’re making ethical and reflective life choices that take the well-being of others into account. In this way, women are setting a new course for all 21st-century workers.