

Gender Perceptions and Microaggressions in Health Technology


Lyn Denend

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

What is Stanford Biodesign?



Our Mission



Educating and empowering health technology innovators

Our Mission

Teaching

Mentoring

Seed Grants



Why Gender Diversity?

- Studies have shown that gender diversity is a business imperative:
 - Linked to positive financial performance
 - Helps catalyze and sustain innovation
 - Increases the “collective intelligence” of the organization
 - Is the right thing to do...
 - ...especially since women make ~80% of all healthcare decisions
- Unclear how our industry was performing
- And our own programs were predominantly male

The Project

- Initiated a survey to characterize the gender landscape within the health technology sector
 - Devices, device-based diagnostics, digital health, health IT
- Specific goals: Better understand the industry's current performance on factors such as:
 - Female representation in leadership
 - Perceptions of gender dynamics, workplace equality, job satisfaction, and work-life balance
- More than 400 responses

*Original Article*

Analysis of Gender Perceptions in Health Technology: A Call to Action

LYN DENEND , STACEY MCCUTCHEON, MIKE REGAN, MARIA SAINZ, PAUL YOCK, and DAN AZAGURY

Stanford Byers Center for Biodesign, Stanford University, 318 Campus Drive, E100, Stanford, CA 94305, USA

(Received 3 October 2019; accepted 10 February 2020; published online 20 February 2020)

Associate Editor Jane Grande-Allen oversaw the review of this article.

Abstract—Gender diversity has been linked to positive business results. Yet limited data exist to characterize the gender landscape in health technology, a field that draws employees from both biomedical engineering and medicine. To better understand the state of gender diversity in this industry, we developed a survey to explore leadership representation and perceptions of workplace equality, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. Data from 400 + health technology professionals revealed that women are significantly underrepresented in senior leadership and that men and women experience the workplace differently. Men believe in greater numbers than females that senior leaders are focused on recruiting and promoting women, promotion criteria are equitable, and the major barrier to leadership roles for women is work/family balance. In contrast, women perceive a less meritocratic and inclusive workplace in which their ability to rise is hampered by exclusion from influential communication networks and stereotyping/bias. Perhaps as a result, more than one-third of female respondents are considering leaving their current jobs, citing dissatisfaction with management and a desire for greater advancement opportunities. This study highlights significant gender perception differences in health technology that require further study and proactive remediation for the field to fully realize the benefits of gender diversity.

sustaining innovation²⁰ and increasing the “collective intelligence” of the organization.²⁸

The US healthcare industry seemingly outperforms the rest of corporate America on gender diversity. Depending how healthcare is defined, women make up 50%³ to 75%¹⁹ of the workforce, and the sector has better female representation at all levels of leadership than other US industries.³

The high-technology industry, by comparison, continues to struggle with a significant gender gap—its workforce is only about one-quarter female.²⁶ While this sector is taking steps to address its unfavorable track record on gender diversity,²⁴ the number of women in high-tech has not risen appreciably despite the fact that employment opportunities are abundant and jobs are generally high paying.⁷

Health technology, a growing field that includes medical device, device-based diagnostic, digital health, and health information technology companies, sits squarely between the healthcare and high-technology industries. However, its gender landscape remains obscure as it has not been extensively examined. In most

**Harvard
Business
Review**

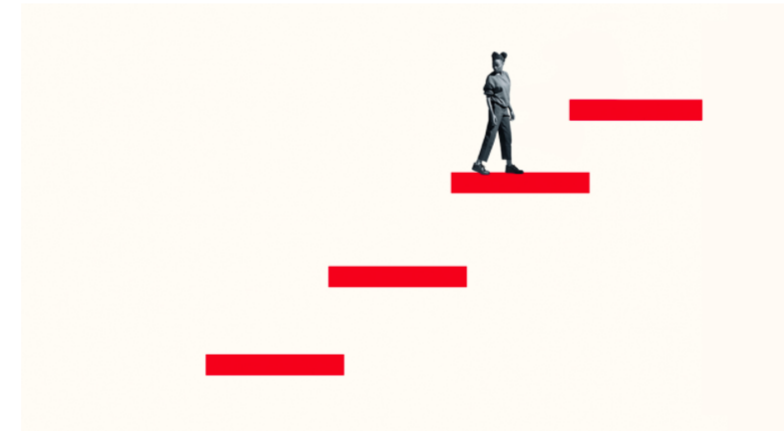
Gender | Research: Small Wins Can Make a Big Impact on Gender Equality

Gender

Research: Small Wins Can Make a Big Impact on Gender Equality

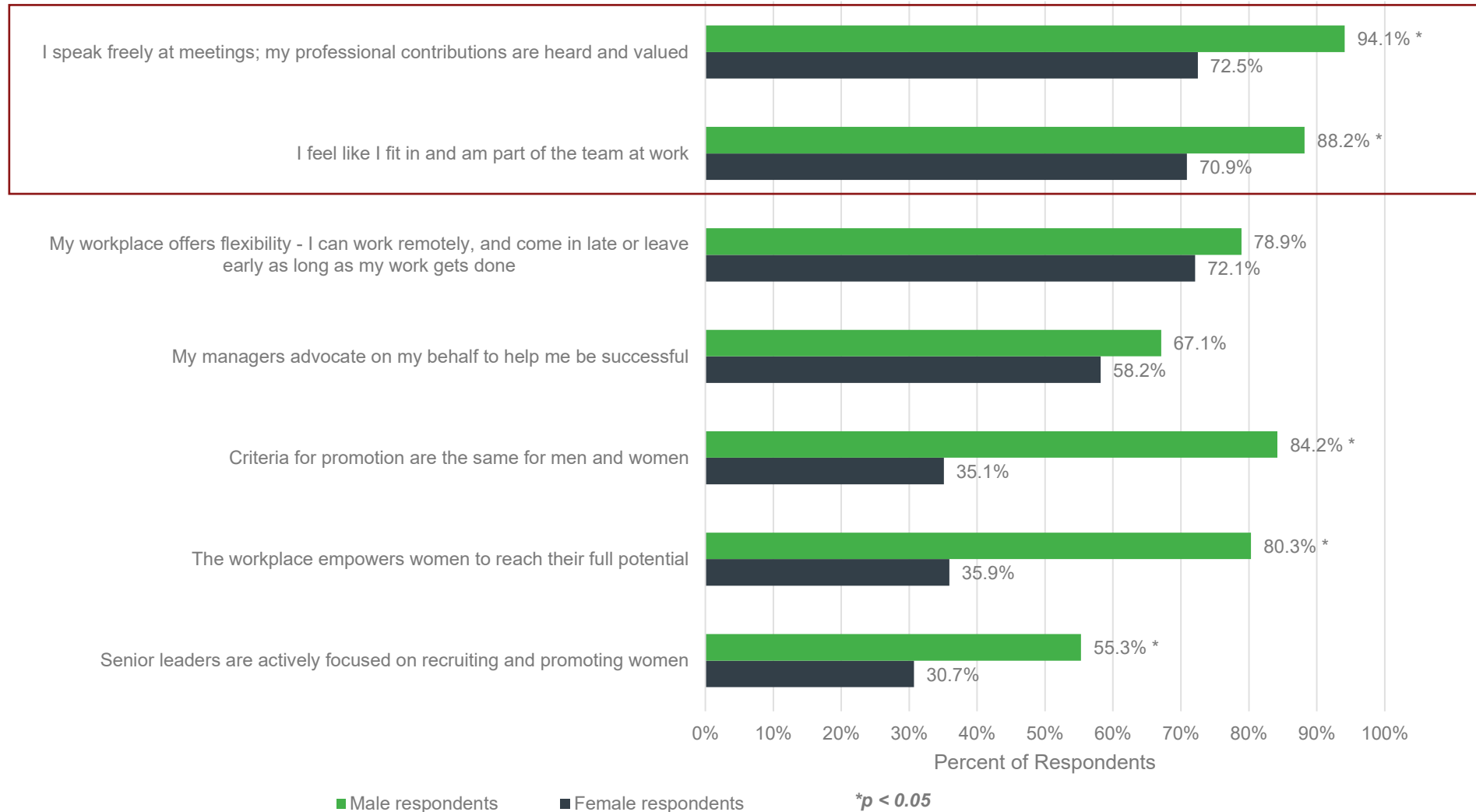
by Lyn Denend, Paul Yock, and Dan Azagury

November 06, 2020

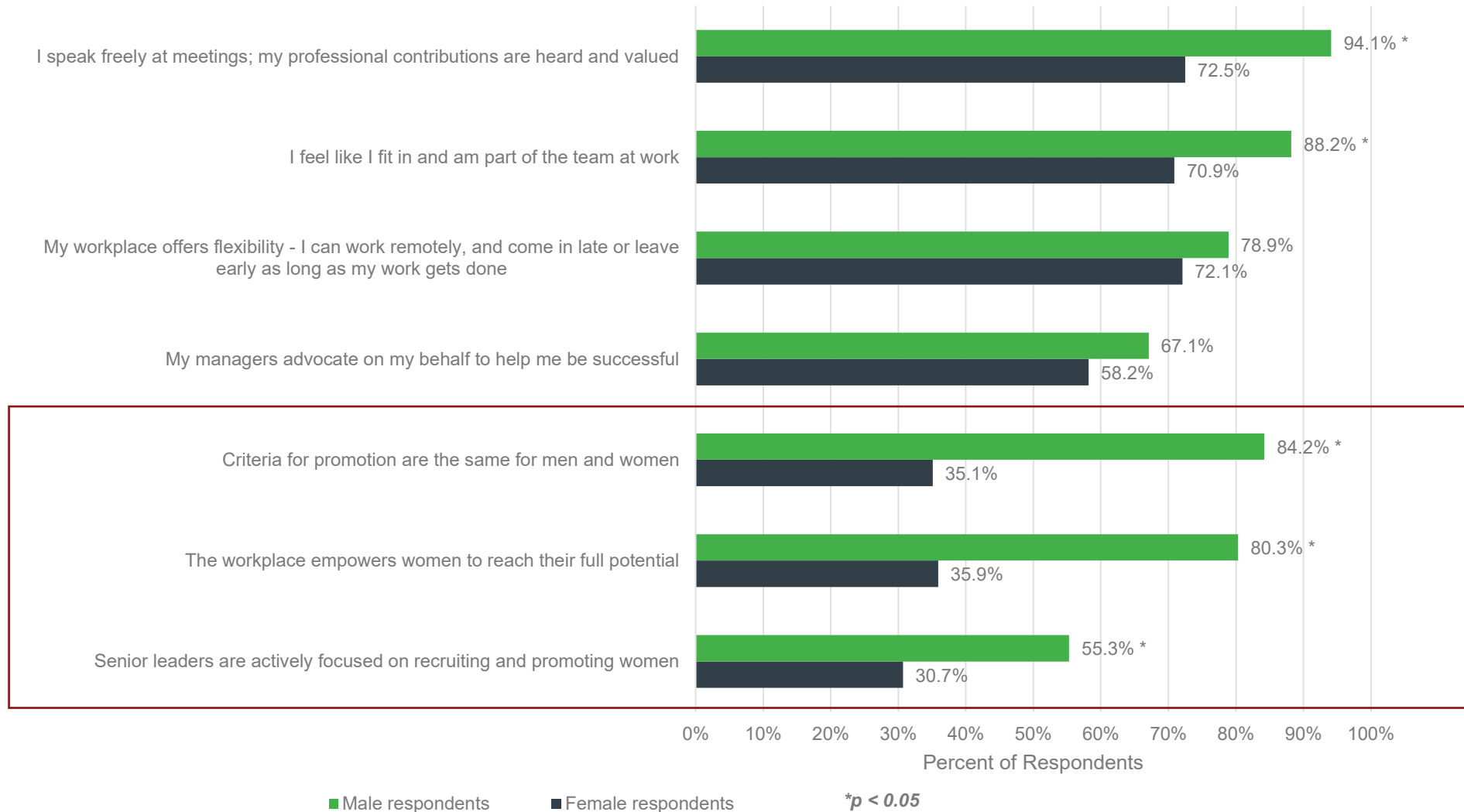


HBR Staff/Klaus Vedfelt/Getty Images

Male respondents scored higher on 5 out of 7 proxies for job satisfaction and inclusive environment at statistically significant levels than female respondents



Male respondents scored higher on 5 out of 7 proxies for job satisfaction and inclusive environment at statistically significant levels than female respondents



Respondents were asked to rate where they believed the greatest inequalities exist between men and women in their workplace (no inequalities = 1, major inequalities = 4) – across all issues, men perceived lesser inequalities compared to women

Inequalities in the Workplace



When asked about barriers holding women back from senior leadership roles, 70.4% of females listed “exclusion from networks of communication and influence” while 61.6% of men cited “desire to balance work and family”

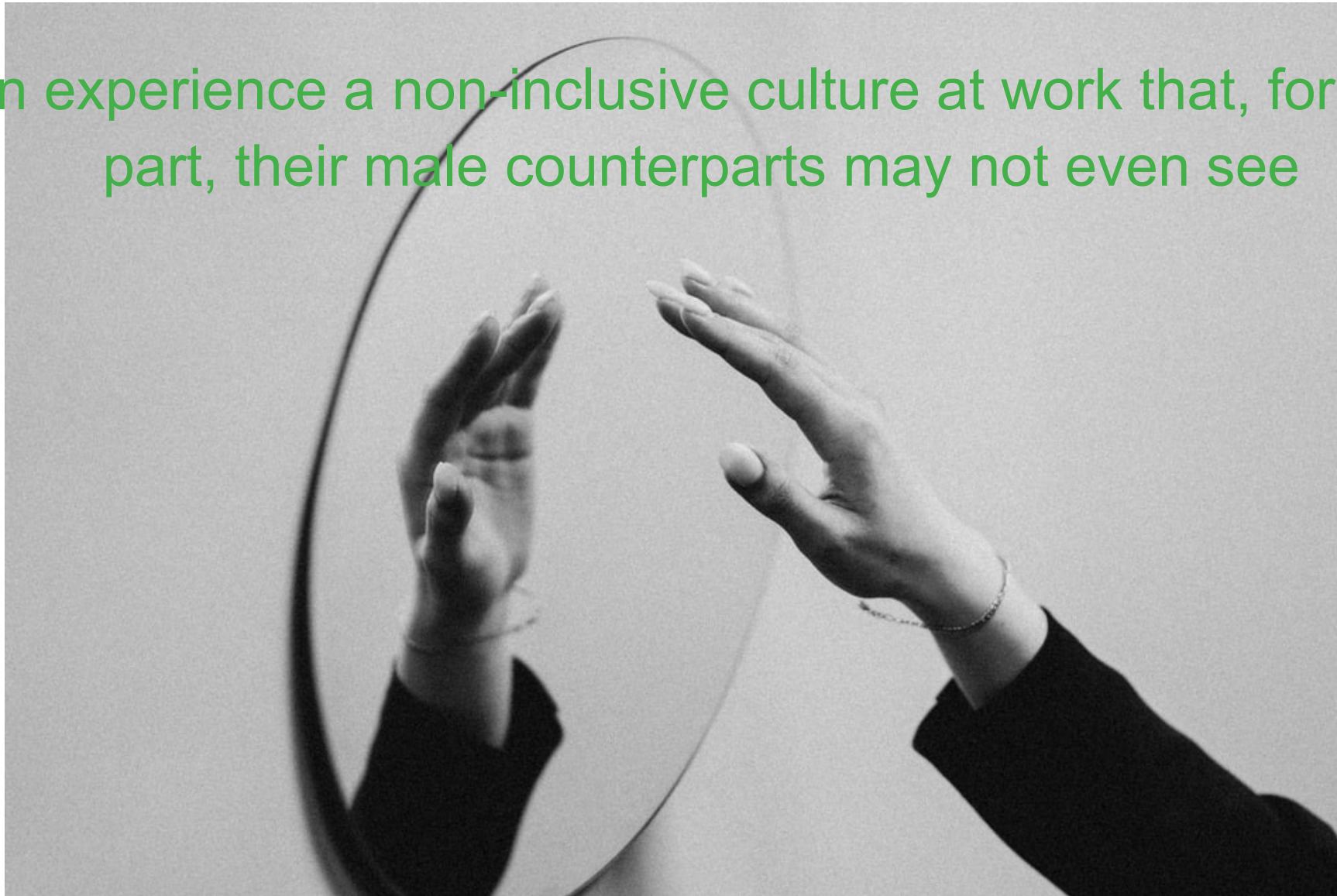
Barriers Holding Women Back from Senior Leadership



Take-aways...

- Men responding to the survey believed that the work environment for their female colleagues is far more meritocratic and inclusive than the women reported
- Male respondents were more likely to believe that efforts around diversity and inclusion are sufficient and/or that the problem is not that great, whereas women are more likely to believe that improvements are needed
- Women experience a non-inclusive culture at work that, for the most part, their male counterparts may not even see

Women experience a non-inclusive culture at work that, for the most part, their male counterparts may not even see



Being interrupted or talked over in meetings

Not giving credit where it is due

Being expected to clean-up after events

Asking female team members for clerical or hospitality assistance regardless of position

Being handed papers after a meeting to recycle

Condoning or explaining away inappropriate comments or humor

Planning social activities for evenings/weekends when not everyone can easily participate

Having concerns invalidated when raised

Small wins

- Pursue a portfolio of concrete, implementable actions that produce visible results
- Small wins motivate further action and are the building blocks to larger organizational transformation



Small wins

- Sourced ideas from our team
- Sought best practices from the literature in the areas of recruiting, hiring, mentoring, promotion, workplace culture, and work/life balance
- Rolled out the small wins concept to our entire team
- Made gender diversity, equity, and inclusion a regular agenda item at our bi-weekly program meetings

10 “SMALL WINS”

Near-term actions to improve the work environment for all employees

- 1 In the meetings you manage and attend, pay attention to different communication styles. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to speak and nobody is regularly interrupted.
- 2 Give credit where credit is due. Identify and acknowledge where ideas originate. Don't be distracted by who speaks loudest or last.
- 3 Find out what flexible work options exist within your organization and try one out as a way of demonstrating your support. Speak up if you hear colleagues disparage those who utilize flexible work arrangements.
- 4 Shift regular meetings to begin after 9:00 am and end before 5:00 pm. This will prevent individuals with child or elder care responsibilities from having to make special arrangements to participate.
- 5 Plan your next social or offsite mindfully, avoiding typically male or female venues. Consider lunch or late afternoon activities so as not to exclude people who can't easily attend after hours.
- 6 Don't make assumptions about what challenges or roles employees might be willing to undertake. Ask them – and then actively support their choices.
- 7 Commit to recruiting and considering at least three qualified candidates for your next job opening who would diversify your team in some substantial way.
- 8 Become a mentor for a high-performing woman (or help her find one who's a good fit). Mentors (both male and female) play a key role in encouraging and empowering women to advance in their careers.
- 9 Start or join an initiative to tackle gender diversity within your organization at a more systemic level. Unsure where to start? Consider addressing the hiring and/or promotion process, which are typically the most significant contributors to workplace gender gaps.
- 10 Recruit at least one male colleague to join the initiative with you. Research has shown that when men get involved in diversity initiatives, the company makes greater progress toward gender parity.

With acknowledgement and thanks to Shelley J. Correll, who developed the “small wins” approach.

Work-in-progress

- More work to do, but off to a reasonable start
- Small wins approachable and sustainable
- Expanding into racial diversity
- Sharing the approach with the broader industry

