

EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

# FUTURE TALENT STRATEGIES: GENDER DIVERSITY AND LEADERSHIP

ROBERT WALTERS

EMPOWERING  
WOMEN



## INTRODUCTION

# FUTURE TALENT STRATEGIES: GENDER DIVERSITY AND LEADERSHIP

As global talent shortages grow more acute, new ways of engaging and developing the business leaders of tomorrow are needed to deliver sustainable talent strategies for the future.

Businesses are investing in their people, but neglecting to address the issues of why women are leaving the workforce, and why women continue to be underrepresented in business at the senior level.

The question is no longer why are women exiting the workforce, but rather, what can employers do to attract and retain talented women in their business.

This research, based on a survey of 102 women working in professional disciplines, explores the effectiveness of current strategies to empower and advance women in the workplace, looking at areas such as flexible working, mentoring, leadership and collating feedback directly from the participants as to what they believe constitutes a successful career.

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# ABOUT ROBERT WALTERS ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING SPECIALIST RECRUITMENT CONSULTANCIES

Robert Walters is one of the world's leading specialist professional recruitment consultancies and focuses on placing high calibre professionals into permanent, contract and temporary positions at all levels of seniority.

The Irish business recruits across the accountancy and finance, banking, sales and marketing, HR, legal, compliance, IT, engineering and business support fields.

We add value to our clients through the provision of market-leading intelligence. Our research consists of reports highlighting the latest recruitment and pay trends, along with insights and surveys into other key employment issues. Our comprehensive understanding of the market also means we regularly feature as key commentators in the media. For further information please visit our website: **[www.robertwalters.ie](http://www.robertwalters.ie)**.



## CASE STUDY

A leading global FMCG business has the goal of becoming one of the leading employment destinations for women in Europe. Part of their plan centres around the creation of an employee resource group for women across their European divisions, which seeks to empower women within the business to use their unique abilities, insights and talents to play an important role in the success of women within the organisation.

They also offer other incentives to attract and retain women in their business, including summer working hours where employees can leave at 12pm on Fridays if weekly hours have been worked, flexi-time and remote/home based working, as well as flexi-holidays.

Importantly, they also offer job sharing in senior roles.

# GENDER DIVERSITY POLICIES AND APPROACHES



84% of women believe employers should have a clear diversity strategy at board level.

86% of women surveyed say gender diversity policies are important.

Yet half believe their employer does not have a clear gender diversity policy.

Without clear policies on how to achieve gender diversity businesses are unlikely to accomplish it, and are likely to fall behind their competitors as the global war for talent grows.

Employers face two challenges: the first, to develop an effective strategy for ensuring gender diversity in their business and the second, to communicate this strategy to their employees and potential employees.

77% of women surveyed felt that it was important that the company's gender diversity strategy was clearly set out at their workplace induction, and 84% felt that gender diversity policies should be in place to help businesses build a workforce that represents the diversity of the broader community.

Of those surveyed, many felt that strategies which focus on the individual, rather than gender, were most beneficial, with 82% identifying that one-on-one mentoring programmes were important, compared to just over half that number who favoured gender-specific networking groups.



**Louise Campbell**  
Managing Director

“Businesses that fail to understand the different motivations that drive women to change jobs risk losing out in the war for talent, as employers that have a strategy in place to address the different needs and requirements of women will secure the best talent.”

# TALENT ACQUISITION STRATEGIES FOR WOMEN



A fifth of women surveyed say achieving a senior or leadership role is their top career priority

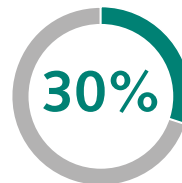
30% of women say improved work-life balance is the number one reason they would change jobs.

However, better career development, a more fulfilling job and a bigger salary are almost as likely to be the main factor when changing jobs.

Of the women we surveyed, there were four main motivators for changing jobs; improved work-life balance, better career development opportunities, a more fulfilling job and a bigger salary.

This presents challenges and opportunities for employers when shaping their talent acquisition strategies, but the key message is that a one-size-fits-all approach may not deliver the best outcomes.

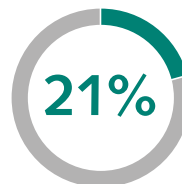
## Reasons women working in professional disciplines would change jobs.



IMPROVED WORK-LIFE BALANCE



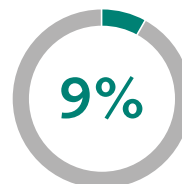
BETTER CAREER DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES



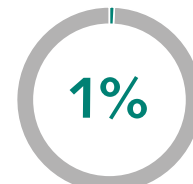
MORE FULFILLING JOB



BIGGER SALARY OR BONUS



ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITY



USE OF SOPHISTICATED TECHNOLOGY

# RETAINING TALENTED WOMEN IN YOUR BUSINESS



43% of women who took a break from their career felt they were disadvantaged when they returned

**98% rank pay, work-life balance and fulfilment at work as important for job satisfaction.**

**97% say a collaborative workplace also matters to them.**

Fulfilling work, a good work-life balance and competitive pay are all important to the women we surveyed, with 98% ranking them as important to job satisfaction.

Workplace culture also has a profound impact on an employer's ability to retain women in their business. Those surveyed placed high importance on the opportunity to give regular feedback to their employers (98%) and on working for a company with ethical business practices (96%).

Employers should also note that a collaborative, team orientated environment is important to the vast majority of female professionals (96%).

Crucially, ensuring that you support your female staff if they decide to have children is essential in order to retain them. 37% of women surveyed said they would change jobs to work for an employer with a better maternity policy.



**Suzanne Feeney**  
Director at Robert Walters

“Women place the highest value on fulfilling and rewarding work. Ensuring that your interview process helps to identify candidates who are passionate about the work you do can help you lower attrition rates.”



# 42%

of women surveyed believe difficulty returning to work after having children is one of the main reasons women are underrepresented in leadership



**AUTOMOTIVE**  
BUSINESS

## CASE STUDY

One of the world's leading automotive businesses identified that a key ingredient to their business success was the diversity of their workforce, where differences are valued and everyone is included.

They have become a leader in the practices of diversity and inclusion, with a formal equal opportunities policy established more than 30 years ago.

They offer industry-leading maternity policies, including up to 52 weeks leave from work on full basic pay. In addition, they offer tax relief on childcare vouchers and even have an on-site childcare facility, providing childcare on a full-time, part-time and emergency basis. The nursery is run by an external provider, but the company paid for the building and funds the associated infrastructure and costs. Flexible work arrangements can also be requested by all employees.

# FAMILY AND MATERNITY POLICIES



37% of women surveyed would change jobs to find an employer with a better maternity policy

Nine in ten women rank flexible working options for parents as important.

But only half of employers offer this.

Balancing family life and a career is one of the main reasons women are underrepresented in senior leadership.

Over half of women who took a break from their career felt they were disadvantaged when they returned (52%). 43% found it difficult to return at the same level.

Having a cohesive strategy for supporting staff during maternity leave and providing a structure for their return to work is vital in combating the attrition seen among women who leave their jobs to start a family.

## Family-friendly policies most important to women



86%

Flexible working arrangements



60%

Maternity leave over the statutory entitlement



59%

Opportunity to come back to work part-time



36%

Employers maintaining regular contact with employees on maternity leave



**Gemma Allen**  
Director at Robert Walters

“Offering additional maternity leave benefits and ensuring that women are kept engaged during their leave can make a huge difference in ensuring they return to work after their maternity leave.”

# REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP



58% of women surveyed believe family pressures or commitments outside of work hold women back

**83% of those surveyed believe women are underrepresented in business leadership.**

**Three in ten say they lack strong female role models at work.**

The women we surveyed widely perceive there to be a lack of female representation in business leadership. While women at junior levels are less convinced of this, the perception is still strong across all levels of seniority. Overall, 83% of those surveyed believe women are underrepresented in business leadership.

The majority of those surveyed believe that the primary cause of gender disparity in leadership is from family pressures or commitments outside of work.

However, issues relating to returning to work after starting a family are also seen as impacting the number of women in leadership. 41% say difficulty returning to work after having children is a significant factor and 43% believe a preference for senior managers to promote men over women prevent women from progressing to leadership roles.

Over a third of respondents think poor career progression strategies and workplace culture also contribute to the challenges women face in reaching leadership positions.

## Why do women believe they are underrepresented in senior management?



# DEVELOPING WOMEN INTO FUTURE BUSINESS LEADERS



A quarter of women believe a lack of professional role models contributes to fewer women in leadership roles

Over nine in ten women say a clear path to career progression is important at work.

94% believe personalised development plans are important in helping them succeed.

As talent management strategies increasingly focus on understanding the individual, businesses have an opportunity to build strategies that not only develop future leaders but also improve gender diversity in leadership.

A clear path to career progression is regarded as highly important to the women we surveyed. Personalised, modular training at all levels of seniority should form the foundation of any career development plans, with 94% of those surveyed saying this was an important career progression strategy.

When we asked women to identify the single most important factor in helping them succeed, 44% cited having a mentor or sponsor, and 20% said that formal leadership training sponsored by employers would be most beneficial in helping them achieve their career goals.

**We asked women: what is the single career progression strategy that would most help you achieve career success?**



- 44% A mentor or sponsor at senior management level
- 20% Formal leadership training sponsored by your employer
- 18% A formal fast stream programme for high potential staff
- 11% Personalised training programmes
- 7% Networking opportunities within the business



# 82%

of women surveyed think mentoring programmes are an effective strategy to build gender diversity

## CASE STUDY



**FINANCIAL**  
SERVICES

To attract talented women to their business, a bank in the UK has adopted specific recruitment initiatives including advertising on recruitment pages on websites aimed at women, particularly working mothers.

They have also made use of social media to promote their career opportunities, including some specifically geared towards working parents.

They train staff on the benefits of diversity in the workplace and on how to hire to achieve this. The company also supports flexible working arrangements, including using a courier service to provide laptops to employees who need to take time off at short notice due to family commitments.

Employees have access to the Bank Workers Charity (BWC) which offers extra support and specialist resources through access to partners including Working Families, Relate, Refuge and Kidscape.

# KEY FINDINGS

**82%**

of those surveyed believe women are underrepresented in business leadership



**Nine in ten** women rank flexible work options for parents as important



**But only half** of employers offer flexible work options for parents

**37%**

of women surveyed would change jobs to find an employer with a better maternity policy.

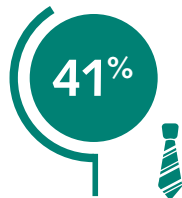
## Why do women believe they are underrepresented in senior management?



FAMILY PRESSURES OR COMMITMENTS OUTSIDE OF WORK (58%)



DIFFICULTY RETURNING TO WORK AFTER HAVING CHILDREN (43%)



MANAGEMENT PROMOTING MEN OVER WOMEN (41%)



A WORKPLACE CULTURE THAT DOES NOT FOSTER DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND EQUALITY (32%)

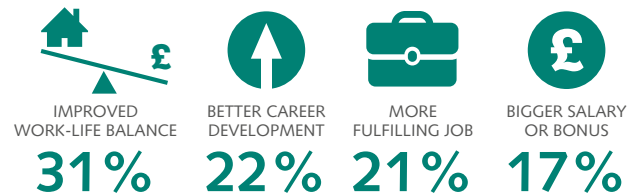
**43%**

of women who took a break from their career felt they were disadvantaged when they returned

## What is important to women at work?

GOOD WORK-LIFE BALANCE	98%
COMPETITIVE PAY AND BONUSES	98%
FULFILLING AND REWARDING WORK	98%
OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE FEEDBACK	98%
A COLLABORATIVE WORKPLACE	97%

## Top reasons women change jobs





## ABOUT THE EMPOWERING WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE PROGRAMME

The Robert Walters **Empowering Women in the Workplace** programme is designed to create conversation and connect professionals, provide advice to help women achieve career success, as well as deliver insight to employers and businesses on how they can best create strategies and policies to ensure gender diversity in the workplace.

[www.robertwalters.ie/empoweringwomen](http://www.robertwalters.ie/empoweringwomen)

## CONTACT US

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To join the conversation, attend events or access the latest advice and research produced as part of the Empowering Women in the Workplace programme, or to discuss your recruitment needs in more detail, please contact your Robert Walters recruitment consultant, email us at [dublin@robertwalters.com](mailto:dublin@robertwalters.com), or get in touch with our Dublin office:

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