

The World Needs More Women In Leadership

It's time for men to step up and step back

By **Jeff Harris**, Impact Recruitment

Women are leaving the workforce at unprecedented rates and it's putting our society on a fast track to an even more unequal gender divide.

As Armine Yalnizyan, an economist with the Atkinson Foundation in Toronto describes it, we are in the midst of a “[She-cession](#)” – a recession characterized by the disproportionate impact that Covid-19 has had in driving women out of the Canadian workforce.

The last two years have been exhausting for workers across all industries and indeed everyone is feeling burnt out from the pandemic. Recovery plans will be hampered unless leaders recognize those who have been bearing the brunt of the pandemic's impact, and take actions to support those individuals with a plan to retain them.

Why Women in Leadership Are Leaving the Workforce

In 2021, close to [half a million Canadian women](#) left the workforce and have yet to return. Working mothers carry more at-home responsibilities when [compared](#) to their male counterparts – even in [dual-career](#) couples. [Women-led industries](#) such as food services were harshly impacted by restrictions and lockdowns, with [27%](#) of Canadian mothers reporting being afraid of losing their job if they take time off work. When paired with a reduction in or complete lack of access

to childcare support, it's clear that throughout the last two years, women have been at a higher risk of exiting the workforce.

Women have dealt with gender-based inequities in the workplace for decades. With the realities of the pandemic, they've been at higher risk of leaving or losing their jobs and working mothers have had to take on the role of primary caregivers at home while balancing their careers. So why aren't men speaking up?

Balancing the Scales

Men occupy [64.4%](#) of management positions in Canada and with that privilege comes the responsibility to even out the playing field. In general, men in leadership positions should ensure they tailor their benefits in a way that best serves the entire workforce. Here are some ways to do that:

1. Flexible Schedules

Working mothers take on the role of primary caregivers at home, so it's unrealistic to expect them to work uninterrupted from 9 to 5. Consider implementing a split day where leadership leads by example, adjusting tasks as needed to ensure company profitability while taking a realistic approach to fostering work-life balance.

2. Prioritize Talent Retention

In 2020 alone, around [1.2 million](#) Canadian women enrolled in post-secondary institutions. Women represent a group critical to the societal and economic growth of the country. Leadership teams need to pay attention to the current corporate landscape. Whether you like it or not, it's a candidates' market out there. Many Canadians who quit their jobs during the pandemic [cited](#) unhappiness in their role and pandemic-related burnout as reasons for leaving. On the other hand, [55%](#) of entrepreneurs are struggling to find talent that is well suited to their needs. Looking internally to ensure the company is fostering an environment that provides equitable opportunities for women to develop professionally will be key to attracting and retaining talent in a post-pandemic world.

3. Lead with Pay Equity

Canadian women working full time make on average [76.8 cents](#) for every dollar Canadian men make, and the gap increases even further for Indigenous women, newcomers and women living with a disability. In 2022, and following the enactment of the [Pay Equity Act](#), there is no room for pay inequities of any kind.

4. #ShowUsYourLeave

#ShowUsYourLeave is a recent [social media movement](#) through which companies are sharing the benefits they provide to new parents. Humans are social creatures and building a family is not only a right but it's also essential to maintain and better our economy in the coming years. Make sure your leadership not only understands this, but also champions it.

5. Get Creative in Showing Your Team They Are Valued

It is a reality that companies are struggling financially too. Instead of offering an employee a \$2,000 pay raise, which when prorated to

a yearly rate is not very impactful, consider offering them added benefits that support family building, such as fertility coverage or a wellness spending account. When facing a shortage of resources, we must ensure we are investing in our workforce. If we don't, they will find another employer that does.

There's More Work to Be Done

Women in Canada hold [25%](#) of roles at the VP level and just [15%](#) of roles at the CEO level. It would be socially irresponsible to allow for those figures to reduce further. We need to catch up with our pre-pandemic selves, remove the added barriers to women in the workplace and strive to continue improving gender equality in leadership. Canadian companies have a responsibility to show leadership in fostering equitable and fair opportunities, so women can not only return to the workforce, but thrive in it—and men have a responsibility to step back and make more space for women in leadership roles.



Jeff Harris is a forward-thinking business leader and Founder & CEO of [Impact Recruitment](#) – a company named on the Growth List as one of Canada's Fastest-Growing Companies for 5 consecutive years. Jeff is primarily focused on upward mobility for the masses and aims to achieve his goals through a combination of leadership development, thought-provoking disruptive measures, technological advancement, and investment in decentralized economies.



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