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**WOMEN IN
2020 SURVEY:
CHOOSING TO MOVE UP
THE CAREER LADDER
—OR NOT?**

Will More Women Reach the Top?

COVID-19 Crisis Doesn't Shake Professional Commitment, But Mid-Level Talent Pipeline Happy to Grow in Place While Workplace Resources to Blend Work & Life Are Scarce

A major corporate objective is to get more women to the C-Suite, but a new survey commissioned by Career Coach and Author, Kathryn Sollmann, "Women in 2020: Choosing to Move Up the Ladder—Or Not?", reveals that few women at the mid-level—the pipeline for senior leaders—currently have these career aspirations. The majority of women in the 35 to 44 age demographic say they have reached their career goals and do not intend to advance further. Though these women are committed to their careers (even after the Covid-19 crisis that has been a stressful convergence of work and family), they admit that higher titles and compensation are secondary to having the personal bandwidth to care for family and overall work-life balance.

Survey data also emphasizes that upper-level management women (not yet in the C-Suite) and women in the 45 to 55 age demographic also largely say that they have reached their career goals. Though these women who are closer to C-Suite or other top management posts would seem to be well-positioned for further advancement, they also say that they don't want to increase the hours they devote to work or invite more stress.

Only a small percentage of women say they are eager to climb as high as possible in their careers and have no concerns about balancing work and family: 19% at the upper level and 5% at the mid-level.

Asked if they would accept a two-year assignment with a bigger title and less time for family, respondents overall were neutral, citing a 50% chance they would do so—challenging the idea that most women have a huge desire to advance in title, even if it means that they will have less time for family.

Relatively few women—only 19% of all respondents and 17% at the mid-level—said they are always trying to advance in their career, and if it means more time at work, they'll figure out a way to manage family.



1950 OR 2020? WORKING WOMEN HAVE FOUR BIG JOBS

The fact that women are concerned about managing work and family is not surprising because survey data shows that women in both age groups (35 to 44 and 45 to 55) still shoulder the greatest responsibility for **three other non-professional jobs**—caring for children (all women have 67% of responsibility), elderly parents and in-laws (71%) and households (71%). Though nearly half of total respondents say they don't identify with traditional values that women should be solely responsible for caring for family—responsibility between female and male partners is still far from equal.

The survey data also gives no indication that younger women are getting significantly more support from partners. The youngest age group surveyed (35-44) includes the tail end of millennials (now ages 23 to 39), and the general perception is that younger men take on greater responsibility for households and families. The survey revealed that male partners in both age groups provide the same level of support.

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ARE MEN REALLY BLOCKING WOMEN FROM TOP JOBS?

For women in both age groups, and for women at both the mid and upper levels, the survey also challenges the idea that women are blocked from top roles—and shows instead that most women **actively choose not to** advance to higher positions for family and lifestyle reasons.

Only 4% of total respondents say that their boss has blocked them from being promoted, and only 16% say that their companies favor male leaders. One-third of total respondents say that women don't typically ask for raises.

The wholesale media reporting that all or most men feel that women should not get ahead is not supported by the fact that two-thirds of all respondents say their male significant other believes that women should have the same opportunities as men. Only 16% of total respondents say that their decision to stay at their current level is fueled by a significant other who does not want them to take on more responsibility. Survey respondents say their male colleagues have similar views: the majority believe that most men at their companies respect women and help them succeed.

When women say they are not actively pursuing higher titles, they do not view this as a statement that they are less ambitious or successful. Only 24% view an ambitious professional solely as someone who wants to be in the C-Suite or run a company.

Nearly 100% of survey respondents say an ambitious professional is someone who continually wants to advance in their career—but their definition of “advance” is not tied to achieving greater and greater titles. Two-thirds of all women put the greatest value on continual learning and the ability to always build a wider portfolio of skills.

Further proof that women do not tie professional success to title is the fact that 65% of all respondents define career success as personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Only 5% of all respondents say that a clear pathway to the top of the corporate ladder defines success. The majority of all respondents feel it's extremely/very important to define success in their own way—not necessarily by the typical definition of reaching the “top”.

HOW TO INCREASE THE SENIOR TALENT PIPELINE

Though the COVID-19 crisis suddenly pitched women into a quagmire of working and caring for children at the same time (often with the added job of homeschooling), the survey shows that despite this amplified immersion in the work vs. life challenge, **the majority of women are still committed to their professional roles**. Only 25% say that the crisis will change their work status—21% say they now realize the importance of staying home, and another 4% who have experienced a job loss, pay cut or furlough, now realize they can afford to live on only their partners' income.



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WHY WOMEN DON'T HAVE THE SUPPORT TO ADVANCE

The fact that 75% of women say they are still committed to their professional careers does not erase the fact that the majority of all survey respondents say they are comfortable at their current levels and are not looking to advance in title.

The survey reveals many reasons why women feel they do not have the support needed to advance further and continually find ways to blend work and life. The fact that, as discussed earlier, women do not get major support from male partners at home is one big reason, but the survey also points out significant reasons within the workplace:

- **Women who have figured out how to take on positions of power are not giving other women “best practices” for blending work, family and life.** Only 57% of total respondents describe women in power as helpful, and only 42% describe them as compassionate. 64% of total respondents feel resentful that women in power are not doing what would be necessary to help other women rise.
- **Women at all levels are not supporting each other in their professional lives.** Only 47% of all women surveyed feel that women outside of the senior-level group are extremely or very supportive of their professional lives, and only 44% feel that women in the senior-level group are extremely or very supportive.
- **Women do not consider other women vastly more supportive than men.** 30% of all women surveyed feel that senior-level men are extremely/very supportive (vs. 47% who feel senior-level women are strongly supportive), and 29% feel that men outside of the senior-level group are extremely/very supportive (vs. 44% who feel women outside of the senior-level group are strongly supportive).
- **Employers do not have enough training to help women blend work and life.** Only 20% of total respondents say their companies offer leadership training resources that focus specifically on easing the work-life struggle.
- **Employers do not provide enough opportunities for women to help other women find work-life solutions.** Only 15% of total respondents have an internal women's networking group, and only 6% have a parenting employee resource group. The majority of respondents say it's important to support women as caregivers and help them find ways to better blend work and life.

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ONE-THIRD OF WOMEN HAVE ONE FOOT ON THE OFF RAMP

Though 75% of women say they are still committed to their professional lives (despite the Covid-19 challenges and despite the lack of support they feel in their workplaces), about one-third of total respondents say they may take a hiatus for personal reasons in the next one to two years. Anecdotally, from her career coaching practice over nearly 20 years, Sollmann notes that it takes just one very common family challenge to turn a possible hiatus into a definite one. Women who consider a hiatus are vulnerable to leaving when a child is not doing well in school, a parent is ill, the college application process needs a lot of attention—anything that upsets a delicate work-life balance. At least half of total respondents agree that women are typically pressured by work-family struggles to stay home.

The survey does not suggest an imminent mass exodus, but the fact that one-third of women say they may leave within one to two years is a big red flag for employers. (It has long been widely reported that 43% of women take a family hiatus at some point in their careers, and Sollmann notes that the average hiatus is 12 years.) This survey's finding that one-third of the talent pipeline is at near-term risk is significant both in opportunity and in cost. Each woman who leaves costs an employer 33% of her salary to replace.

Most employee engagement studies cite lack of engagement and not being heard by managers as reasons that about one-third of all employees (both men and women) think about leaving their jobs. This survey shows one-third of women specifically consider leaving for family reasons, and the fact that they feel they receive so little support for the lives they lead outside of the workplace could drive them out with greater speed—and in greater numbers.

NO NEWS IS NOT GOOD NEWS

The survey data points out that women do not feel comfortable voicing their work-life struggles within the workplace—suggesting that they want and need employers to be proactive in providing resources and “safe spaces” for problem-solving and shared best practices among women. About two-thirds of total respondents strongly or somewhat agree that most women are afraid to voice their true feelings about the work and family struggle, which perhaps makes employers take a “no news is good news” approach. Only half of respondents have made a few close colleagues aware of their struggle. A more dramatic finding: the majority of women at both the mid and senior levels strongly or somewhat agree that most women would be more apt to say that they weren't given the opportunities to advance than admit they didn't really want the added responsibility.



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Conclusion

Companies are spending millions of dollars each year on leadership training for women that is largely falling on deaf ears. The objective of these programs is to get more women in leadership roles and propel a greater percentage into the C-Suite. The fact is that the leadership talent pipeline is filled with women who don't have the support they need at home or in the workplace to take on greater responsibility—and without this support, they are comfortable “growing in place”—continuing to develop their portfolio of skills and expertise without reaching for higher titles and taking on additional work-life stress. Especially as COVID-19 has overloaded women with family responsibilities, Sollmann says employers need to reframe their generic “Leadership Training” into “Work-Life Training for Leaders”—giving women the tools, resources and support they need to better manage all aspects of their lives and be better equipped to take on senior-level roles.

Whether or not women receive more work-life support and resources, it is clear that they are making their own choices about upward career mobility and defining ambition and success on their own terms. They do not place wholesale blame on men for the fact that more women are not at the top. They will not reach for higher titles or take on additional responsibilities only for prestige, recognition or money—or any perceived obligation to advance the sisterhood. With many jobs outside of the workplace—and with little work-life support in the workplace—women in 2020 believe professional fulfillment and the ability to balance work and life are the best markers of success.

ON-LINE SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted April 29 to May 4, 2020 by Decision Analyst, a research and analytical consulting firm serving major corporations, advertising agencies and marketing consultancies in the Americas, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The firm consistently ranks among the top 5 research agencies in the U.S.

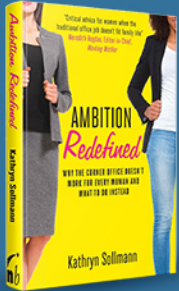
The 15-minute, online survey used the American Consumer Opinion panel and affiliates sample source, and reflects input from 307 respondents within a national representation of the United States. The sample included women in the 35 to 55 age demographic (with a breakdown of 49% aged 35 to 44 and 51% aged 45 to 55) who are college graduates and are employed full-time (87%) or part-time (13%). The majority of respondents (59%) are at the mid-professional level, and 41% are at the upper level.

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About Kathryn Sollmann

As an author, speaker and coach, **Kathryn Sollmann** helps smart, capable, well-educated women integrate work and life through many ages and stages. For employers she creates work+life resources that retain talented women—with a mission to **keep women working** toward financial security in a flexible way, alongside child and aging parent caregiving roles.



Kathryn's book, **Ambition Redefined: Why the Corner Office Doesn't Work for Every Woman & What to Do Instead** (Hachette Business Group), has been called a "Business Book to Watch" by 800-CEO-READ. Her book is endorsed by Working Mother Magazine and is on the recommended reading list for IBM women worldwide.

A mother of two adult daughters, Kathryn has worked non-stop since age 16 in many flexible ways. Throughout her career she has negotiated flexible full-time and part-time schedules with demanding employers, launched several entrepreneurial ventures solo and with partners, established independent marketing communications and career coaching practices, worked in a home office as a telecommuter and generated a wide range of freelance projects—while managing a household, carpooling, attending school plays, tending to sudden health issues of aging parents, taking dogs to the vet and making yet another dinner.

Kathryn knows well how difficult it can be to blend work and life, but she continually sounds a wake-up call for women who overlook the financial impact of career breaks for caregiving roles. In 2002, she co-founded the Women@Work Network, one of the first companies focused on helping women return to the workforce, and she has created and led many compelling events that show women alternatives to the more than full-time, traditional corporate grind.

A frequent media resource, Kathryn's views on women, work and financial security have appeared in *The Financial Times*, on the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* editorial pages, Cheddar TV, Yahoo! Finance, WCBS Radio, The Today Show, *ForbesWomen* and NPR—and her work has been featured in *CEO World*, *Thrive Global*, *Quartz@Work*, *Money*, *Next Avenue*, *Entrepreneur*, *Working Mother*, and many other national and regional publications.

In her book and in discussions with women nationwide, Kathryn encourages no-apologies independence from the "lean in" and "break the glass ceiling" mantra: her message is to find your own brand of ambition and success, take full advantage of today's more flexible workplace, chart alternate career paths that accommodate and fund life and tuck all generations of your family into a future that is financially secure and safe.

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