

PROGRESS WITH A CAVEAT: THE COMPLEX REALITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To remain competitive and innovative, organizations must optimize the full potential of their workforce, especially women, who constitute nearly half of today's employed population.¹ Progress has been made, but persistent challenges continue to limit their full contribution. Understanding these complex realities is critical for organizations aiming to attract, retain, and develop top talent. This report highlights seven key realities for women in the workplace, offering strategic guidance to unlock talent, close gaps, and build inclusive environments in which all employees can excel and lead.

Reality 1: Confidence is present, but hesitation remains.

Most women are confident in sharing their perspectives, but hesitation remains a challenge, particularly in high-stakes situations and when pursuing new opportunities. Generational data show a narrowing gender gap, with younger men and women experiencing similar levels of hesitation, unlike the wider gaps seen in older generations. This could point to evolving cultural norms and workplace dynamics, as well as the possibility that men's confidence grows more steadily over time compared to women's, leading to uneven confidence development.

Reality 2: Authenticity is common, but conformity pressures persist.

Most women feel comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work, yet notable differences in comfort exist across racial groups. At the same time, pressures to conform to traditional workplace norms — such as adjusting one's appearance, behavior, or communication style — remain a challenge for many employees, particularly younger generations. Minimal gender differences suggest that conformity expectations affect talent broadly, underscoring the need for inclusive environments that balance authenticity with evolving workplace standards.

Reality 3: Recognition gaps persist across generations but show up differently for Gen Z and Gen X women.

Women overall report less recognition for their strategic contributions than men, with the widest gap among Generation Z. Although similar proportions of Gen Z men and women feel they must self-advocate to gain the same visibility as their peers, Gen Z women receive the least recognition for strategic contributions. Among Generation X, a different pattern emerges: Women report both lower recognition and less pressure to self-advocate compared with Gen X men. Together, these findings highlight the complexity of recognition dynamics and suggest that cultural and structural barriers, rather than individual effort alone, may play a role.

Reality 4: Personal and professional support offers a shared foundation for success.

Women and men equally recognize the importance of personal and professional networks in career growth. Younger generations especially rely on personal support to take on ambitious roles. Access to professional networks is slightly lower for women, but support systems remain fundamental to participation and ambition in the workplace.

Reality 5: Employees commonly prioritize others, but women are more often sought for emotional support, especially among older generations.

Both genders frequently put others' needs first, but women, particularly Gen X and Baby Boomers, are more often sought for emotional support than men. This imbalance in emotional labor is smaller among younger generations, suggesting evolving expectations.

¹ [Labor Force Snapshot: Women in the U.S. Labor Force](#), SHRM, 2025.

Reality 6: Effective management of work and life responsibilities is modeled, but internal pressure is felt by the majority of younger workers.

Both women and men see role models successfully managing their careers and personal lives, yet over half feel internal pressure to excel in both. This pressure is highest among younger workers and caregivers, signaling a risk of burnout. Employers must design policies that go beyond visibility to actively ease work/life tensions.

Reality 7: Men are slightly more likely to feel satisfied and aligned in their careers.

Both women and men experience shifts in career aspirations, but men report higher satisfaction and alignment with professional and personal goals. This suggests that both men and women are evolving their career aspirations and acting on them, so differences in satisfaction and alignment may stem from factors beyond these adjustments. Organizations can support long-term career fulfillment by offering flexible pathways and embracing diverse definitions of success.

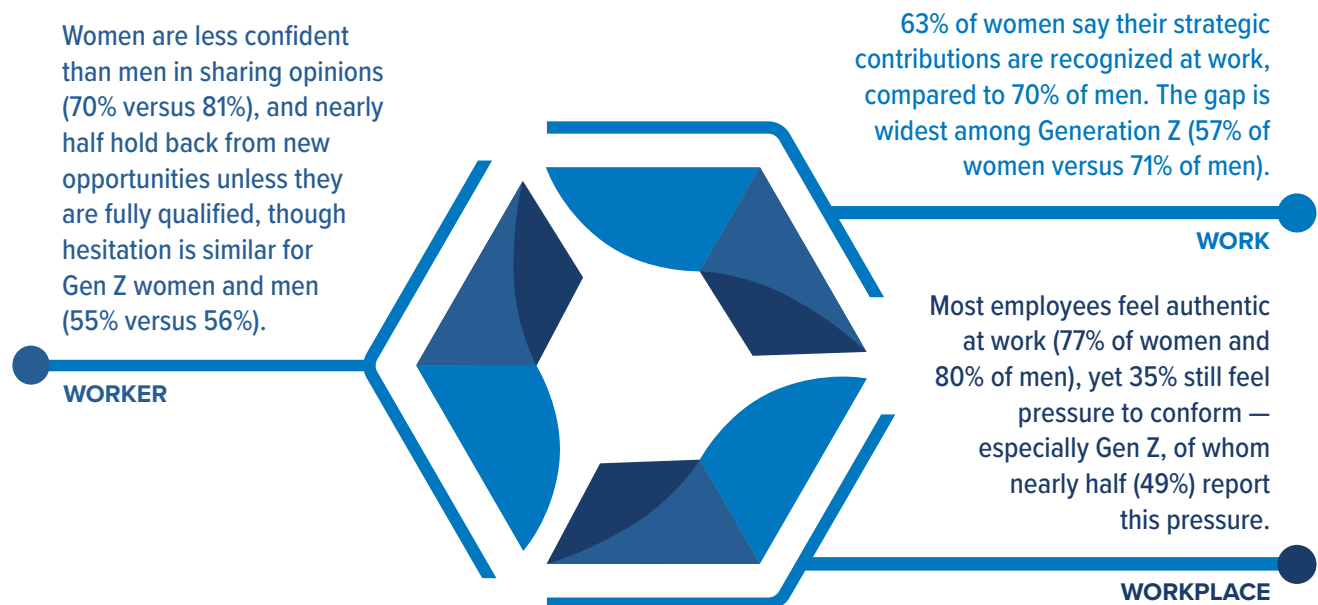


INTRODUCTION

To remain competitive and drive innovation, organizations must harness the full potential of their workforce. Women, who represented 47.2% of the employed population in February 2025, play a critical and transformative role in today's labor market.² Over the past century, women have been instrumental in driving significant changes in the workplace. Their participation has grown from a modest 28.1% in 1948 to a consistent range of between 46% and 47.5% since 2000, marking a profound evolution that has reshaped industries and economies.³ Today, they are indispensable contributors, bringing innovation, productivity, and fresh perspectives to every corner of the economy.

To better understand women's workplace experiences and what they mean for long-term talent optimization, SHRM surveyed 1,012 working women and 1,036 working men across the U.S.

This report outlines seven key realities for women in the workplace today. While many findings reveal common challenges across genders, others highlight persistent gaps in areas such as recognition, emotional labor, and perceptions of progress. These differences, though sometimes subtle, point to unique hurdles that can affect women's satisfaction, advancement, and long-term engagement. By examining how gender intersects with generation and race, the report offers nuanced insights to help organizations better support women as a vital part of their talent strategy. In today's competitive labor market, understanding both the shared and distinctive experiences of women is essential. Optimizing talent means more than just closing gender gaps — it requires building workplaces where all employees can thrive, contribute fully, and pursue meaningful careers over time.



Progress with a Caveat: The Complex Realities for Women in the Workplace

² [Labor Force Snapshot: Women in the U.S. Labor Force](#), SHRM, 2025.

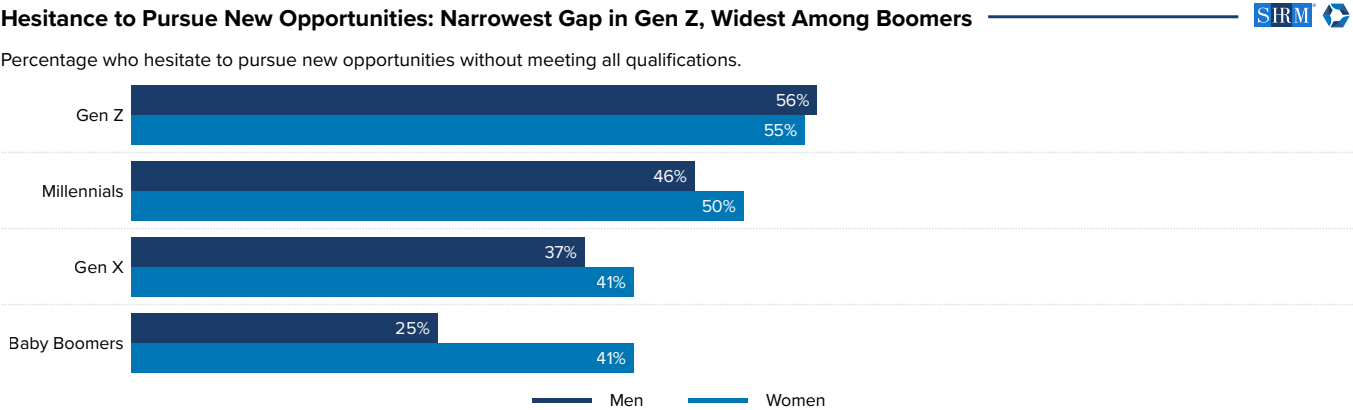
³ [Labor Force Snapshot: Women in the U.S. Labor Force](#), SHRM, 2025.

REALITY 1: CONFIDENCE IS PRESENT, BUT HESITANCE REMAINS

Confidence is a cornerstone of success, empowering people to voice their opinions, assert themselves in critical moments, and seize opportunities. While most women exhibit confidence in many situations, hesitation still holds some back.

A significant majority of women (70%) said they feel comfortable sharing their opinions even when others choose to stay silent. Although this figure is lower than the 81% of men who feel the same, it underlines that most women are confident in contributing their perspectives. Under pressure, however, confidence declines. During high-stakes conversations, 61% of women said they feel confident, compared to 76% of men. Still, it's worth noting that even under these demanding circumstances, the majority of women feel confident asserting their perspective.

Yet, when it comes to stepping into new roles or challenges, hesitation sets in. Nearly half of women (47%) reported holding back from pursuing opportunities unless they meet all listed qualifications, just slightly more than the 43% of men who feel similarly. Among younger generations, hesitation appears less linked to gender. For instance, Gen Z men and women show almost identical levels of hesitation, with 56% of men and 55% of women hesitating to pursue new opportunities unless fully qualified. This contrasts sharply with Baby Boomers, where 41% of women hesitate compared to just 25% of men, reflecting wider gaps among older generations.



SOURCE: PROGRESS WITH A CAVEAT: THE COMPLEX REALITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE, SHRM, 2025. VISIT [SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH](https://www.shrm.org/research) TO LEARN MORE.

The findings suggest that hesitation to pursue new opportunities may reflect both generational shifts and accumulated workplace experiences. Among younger workers, hesitation appears less tied to gender, with men and women showing nearly identical levels of hesitation — pointing to possible changes in norms around what it means to be “ready” for new roles. In contrast, older generations — particularly Baby Boomers — show wider gender gaps, which may reflect the cumulative effect of women having received stronger external signals throughout their careers that they should only seek opportunities when fully qualified. Only time will tell whether younger workers will maintain these narrower gaps or whether similar patterns may emerge as they spend more years navigating workplace expectations.

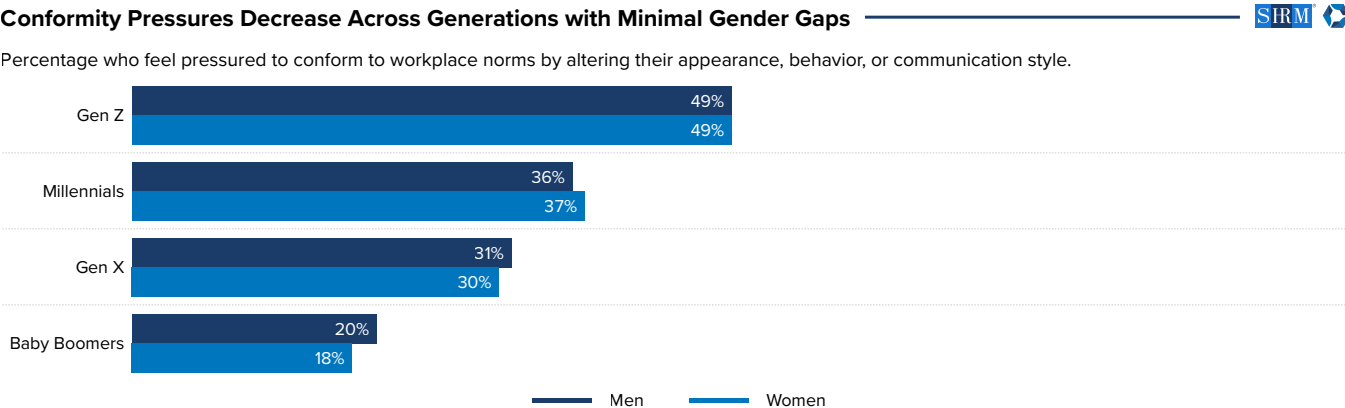
The data is clear: Confidence is present, but hesitation remains. These patterns highlight not only where progress has been made but also where it still risks stalling, particularly in pivotal moments and across generations or time in the workplace. Addressing the roots of hesitation will be essential for organizations aiming to fully leverage the talents of their workforce and sustain momentum in today’s evolving landscape.

REALITY 2: AUTHENTICITY IS COMMON, BUT CONFORMITY PRESSURES PERSIST

Authenticity in the workplace allows workers to bring their true selves to the table. While many women feel confident expressing their identities at work, lingering pressures to conform to traditional workplace norms remain, creating unique challenges that differ across generations and racial groups. It is important to note that self-expression — the ways employees outwardly behave, communicate, or present themselves — can be constrained even when authenticity is maintained because not all forms of expression align with workplace expectations.

A majority of women (77%) reported feeling comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work, a level similar to that of men (80%). However, this comfort varies meaningfully across racial groups. Non-Hispanic Black women reported the highest levels of comfort (88%), while non-Hispanic Asian and Pacific Islander women reported the lowest levels (65%), followed closely by Hispanic women (71%). In contrast, men show minimal differences in comfort levels across racial groups, highlighting the unique intersectional challenges faced primarily by women of specific racial or ethnic backgrounds.

Conformity pressures — feeling like one has to adjust their appearance, behavior, or communication to meet workplace norms — affect 35% of employees and are especially high among younger generations. Gen Z men and women reported the greatest conformity pressure at 49% each. The pressure gradually decreases with age: 36% of Millennial men and 37% of Millennial women said they feel this pressure, followed by 31% of Gen X men and 30% of Gen X women, with Baby Boomers experiencing the least pressure — 20% of men and 18% of women. Notably, the gender gap within each generation is minimal.



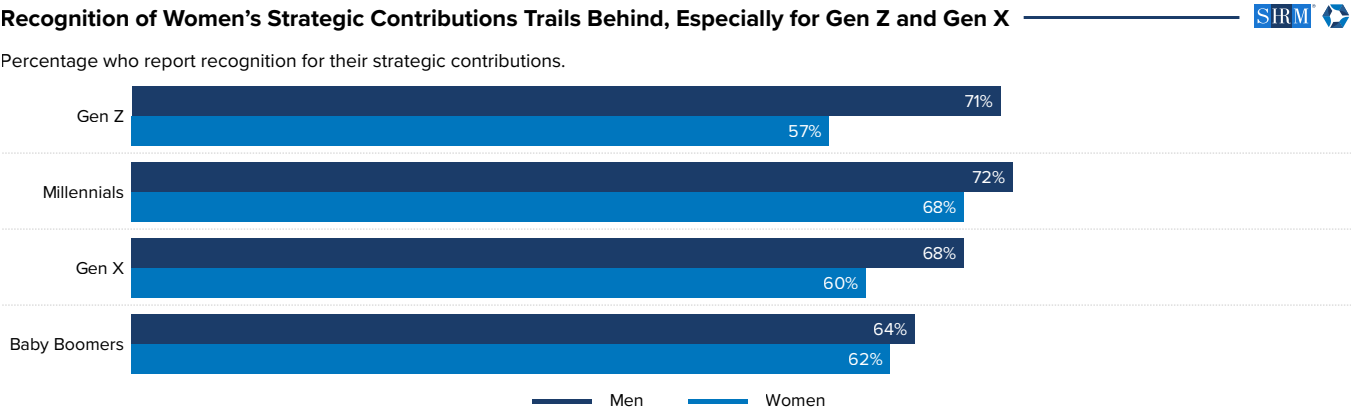
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This pattern suggests that older employees, or those with more workplace experience, may have internalized established workplace norms over time, while younger employees are more acutely aware of pressures to adjust their behavior. Younger employees are also still shaping their professional identities, which may sometimes diverge from established norms. While most employees feel authentic at work, pressures to conform can constrain self-expression — how they communicate, behave, or present themselves day-to-day — even when they remain true to their values. Organizations that foster environments in which employees can be authentic while navigating professional expectations support both self-expression and engagement, ultimately unlocking stronger individual and collective outcomes.

REALITY 3: RECOGNITION GAPS PERSIST ACROSS GENERATIONS BUT SHOW UP DIFFERENTLY FOR GEN Z AND GEN X WOMEN

Recognition is a powerful driver of engagement and career growth. When individuals feel their strategic contributions are seen and valued, it can reinforce motivation and strengthen their professional visibility. Yet, gender disparities in perceived recognition suggest that not all employees experience this recognition in the same way, and these differences appear to vary by generation.

Overall, 63% of women said their strategic contributions are recognized at work, compared to 70% of men. The gap is widest among Gen Z: 71% of Gen Z men said their strategic contributions are recognized, compared to just 57% of Gen Z women. This 14-percentage-point difference raises questions about how recognition is earned, interpreted, and distributed.



SOURCE: PROGRESS WITH A CAVEAT: THE COMPLEX REALITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE, SHRM, 2025. VISIT [SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH](https://www.shrm.org/research) TO LEARN MORE.

Interestingly, similar shares of men and women reported feeling pressure to self-advocate in order to gain the same visibility as their colleagues. Among Gen Z, for example, 55% of men and 53% of women said they feel this pressure. Yet, despite these comparable perceptions, Gen Z women reported the lowest levels of recognition for strategic contributions of any group. This disconnect may suggest that even when women feel compelled to self-advocate, their efforts may not lead to the same outcomes — or they may encounter barriers that limit their ability to advocate effectively.

Among Gen X women, a different pattern emerges. They were the least likely to feel they must self-advocate to gain the same visibility as their colleagues (39%). Yet, despite this, they also reported lower recognition than their male peers (60% versus 68%). Gen X men, by contrast, were somewhat more likely to feel this pressure (46%) and also more likely to feel recognized. These findings may reflect generational differences in workplace culture, where self-advocacy was historically more accepted — or even rewarded — for men, while often discouraged or penalized for women.

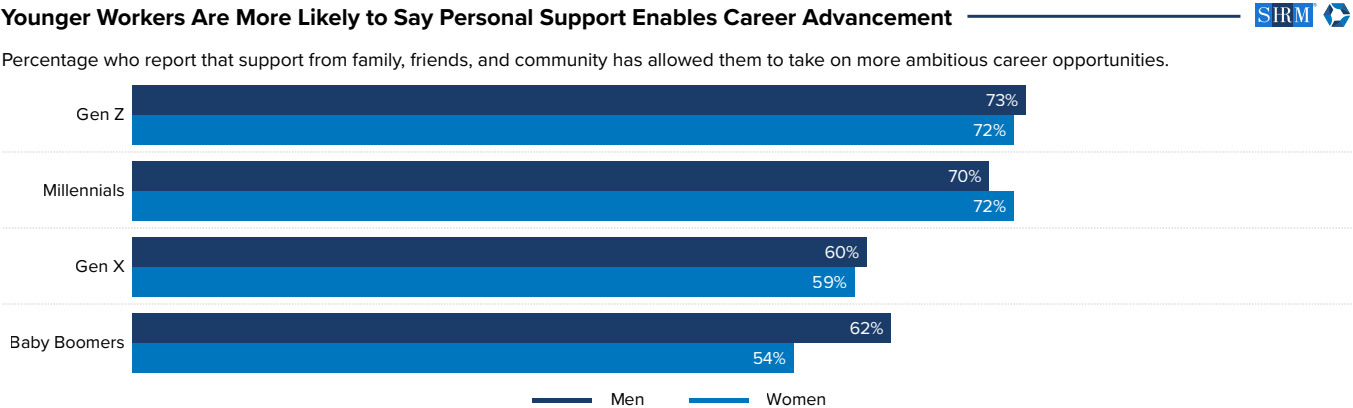
The data reveal a complex relationship between the perceived need to self-advocate and the experience of recognition, especially across gender and generations. Although similar proportions of men and women said they feel pressure to self-advocate, women, particularly in Gen Z and Gen X, reported lower levels of recognition compared to their male peers. These patterns may indicate that recognition is not solely determined by individual initiative and is also shaped by broader cultural and structural factors influencing how visibility translates into acknowledgment and value.

REALITY 4: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT OFFERS A SHARED FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

A strong support system, whether personal or professional, plays a critical role in helping employees navigate workplace challenges and pursue career growth. Women and men alike recognize how these connections empower them to engage fully in their careers and seize new opportunities. For organizations focused on attracting and retaining top talent, fostering these support systems is essential.

Most women (72%) reported that support from family, friends, and community has enabled their workforce participation, closely matched by 70% of men. Similarly, about two-thirds of women (66%) said these networks empower them to take on more ambitious career roles, equal to the share of men who say the same. Access to professional networks, which are important for visibility and advancement, was slightly lower for women (62%) than for men (66%) but still represents a vital resource for many women.

Younger workers, both Gen Z and Millennials, were especially likely to rely on personal support networks. Among Gen Z, 72% of women and 73% of men said these networks helped them take on more ambitious career opportunities. The pattern is similar among Millennials, with 72% of women and 70% of men reporting the same. On the other hand, far fewer Gen X and Baby Boomers said the same.



SOURCE: PROGRESS WITH A CAVEAT: THE COMPLEX REALITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE, SHRM, 2025. VISIT [SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH](https://www.shrm.org/research) TO LEARN MORE.

These findings underscore that support systems are more than just helpful — they are fundamental to career participation and ambition. To attract and retain top talent, organizations should prioritize building accessible professional networks and recognize the vital role personal support plays, particularly for younger employees balancing work and life demands.

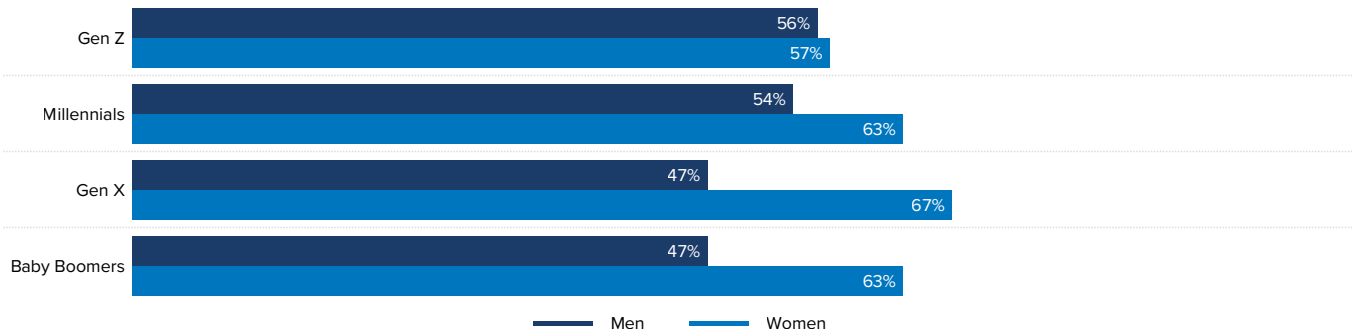
REALITY 5: EMPLOYEES COMMONLY PRIORITIZE OTHERS, BUT WOMEN ARE MORE OFTEN SOUGHT FOR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT, ESPECIALLY AMONG OLDER GENERATIONS

Support among colleagues is a cornerstone of effective teamwork and workplace well-being. Whether it's offering a listening ear, helping solve problems, or stepping in during busy times, these supportive behaviors help teams thrive. The data shows that both men and women frequently prioritize others' needs: Half of women and 46% of men said they find it hard to say no to co-workers' requests even when they are already stretched thin. Similarly, 55% of women and 56% of men said they often put others' needs ahead of their own goals or preferences.

While this altruism is common across genders, a notable gender gap remains in who is approached for emotional support, particularly among older generations. Among Gen X workers, 67% of women reported being frequently sought out for emotional support by colleagues, compared to 47% of men. A 16-percentage-point difference exists among Baby Boomers, with 63% of women and 47% of men in this role. Among Millennials, the gap narrows to 9 percentage points, and among Gen Z, men and women reported nearly equal rates at 56% and 57%, respectively.

Women Are More Likely to Be Sought Out for Emotional Support, but the Gender Gap Is Narrower Among Younger Workers

Percentage who report often being sought out by colleagues for emotional support.



SOURCE: PROGRESS WITH A CAVEAT: THE COMPLEX REALITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE, SHRM, 2025. VISIT [SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH](https://www.shrm.org/research) TO LEARN MORE.

These trends suggest that while both genders contribute supportively, women — especially older women — often shoulder more emotional labor at work than their male counterparts. The more balanced experience among younger generations may reflect evolving expectations of shared support roles. For organizations aiming to attract and retain top talent, this signals an opportunity to promote a culture in which offering and receiving emotional support is a shared responsibility. Distributing emotional labor more evenly can strengthen team relationships and reduce burnout for those currently bearing the greatest burden.

REALITY 6: EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF WORK AND LIFE RESPONSIBILITIES IS MODELED, BUT INTERNAL PRESSURE IS FELT BY THE MAJORITY OF YOUNGER WORKERS

Most employees said they witness successful examples of people in their organization managing both career and personal responsibilities. This visibility can send a powerful message about what’s possible. More than three-fourths of women (77%) and men (76%) said they see women doing this well, and the majority also said they see men managing both domains, though fewer women (66%) than men (76%) said this about male colleagues.

However, seeing these examples doesn’t necessarily reduce the internal pressure many employees experience. Over half of women (52%) and men (51%) said they feel pressure to excel in their career while also being fully present and engaged in their personal and family lives.

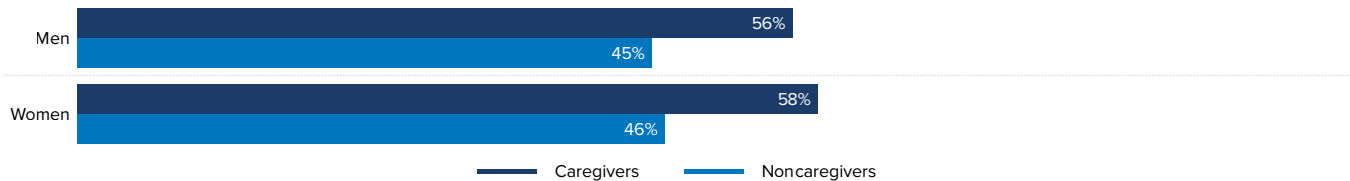
This pressure is especially acute for younger employees. Nearly two-thirds of Gen Z women (65%) and 57% of Gen Z men reported feeling this dual pressure. Among Millennials, 56% of both women and men said the same. This compares to lower rates among Gen X (49% of women and 46% of men) and Baby Boomers (27% of women and 35% of men).

Caregiving responsibilities, which include caring for children, older adults, or adults with disabilities, may help explain some of these generational differences. In our sample, Baby Boomers were the least likely to be primary caregivers (24%), followed by Gen Z (37%), Gen X (50%), and Millennials (59%). And caregiving clearly intensifies the pressure: 58% of female caregivers reported feeling this pressure, compared to 46% of noncaregiving women. Similarly, 56% of caregiving men said they feel this way, versus 45% of their noncaregiving counterparts.

Caregivers Feel More Pressure to Excel at Work and at Home, Regardless of Gender



Percentage who report feeling pressure to excel in their career while also being fully present and engaged in their personal or family lives.

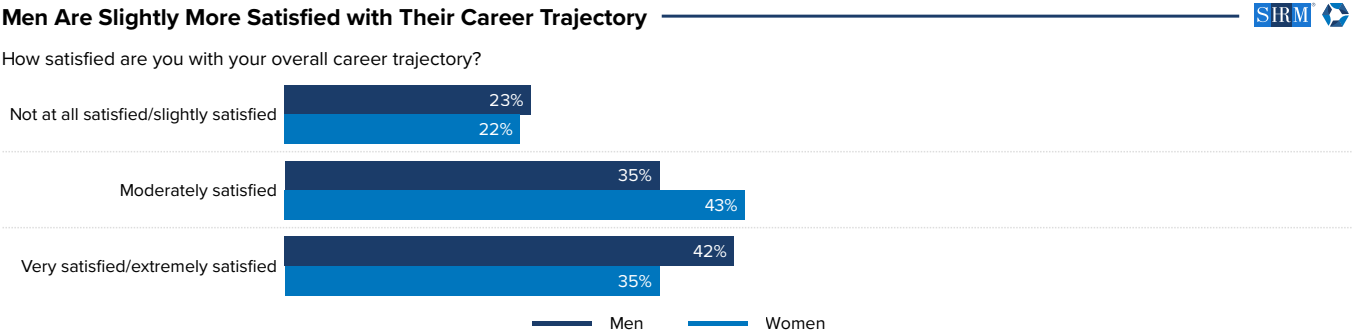


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These findings suggest that younger employees, especially those with caregiving responsibilities, are navigating complex expectations. If unaddressed, these pressures could contribute to burnout or prompt top talent to seek more flexible or supportive environments elsewhere. To remain competitive, employers must move beyond role models and actively design workplace cultures and policies that reduce friction between work and life.

REALITY 7: MEN ARE SLIGHTLY MORE LIKELY TO FEEL SATISFIED AND ALIGNED IN THEIR CAREERS

Career satisfaction and alignment with personal and professional goals are key components of a fulfilling work life. Most men and women reported some degree of alignment, but men were more likely to say their careers are completely or mostly aligned with both their professional goals (68% versus 58%) and their personal goals (62% versus 56%). They were also more likely to report being extremely satisfied or very satisfied with their overall career trajectory (42% of men versus 35% of women).



SOURCE: [PROGRESS WITH A CAVEAT: THE COMPLEX REALITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE](#), SHRM, 2025. VISIT [SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH](#) TO LEARN MORE.

Yet, both men and women reported a shift in their career aspirations over time. Among women, 28% said their aspirations have shifted toward higher-level roles, while 25% have recalibrated toward less demanding or lower-level roles. For men, 25% reported moving from previously aspiring to lower-level roles to now aiming for higher opportunities, and 22% reported a shift from higher-level aspirations toward lower-level roles. Nearly half of men (47%) said their career aspirations have remained stable, compared to 41% of women.

Men and women both reported shifts in career aspirations over time, but men still reported slightly higher levels of career satisfaction and alignment. This suggests that factors beyond just shifting goals contribute to differences in satisfaction.

To promote long-term satisfaction and success, organizations must recognize that career alignment is not static. It evolves over time, often in response to life circumstances, structural barriers, and shifting goals. By creating environments that support flexible pathways, value diverse definitions of success, and actively encourage career development at every stage, employers can help more workers, especially women, find a fulfilling fit between their personal values and professional ambitions.



LOOKING FORWARD: BUILDING PROGRESS TO UNLOCK THE WORKFORCE'S FULL POTENTIAL

This report highlights the complex and evolving realities shaping women's workplace experiences today. While many women demonstrate confidence, authenticity, and strong support networks, persistent gaps remain in recognition, voice, career alignment, and satisfaction. These challenges vary across generations and intersect with broader cultural and structural dynamics.

Importantly, women's perceptions about progress reveal a sense of fragility that cannot be ignored: Only 37% of women feel that progress for women in the workplace is somewhat or extremely secure, compared to 53% of men. Moreover, 56% of women believe that gains made for women in the workplace could be easily undone in the near future, a concern shared by just 43% of men. This sense of vulnerability is echoed when considering specifically women of color, with 56% of women and 46% of men worried that progress for this group in the workplace could be easily undone in the near future.

Women are about 1.3 times more likely than men to believe that gains made for women in the workplace could be easily undone in the near future.

These perceptions serve as a critical reminder that gains made are not guaranteed to endure without continued attention and action. To thrive in today's competitive labor market, organizations must commit to sustained, proactive efforts. This means creating environments in which women — and all employees — are seen, heard, supported, and empowered to grow at every stage of their careers.

Ultimately, supporting women's success is a strategic imperative to attract, retain, and unleash the full potential of a diverse workforce. By building on the progress outlined in this report and addressing persistent gaps, employers can foster workplaces in which everyone thrives, innovates, and leads.



RECOMMENDATIONS

NO. 1: BUILD CONFIDENCE AND REDUCE HESITANCE

Help employees overcome hesitation and embrace opportunities by fostering a culture that encourages growth, risk taking, and learning from mistakes. Targeted development, coaching, and stretch assignments can close confidence gaps, ensuring all employees are prepared to advance.

Actionable Steps

1. **Assess Confidence Levels:** Create awareness of gaps in employee confidence and hesitation by embedding assessment tools such as the [SHRM Linkage Advancing Women Leaders 360° Assessment™](#) to inform development opportunities.
2. **Launch Mentoring, Coaching, and Stretch Assignments:** Establish intentional development experiences that include mentoring and coaching programs, and provide stretch assignments that challenge employees to grow beyond their comfort zones.
3. **Promote a Growth Mindset:** Foster an organizational culture that embraces risk taking by framing mistakes as valuable learning experiences and reducing the fear of failure.
4. **Monitor Engagement and Progress:** Continuously monitor employee progress and engagement to ensure confidence-building initiatives are effective, and adapt as needed.

NO. 2: FOSTER AUTHENTICITY AND REDUCE CONFORMITY PRESSURES

Optimize talent by creating a work environment in which employees feel empowered to bring their full, authentic selves to work. Reducing pressures to conform enables people to contribute their unique strengths, ideas, and perspectives, driving innovation and engagement across all employees.

Actionable Steps

1. **Cultivate a Culture That Encourages Individuality:** Establish policies and practices that support diverse work styles and encourage employees to express their authentic voices.
2. **Train Leaders to Lead with Openness:** Develop leaders' ability to model authenticity through transparent communication and genuine connection, fostering trust and psychological safety.
3. **Evaluate Workplace Norms to Remove Conformity Barriers:** Assess policies, dress codes, and communication standards to ensure they allow flexibility and minimize subtle pressures to conform.
4. **Use Data Insights to Tailor Support:** Leverage employee feedback and engagement data to identify where authenticity barriers exist, and design targeted initiatives that help unlock employee potential.

NO. 3: CLOSE RECOGNITION GAPS AND PROMOTE VISIBILITY

Recognition can drive engagement and retention by reinforcing valued contributions and motivating top performance. Unequal recognition can limit employee growth and development. By training managers to deliver consistent, impactful recognition; empowering employees with self-advocacy skills; and systematically tracking recognition patterns, organizations can maximize workforce potential, increase the visibility of key contributors, and better align rewards with performance across the team.

Actionable Steps

1. **Train Managers in Equitable Recognition:** Develop managers' capabilities to deliver recognition that motivates and engages all employees effectively. By ensuring recognition is consistent and aligned with individual contributions, managers can maximize employee performance and foster a high-performing team culture.
2. **Offer Self-Advocacy Workshops:** Equip employees with strategies to confidently communicate their achievements.
3. **Track Recognition Gaps:** Regularly analyze recognition data to identify gaps in frequency or impact across teams and roles, enabling targeted improvements.

NO. 4: EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY SUPPORT NETWORKS

Professional networks play a crucial role in career growth and talent development, yet many employees, especially younger workers, also rely heavily on personal support systems. By expanding access to formal networks, fostering cross-generational mentorship, and tailoring networking opportunities to different career stages and individual needs, organizations can better leverage both personal and professional connections to optimize talent development and advancement.

Actionable Steps

1. **Expand Access to Professional Networks:** Offer memberships to industry associations and internal affinity groups, as well as registration for networking events such as the [SHRM Linkage Institute](#).
2. **Tailor Networking Opportunities:** Design events and programs that meet the unique preferences and needs of different generations.
3. **Facilitate Cross-Generational Mentoring:** Connect employees across age groups to encourage knowledge exchange and broaden perspectives.
4. **Recognize Informal Support in Talent Strategy:** Acknowledge and reward employees who provide informal career support to colleagues.



NO. 5: ADDRESS EMOTIONAL LABOR INEQUITIES

Emotional labor involves the often-invisible effort that employees invest in managing their own emotions and supporting others to maintain a positive and productive workplace. This includes providing emotional support, navigating social dynamics, and sustaining team morale. Recognizing and sharing this responsibility can reduce burnout and improve team well-being.

Actionable Steps

1. **Recognize and Reward Emotional Support:** Formally acknowledge employees who contribute to the team's emotional well-being.
2. **Train Teams in Shared Responsibility:** Teach all employees to contribute to maintaining a positive, supportive workplace.
3. **Monitor Burnout Risks:** Track workload and well-being metrics to identify and address emotional labor imbalances early.

NO. 6: REDUCE WORK/LIFE PRESSURES

Alleviate stress and turnover risks by offering flexibility, supporting caregivers, and encouraging healthy boundaries, helping employees better manage responsibilities both at work and outside of work.

Actionable Steps

1. **Implement Flexible Scheduling Options:** Allow employees to adjust their hours or work location to accommodate personal responsibilities.
2. **Support Caregivers with Targeted Benefits:** Provide resources such as leave, child care assistance, or elder care support to ease the burden on employees managing caregiving duties.
3. **Normalize Boundary Setting and Self-Care:** Encourage a workplace culture in which setting clear work/life boundaries and prioritizing self-care are accepted and modeled by leadership.
4. **Use Engagement Surveys to Monitor Stress:** Regularly assess employees' stress levels and workload concerns through surveys and feedback tools to identify issues early and tailor supportive interventions.



NO. 7: IMPROVE CAREER SATISFACTION AND ALIGNMENT OVER TIME

Support evolving career goals through flexible pathways, accessible development resources, and regular career conversations. Monitoring satisfaction by demographic group can address inequities and strengthen long-term employee commitment.

Actionable Steps

1. **Offer Flexible Career Pathways:** Provide both vertical and lateral career options to accommodate changing goals.
2. **Provide Career Development Resources:** Make coaching, training, and career-planning tools readily available to all employees.
3. **Review Satisfaction by Demographic Group:** Assess career satisfaction by gender and generation to address inequities.
4. **Encourage Ongoing Career Conversations:** Create regular opportunities for employees to discuss aspirations, challenges, and potential career moves with managers.

To effectively apply the recommendations and drive sustainable progress, organizations should adopt a structured talent optimization approach consisting of three phases:

- » **Prepare:** Assess current gaps and build foundational support using tools such as the SHRM Linkage Advancing Women Leaders 360° Assessment™ and Organizational Assessment™, with intersectional data segmentation.
- » **Position:** Align policies, recognition systems, and leadership commitment; expand employee resource groups, mentoring, and sponsorship; and curate targeted development experiences and resources.
- » **Perform:** Execute tailored interventions including mentoring, coaching, flexible work policies, and ongoing monitoring of key engagement and retention metrics to refine efforts.

This framework provides strategic, data-driven, and actionable steps to close gaps, support women's advancement, and optimize the full potential of the workforce.

RESOURCES

[SHRM Linkage Purposeful Leadership Model](#) — The Purposeful Leadership Model from SHRM Linkage equips leaders to be more inclusive, more purposeful, and, ultimately, more effective in how they lead teams and drive impact.

[SHRM Linkage Advancing Women Leaders Solution](#) — SHRM Linkage's Advancing Women Leaders Signature Solution supports organizations in assessing, developing, and empowering their high-performing talent to lead inclusive, successful teams.

[SHRM Linkage Institute](#) — The SHRM Linkage Institute is an immersive leadership development experience for organizations that want to develop, engage, and align their high-potential leaders and drive team performance.

[Labor Force Snapshot: Women in the U.S. Labor Force](#) — SHRM's labor force snapshot offers insights aimed at understanding the evolution of female labor force participation and employment representation, both historically and in the present day.



OPTIMIZING TALENT. TRANSFORMING ORGANIZATIONS.

SHRM Linkage empowers organizations to drive enterprise results by developing talent critical to their success.

Learn more about advancing women leaders with data-driven solutions from SHRM Linkage.

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