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## Attracting & Retaining Women in the Workforce

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Gender diversity is an important topic in the U.S. workforce, especially within sectors that are known for being male dominated, such as Helbling's core segments of architecture, engineering, and construction (A/E/C); facilities management; and real estate development. While organizations within these industries realize the positive attributes that women can bring to the table and want to enhance their gender diversity at all levels, there is an extremely small talent pool from which to draw qualified candidates. Therefore, organizations need to have best practices in place to successfully recruit and retain this valuable talent resource.

Tom Dunn, Senior Managing Consultant, says, "While our core sectors are very male dominated, there is clearly an industry-wide conversation taking place regarding how organizations view and value gender diversity. Making diversity a company mission and value is the first step toward building a more balanced workforce, and we see many organizations taking that initial step. There has been an aggressive push for diversity in our core sectors over the past five to ten years, so the pool of female candidates in certain skill sets remains limited but it is growing. For example, architectural and planning careers have a more gender diverse workforce than say the mechanical or electrical engineering career-path."

He goes on to say, "If the industry can continue to aggressively educate young women early in their lives about the value and benefits of STEM education and careers, the future pool of female talent looks promising, but generating real progress will require a continuous and sincere effort."

### The impact of women

There's no denying the significant impacts that women can make upon organizations, and many studies prove that point. An example is recent research conducted by The Peterson Institute for International Economics. Its survey of 21,980 publicly traded companies in 91 countries found that having more female leaders in high levels of corporate management correlates with increased profitability. From its analyses, the institution believes that having more females in high level corporate roles leads to increased skill diversity within top management, enhanced monitoring of performance, and less gender discrimination throughout all levels of management.

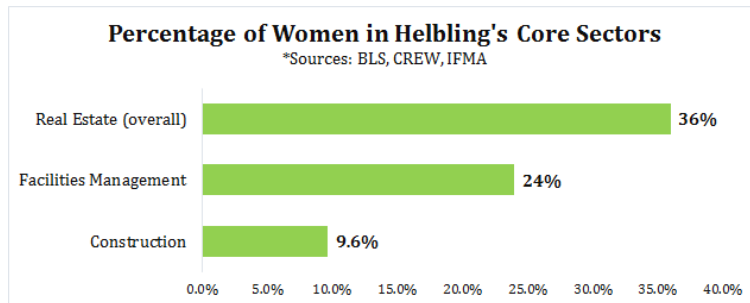
Dunn says, "All candidates need to have the right technical skills and experience first. But, I think that women can bring emotional intelligence, creativity, and strong soft-skills to executive level roles that may contrast with many male counterparts. The construction and facilities industries have historically valued technical skills and operational experience over these traits, but as the industry becomes more people-centric, these qualities will only become more critical."

"Women also tend to have a deeper ability to think creatively," adds Tom Helbling. "They analyze things more deeply. They're organized, intuitive, and for the most part, they can establish collaboration within teams easier than men. Sometimes, it is the women within an organization who are not afraid to go outside the norm, and that's extremely important in the industries we serve. An organization has to be innovative and adaptable, and women employees can support developing and growing those attributes."

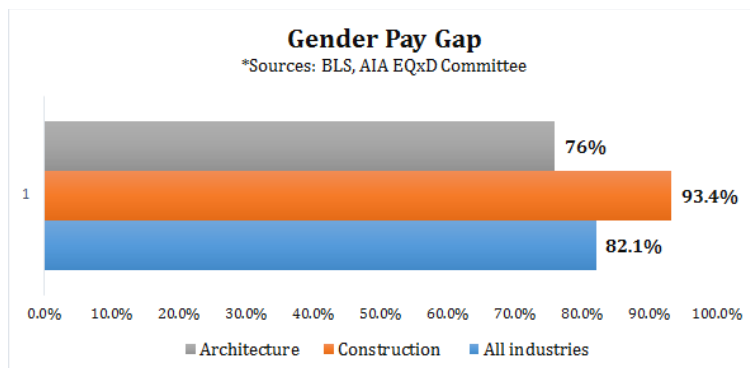


## Statistics of women within A/E/C, facilities management, and real estate development

Currently, women hold about 33 – 37% of management, senior management, and director positions, and only 25% of C-Suite roles across all industries in the U.S., according to McKinsey and Company's survey, Women in the Workplace 2016, conducted in conjunction with LeanIn.org. These statistics are much different when looking at the fields of A/E/C, facilities management, and real estate development. The Bureau of Labor Statistics' most recent analysis reported that only 9.3% of the construction workforce are women. According to the International Facility Management Association, women represent 24% of facilities management professionals. While the numbers are more positive for real estate, women are still at 36% (including within real estate development).



Worthy to note is the fact that, while women make 82.1% of what men make across the board of U.S. industries, they make 93.4% within construction. However, the findings aren't as positive for women in architecture with females in this profession only earning 76% of what men earned for the same positions.



## How to attract and retain women employees

In 2015, the American Institute of Architect's (AIA) San Francisco's Equity by Design (EQxD) committee, released a report that outlined the challenges that women face in working within the architecture sector, which are highly applicable to the related aforementioned industries. Among top challenges noted were: concern about work/life balance and the long work hours that make it difficult to start/raise a family; lack of female role models; and generally lower pay compared to men for the same work.

"In working with many female candidates, I think the biggest challenge for them is to not become frustrated by the preconceived notions and misconceptions that often come with working in a male dominated environment," explains Dunn. "Depending on the organization, a company may be slightly more or less enlightened on the subject of diversity. Like all candidates, women have to be very astute about evaluating their fit with an organization before making a commitment."

Wendy Zang, Managing Search Consultant, elaborates, "The difference in recruiting women actually begins with how women approach career opportunities. There have been numerous studies that show women are less likely to apply for positions when they don't meet 100% of the qualifications. They are also less likely to apply for senior level roles if they have been rejected from similar positions in the past. We have an advantage as search consultants because we are able to alter that perspective with female professionals we contact. It's rare that any candidate meets 100% of the qualifications for any position, as often job descriptions are a wish list of every skill or qualification an employer would like to have. In assessing all candidates, we look at their experience and skill set, and explore their potential to assume more responsibility. In doing so, we can bring female candidates into a recruitment process who may not have been found or attracted by traditional recruitment methods."



Zang goes on to say, “Efforts must go beyond just getting a female candidate to the table. An organization has to continue demonstrating that gender equity is something it cares about and that a diverse workforce and diverse leadership are highly valued. Women need to see that throughout the recruitment and onboarding process. Only if an organization can show those values in both tangible and intangible ways will they be able to secure and retain high-performing female employees at any level.”

To improve their recruitment and retention of women, organizations can develop and implement practices and procedures, including:

- Create an inclusive workplace culture in which men and women are valued equally.
- Brand their organization as an employer that values diversity. For example, provide an equal amount of photos of men and women workers throughout its website and on its social media platforms.
- Remove the subconscious bias of internal recruiters.
- De-bias job descriptions and employment ads. A study by Zip Recruiter found that by removing gender-biased words in position descriptions can increase applicants by 42%. Share information about company culture and leadership with ads.
- Highlight diversity and a female-friendly culture when interviewing and have female employees involved in the recruitment process.
- Tailor professional development opportunities that align with female employees’ preferences.
- Develop benefits/perks that appeal to women (i.e. family-friendly flexible work policies, professional development and mentoring for women, and maternity and fertility benefits.)
- Measure and report diversity turnover.

## Ensuring long-term gender diversity

Anyone who understands business management knows that a front-end process, like diversity recruiting, can only have a long-term impact when follow-up procedures are monitored as well. Therefore, analyzing metrics, such as the ones below, can ensure that gender diversity recruitment initiatives are appropriately supported and successful.

- Gender representation by level
- Attrition by gender
- Gender representation of external candidates for hire
- Gender representation of promotions
- Salary differences in comparable positions by gender
- Bonuses in comparable positions by gender
- Assignment of high-visibility projects by gender

While the pool of female talent in A/E/C, facilities management, and real estate development is limited, it is viable to recruit and retain high-performing women. In doing so, an organization will only strengthen its team, diversify its perspective, and brand itself as a forward-thinking, diversity-friendly entity - a vital attribute to continually progress and ensure success in a competitive business environment.



## Additional Resources for Recruiting & Retaining Women

### InHerSight.com

This website was developed by a company with the same name. It helps women explore career opportunities and organizations that foster supportive environments for all employees. The website has received numerous positive reviews from entities such as The Wall Street Journal, FastCompany, CNNMoney, and Forbes. Not only does its insight support women in making better career decisions, it allows employers to see how their organizations are perceived as the site's main feature is a 14-factor rating system of over 27,000 companies. It would be beneficial for an organization to check if it is on there and if not, consider getting a listing, and encouraging female employees to provide reviews.

### Associations and LinkedIn Groups for Women in A/E/C, facilities management, and real estate development

- LinkedIn Groups and number of members:
  - National Association of Women in Construction – 11,412
  - Professional Women in Construction – 3,049
  - Women in Facilities Maintenance & Construction – 2,072
  - Women in Facilities Management & Construction – 1,635
  - Groundbreaking Women in Construction National Leadership Conference – 1,739
  - Women Construction Owners & Executives – 2,372
  - Women in Construction Action Network – 1,045
  - WWIC – Women Working in Construction – 1,146
- National Association of Women in Construction – [www.nawic.org](http://www.nawic.org)
- National Association of Professional Women in Construction (PWC) – [www.pwcusa.org](http://www.pwcusa.org)
- Women Construction Owners and Executives (WCOE) – [www.coeusa.org](http://www.coeusa.org)
- Women in Construction Operations (WiOPS) – [www.womeninoperations.com](http://www.womeninoperations.com)
- Women Builders Council (WBC) – [www.wbcnyc.org](http://www.wbcnyc.org)
- National Association of Black Women in Construction (NABWIC) – [www.nabwic.org](http://www.nabwic.org)

Helbling & Associates is a retained executive search firm specializing exclusively in facilities management, construction, engineering, and real estate development.

