

# BEST PRACTICES FOR RETAINING *women*

## Attract High-Performing Talent

Forté partners with forward-thinking companies and academic institutions to drive gender representation at every level. We deliver holistic solutions to recruit and retain leading talent, actively shaping a more equitable and impactful future for women throughout their careers.



EARLY CAREER

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MID CAREER

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ADVANCED  
CAREER

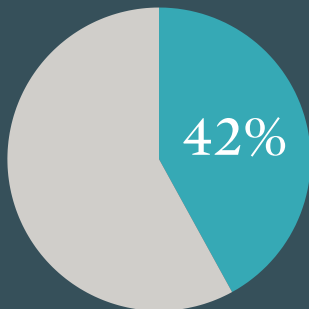


# Best Practices for Retaining Women

Since 2001, Forté has been at the forefront of changing the status quo. When Forté launched, women comprised just 28% of MBA students at leading business schools, and Forté's mission was challenging: grow women's enrollment, increase the ranks of women pursuing business careers, and help launch more women into the C-suite.

**Over the years, Forté's hard work, along with other organizations and individuals, has paid off.**

Women enrolled in full-time MBA programs:



11%  
of Fortune 500 CEOs are women



33%  
of S&P Board seats are occupied by women

**Currently, women make up 42% of MBA students at leading business schools, and post-MBA compensation has increased significantly for both white and underrepresented minority (URM) women.**

But gender disparities in pay and promotions persist. According to Forté research, post-MBA women lag men in number of direct reports, proximity to the CEO, and budget responsibility. Women also report lower career satisfaction than men across five measures – current role, current organization, current level, number of people managed, and current salary – which is a continuing trend from two years ago.

Since one-third of MBAs of all genders – and a much higher proportion of women and minorities – believe they must change jobs to advance their careers, it is essential for companies to deliver on what's most important to top-performing women if they want to retain them.

# 1

## PAY ATTENTION TO PAY

If you want to hang onto your superstar employees, make sure your company is offering equitable opportunities and compensation to men and women. Forté's recent alumni survey revealed that while women see a significant average salary bump (52%) from their last pre- to first post-MBA jobs, men's increases were significantly higher (73%). Unfortunately, pay widens over time, with men's average salaries from pre-MBA to the present surpassing women's significantly. As more companies adopt pay transparency, such as publishing salary bands and consistent compensation ranges, professionals will more easily spot gender pay gaps and will look elsewhere if your company isn't equitable.

Women  
experienced  
on average a

**108%**

increase in salary from their pre-MBA job to their current roles while men's salaries rose 168% on average

**63%**

of U.S.  
companies are  
planning to  
share pay  
information.



The national gender wage gap widened in 2024 for the second year in a row to

**80.9%**

from

**82.7%**

in 2023.





## 2

## PAVE THE WAY TO THE TOP

Besides fair pay, other factors affect people's decisions to stick around for the long haul. Forté's survey revealed that post-MBA men outpace women in promotions, number of direct reports, proximity to CEO, and budget responsibility. Adding to these disparities, Forté's research revealed that sponsorship and formal career and development planning as barriers to leadership have increased since 2023.

Across all participant categories (URM men and women and non-URM men and women), the dearth of formal career development plans was cited as the biggest obstacle to leadership advancement. Companies that institute formal career development programs, leadership training, and sponsorship opportunities will be better positioned to retain them.

Non-URM  
women  
experienced the  
biggest decline  
in promotions



**1.8**  
in 2023  
**1.4**  
in 2025

while non-URM  
men saw the  
largest upticks in  
the same period



**2.3**  
in 2023  
**2.4**  
in 2025

Men have more direct reports  
than women

MEN  
**3**

WOMEN  
**1.6**



and they manage bigger budgets

**55%**  
MEN

TO

**45%**  
WOMEN

When women  
don't receive the  
development support  
they need, they are

**1.5x**

more likely than  
men to leave  
their companies  
to advance in  
their careers.





## 3 | FOCUS ON FLEXIBILITY FIRST

Post-COVID, many companies are mandating a return to the office, but close to half of employees say this would cause them to look for a new job. According to Forté's research, the ability to work remotely and flexibly is the most valued workplace benefit by both genders. Women value their time, including time off, more than men, and they ranked flexible work policies and programs to enhance diversity and inclusivity highest among workplace initiatives. Companies that allow employees to have agency in how, where, and when to do their work have a better chance at retaining women, who are more likely than men to leave a job if flexibility wanes.

72%

WOMEN

cite remote/flex work  
as their top job perk.

61%

MEN



In 2025, women with a bachelor's degree participating in the work force fell to 67.3% after peaking at



70.3%

in 2024, and research shows that declining flexibility is a major cause.



## 4 | INVEST IN HER SUCCESS

Job fulfillment is not one-size-fits-all. Women's career satisfaction lags men's across five measures – role, organization, level, people management, and salary – and the biggest gaps are in salary, role, and level. These inequities hold women back from advancement, which leads to job-switching. Forté's research found that lack of advancement opportunity is the primary reason that both men and women leave jobs, but women and minorities are more likely to leave their jobs within the next year than non-URM men. To remain competitive, businesses must prioritize fair compensation and bonus structures and provide more leadership opportunities that will allow women to thrive.

44%

38%

Plan to leave their jobs within a year due to a lack of advancement opportunities.

Women are much less satisfied with their growth potential than men.

9.8%

GENDER GAP



## 5 | SUPPORT HER SKILL-BUILDING

Women have a hunger to learn — and that is a competitive advantage in the workplace. Across industries and leadership levels, women are actively seeking knowledge and upskilling to grow their impact. Forté’s research showed that women’s “commitment to continuous learning” is higher than men’s, most prominently among URM women. Women also lead men in the use of AI for job searching and within the workplace, particularly to learn AI tools and interfaces and identify the tasks that are ideally suited for AI. In today’s business landscape, focused upskilling is essential because it creates a future-ready, adaptable workforce and, by introducing new skills and ways of thinking, it boosts innovation, job satisfaction, and employee retention.

Women are more likely to use AI to help optimize their resume

64%	51%
WOMEN	MEN

improve cover letters

59%	41%
WOMEN	MEN

and practice interview questions

45%	32%
WOMEN	MEN

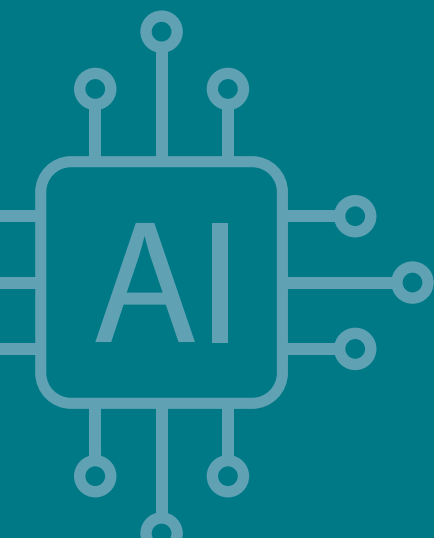
Women’s “commitment to continuous learning” is higher than men’s

WOMEN	48%
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MEN	39%
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and it is particularly high among URM women (57%).

Most employers believe skill gaps are “the biggest barrier to business transformation.





# Leverage Forté for Retention Success

Forté offers the following professional programs to support the retention, advancement, and elevation of women in organizations at every career stage, which can be customized to meet the specific needs of corporate partners:

## 1 Invest in Your Women's ERG

Employee Resource Groups are powerful engines for belonging, development, and retention. With the right support, they can become transformational. Forté partners with organizations to strengthen their Women's ERGs by equipping them with accessible, practical, and scalable professional development tools.

Through Forté's Learning Journeys, Take It to Work guides, and a growing library of ERG-friendly resources, companies can give their women talent at every stage of their careers opportunities to build soft skills, deepen connections, and explore leadership potential. These assets help ERG leaders spark meaningful conversations, facilitate skill-building sessions, and foster a community where women feel empowered to grow and thrive. Whether your ERG is newly formed or well-established, Forté's materials provide flexible support that can be integrated into existing programming or used to inspire new initiatives. By investing in your Women's ERG, you cultivate a culture of inclusion, boost engagement, and strengthen the pipeline of rising women leaders within your organization.

## 2 Launch Mid-Career Women Leaders with Leadership Bootcamps

As women advance in their careers, leadership and soft skills surpass technical skills in importance. Forté's leadership bootcamps are game-changers for mid-career women who want to explore essential leadership topics in-depth with experts, coaches, and peers. Through a two-day faculty training, interactive workshops, and assessments, women can apply what they learn in real-time at their workplaces, determine how each skill impacts their leadership style and growth potential, and master the critical skill of effectively giving and receiving feedback.

## 3 Champion Future Women Executives with Rise

Despite progress, women still significantly lag behind men in reaching the top of the org chart. Forté's Rise program offers personal executive coaching, workshops with subject matter experts, and a leadership assessment – all designed specifically to launch experienced women leaders into senior director, vice president, and c-suite roles. Rise helps women with at least eight years of professional experience craft strategies for advancement, cultivate deeper networks through trust and influence, and articulate a vision to generate buy-in. It's a win-win.

## 4 Embrace Inclusive Leadership

Women alone should not bear the hurdles of gender disparity – men have a role in changing the status quo, too. Forté's Inclusive Leadership initiative highlights the value of men's contributions to fostering work environments that prioritize women's advancement. For companies that recognize the benefits of male allyship but don't know where to begin, Forté offers resources to help organizations take inclusive action. Offerings include a free corporate toolkit with information, best practices, a framework for developing inclusive leaders and navigating difficult conversations, and a multi-module curriculum with customizable PowerPoint decks, lesson plans, and facilitator guides.



Find it all at [www.fortefoundation.org/morewomenleading](http://www.fortefoundation.org/morewomenleading)  
[corporatepartners@fortefoundation.org](mailto:corporatepartners@fortefoundation.org)

