

A Sound Mortgage Business Strategy

A recent study by Stanford University, Northwestern University, Dartmouth College, and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology has found that investors might prefer companies that have a higher number of women in the workforce. The reason? Jennifer Dannals, a Dartmouth researcher on the study told NPR that these participants valued companies with better gender diversity numbers because they expect those companies to be more innovative and creative.

Another research by the Center for Creative Leadership shared similar results. “Previous research shows that Fortune 500 companies with the highest representation of women on boards financially outperform companies with the lowest representation of women on boards,” said Cathleen Clerkin, Strategic Research Manager at the Center for Creative Leadership in a blog. Moreover, the research suggested that gender-diverse teams have higher sales and profits compared to male-dominated teams, and a recent Gallup study found that gender-diverse business units have higher average revenue than less diverse business units.

Needless to say, gender diversity is a business priority.

It is a culture that companies like Fannie Mae believe should be fostered at all levels. Perhaps that is the reason that the GSE is participating in the 2019 Women in the Workplace study by McKinsey. “The findings will help us assess our initiatives, measure our performance against industry-wide trends, and identify additional opportunities to support our efforts to harness the power of our diverse and inclusive workforce,” said **Nancy Jardini**, SVP, Chief Compliance Officer, and Chief Office of Minority and Women Inclusion Officer, at Fannie Mae.

Freddie Mac is also driving initiatives towards equality by building an infrastructure that supports a culture where all people can do their best work. Giving an example of equity issues related to women and minorities, **Jacqueline Welch**, Chief HR Officer and Chief Diversity Officer, Freddie Mac said that research showed that on average women and minorities earned less than their white male counterparts. It’s the reason the company doesn’t ask job candidates for their salary history. “This inequity has a cumulative effect throughout one’s career. That’s why putting candidates in a better position to self-advocate for an equitable salary is so important,” she said.

According to **Tammy Richards**, COO, loanDepot. “As an industry, we can’t afford to ignore that 50% of our lending customers are female. Through D&I programs, companies can learn to better serve their diverse customer base and be a market leader,” she said.



According to **Suzy Lindblom**, COO, Planet Home Lending, the industry has stepped up, created, and embraced great initiatives such as NEXT Conferences, mPower and Women in Housing, Real Estate Ecosystem (NAWRB) and National Association of Minority Mortgage Bankers of America (NAMMBA), all of which focus on the professional efforts of women in the financial industry. “Out of

these organizations and others have come the recognition awards for the hard work that women have long demonstrated in molding our industry,” she told *MReport* recently.

Explaining the basis of mPower (MBA Promoting Opportunities for Women to Extend their Reach) a networking group for female mortgage professionals, **Lisa J. Haynes**, SVP, CFO, and Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer, Mortgage Bankers Association said that the group is meant to create a safe environment “where women professionals can feel comfortable sharing their honest experiences alongside their colleagues.”

“Many organizations promote affinity groups for women, providing a forum for open dialogue and sharing challenges in the workplace, which they can discuss in a safe environment freely and receive advice without any fear of repercussion,” explained **Colleen Winslow**, Chief HR Officer, RoundPoint Mortgage Servicing Corporation. “I’ve also seen many organizations support having role models, women in power, guest speakers to provide tips and advice on how to navigate, communicate and self-promote.”

Another example is that of the resource groups for women at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Fannie Mae’s Women’s Employee Resource Group (WERG) hosts events regularly on empowering topics such as career navigation, networking, and advocating for yourself at work. Additionally, WERG members and their guest speakers have addressed a variety of topics, including pressing for progress on gender parity. “While we know that diversity makes us a smarter, more innovative, and successful company, we are committed 100% to an inclusive workplace for all of our employees,” Jardini said.

Freddie Mac is also reaching out to its vendors and suppliers to extend its D&I initiatives that promote gender equality. “We spend time thinking about and acting on ways to extend our reach to also include our suppliers. We actively work to grow and develop women-owned businesses and other diverse suppliers through our Vendor Academy,” Welch said.

“Sometimes women have the perception that only one of us can succeed,” said **Kristy Fercho** EVP, President of Mortgage, at Flagstar Bank. “I try to expose women to other successful women in the industry, so they can gain confidence that there are plenty of opportunities for all of us to be successful, and through networking and support, we can continue to thrive in our careers and the industry.”

In fact, coaching, mentorship, and sponsoring can be key to strengthening a woman professional’s career growth.

Speaking of these relationships, Welch made some helpful distinctions. “A coach talks to you, usually over a defined period, and helps you upskill in a key area for your career growth. A mentor talks with you, usually over time, and provides insight and perspective as you navigate your career. A sponsor talks

about you and uses their influence to help you obtain high-visibility assignments, promotions, or jobs. Research has shown that a culture of coaching, mentoring, and sponsorship can help accelerate career development for women.”

“I have mentored, coached, and promoted female leaders because I truly believe in the importance of doing so. I am always amazed at how much I can learn from these interactions with other professional women,” Jardini said. “Each member of my leadership team brings a unique set of skills to the table, which contributes to the overall success of the team.”

Despite these strides, and focus on progressing their careers, women face challenges in finding the work-life balance, more so than men—this is especially true when they’re balancing motherhood with work. “So many of the highest paying roles in mortgage banking feel out of reach for anyone who is considered the primary caregiver in the family,” said **Brenda Jarvis**, EVP, Business Development, TruLoan Mortgage. “Companies must find ways to be flexible with hours to allow the best talent to do the best work for every role and do away with old ideas that work must be performed during certain hours and in the office.”

Giving her example, Richards said that as a mother of five, she faced many of the challenges that women traditionally faced as working professionals. “I emphasize on “traditionally” because today these challenges, such as juggling work/life balance while raising a family, are shared by men and women alike,” she said. “However, it’s still more common for women to try to overcompensate by attempting to prove their worth in the workplace or be something they’re not. Having this mindset is as outdated and detrimental as what we’re fighting to change—you’ll make a bigger difference by staying true to yourself.”

Caroline Reaves, CEO, MCS shared a personal experience when she spoke recently to a group of aspiring female business professionals at Louisiana Tech University on finding the right balance. “I made some decisions early in life to raise a family while I worked,” she said. “I was a young mother and working and was able to move up. Slower at first because I wasn’t able to devote the time I would otherwise have liked to because I was raising a family.”

For organizations that want to help women support those decisions, **Kelly Hebert**, Director of Sales Operations, LERETA advises offering maternity leave and support for new and returning mothers. “I believe the decision to start or expand your family disproportionately challenges women professionals. Those who lack support during these life-changing events are more likely to look for opportunities in more family-friendly organizations once they understand the effect their work/family life balance will have without a support system,” she observed.

“I describe career ascension as a Christmas tree, not a ladder, it’s important to make horizontal moves sometimes to reach the top ... and the view when you step back and look is much more complete and

satisfying,” Winslow said. “I use my career journey as an example and it resonates with the women I speak with.”

“The industry is always looking for top talent, and what is a better way to broaden the scope by actively seeking out the hidden talent,” Haynes said. She advised that men who want to make a difference must “be deliberate and intentional in supporting and empowering the mission of gender equality as well as actively participate in discussions involving diversity and inclusion.”

But ultimately, Reaves said that women (and men) must choose what’s right for them and their family and make the most of that choice. “I am sure that I missed out on some career opportunities because being a wife and mom is so important to me. At the same time, I know that I had to make some sacrifices along the way to advance my career,” she said. “It’s important that we empower

women to be who they want to be and focus on what’s important to them. Not every working woman wants to be an executive and not every female executive wants to have a family. The saying, “Women can have it all,” is not entirely true. There’s a finite amount of time each day, and that means we have to make choices. Let’s allow each woman to make her own choices about career and family. And support them in those decisions.”

About Author: Radhika Ojha



Radhika Ojha is an independent writer and editor. A former Online Editor and currently a reporter for MReport, she is a graduate of the University of Pune, India, where she received her B.A. in Commerce with a concentration in Accounting and Marketing and an M.A. in Mass Communication. Upon completion of her master’s degree, Ojha worked at a national English daily publication in India (The Indian Express) where she was a staff writer in the cultural and arts features section. Ojha also worked as Principal Correspondent at HT Media Ltd and at Honeywell as an executive in corporate communications. She and her husband currently reside in Houston, Texas.