

What's Holding Women Back: A Look at Female Ambition in Canada

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New Research from American Express Canada Finds Few Corporate Women Believe C-suite is Achievable

TORONTO, Jan. 11, 2016 /CNW/ - Can women have it all? New research commissioned by American Express Canada and Women of Influence suggests a more pertinent question for 2016—do they even want it all? With the workplace and landscape of life changing rapidly and the word *success* being redefined, this research examines the state of female ambition in Canada, looking at what, if anything, is holding women back.

According to the new research, Canadian female entrepreneurs¹ and corporate workers² are divided when it comes to career ambition. Approximately half agree they would describe themselves as ambitious in their career (51%) and are highly motivated to advance their career further (47%). Among corporate workers, even fewer believe it is achievable to reach the c-suite³ (32%), and less than a third (28%) aspire to it.

"As a company that supports the advancement of women and balanced leadership, we're excited to partner with Women of Influence to better understand what motivates women to advance in their careers," said Naomi Titleman, Vice President, Human Resources, American Express Canada. "The disparity shown between women who are ambitious in their careers and those who believe the c-suite is achievable suggests companies have a role in helping these ambitious women to reach their full potential."

The research suggests Canadian female entrepreneurs and corporate workers believe they have the skills it takes to be a successful leader⁴. Why then, are there not more corporate women aspiring to the c-suite?

Canadian Women Lack a Champion

Perhaps one reason is that many Canadian women are lacking a champion to push their careers forward. According to the research, mentorship and sponsorship are still rare among female entrepreneurs and corporate workers (with only 27% having a mentor and 8% a sponsor).

However, corporate workers with a sponsor are almost twice as likely to believe reaching the c-suite is achievable (61% vs. 32% overall). Having a champion was also found to have a big impact on confidence, as female corporate workers with mentors and sponsors are significantly more likely to consider themselves as high potential employees (70% overall compared to 86% with a mentor and 89% with a sponsor).

"Sponsorship is a big part of American Express culture. Many of us have had sponsors that have taken chances on us, and we might not be where we are without them," said Titleman. "The big difference between mentorship and sponsorship is that while you can ask for a mentor, sponsorship is earned. Sponsors endorse you and have a direct impact on your career advancements."

Women with mentors or sponsors credit them with encouraging them to go after opportunities (47%), offering unbiased career advice (37%), expanding their network (28%), advocating on their behalf for job opportunities (28%), giving unbiased personal/family advice (28%) and providing access to new opportunities that otherwise wouldn't be possible (27%).

A Shift in How Women Define Success

When it comes to building a career, money talks, but passion speaks volumes. Of the more than 1,000 women surveyed, over two-thirds (67%) agree their definition of career success has changed since they first started working. The majority of women (72%) now define success as "loving what they do," compared to the 45 per cent who said "meeting their financial goals".

It would seem that women aren't looking to climb the corporate ladder on someone else's terms. In fact, almost one in five female corporate workers (17%) have turned down a promotion with fit being the number one reason (36%).

"Because every woman's definition of success is different, organizations should strive to enable and

empower their workforce to carve their own individual career path," said Stephania Varalli, Co-CEO, Women of Influence. "Women of course want to show ambition, but they also want to stay true to their core values, like work/life balance."

Gender Inequality on the Home Front

While nearly three quarters (73%) of women surveyed are primary breadwinners or contribute equally to the household income, the balance isn't being offset at home, according to the research. Nearly half agree that they take on more household responsibilities than their partner (44%), or evenly share household responsibilities (31%).

In addition, close to half (47%) agree they've made sacrifices in their own career to benefit their partner/family, compared to the 24 per cent who agree their spouse made sacrifices to benefit their family and/or career. Furthermore, almost one in five women (18%) agree their career has taken a back seat to their partner's career.

Still, most women (84%) agree it's possible to have work-life balance and still be successful.

About the Research

Commissioned by American Express and Women of Influence, the 2015 Women's Leadership Study was conducted online by Nielsen on October 7-21, 2015 to 1,270 female entrepreneurs and female full time corporate workers in Canada. As the study was conducted online, it is precluded from reporting a margin of error. The margin of error for a representative sample of this size (n=1,270) would be at ± 2.7 percent within a 95% confidence interval.

About Women of Influence

Women of Influence, now in its 22nd year, is one of North America's leading organizations offering solutions to further women's advancement. With [courses in executive leadership](#), [global events](#), and [print](#) and [digital content](#), Women of Influence annually reaches over 200,000 professional women and men across North America and internationally. For more information, please visit www.womenofinfluence.com

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¹ Defined as women who are self-employed full time or part time

² Defined as women working full time in a corporate or office environment

³ C-suite is defined as the highest levels of senior leadership within a corporation

⁴ **Top skills sought-after in a leader:** Problem solving (20%), decision making (19%), verbal communication (19%), empathy (17%), conflict resolution (17%), charisma (4%), assertiveness (3%), negotiation (2%). **Where female entrepreneurs and corporate workers rank themselves as strong:** Problem solving (87%), empathy (84%), decision making (81%), verbal communication (76%), conflict resolution (73%), assertiveness (61%), negotiation (59%), charisma (57%).

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