



# The Lost Leaders



## Background

Gender parity is stalling at best and at worst going backwards. In the UK alone, ECC's research indicates that, across the banking, legal and FTSE 350 sectors, 20,000 women need to be promoted to achieve parity. But given attrition challenges, employees' new expectations and outdated talent models, more than fishing in one pool of 'typical' or 'traditional talent' is needed. Organisations must look beyond to other previously untapped pools of talent. Women with the skill, experience and ambition for senior leadership have not disappeared from your business. They are still there but stuck or overlooked by criteria used to identify and promote internal talent. To learn more about why segmenting your workforce of women by alternative talent pools is important and why it is essential to build a plan to engage these women watch 'Where have all the senior women gone'.

By reimagining talent as the four different pools ECC has identified through their research, you can take steps to harness their potential. These are The Boundaried Workers, The Overlooked, The Conscious Quitters and The Lost Leaders. Take note, these categories won't cover every individual, and some individuals will be in more than one. Here we explain The **Lost Leaders**.

## Who are The Lost Leaders?

This fourth talent pool, the place where unsupported Boundaried Workers, Conscious Quitters and The Overlooked are headed - if their organisations fail to act - are The Lost Leaders. The workers in this pool have potential, but their organisations are not galvanising their talents. Midlife women in mid-level managerial roles are often in this pool, but men and women of any age can be too. For The Lost Leaders, stress and the risk of burnout increases, and these valuable workers are likely to seek more supportive employment environments elsewhere.





## What do The Lost Leaders experience?

This is a substantial, dissatisfied pool of workers who report poor motivation (57%), poor job satisfaction (56%) and burnt out (46%). Hybrid is making them feel excluded (58%) and short of exposure to leaders (45%). This is because of:

- A **lack of relatable workplace role models**, for example, because a woman sees a senior team that is all men. Or a black woman sees only white leaders and feels they need to code-switch to fit in. A recent report included anecdotal evidence explaining the difference it makes for women, and particularly women of colour, if they see someone in a senior position who looks like them.
- Being **unable to see clear progression routes** in the company. Their boss doesn't advocate for them, and they lack sponsorship. Training programmes aren't valued enough by the company, and climbing the organisation's hierarchy, rather than exploring lateral moves, is encouraged. This leaves them feeling lost and uninspired.
- Their **manager's poor leadership skills** and lack of authentic communication. Individuals might feel they cannot fit into the existing culture which encourages overwork, prioritises office presenteeism and doesn't flex on standardised working hours.
- Feelings of **isolation and burn out**. Particularly for a midlife woman who is experiencing menopausal symptoms, or part of the sandwich generation and caring for both younger and older family members. In 2022 Deloitte surveyed over 5000 women across 5 countries and found that almost half are burnt out, more than half want to leave within 2 years, and only 10% plan to stay for more than five years. The study also showed that 40% of women reported burnout was a key driver for them actively looking for a new employer.
- Being part of an organisations middle management. Gallup's book 'It's the Manager' indicates that **middle managers experience elevated levels of stress**. Research produced in 2015 by Columbia University found almost 1 in 5 (18%) of middle managers reported symptoms of depression.



## What should organisations be doing to support their Lost Leaders?

If you start by acknowledging there are talented individuals that you have probably missed, you can begin to action plan how to realise this opportunity. This considerable pool of potential talent could help your organisation progress in gender equity if identified and harnessed. Understanding this segment of workers will help you and your leaders broaden their perspectives when they are identifying talent for development, stretch opportunities and progression.

### Actions

Organisations should be concerned if their employees are in this pool. It means they missed supporting them at earlier stages, for example when they were in the Boundaried, Overlooked or Conscious Quitter pools. It also means they have a much larger job on their hands of supporting and inspiring these workers. It's necessary for organisations to look for holistic ways to support their talent and tackle the cultures and systems that have led to them feeling lost.

Whatever your role in the organisation, the combination of factors that lead to individuals arriving in this pool are so wide that actions should be tailored to the individual. So, for example your midlife women experiencing menopausal symptoms will benefit from interventions that reflect their experience and barriers to progression.

Leaders who coach are more able to 'meet' each individual where they are at and formulate a plan to help them meet their objectives. We recommend as a starting point that you read **'Coaching Women: Changing the System not the Person'** by Geraldine Gallacher. It provides case studies of women in the different pools, including The Lost Leaders and it will help you understand the role in coaching in unlocking their potential.