

2023 REPORT

WORKING MOTHERS SPEAK



Listen to Your Mothers

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LETTER FROM THE FOUNDERS

Crying, shouting, kicking, screaming. Parents often share these displays of emotion with their children. While for the child, these can be developmentally appropriate, for the parents, they are often a result of overwhelming stress from a lack of “work-life balance”. For mothers, these emotions are paired with an invisible load¹ of labor at home, wage gaps and other burdens we face as parents, employees, and humans.

While more women have joined the workforce over the past four decades, according to the Department of Labor, employers are losing traction on attracting and retaining mothers in industries where their skills and perspective can add the most value². The U.S. Chamber of Commerce says Female-dominated industries such as education, childcare, healthcare, and food service are facing large labor shortages³. While it’s easy to watch one or two mothers leave their jobs and think this is an individual issue, what would it look like if we lost 20%, 30%, or even 40% of working mothers from these industries? It’s time to consider what role we all have in creating the structures, systems, and cultures that will secure our workforce for the long term. **It’s time for employers, in particular, to recognize that this is their problem, too.**

We (Andrea, Katrina, Miriam, Renée) founded Listen to Your Mothers because, despite our varying ethnic, religious, sexual orientations, and cultural backgrounds, we experience firsthand the myriad of challenges faced as mothers and professionals, and want to do something about it. Between dinner, bedtimes, illnesses, new jobs, and family vacations, we developed this report to amplify what mothers already know they need, to demonstrate that this is not just a “women’s issue”, and to provide clear actions that employers can begin to take now.

Working alongside employers, Listen to Your Mothers will leverage our expertise in strategic planning, operations management, equity-based solution development, and Human Resources to make the employer actions outlined in this report truly attainable within your industry, organization, and teams. We know that change is possible because other nations and bold employers within the U.S. are already doing the hard work. We know that everyone will benefit from these changes.

“During layoffs, my team of six was narrowed to four, and [two of us were pregnant, due only 5 weeks apart]. We worked a ridiculous amount during our maternity leaves, and I was beyond miserable. I was dealing with postpartum issues, I felt like an awful parent and an awful employee, and was running myself totally ragged with no time left to be just a person or care for myself.”

- LYM Survey Respondent

With love,

Andrea Lebron, Katrina Magdol,
Miriam Rubin, and Renée
Omoladé

Andrea Lebron
Katrina Magdol
Miriam Rubin
Renée Omoladé



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On Mothers Day 2023, Listen To Your Mothers launched the inaugural **Survey for Working Mothers**. The survey had two primary objectives - to capture the diverse experiences of working mothers across industries and identities and to inform our business plan and services. to ensure Listen to Your Mothers' work continues to reflect the most current experiences and needs of working mothers.

This report provides context on the national landscape for working mothers, outlines three key trends from the 288 survey responses we received, and makes a call to action addressing how employers can attract and retain mothers in the workforce.

1 National Landscape



National Landscape

Mothers' participation in the workforce has increased significantly over the years, especially in key industries such as education, health care, and social services. Yet, a detrimental lack of systemic, structural, and cultural support for working mothers persists. Mothers earn significantly less than their male and non-parenting counterparts and are more likely to take a break from work to care for their children, impacting their career and long-term earnings.

2 Survey Results



Survey Results

- Almost all respondents made a change to their careers once becoming mothers, such as accepting less pay or turning down career advancement opportunities.
- Working mothers feel the most supported when comprehensive benefits and flexible workplace policies are available.
- At a micro level, many managers support working mothers as best they can, but a lack of systemic, structural, and cultural support at the organizational level persists.

3 Employer Implications



Implications for Employers

Employers spend millions in turnover, disengaged employees, and increasing healthcare costs. Additionally, the nation's economy loses billions of dollars a year because of the conflict between school and work schedules. The changes that mothers in our survey are asking for will significantly mitigate these challenges for employers and enable more employers to reap the benefits of increased female representation in their organizations.

4 Call to Action



Employer Call to Action

Employers can play a vital role in supporting working mothers by taking a series of distinct actions. These actions are outlined in order of the trends raised in the survey results.

- Career growth and retention
- Flexibility and benefits
- Culture and climate

>>Keep a look out for "quotes" from real respondents throughout this report!

NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

Despite the increase in mothers participating in the workforce, a detrimental lack of systemic, structural, and cultural support persists.

Mothers do not have the flexibility, benefits, or supportive work culture to balance work and caregiving. Mothers and women of color (who make up a disproportionate number of caregivers) face discrimination, bias, and inequity in the workplace at astounding levels. Academics refer to this as the Motherhood Penalty⁴ but for thousands of working mothers, this is reality.



Who are working mothers in the U.S.?

Mothers in the workforce

- Over 24 million employed women (14% of the total workforce) had children under the age of 18 in 2021⁵
- 73% of mothers participated in the workforce in 2023 versus 47% in 1975; For single, widowed, or divorced moms, the rate was 76.9%⁶
- Black mothers are more likely to participate in the workforce (71.3%), Asian mothers (64.3%), or Hispanic mothers (62.8%); For those with children under 6, the rate was 67.9% versus 76.7% for those with children ages 6 to 17⁷
- 40% of working mothers work in educational services, health care, and social assistance, and 48% work in management, business, science, and arts occupations⁸

Working mothers face huge pay inequities

- Equal Pay Today cites that working mothers take in 75 cents for every dollar a working white father makes.⁹ For women of color, the gap is even more significant. Latina moms earned 47 cents, Native American moms earned 49 cents and Black moms earned 52 cents compared to White dads¹⁰
- The earnings of more education mothers fall less and recover faster than those with less education¹¹
- For women who took just one year off from work, their annual earnings were 39% lower than women who worked all 15 years between 2001 and 2015¹²

Working mothers are forced to make big tradeoffs

- About one out of four working moms have turned down a promotion to balance work and parenting¹³
- By age 50, White and Hispanic mothers with two or more children have two to seven fewer years of experience in full-time employment. Among Black mothers, only mothers with three or more children experience a significant reduction, averaging five fewer years of full-time work¹⁴

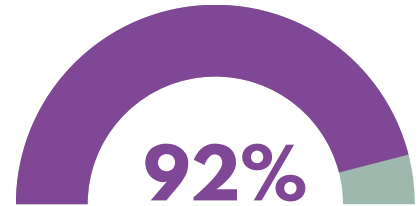
A significant gap exists in paid family leave and childcare

- Despite paid family leave policies in some states, only 12% of part-time workers and 28% of full-time workers have access to paid family leave and only about one in 20 low income women, predominantly women of color, have access to paid family leave¹⁵
- Mothers are 40% more likely than fathers to report childcare issues harmed their careers, particularly impacting black mothers who spend on average 56% of their income on childcare compared to 42% for Latina moms and 26% for white moms¹⁶

SURVEY RESULTS

TREND #1: CAREER GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Ninety-two percent of working mothers made a change to their careers, such as accepting less pay or turning down career advancement opportunities, to balance their workload with motherhood.



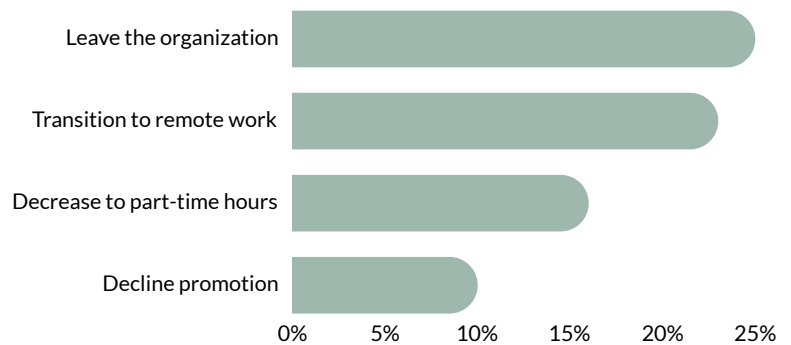
Current work structures provide limited options for working mothers, often forcing them to choose between an ambitious career and a fulfilling family life. More often than not, mothers are faced with difficult decisions to take huge hits to their careers, leaving their jobs, taking pay cuts, and passing up promotions in search of opportunities that work better for their families.

“I have turned down opportunities that didn't allow for flexibility and weren't parent-friendly. I've worked some jobs that were absolutely terrible just to make this work.”

The most common change respondents have made to their careers was leaving their organization.

1 in 4 respondents reported leaving their job altogether to balance workload with motherhood.

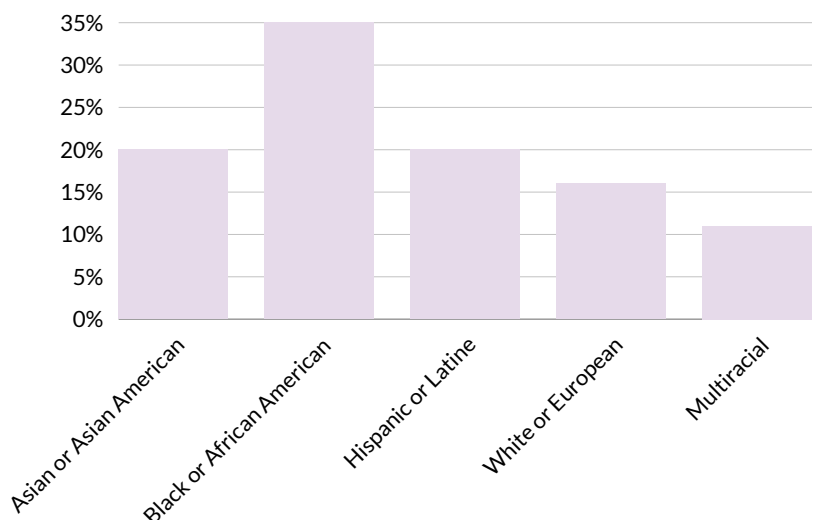
The top four career changes made to balance motherhood



Career Impact BY RACE

African American respondents most commonly reported making significant career changes to balance family life and work.

% Career Impacted by Motherhood



“I left my field, which I went to school for, because I wasn't spending quality time with my children and I was underpaid and underappreciated.”

TREND # 2: FLEXIBILITY & BENEFITS

Working mothers feel the most supported when comprehensive benefits and flexible workplace policies are available.

Comprehensive benefits (e.g., paid leave, time off, childcare benefits) and flexibility (e.g., flexible schedules, remote work, part-time/job sharing options) are among the top factors leading mothers to feel supported at work. The availability of these options often determines whether or not mothers can remain in their jobs after having children.



88%

Respondents list flexibility as the top factor to feeling supported at work.

Paid Leave

Adequate paid leave, as well as time off and job protection for pregnancy complications, childbirth, infant care, breastfeeding, and pumping, are essential to supporting maternal health and ensuring that families are set up for success. Respondents reported that lack of access to these benefits negatively impacted their ability to care for themselves and their children far beyond the infancy stage.



77%

Respondents say lack of paid leave is the main reason for feeling unsupported at work.

“Our office didn't provide any paid leave so I had to use all my vacation and sick time. I didn't take a single sick day during pregnancy because I needed all of them after giving birth. I only had six weeks off because we couldn't afford to miss a paycheck. I didn't even get the hang of breastfeeding before I had to go back.”

Schedules & Remote Work

Respondents say flexible schedules and remote work are critical to manage pickups, drop-offs, and unexpected childcare coverage needs.



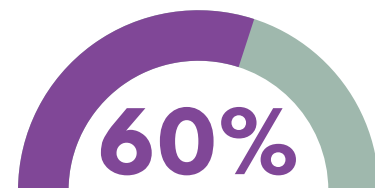
7/10

Respondents feel most supported when hybrid/remote work options are available.

“My employer does not allow remote work, despite much of the work being done in a virtual manner. This policy negatively impacts my availability for childcare pickups and drop-offs, as well as the amount of time I am home to care for and bond with my daughter.”

Access to Childcare

Limited access to affordable and reliable childcare offers a significant barrier to mothers wishing to remain in the workforce.



60%

Respondents feel unsupported at work due to the lack of affordable childcare.

“It's hard to manage expensive daycare payments with the pay I receive. I wish my job had a daycare center or help with childcare. I have to have my mom take my kids to daycare because I have to be at work before daycare even opens.”

TREND #3: CULTURE & CLIMATE

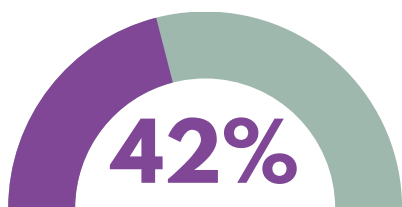
At a micro level, many managers support working mothers as best they can, but a **lack of systemic, structural, and cultural support at the organizational level persists.**

A supportive culture and climate for working mothers means having parents, particularly mothers, in leadership roles; managers, and peers who are understanding and express interest in employees' responsibilities outside of work; and a manageable workload that enables employees to be present both at work and with their families.



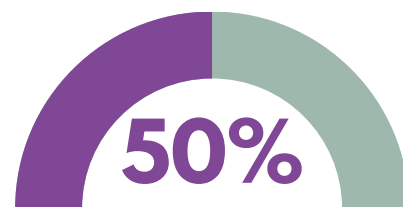
57% do not feel well-supported by their organizations.
of respondents

"I want workplace support in tangible ways. Show me the thoughtful pumping space. Show me the paid leave recognizing that parental leave is not a vacation and saved vacation/sick time is very necessary when you have a child starting daycare and sick all the time. I have "support" but it's very empty."



Respondents feel more supported by their managers than their organizations.

"My boss is a mother as well and has provided me with so much flexibility. It is not the culture of my organization, but directly reporting to someone who always encourages me to put my family first has been a tremendous blessing."



Respondents say unmanageable workload is a factor leading them to feel unsupported at work.

"In my current organization, it is expected that "flexibility" means you will spend all your non child time working to "keep up" with all the non parents. To me, that's not support or flexibility, it's actually the opposite!"

IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

Did you know replacing an employee costs anywhere from **one-half to two times** the person's annual salary?¹⁷

The U.S. quit rate hit a 17-year high in 2018 - before the Covid-19 pandemic. And then the "Great Resignation" or "Great Reshuffle" shook U.S. employers even more. According to the 2023 State of Motherhood report, 25% of respondents are stay-at-home parents¹⁸, compared to 15% one year ago. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce says most industries are still struggling to recover: "Even if every unemployed worker were to fill an open job...there would still be millions of unfilled job positions."¹⁹

Retaining mothers in the workforce is a win-win solution. This benefits the nation's economy, employers, the mothers who choose to work, and their children.

\$55 billion

Conflicting work and school schedules cost the U.S. economy \$55 billion in lost productivity each year.¹⁶

Mothers need their employers to create structures, policies, and a work culture that supports them in caring for their children. Doing so will save the economy billions of dollars.

Employers face hidden costs from turnover when they do not provide employees with adequate support.²⁰ In addition, their bottom line benefits from retaining and promoting women. For example, companies with executive teams with more than 30% women are significantly more likely to outperform those with only 10 - 30% women. These companies are more likely to outperform companies with fewer than 10% women executives, per McKinsey & Company's Diversity Wins report.²¹

Research continues to support the effectiveness of flexible workplaces. Flexibility comes in many shapes and sizes. One recent study, as reported by Forbes, found that companies giving employees choice over where to work outperformed companies with restrictive policies by 16%.²² Studies on the six-hour work shift and four-day workweek show improved health outcomes and productivity. The Women in the Workplace 2023 Report by McKinsey & Company found that women who work in a hybrid or remote work environment face fewer microaggressions and increased psychological safety.²³


According to the Bipartisan Policy Center, nearly 20% of adults ages 25 - 54 are not in the workforce for two main reasons: issues related to childcare or parenting (24%) and other caregiving responsibilities (20%).²³ This study found flexibility, competitive compensation, paid sick leave, and affordable childcare determine whether or not this untapped talent will decide to return to (or enter) the workforce. Similarly, 64% of at-home parents contributing to the 2023 State of Motherhood report indicated flexible work schedules would compel them to (re)join the workforce.¹⁸

EMPLOYERS CALL TO ACTION

Employers play a vital role in supporting working mothers. They can provide the conditions that enable mothers to be healthy, engaged, and productive members of the workforce.

Employers can begin the systemic, structural, and cultural shifts that are essential to retaining and engaging working mothers. Making these shifts will not only benefit mothers, but it will benefit all employees, while also giving employers a leg up in today's rapidly evolving and competitive labor market. In this section, we outline several distinct actions for employers to consider that focus on: Career Growth & Development, Flexibility & Benefits, and Culture & Climate.

Career Growth & Development

| Actions | Advantages |
|--|---|
| <p>Rewards and Recognition Provide incentives for employees to join and stay at your organization such as competitive pay increases, employee recognition, and opportunities to highlight strong leadership.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retains strong employees • Maintains institutional knowledge • Helps employers match employee strengths with needs of the organization • Fosters parent representation within organization <div data-bbox="1096 1249 1421 1417">  <p>Quick Win</p> </div> <p data-bbox="1112 1438 1421 1753">Create an informal opportunity for parents to get together during the work day, such as a "Bring Your Child to Work" day or a lunch for new mothers returning from leave.</p> |
| <p>Advancement Opportunities Create multiple ways for team members to advance and learn within your organization, and be transparent about the process and criteria. Provide options for advancement that do not include supervisory responsibilities.</p> | |
| <p>Peer Support and Mentorship Provide opportunities for parents, and mothers specifically, to informally support one another; for example, on a Slack channel or in an Employee Resource Group. Support mentorship relationships outside of the manager-employee relationship.</p> | |
| <p>Strategic Workforce Planning Be proactive and agile in how you structure your workforce. Include resources for temporary staffing to cover leaves, additional staffing during peak times, and consultant/fractional staffing for specific expertise.</p> | |
| <p>Discrimination and Bias Prevention Review your compensation, hiring, promotion, and development practices to reduce bias and eliminate discrimination against parents.</p> | |

SCHEDULE FREE CONSULTATION


Listen to Your Mothers can help you put these actions into motion.



"My business partners (specifically our CEO) are mothers. Having someone who performs at a high level both as a businesswoman and a mother in my organization has made me feel supported."

EMPLOYERS CALL TO ACTION

Flexibility & Benefits

| Actions | Advantages |
|---|---|
| <p>Flexible Structures Support flexibility in all forms—part-time schedule, alternative work schedules, job sharing, reduced work weeks. Provide consistency within each structure.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides competitive edge on recruitment • Increases productivity • Increases employee satisfaction and engagement • Reduces employee turnover and absenteeism • Creates consistency for customers and team members • Expands schedule availability to customers • Improves physical and mental health for employees <div data-bbox="1094 1161 1419 1329">  <p>Quick Win</p> </div> <p data-bbox="1117 1346 1393 1451">Make sure your leave policy is up to date and easily accessible.</p> |
| <p>Remote Work Options Allow for hybrid and remote work wherever the nature of the work permits. Provide alternative flexibility or perks for employees whose jobs require them to work in person full time.</p> | |
| <p>Leave & Time Off Provide paid leave to all parents regardless of gender or birthing status and options for a reduced schedule when employees are transitioning into and coming back from leave. Provide paid time off, sick time, and leave policies that support the employee's own physical and mental health, and that of their children, spouses, and family members.</p> | |
| <p>Childcare Benefits Offer childcare benefit options that are reflective of the needs of employees. Benefits may include dependent care flex spending accounts, back-up childcare benefits, childcare vouchers, subsidies, and on-site childcare.</p> | |
| <p>Awareness of Relevant Laws Ensure managers understand relevant laws (PUMP Act, Pregnant Workers Fairness Act, MA PFML in Massachusetts) and that they are being appropriately followed and implemented consistently.</p> | |

SCHEDULE FREE CONSULTATION

[Listen to Your Mothers can help you put these actions into motion.](#)



“Daycare in the building where I worked made all the difference with my first son - we could commute together and I knew he was nearby.”

EMPLOYERS CALL TO ACTION

Culture & Climate



| Actions | Advantages |
|---|---|
| <p>Equitable Policies and Practices Establish, communicate, and use a strategic change management approach to implement formal policies and practices. Look out for areas of inconsistency in implementation, and inequitable access to flexible work and benefits.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases equity by reducing exceptions made for individuals • Reduces confusion for employees and managers • Increases employee retention • Increases employee sense of belonging • Increases productivity and efficiency • Provides competitive edge on recruitment • Helps direct employer resources to solutions that have the highest return on investment |
| <p>Training & Education Provide training for managers and employee education on available benefits, flexible work policies, leave and coverage planning, and strategies to support working parents.</p> | |
| <p>Communication Norms Set shared expectations around how to use communication tools, frequency of communication, and response time that take into account employee obligations outside of work.</p> | |
| <p>Leaders as Role Models Set and respect boundaries between work and non-work time. Ensure that senior management is modeling by taking time off, talking openly about responsibilities outside of work, and upholding boundaries around work/life.</p> | |
| <p>Measure Satisfaction, Engagement & Retention Regularly solicit feedback from employees and specifically mothers, through anonymous employee surveys, exit interviews, and stay interviews to get real-time feedback and use it to inform future policy and practices.</p> | |



Quick Win

Add your organization's available flexible work options to all job postings.

SCHEDULE FREE CONSULTATION

[Listen to Your Mothers can help you put these actions into motion.](#)



“My manager (a man!) took me aside and explicitly told me to take every single bit of the leave that was available to me, and not to worry about what my job or responsibilities would look like when I came back to work. I would've taken it all anyway, but that single short conversation went such a long way in helping me not to feel guilty about it!”

SURVEY METHODOLOGIES

Design of Research

Our research employs a multifaceted approach, capturing both qualitative and quantitative data. This structure was driven by our desire to understand the individual experiences and perspectives of our respondents (through qualitative data) as well as the more generalizable trends underlying their experiences (through quantitative data). This mixed-method approach allowed us to capture a more holistic understanding of the experience of working mothers.

Data Collection Processes

To execute our mixed-methods approach, we designed The Survey for Working Mothers. The survey was administered online via a Google Survey and translated into three languages other than English: Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic. It was conducted from May 14, 2023 - November 15, 2023 and distributed in a multitude of ways including:

- Emails to networks
- Social Media (LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram)
- Listen to Your Mothers Website
- Flyers posted in the community
- Word of Mouth
- Presentations at Partner Events
- All survey respondents were entered in a raffle for a thank-you prize

Limitations

- We faced challenges with bots and had to spend significant time cleaning the data and excluding responses generated by bots.
- Our initial survey focused on the experiences of mothers and does not represent the perspective of all caregivers.
- There is insufficient racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in the responses we received. We did our best to account for this lack of perspective in the survey data through expanded research on the national landscape and will continue working to expand the demographics of our responses in future surveys.

Ethical Considerations

These responses will help ensure that employer policies, procedures, and practices are informed by those who will be most impacted by their implementation. With our respondents' permission, they may also be used to bring more public attention to the challenges and hopes that working parents have for their workplace. We will never link responses with identifiable information.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The tables below provide a demographic breakdown by race, family structure, age, industry, and annual household income, of the 288 survey responses we received.

| Racial Background | | Family Structure | | Age | |
|----------------------------------|------|------------------------------------|-------|----------|-----|
| White or European | 69% | Two parent household | 74% | Under 17 | 2% |
| Hispanic or Latiné of any race | 9% | Single parent household | 8% | 18-29 | 7% |
| Black or African American | 8% | Additional caregivers in household | 6% | 30-39 | 52% |
| Asian or Asian American | 6% | Co-parenting but living separately | 5% | 40-49 | 29% |
| Multi-racial | 5% | Two+ parents in the household | 2% | 50-59 | 7% |
| Middle Eastern or North African | 1% | A family structure not listed | 2% | 60+ | 3% |
| Prefer not to disclose | 1% | Prefer not to disclose | 0.35% | | |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 0.4% | | | | |

| Industry | | Annual Household Income | |
|---|--------|-------------------------------------|--------|
| Education | 20.49% | < \$50,000 | 6.60% |
| Healthcare | 20.14% | > \$50,000 but less than \$75,000 | 9.72% |
| Nonprofit | 18.75% | > \$75,000 but less than \$100,000 | 9.47% |
| Government & Public Administration | 5.56% | > \$100,000 but less than \$150,000 | 16.14% |
| Consulting | 5.21% | > \$150,000 but less than \$200,000 | 19.79% |
| Banking & Financial Industry | 4.51% | > \$200,000 | 30.55% |
| Legal Services | 3.82% | Not applicable/prefer not to say | 5.56% |
| Construction | 2.78% | | |
| Media, Publishing or Broadcasting | 1.39% | | |
| Other (included in this category: Arts & Entertainment, Agriculture, Food Services, Manufacturing, Real Estate, Transportation, Hospitality, Insurance) | 17.36% | | |

This survey will continuously inform our work of partnering with employers and mothers to reimagine workplaces so that parents can thrive and organizations can retain the talent they need.

ABOUT LISTEN TO YOUR MOTHERS

Drawing on the insights of working mothers, **our mission** is to collaborate with business leaders to shift culture and implement practices that retain and grow talent.

Values

- **Amplifying Stories for Change:** Share stories to ensure that practices, policies, and history reflects the voices of the many, not the few.
- **Engagement at All Levels:** Seek and amplify input from diverse perspectives and levels within an organization.
- **Targeted Universalism:** Center those who are most marginalized to benefit everyone.
- **Advocate for Structural, Cultural, and Systematic Change:** Focus on structural and cultural change on rather than putting the onus on individuals.
- **Realistic Recommendations that Push the Envelope:** Make recommendations implementable while also pushing the envelope on what has historically been “possible”.
- **Design for Liberation:** Develop systems that are human-centered and equity driven.

Vision

We envision a world where all workplaces are designed to support the diverse family structures of their employees. We strive to be the leading agency on developing practices that support working parents in the U.S., and set the standards for what a family-friendly workplace looks like. We believe that engaging and retaining working parents in the U.S. workforce is essential to fostering a thriving economy.



Pictured from left to right: Andrea Lebron, Miriam Rubin, Renée Ompladé, and Katrina Magdol

Our Services

- In-Depth Assessment of Assets and Opportunities
- Responsive Policy and Benefits Package Development
- Change Management and Implementation Support
- Training and Coaching for Managers and HR Leaders
- Evaluation and Progress Measuring

Visit listentoyourmothers.com or email us at info@listentoyourmothers.com for more information



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