

# Achieving Gender Parity: Insights from the Concordia Summit

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By Amanda Roberts



In a notable panel at the recent Concordia Summit in New York, female executives from Mars Chocolate, Walmart and Virgin United joined leaders from civil society to discuss gender diversity and gender parity in the C-suite.

Though these accomplished women have led unique lives, their reflections on the panel illustrated common career experiences, and underscored the inequality women continue to face in the workplace. The panelists offered some insight and advice to help the next generation of women leaders break through the barriers to gender parity.

## Rotate jobs to broaden skillsets and build the leadership pipeline.

From finance to HR, manufacturing to operations, exposure to a broad base of functions within a company provides critical development opportunities for high-potential talent. Tracey Massey (Mars Chocolate) and Gisel Ruiz (Walmart) noted that **rotating through different business units within their companies was key to their successes**. For Ruiz, it enabled her to stay curious, to constantly learn and to be flexible. The variety of experience and consistent track record of taking on new responsibilities and challenges ultimately demonstrated to Walmart leadership that Ruiz could stay ahead of the curve, revealing her high leadership potential. A progression like Ruiz' keeps the pipeline filled with quality candidates, which is crucial for developing future female leaders.

## Push young women.

Societal norms have made women less likely than men to raise their hands for certain challenges, and current female leaders are well-positioned to mentor women climbing the ladder. Massey argued that “pushing” female talent into opportunities like job rotations is a beneficial investment for the person’s career, the sponsor’s upward mobility and, ultimately, the company. Identifying and supporting female talent and driving them toward greater responsibility and accountability keeps the flow of gender diversity to the top going, while also ensuring successful female leaders can progress. As Massey said: **“In order to get into the C-Suite from here, I must find my successor.”**

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## Create progressive, female-driven programs to amplify women in the workplace.

Valerie Jarrett (White House) detailed a progressive initiative spearheaded by female White House staffers, intended to **“amplify” the work – and words – of fellow women**. These women often felt their voices were unheard or ignored among those of their male counterparts. The strategy involved women repeating the key points their female colleagues made, giving credit and recognition to the original ideator. This approach mitigated a not-uncommon practice of men taking credit for great ideas presented by female staffers, and made the female voices louder — both literally and figuratively. The White House amplification initiative demonstrated the power of a collaborative effort toward gender parity. Similar programs can be organically instituted in nearly every work environment.

## Advocate from the top.

To elevate themselves, women need more than just encouragement. They need an advocate — one who can show them the inside track to maneuver around an organization, and also work behind closed doors as a champion when they are not in the room. **All of the panelists attributed their growth to such advocates throughout their careers — many of whom were men, as they have historically held the majority of leadership roles.**

Judith Rodin (Rockefeller Foundation) reflected on the value of initiatives like these, in tandem with individuals who can advocate from the top. Her organization’s **100x25 campaign** aims to ensure there will be 100 women CEOs at *Fortune* 500 companies by 2025. Similarly, at Egon Zehnder our **Leaders & Daughters** initiative gathers prominent global leaders of both genders, along with their daughters, to discuss and identify practical solutions for developing the next generation of women leaders. As advocates for their daughters and the women in their organizations, they have the power to not only transform the conversation, but create change for gender parity.

## The future of gender parity

The experiences of these female leaders illustrate that progress has been made, but that much more needs to be done. As more women break equality barriers, the business benefits will become even more apparent. Gender diversity will no longer be a strategy; it will become the norm.

*Interested in learning more about our Leaders & Daughters initiative? Read our report, **Cultivating the next generation of women leaders**, which contains insights and findings from our 2016 events.*

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