There is no shortage of qualified women to fill leadership roles: Women make up almost half of the U.S. labor force. They outnumber men in earning bachelor’s and master’s degrees and are nearly on par in getting medical and legal degrees. Yet from the corporate boardroom to Congress, from health-care companies to the courts, from non-profit organizations to universities, men are far more likely than women to rise to the highest paying and most prestigious leadership roles.
Barriers to Women’s Leadership
The “qualities” of a leader—as well as the path to achieve leadership roles—are still largely based on an outdated model that shuts women out.

**Old Stereotypes**
Traditionally, power structures value traits thought of as masculine and do not view them as favorably when they are exhibited by women.

**Fewer Connections**
Men still surpass women in having the networks to learn about opportunities and find mentors and sponsors to champion their advancement.

**Bias and Discrimination**
Sexual harassment, hostile work environments and subtle biases are still obstacles. Outright discrimination persists, data from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission show.

**Lack of Flexibility**
Balancing work and family can be a challenge that keeps women from attaining leadership roles. Workplaces are still designed around a decades-old notion of gendered domestic roles.
The Benefits of Gender-Inclusive Leadership

• Just as the status quo is holding women back from leadership positions, it is holding men back from embracing caretaking and support roles. All genders benefit when individuals are free to make their own choices.
• Families are more secure when women move into higher-paying leadership roles, particularly families where the woman is the sole or primary breadwinner.
• With more women in top jobs, businesses benefit from the creativity of a wider range of talented leaders. It enables them to recruit and retain a more talented workforce.

Closing the Leadership Gap

Individuals
• Examine your own biases – and be an ally, mentor and sponsor for women.
• If you’re a woman, seek out skill building opportunities and leadership training. Learn to negotiate for salary and benefits at salary.aauw.org

Employers
• Prioritize an equitable workplace. Widen recruitment networks and candidate pools. Do blind resume screening.
• Support internal growth opportunities, continued professional development and skill training, and equitable retention and promotion policies.
• Promote workplace flexibility policies that will enable all employees to find an appropriate work/life balance.

Policymakers
• Support state pay equity laws and the federal Paycheck Fairness Act. Ban salary-history questions for job applicants and prohibit punishment for workers who share salary information.
• Pass state and local initiatives that promote parental leave and flex-time policies. Support the federal Family and Medical Insurance Leave (FAMILY) Act.
• Support continued EEOC salary collection and reporting requirements to root out pay disparity.