

CLOSING THE PROMOTABILITY GAP:

How Organizations Can Accelerate
Gender Balanced Leadership

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PromoteHer
Accelerating Gender Balanced Leadership

MISSION



As leadership coaches who work with countless women to help them advance in their careers, we're frustrated by the slow pace at which women are rising in organizations and the projected timeline to achieve gender equality.

We are on a mission to play a significant role in what UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres says is the "unfinished business of our time."

In early 2020, we created and tested an assessment and educational framework called *PromoteHer*. By zeroing in on the female-direct leader relationship, we've discovered how to narrow the promotability gap and fast-track promotability.

We are encouraged that 23% of our *PromoteHer Beta* participants earned a raise and a promotion. In addition, participants and their direct leaders reported improved relationships and increased alignment on promotion readiness.

With these results, we're more activated than ever to continue our mission to accelerate gender balanced leadership.

JOIN US,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer".

Jennifer Deane, PCC

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa".

Lisa Martin, PCC

257 YEARS IS A TIMELINE WE CANNOT ACCEPT

In recent years we have experienced a wave of effort and advocacy towards reaching gender equality, but despite all the efforts that are being made¹ we have a long way to go and much more to do. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF) at our current rate of progress it's going to take nearly a century before we achieve parity and close the overall global gender gap.²

The UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres has stated that achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time, and the greatest human rights challenge in our world.

Equal levels of female leaders in our organizations is not only good for business, it's one of the measures towards reaching overall gender equality. It's clear that women are entering the professional workforce in equal numbers as men⁴, however globally, only 36% of senior private sector's managers and public sector's officials are women.⁵

According to the WEF, continued closure of the gender balanced leadership gap at the current pace will extend the time needed to close the overall gender gap from 100 years to 257 years.⁶

SPEEDING UP THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

"Fortunately, the pathways to accelerating gender parity have also become more evident. Companies must treat people with dignity and respect and offer equal opportunities to all members of the society, leveraging gender diversity and investing in all of their talent through ongoing upskilling and reskilling. Governments must create policies that provide talent development, integration and deployment opportunities for all genders, diversify the leadership pool and provide support to families and caregivers, in both youthful and ageing societies alike. And business and government must work together on creating a new economic and social narrative for action and on coordinating and speeding up the process of change."

- Klaus Schwab, Founder and Executive Chairman, World Economic Forum³



AS LEADERSHIP COACHES, WITH YEARS OF EXPERIENCE WORKING WITH
FEMALE LEADERS TO ADVANCE THEIR CAREERS, THIS IS A TIMELINE WE
SIMPLY CANNOT ACCEPT.

We believe there is a way to accelerate gender balanced leadership and, therefore, reduce the number of projected years to reach gender parity worldwide.

FAST-TRACKING FEMALE PROMOTABILITY IS THE LINCHPIN

There are countless resources and research papers that explore the current lack of gender balanced leadership and make recommendations to remedy the situation.⁷ We reviewed this data to help us better understand how we could play a part in speeding up the predicted time frame to build gender balanced workplaces.

We are aware that for the past few years organizations and governments worldwide have been hiring women directly into senior positions as part of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) agenda. We also know from our experience that organizations have been investing in women-centric leadership training, coaching and enhanced EDI policies for some time now.

Yet, there are still not enough women at the top. The hiring, retention and advancement of women remains problematic.⁸

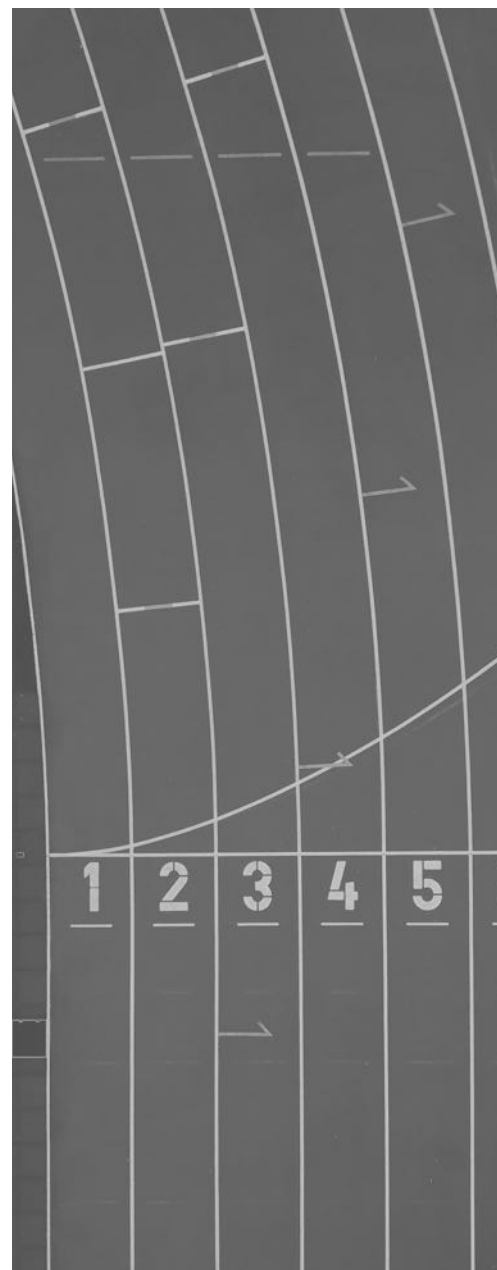
After examining commonly reported reasons as to why women are not populating the higher ranks in organizations⁹, we asked:

“What could have the greatest impact on increasing female representation at senior levels in the workplace?”

Our answer: Find a way to fast-track female promotability. We believed this to be the linchpin.

We will accelerate gender balanced leadership if we can increase the number of female leaders being promoted into higher positions.

BUT BEFORE WE COULD SPEED THINGS UP, WE HAD TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WAS SLOWING THEM DOWN.



THE POWER DYNAMIC THAT DECELERATES PROMOTABILITY



"IT WAS CLEAR TO US THAT ONE OF THE PROMOTION ROADBLOCKS FOR FEMALE EMPLOYEES WAS THIS POWER DYNAMIC WITH THEIR DIRECT LEADER."

In most organizations today, when it comes to promotions, an employee's direct leader holds the balance of power. They tend to be the gatekeeper of information, opportunities and relationships that lead to the promotion of their direct reports. This power dynamic must be navigated skillfully by both the employee and their leader to ensure a robust talent pipeline.

It was clear to us that one of the promotion roadblocks for female employees was this power dynamic with their direct leader. Case in point, when a woman is not championed by her leader it negatively impacts her promotability.

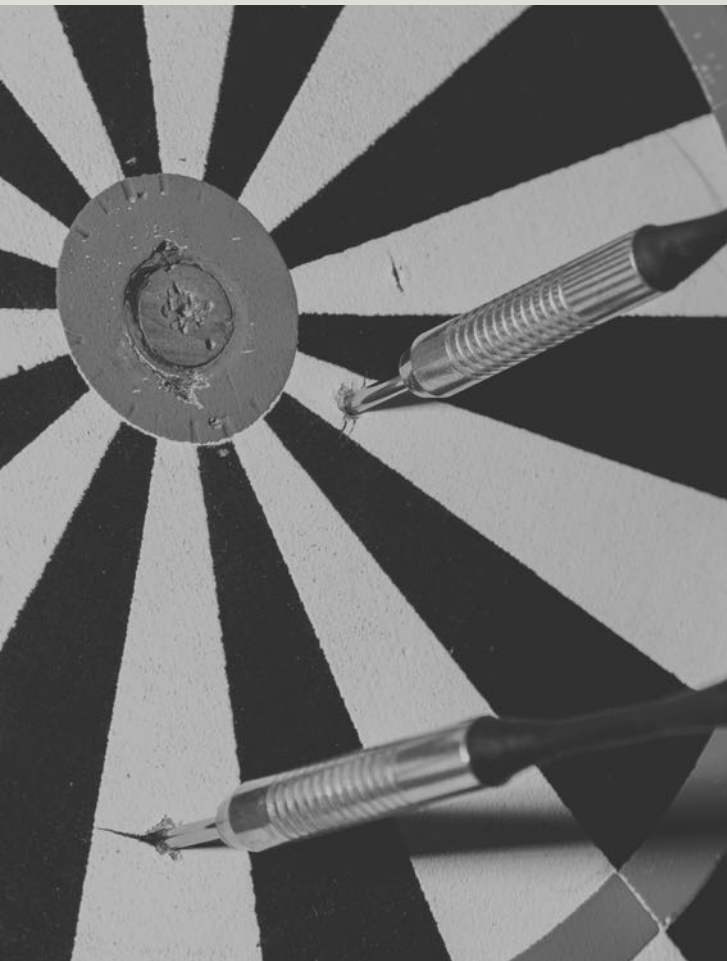
But perhaps we'd overlooked other factors in this pivotal female employee - direct leader relationship that were impeding the pace of promotion.

We took a deeper look.

THOROUGH RESEARCH AND EXTENSIVE INTERVIEWS REVEALED 3 UNIQUE OBSTACLES THAT PLAY INTO THIS POWER DYNAMIC AND CAN DECELERATE PROMOTION FOR WOMEN.

THREE PROMOTABILITY DECELERATORS

LACK OF ACCURACY IN PREDICTING PERFORMANCE



Women often underpredict how they will be perceived by their managers, regardless of the gender of their boss.¹⁰

A female leader's inability to accurately predict how she is perceived by her manager may prevent her from clearly understanding her value. This, in turn, may lead to her downplaying her contributions.

Researchers believe this under-prediction phenomenon is detrimental to both women and the organization as it could be a factor holding women back from workplace advancement.¹¹

LACK OF SPECIFIC AND FREQUENT FEEDBACK



Without consistent access to specific feedback female leaders may not have an accurate sense of their strengths or weaknesses.

In a study conducted by the Harvard Business Review, performance evaluations for female leaders lacked specific references to how her technical skills could improve, therefore leaving women in the dark on how to get ahead in the “critical skills” needed for a job.¹²

In addition to the lack of feedback on technical skills, researchers have identified what they call a “protective hesitation” by some male managers when providing feedback to female employees.¹³ This tendency of some male managers to withhold feedback that they anticipate may be upsetting for their female direct reports deprives women of the valuable feedback needed for them to continue to grow and rise in their careers.

Missing valuable input and information about their performance from others impedes female leaders’ promotability.

3

LACK OF EQUAL AND TRANSPARENT ACCESS TO CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES



A person's ability to engage in career advancing opportunities such as stretch assignments, mentoring and sponsorship directly impacts their ability to be promoted.¹⁴ Multiple research sources find that access to career advancing opportunities are often unclear, unadvertised, and unevenly offered to women in today's workplaces.¹⁵

- ▶ **WOMEN ARE 24% LESS LIKELY THAN MEN TO GET ADVICE FROM SENIOR LEADERS.¹⁶**
- ▶ **WOMEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO GET STRETCH ASSIGNMENTS THAN MEN – WOMEN WILL BE ABLE TO GAIN MORE ACCESS TO THEM IF THEY ARE PUBLICISED.¹⁷**
- ▶ **WOMEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO HAVE A SPONSOR WHO ADVOCATES AND OPENS DOORS FOR THEM.¹⁸**

Furthermore, even when women do have access to a sponsor, they tend to “underestimate the role sponsorship plays in their advancement. And those who do grasp its importance fail to cultivate it.”¹⁹

When women are not “in the know” and don't participate in career advancing opportunities it negatively impacts the speed of their promotion.

CLOSING THE PROMOTABILITY GAP



Not only are these 3 obstacles decelerators of female promotion, they spur misalignment between female employees and their leaders' perceptions of a woman's ability to rise. We call this the Promotability Gap.

The Promotability Gap is the extent to which a female employee and her direct leader are misaligned on her readiness for promotion.

Closing the Promotability Gap became our mission. Clearly, if we could narrow this gap we could improve promotion rates and accelerate gender balanced leadership.

This was our watershed moment. With this new information about the importance of the female employee-direct leader relationship, we evolved our leadership development framework for women and created PromoteHer.

PromoteHer is a program that provides measurement and education designed to help organizations achieve a higher rate of female promotion by:

-  Calculating and improving a woman's Promotability Quotient (PQ)
-  Closing the Promotability Gap

“THE PROMOTABILITY GAP IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH A FEMALE EMPLOYEE AND HER DIRECT LEADER ARE MISALIGNED ON HER READINESS FOR PROMOTION.”

BETA LAUNCHED IN EARLY 2020

From January through early June 2020, we ran the PromoteHer Beta program with 23 women from 3 companies.

The focus of the Beta was to test our theory that measurement and education around promotability would, in fact, narrow the Promotability Gap and improve female promotability. The anchors of the PromoteHer program are the PQ Assessment and Live Virtual Competency Training.

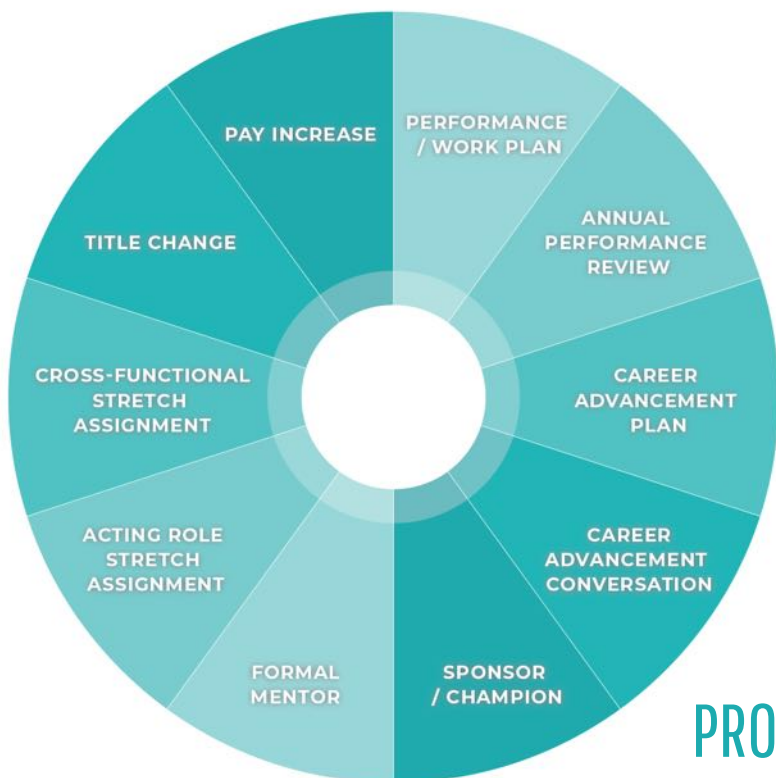


MEASURING THE PROBABILITY OF PROMOTION WITH THE PQ ASSESSMENT

The PQ Assessment calculates an individual's Promotability Quotient (PQ) and the employee-direct leader Promotability Gap.

This dual-rater assessment measures an employee and her direct leader's perspective on her probability of promotion based on 10 primers and 5 competencies.

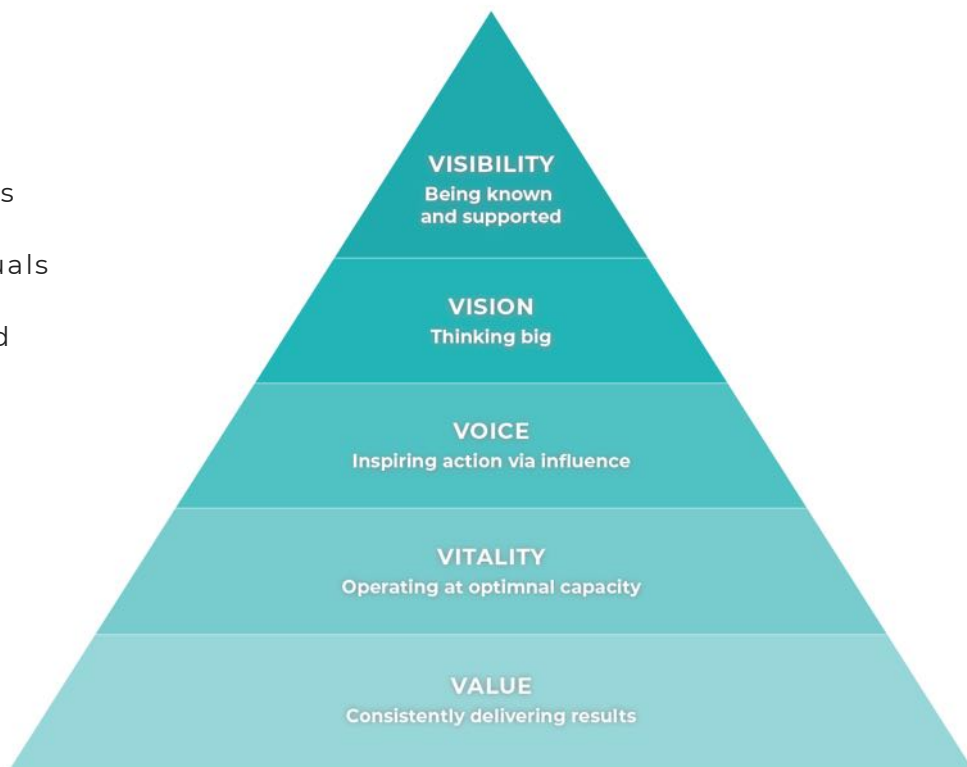
PROMOTABILITY PRIMERS



Promotability Primers are tangible actions, assignments and achievements that position individuals for promotion. These primers are measured as either complete or non-complete providing a snapshot in time of progress.

Promotability Competencies are vital skills that, if cultivated, position individuals for promotion. The competencies are measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

PROMOTABILITY COMPETENCIES



The Promotability Quotient is a rating representing a woman's proficiency in the Promotability Primers and the Promotability Competencies - as perceived by the female employee and her direct leader. The difference in perceptions is the Promotability Gap.

Individuals who possess a high Promotability Quotient and a low Promotability Gap are prepared and positioned to rise and advance in their career.

IMPROVING LEADERSHIP SKILLS WITH LIVE VIRTUAL COMPETENCY TRAINING



The PromoteHer program's educational foundation is based on improving participant's leadership skills in 5 key areas that boost promotability:

VALUE
VITALITY
VOICE
VISION
VISIBILITY

Participants also engage in coaching and career-building assignments that further their ability to lead themselves, their teams, and their organizations.



BETA KEY FINDINGS

It's important to note that halfway through the Beta we were impacted by COVID-19. As a result, some participants withdrew from the program and we weren't able to capture their complete reassessment data.

Despite the challenges we faced, the PromoteHer Beta revealed 4 key findings that will guide our future program delivery.

1

THE PROMOTABILITY GAP IS MEASURABLE

The Promotability Primers were assessed at the beginning and the end of the program. The Promotability Gap for each employee-direct leader pair at the beginning of the program ranged from 1.14% to 60.23%. The average Promotability Gap of all employee – direct leader pairs was 19.22%. This percentage reflects how an employee and her direct leader differ in their perceptions of her readiness for promotion.

Due to challenges of COVID-19 we experienced a decrease in participation in our reassessment, making it difficult to accurately report how the Promotability Gap was impacted by the program. However, from the available data, at the end of the program we saw a shift in Promotability Gaps ranging from 4.55% to 21.59%. The average Promotability Gap of all employee-direct leader pairs at the end of the program was 10.94%.



2

FEMALE UNDERPREDICTION MEETS DIRECT LEADER ROSE- COLOURED GLASSES

When leaders rated their direct reports' progress on 10 promotability primers, 70% (16 out of 23 leaders) indicated a higher score than the employee's themselves. The optimistic perspective held by the leaders highlights a potential cause of the Promotability Gap and underscores the relevancy of the under-prediction phenomenon. To narrow the gap, it's clear that employees and their leaders need to improve their dialogue and gain a shared understanding of progress on these important indicators of promotability.



3

PARTICIPANTS INCREASED THEIR OVERALL PROMOTABILITY

We were able to isolate the employee-direct leader pairs that completed both the assessment and reassessment and calculated the average score to allow us to compare overall promotability progress.

The initial assessment average promotability score was 56.81%, the final average promotability score was 63.63%. This is an improvement in promotability of 6.82%.

4

TWO PROMOTABILITY COMPETENCIES ARE THE BIGGEST HOLDBACKS



The initial assessment showed that both the employees and their direct leaders rated Vision and Visibility as the lowest scoring, on average, of the 5 Promotability Competencies. This clearly indicated there are more opportunities for development for women to build their skills in these areas.

OVERALL, OUR INITIAL FINDINGS SUGGEST WHEN GIVEN THE RIGHT STRUCTURE FOR MEASUREMENT AND EDUCATION WE CAN NARROW THE PROMOTABILITY GAP AND IMPROVE FEMALE PROMOTABILITY.

PromoteHer Program Outcomes*

- ▶▶ 11 completed a career development conversation with their direct leader
- ▶▶ 8 reported that their career development conversation resulted in a clear career plan
- ▶▶ 1 secured a mentor, and 9 are in the process of securing a mentor
- ▶▶ 4 are in the process of securing a champion
- ▶▶ 5 achieved a promotion and a raise, and 1 achieved a raise

**As reported by 16 participants*

WHAT SHOULD ORGANIZATIONS DO TO CLOSE THE GAP?

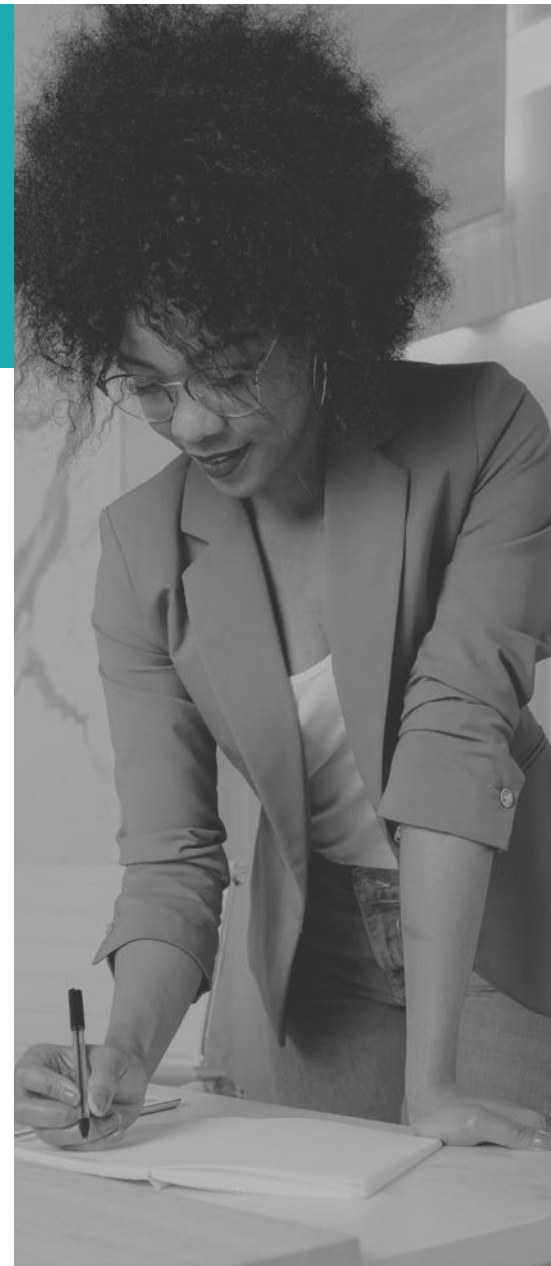
The discovery that fast-tracking female promotion is a linchpin that will accelerate gender balanced leadership has important implications for organizations.

Based on our review of existing research and our own findings from the PromoteHer Beta, we have developed recommendations for organizations to play a pivotal role in closing the Promotability Gap and accelerating gender balanced leadership.

FOSTER FEMALE EMPLOYEE-DIRECT LEADER ALIGNMENT THROUGH COMMITMENT TO MEASUREMENT AND POLICY

Organizations can mitigate the impact of the power dynamic that exists in the employee-direct leader relationship by regularly measuring and adopting policies that strengthen employee-leader alignment. To get started, commit to 3 areas:

1. Measure alignment in the female employee-direct leader relationship.
2. Educate individuals on the power dynamic that can decelerate promotion and the importance of improving alignment to accelerate promotion.
3. Execute formal career development planning by creating policies and structures that outline roles and responsibilities for both the female employee and her direct leader to engage in regularly scheduled career advancement conversations. This fosters alignment and supports promotion via the consistent exchange of critical information and feedback.



PREPARE FEMALES FOR PROMOTION THROUGH ASSESSMENT AND TRAINING ON PROMOTABILITY PRIMERS AND COMPETENCIES

By assessing the specific factors and vital skills that contribute to an individual's successful promotion, organizations can use data to specifically accelerate the speed of female promotion by providing targeted training and development. To get started, commit to 3 areas:

1. Encourage female employees and their direct leaders to engage in regular career advancement conversations.
2. Analyze and leverage the collective data gathered through the organizational assessment process to tailor programs that help female employees achieve actions and skills that lead to their promotion.
3. Provide career advancement resources and tactical education at every level to raise the collective awareness of what helps people advance.



CLEAR THE PATH TO PROMOTION THROUGH EQUITABLE AND TRANSPARENT ACCESS TO CAREER ADVANCING OPPORTUNITIES

Organizations can foster fair and transparent access for female employees (or even increased access) to career advancing opportunities like stretch assignments, mentoring and sponsorship.

Gaining equitable access to these opportunities is pivotal to a female's ability to advance and the speed at which it happens. To get started, commit to 2 areas:

1. Create policies that outline the criteria and process for accessing career advancing opportunities.
2. Inspire senior leaders to champion females within the organization by highlighting the importance of this role to speeding up gender balanced leadership.



LEARN HOW

PromoteHer can accelerate gender balanced leadership in your organization.



Start with attending a live, virtual 30-minute information session with PromoteHer co-founders Jennifer Deane and Lisa Martin.



PromoteHer
Accelerating Gender Balanced Leadership

**CONTACT US AT:
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TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT.**

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