



A CURATED RESEARCH REPORT

Prepared by
CENTER FOR WOMEN AND BUSINESS AT BENTLEY UNIVERSITY

Men as Allies: Engaging Men to Advance Women in the Workplace



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About the Center for Women and Business (CWB)

The CWB is dedicated to advancing women in business, from the classroom to the boardroom. We identify and leverage best-in-class policies and practices and provide tools and training to foster inclusive organizations. We design programs to inform and empower students, alumni, and business professionals.

Our dynamic programs and content focus on critical issues impacting workplace and gender diversity.

- The Multigenerational Workforce—Issues and Impacts
- Men in Partnership to Advance Women
- Mentorship and Sponsorship
- Employee Networks
- Advancing Women to the C-Suite and Boardroom
- Unlocking Unconscious Bias for Inclusive Leadership
- Women's Workplace Retention and Re-Entry
- Corporate Culture and its Impact on Workplace Diversity
- Workplace Flex
- Parental Leave
- Wage Parity
- Pipeline Issues
- Measuring Success

About This Report

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The Center for Women and Business (CWB) at Bentley University has compiled this report based on a literature review and synthesis of current practical research and media coverage on the growth and development of male allies in today's workplace. The goal of the report is to provide a brief, accessible overview of "the state of the state" on men as allies in advancing women in the workplace.

The report addresses: What do men think about the challenges facing women and why? How does corporate culture influence the dynamic for men who want to help? What prevents many men from taking action? What do experts say it takes to ignite change in attitudes and action on the part of men in power? And finally, the report summarizes advice on how to lay the foundation for a successful men as allies initiative.

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“Indeed, gender mainstreaming is an idea whose time has come—for men.”¹

—Michael S. Kimmel, Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at Stony Brook University and Executive Director of the Center for the Study of Men and Masculinities

MEN AS ALLIES: WHAT’S ALL THE BUZZ?

The notion of *men as allies* is not new. Michael Kimmel wrote the quote above more than a decade ago. In fact, we can trace the roots of the concept to the men’s movements of the 1970s and the work of experts like Kimmel and his contemporaries, Bill Proudman and Michael Welp, founders of the consulting firm White Men as Full Diversity Partners. These thought leaders have been researching, writing, and speaking on this and related issues for several decades. Even as far back as the 1800s, at the historic Seneca Falls women’s conference, 40 men, including Frederick Douglass, were present to support women.

Flash forward to today, and the concept of men as allies has become a focal point of gender diversity initiatives, gaining ground in our corporate and societal lexicon. Indeed, our extensive research and literature review revealed an abundance of prescriptive articles instructing men (primarily white) on how to become allies to women and other minorities.

What’s Fueling the Trend?

Shifting public opinion is likely playing a role in the increased focus on male allies. People took notice as actress Emma Watson addressed the United Nations in 2014, urging men to join the feminist movement under the banner #HeForShe. Former President Obama garnered attention when he proclaimed he was a feminist, and soon other male public figures and male celebrities followed suit.

The men as allies trend is certainly also fueled by changes in the business world and our increasingly divisive political and social climate.^{2&3} These days, hyperbolic media and politics are exacerbating rifts in gender equality. In business, the diversity challenges of the tech industry and the booming sharing economy are bringing to the forefront the profound need for enlightened male allies.⁴

Take for example the alleged sexist corporate culture at Uber and the “Male Allies Plenary Panel” at the 2014 Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing.⁵ The panel, featuring “well-meaning, intelligent” male executives from Facebook, Google, and Microsoft, attracted harsh criticism for its myopic conversation and advice.^{6,7,8} The best way for women to deal with workplace discrimination, the male executives said, was for them to “work harder” and “speak up.”⁹

Meanwhile, research by some of the world’s most influential institutions, including the World Bank, Goldman Sachs, the International Monetary Fund, Ernst & Young, the World Economic Forum, McKinsey & Company, and others, has clearly demonstrated that women’s full economic participation leads to greater competitiveness.¹⁰ In an uncertain political, business and social atmosphere, many corporate leaders are opening their eyes to shifting public opinion and embracing the increasingly strong business case for gender equity—and the impact they can have as male allies. As Robert Zoellick, former director of the World Bank, said, “Gender equality is the right thing to do. And it is also smart economics.”¹¹

“Visionary men have long been public champions and behind the scenes dealmakers for the cause of women’s inclusion. Today we need them more than ever.”¹²

—Ambassador Melanne Verveer and Kim Azzarelli, Chair of Cornell Law School’s Avon Global Center for Women and Justice

More Work To Do

Despite the growth in understanding and support from male colleagues, anecdotal evidence indicates that a significant need for greater awareness and action still exists. McKinsey's *Women in the Workplace* report notes, "Although company commitment to gender parity is at an all-time high, companies do not consistently put their commitment into practice, and many employees are not on board."¹³

This is also supported by research. The 2014 Pershing Harris Poll found that younger men were less open to accepting women leaders than older men were;¹⁴ and a 2014 Harvard Business School (HBS) survey of MBA graduates showed that three-quarters of millennial women anticipated their career would be at least as important as their partners', while half of the men expected that their own careers would take priority. Likewise, less than half of the women MBA graduates believed they would handle most of the child care, while two-thirds of their male peers believed their wives would do so.¹⁵

Many experts predicted that millennial men would naturally become allies for women in business, ushering in a new era of enlightened interpersonal relations. The current body of research should dispel any notion that millennial men see women as equals. The HBS MBA survey concluded, "Indeed, this information raises a serious concern that unless something is done soon to change millennial men's attitudes toward women, these men ascending to the C-suite may hinder — rather than advance — current efforts to reduce the discriminatory effects of gender bias."¹⁶ Supporting this thesis, a 2016 study conducted by McKinsey and LeanIn.Org concluded that at our current pace, "it will take more than 100 years for the upper reaches of U.S. corporations to achieve gender parity."¹⁷

What is a Male Ally?

The documentary *Code: Debugging the Gender Gap* describes a male ally as "...a man who will advocate for women even when there are no women in the room."¹⁸

Male allies are men who associate with, cooperate with, and support women. However, this basic definition does not begin to describe the complexities inherent in the term. "Allies listen, co-create opportunity, and build a personal brand for accountability and trust. For us men, we aren't allies to women because we aspire to be, or because we say we are," says consultant Chuck Shelton. "We're allies only when specific women are willing to say to us and others, 'Here's an example of how you are collaborating with me, supporting me, making and keeping promises, and receiving from me in a two-way relationship....'"¹⁹

Male allies come in many forms, but perhaps it is best not to put the focus on what male allies are, but instead on what they can *do*. A 2016 Fairygodboss and Artemis survey highlighted ways in which men have been allies to advancing women's inclusion at work (see Table 1).

Table 1: Ways I Have Been an Ally

Privately advocated for equality, inclusion and diversity	53%
Publicly advocated for equality, inclusion and diversity	41%
Met with women in your workplace to discuss equality, inclusion and diversity	29%
Identified cases of inequality or lack of diversity and worked to fix them	20%
I have NOT acted as an ally	21%

Source: Fairygodboss and Artemis Connection. "Men in the Workplace: An in-depth exploration of what men think of gender diversity in the workplace." Slide presentation, 20 September 2016. Page 32.

WHAT ARE THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF GENDER BALANCE?

It is clear from a multitude of sources, improving gender representation in the workplace benefits everyone—it is good for our workplace culture, our professional development, our society, our personal lives, and the financial bottom line. But these gains are only attainable with the cooperation and support of our male colleagues, mentors, and sponsors.

Men as allies expert Michael Kimmel explains, “We cannot fully empower women and girls without also engaging men and boys, and when we do, we find out that gender equality is a good thing for men as well as women.”²⁰ Because the majority of senior leaders in today’s business world are still men, they are in the best position to influence cultural and organizational change.²¹

Business Value

Many organizations have failed to think strategically about women as a business opportunity, and how that strategy could possibly be the solution to some of their most pressing business problems.²² However, it is well established that talented women leaders change the work environment for the better, delivering improved financial results, retention and productivity, and deepening the talent pool.²³ When it comes to the business case, the proof is in the numbers.

On a macro level, a recent report from McKinsey Global Institute estimated that \$12 trillion could be added to global growth by advancing gender equality.²⁴ Even at the individual company level, we

see a correlation between financial performance and female leadership. A landmark and much-quoted report from Credit Suisse Research Institute found that companies with women directors outperformed those without women directors in average growth, price/book-value multiples, and return on equity.²⁵ Many CEOs are taking these stats to heart. Sebastien Bazin, CEO of Accor, is committed to closing the pay gap in his company, doubling the share of women in COO roles by 2020 and tripling the share of women on the executive committee by 2018. He also pledged to get 50,000 male employees (60% of the company) to commit to be HeForShe champions for gender equality.²⁶

Other numbers that make the case for gender balance include:

- Women in the U.S. influence nearly 75% of purchasing decisions, and globally control over \$29 trillion in consumer spending.²⁷ Raising women’s employment levels would increase GDP by 5% in the U.S. and more in other countries.²⁸
- Thomson Reuters reported that average stock prices of gender-diverse corporate boards outperformed those with no women.²⁹ Catalyst reported a 26% difference in return on invested capital (ROIC) between the top quartile companies (with 19-44% women board members) and bottom quartile companies (with no women directors).³⁰
- Fortune 500 companies with gender-balance consistently outperform those that don’t. They navigate economic downturns better and at a greater rate.³¹

“Success today, whether in business or in our communities, requires cultural dexterity – the ability to work effectively with people who are different from ourselves. To build that skill we must understand the lens through which we view the world. For white men, that means acknowledging that we have a race and a gender. It also means recognizing that we can contribute to advancing diversity in our organizations.”³²

–Bob Moritz, Global Chairman, PwC

Cultural, Social and Personal Value

There is large body of research demonstrating the positive impact on workplace culture of supporting and advancing women. Building understanding, respect, and stronger relationships between male and female colleagues will improve working lives, outputs, access to sponsorship, and women's career advancement.³³ However, committing to gender equality means men must actively engage to change workplace culture.³⁴

Men are often not aware of the personal benefits of gender equality, such as freedom to share financial responsibilities with a female spouse or partner, more rewarding intimate relationships with women, freedom to be more involved with children, freedom from limiting masculine gender norms, and better psychological and physical health.³⁵

THE STARTING POINT: WHAT DO MEN THINK?

Research demonstrates unequivocally that the key to “getting men on board” is awareness. Men must first recognize their biases and be open to attitude change. But before beginning that journey, both men and women must understand what men are thinking.

What Bias?

Men tend to act as individuals, believing they are not influenced by any group or culture. The hard work for most men is recognizing and acknowledging that the dominant culture in most organizations is a (white) male culture, and that this culture affects everyone's behavior, even our leaders'. To use an analogy suggested by Bill Proudman, men are like fish in a fishbowl. Because they never have to leave, they never see the water that surrounds them. They must make a conscious effort to see the culture around them—the water in the fishbowl.³⁶

Michael Kimmel explains that, “Without confronting men's sense of entitlement, we won't see why so many men resist gender equality.”³⁷ For many men, “gender equality is a zero-sum game.” They believe that if women win, men will lose.^{38&39} If more women advance into higher-level jobs and gain more power and influence, then men will lose jobs and have less power and influence. This myth leads men to fear gender diversity efforts and avoid serving as allies.

Not My Problem

A study, conducted by Creative Coaching consultant Karen Barr, interviewed 25 senior male business leaders over nine months and found that many men did not believe gender diversity was a business critical issue. “There was a lack of understanding on the impact of women on your ROI, or your numbers.” Some truly disbelieved figures Barr quoted from well-respected, current studies conducted by McKinsey, Catalyst, the Rebey Institute, and the Grattan Institute. “They wanted...to see the results themselves.” Furthermore, they didn't accept the issue of women's leadership as their responsibility.⁴⁰

The Fairygodboss/Artemis survey found that most men interviewed didn't perceive gender bias to be a major issue in the workplace. Only 33% believed there was gender bias at work and only 10% believed their own workplaces harbored any kind of gender bias.⁴¹

It's worth noting that women's perceptions of fairness in the workplace differs from men's. According to the McKinsey/LeanIn.Org study, a majority of women believed they were subtly disadvantaged in daily interactions at work and questioned workplace fairness.⁴² A Cambridge University study reported that 43% of women aged 28-40 felt that opportunities to progress were not equal between men and women.⁴³

Awkward and Unsure

Men who do embrace gender equity as their responsibility understand the need for a shift in workplace culture, but many do not know how to go about making it happen.⁴⁴ When men do recognize a gender issue at work and want to help, they admit to feeling uncomfortable. The sentiment of men in the Fairygodboss/Artemis study was, "...it's kind of awkward" or "I might say the wrong thing." Only 41% of men surveyed said they had publically advocated for a woman; 21% said they have not advocated or acted as an ally.⁴⁵

PwC Global Chairman Bob Moritz described this hesitency, "When the topic of diversity comes up, white men often feel labeled 'the bad guys.' We can be so worried about saying the wrong thing that sometimes we default to saying nothing instead. But that is a mistake."⁴⁶

Work/Life Imbalance

Men see inclusion and work/life balance as the biggest challenge women face in the workplace, followed by childcare and mentorship, this according to the Fairygodboss/Artemis report. At the same time and in contradiction, men see the lack of flexible work options for women as the least important problem.⁴⁷ (See Figure 1) A 2013 Pew Survey found that men placed nearly equal—and high—value on "being a good parent" (91% of men; 94% of women) and "having success in marriage" (83% of men; 84% of women).⁴⁸ A short mental leap tells us that this data supports the need for men to help women. If women are to "lean in" to attain these goals, they need men to help at work and at home.



Source: Fairygodboss and Artemis Connection. "Men in the Workplace: An in-depth exploration of what men think of gender diversity in the workplace." Slide presentation, 20 September 2016. Page 28.

The Intention Gap

University of Cambridge research, confirmed by the McKinsey/LeanIn.Org study, identified a gap between intention and implementation. The research showed that, “It is not easy to change the established, if unwritten, rules of the way power is wielded in the workplace.”⁴⁹ More than 75% of CEOs included gender equality in their top ten business priorities, but gender outcomes across the largest companies are not changing. Research indicates that corporate America promotes men at 30% higher rates than women during their early career stages and that entry-level women are significantly more likely than men to have spent five or more years in the same role.⁵⁰ The data suggests we fall short in translating top-level commitment into a truly inclusive work environment.

The Good News

When it comes to what men think, there is also positive news. Many sources point to the fact that men generally have good intentions. About 70% of men in the University of Cambridge study believed that a more equal society between men and women would be better for the economy. Many of the problems women report, the study suggests, are caused by unconscious behaviors.⁵¹ These days, says Deborah Spar, president of Barnard College, most men “are firmly committed to advancing the careers of women around them. They want their wives to succeed; they want their daughters to succeed; they want their female friends to succeed; they want to reap the rewards of investing in the trajectories of female employees and co-workers. The problem is that they just don’t know how.”⁵²

“When male leaders show that advocating for and sponsoring women is important, the culture and dynamics shift.”⁵³

—Robert Pantano, Senior Vice President,
Cardinal Health

WHAT IGNITES ATTITUDE CHANGE? MOVING FROM THOUGHTS TO ACTION

In order to gain genuine support for women, we know we need to help increase men’s awareness of gender bias. Indeed, Catalyst research demonstrates that the greater men’s awareness of gender bias is, the more likely they are to feel it is important to achieve gender equality. But how do we get there, especially when research also tells us that men might be prone to negative views – even worse than inaction – before they gain knowledge through D&I training or other programs?^{54&55}

Go Personal and Professional

Studies show that a combination of personal and professional experiences can profoundly affect men’s thinking about gender diversity in the workplace. Research on men as allies in the tech industry conducted by the National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT) found that “men described various motivations for becoming advocates, including having a minority experience themselves; relationships with their wives, daughters, and mothers; having had female bosses, mentors, or colleagues; attending workshops on bias; and witnessing bias in action.”⁵⁶ It is clear that we must help men define and clarify their personal motivations.

Define Self-Interest

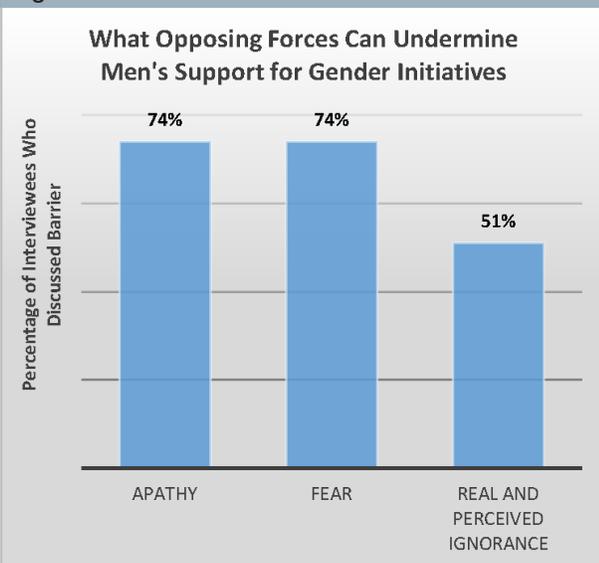
Data indicates that for men to get the greatest impact from training initiatives, they must see such programs as relevant to their jobs. This means bottom line motivators are important, but perhaps surprisingly, so are values like social responsibility. Catalyst research shows that men’s interest in training is linked to a belief that they will develop skills that can help improve the communities in which they operate.⁵⁷ And those who display a strong sense of fairness are significantly more likely to become male advocates for gender equity.⁵⁸

Consultant Chuck Shelton adds that a “competitive spirit can also fuel many men’s willingness to consider the opportunities of being an ally.” He calls it the “Sustainable Collaborative Advantage: when you are known as a man who collaborates well with women, they will choose to work with you.”⁵⁹

Recognize Barriers

It is not easy for many men—even believers—to speak up and act on behalf of women. It is often easier to institute employee resource groups and training programs than it is to make personal behavioral changes. According to Catalyst and NCWIT research, there are many factors discouraging men from taking action as allies (see Figure 2).⁶⁰ These include apathy, fear, lack of leadership support, lack of time, and a belief that the problem is too daunting. Men also cite lack of clear rationale and lack of consistency. Another deterrent is the notion that “we’ve made progress and we are done.” This can be related to fatigue; advocates often become discouraged when progress feels too slow. Good diversity training and men as allies initiatives can address these issues.

Figure 2



Source: Prime, Jeanine and Moss-Racusin. Engaging Men in Gender Initiatives: What Change Agents Need to Know. Catalyst, 2009. Page 14.

Provide Good Training

Creating and implementing effective men as allies training initiatives requires thoughtful planning. Here’s some expert advice:

■ Ensure a Sense of Inclusion

Any effective male allies training will first make sure men feel included in the discussion. Some companies have focused solely on women to fix the gender problem, unwittingly alienating men. Yet if men feel part of the diversity workforce—especially white men—they will be more engaged. It’s important to note that 2016 Gallup research suggests that disengaged employees cost the U.S. more than \$450 billion each year in lost productivity.⁶¹

Jorge Quezada, chief diversity officer of Kraft Group, says when he sees men buy-in, it can be like a lightbulb going off. “In the inclusion courses we teach at Kraft, the big ‘aha’ moment for us is when men have said, ‘Oh, thank you, we are finally part of the conversation!’ That has been really exciting when they realize they are not being told what to do, but are being invited to be part of the solution.”⁶²

It is also important to be clear that men are not invited to join the discussion just so they can be blamed for gender inequity problems.

■ Identify Male Privilege

Help men better understand the potentially confining aspects of masculine norms. (Take it like a man. Be a man’s man.)⁶³ Men might not realize that these can suppress their willingness to acknowledge and act to correct gender bias. Catalyst’s research showed that the more men were willing to defy some masculine norms, the higher their awareness of gender bias became. Help men learn what it means to have male privilege.⁶⁴

■ Appeal to a Sense of Fair Play

Although awareness of gender bias is crucial, it is a sense of fair play that ultimately distinguishes whether or not men champion gender equality or not.⁶⁵ The moral imperative to act fairly to all is a reason men in the tech industry cited as to why they supported diversity efforts. They see it as "the right thing to do." According to the NCWIT study, 38% had been convinced by moral reasons to bring more gender diversity into the field of computing.⁶⁶ Heightening men's sense of fair play and engaging them in solution-building can be powerful strategies.

■ Tell Stories

Research shows that personal stories increase empathy, and might increase awareness in a male colleague who has trouble understanding the struggles women or minorities face at work. A woman interviewed for the University of Cambridge report shared this: "It was a surprise to me how male dominated the workplace was. Designed by men, for men, with a dominant male culture and set of values." And a man in the same study: "I have seen women make comments or suggestions in meetings and them being glossed over until a man says exactly the same thing and then everyone says 'oh yes, good idea.'"⁶⁷

■ Use Social Proof

If a man feels like everyone else at work is supporting women, then he is more likely to support women as well. Influential managers can play a critical role here.⁶⁸ Sharing examples of what other prominent companies and CEOs are

doing to advance gender equity can also serve as social proof. Warren Buffett has fought to bring women onto the board of Berkshire Hathaway—there are now three. Buffett believes women are key to America's prosperity and wants to continue promoting women's leadership in business so that men immediately consider females as qualified candidates for top positions, without having to be prompted.⁶⁹

■ Make the Business Case

As multiple resources confirm, the most persuasive arguments for men to support diversity are business case arguments. Since we know many male employees must first overcome zero-sum thinking, it is important to demonstrate how gender diversity is better for everyone, not just women. Diversity helps companies reach out to new customer bases, improves and deepens the talent pool, and fosters a greater diversity of ideas and innovation.^{70&71}

In *Why Women*, Jeffrey Halter points to the fact that, "Most companies fail to put an economic value on women's leadership."⁷² Yet, McKinsey's *Diversity Matters* study found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15% more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians.⁷³ And, a Peterson Institute for Global Economics survey of 22,000 firms globally found that increasing the number of women in the C-suite from 0% to 30% results in a one percentage point increase in net margin. This translates to a 15% increase in profitability for a typical firm.⁷⁴

"In order to convince your organization to embrace a culture of truly inclusive leadership, it's crucial to couple a deep understanding of the big picture with whichever company-specific cases will bring these issues closer to home. That's when the hard work begins: putting effective programs in place to support the new culture, ensuring that unconscious bias is properly understood and consistently rooted out, and holding senior leaders accountable for real, measureable progress. Good leaders don't just talk about inclusive leadership. They get results. "⁷⁵

—Jim Turley, Retired Chairman & CEO, Ernst & Young and Honorary Director and Former Chair of Catalyst's Board of Directors

CUTTING TO THE CHASE: HOW CAN MEN HELP WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE?

Once you've converted attitudes and diminished barriers – like fear and apathy – you can get down to the business of achieving gender balance in partnership with male allies. To reinforce the work you've done in training initiatives, also consider these factors.

Check the Culture

Does the workplace culture support authentic male ally efforts? We've noted previously that in workplace culture there is often a gap between intention and implementation of change. Here are a few simple, high-level recommendations to create a supportive culture for your male advocacy work.

- Get the facts about your company – men's attitudes, women's, and the differences in what they say. What's happening at the middle manager level?
- Have honest conversations – men need to ask their female colleagues and especially their female direct reports about the barriers they face at work and home.
- Lead and hold people accountable – leaders drive the culture so decide what metrics model to use. Commit at the top to create an inclusive workplace that holds managers accountable.
- Train managers – research shows that front-line managers have a significant impact.⁷⁶

Recruit Male Mentors and Sponsors

Share these practical steps with male employees ready to become mentors and sponsors of women:

- Identify a woman candidate, a woman with whom you have worked, or one you have observed at work, who has made a strong positive impression on you.
- Consider what you see as this woman's particular strengths and talents and what you know about her background, work experience, current work situation, career goals and ambitions.
- Explain how you want to help her and why. Be clear. Ask open-ended questions, listen attentively to her answers, and try to see things through her eyes.
- In all of these considerations, inquiries and conversations, make no assumptions. Be sure your conclusions are based on hard facts, not on what you assume to be true.⁷⁷

Stay Tuned

It is worth noting that many of the sources cited in this report are recent articles rather than academic research. Few bona fide studies have been conducted to date. Subsequent to this report, we will host an intensive CWB-moderated executive roundtable discussion exploring current best practices and challenges companies face as they implement men as allies programs. We will issue a follow-up executive blueprint report reflecting the takeaways from that meeting, along with a practical roadmap for launching your own Men as Allies group.

“When it comes to ensuring that women have the best chances of advancing in corporate leadership, our entire organizational structure and culture should support the idea that women in leadership are the expectation rather than the exception. In order to thrive, companies need the leadership of talented, intelligent women, and those women truly deserve opportunities to lead.”⁷⁸

– Michael Simonds, President and Chief Executive Officer, Unum US

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- ¹⁰ Verveer and Azzarelli
- ¹¹ Zoellick
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- ¹³ Lean In and McKinsey, P 18
- ¹⁴ Pershing, P10
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- ⁶¹ Gallup, P19
- ⁶² Diversity Woman
- ⁶³ Prime and Moss-Racusin, P3
- ⁶⁴ Proudman
- ⁶⁵ Prime and Moss-Racusin, P8
- ⁶⁶ Ashcroft, P19
- ⁶⁷ Univ. of Cambridge, P6&12
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- ⁷⁰ Ashcroft, P19
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 - ⁷⁵ Turley
 - ⁷⁶ Fairygodboss and Artemis, P6
 - ⁷⁷ Abbott
 - ⁷⁸ CWB, P2

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