



**COLORADO WOMEN'S
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**

WORK *THAT WORKS* FOR ALL

Employee Retention Strategies from the
Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce

Retention is a core business strategy

...that directly impacts your bottom line. Every time you lose a talented employee, you're not just facing recruitment and training costs. You're losing institutional knowledge, disrupting team dynamics, and weakening the organizational resilience you've worked hard to build.

Organizations that get retention right are the ones that save money, preserve what they know, and create workforces that can weather whatever comes next. Here's what the data tells us: 94% of employees say they'd stay longer if their employer invested in their development. That's a clear signal. Yet too many workplaces are still losing good people because they haven't created environments where everyone, especially women, feels genuinely supported and valued.

At the Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce (CWCC), we're guided by a simple belief: work should WORK for everyone. When you create conditions for women to succeed, you're not just helping half of your workforce. You're transforming how your entire organization operates. Retention strategies that support women support all team members.

The business case here is straightforward. When your team members see the workplace as fair and inclusive, they show up differently. They're more willing to take risks, speak up with ideas, and stay engaged. They're far less likely to burn out or start looking for the exit, and they innovate more. Those are the outcomes every leader wants.

What you'll find in the pages ahead are evidence-based strategies pulled from research and real-world practice. These aren't theoretical exercises or aspirational wish lists. These are practical, implementable approaches that work. The only question is how quickly you're ready to start.

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Retention Strategies That Work For ALL

At the Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce (CWCC), we believe work should WORK for everyone.

That's the driving force behind this resource guide.

The strategies that follow aren't just about supporting women — though that's certainly part of our mission. They are about building workplaces that work better for everyone.

When you create clear paths to advancement, equip managers to truly support their teams, and foster cultures of genuine inclusion, you're strengthening your entire workforce.



Preserve Flexibility as a Competitive Advantage

Flexible work arrangements are key retention drivers that allow employees to manage personal and professional demands. True flexibility goes beyond remote work; it includes structuring the workday to respect employees' lives.



ACTION STEPS:

1

Preserve remote and hybrid options.

Resist the trend toward full return-to-office mandates unless truly necessary for the work.

2

Offer flexible scheduling that respects care giving realities.

Allow employees to adjust their work hours to accommodate personal needs. Be thoughtful about school drop-off times (typically 7:30-9:00 AM) and pick-up times (typically 2:30-4:00 PM), and avoid scheduling all-hands meetings or major deadlines exclusively on Mondays or Fridays when caregivers face additional challenges.

3

Establish core collaboration hours.

Define a window (e.g., 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM) when most meetings should occur, protecting early mornings and late afternoons for flexible scheduling.

4

Create protected work time.

Distinguish between “meeting hours” and “focus work hours.” Consider implementing meeting-free blocks (such as afternoons or specific days) so employees can accomplish deep work without interruption.

5

Ensure flexibility doesn't limit advancement.

Track whether employees who use flexible arrangements receive equal opportunities for promotion and high-visibility projects.

Treat Childcare as Infrastructure

Childcare is not a perk, it's fundamental infrastructure that determines whether working parents can fully participate in the workforce. The lack of affordable, accessible, reliable childcare systematically drives women to leave jobs or reduce hours, particularly during critical career-building years. Organizations that treat childcare as essential see dramatic improvements in retention, productivity, and loyalty.

ACTION STEPS:

1

Subsidize childcare costs.

Offer stipends, reimbursements, or pre-tax dependent care accounts that meaningfully offset the high cost of childcare. Even partial subsidies can make the difference between staying in the workforce and leaving.

2

Partner with childcare providers.

Negotiate corporate rates with local childcare centers, preschools, and after-school programs to secure spots and reduced fees for employees.

3

Provide on-site or near-site childcare when feasible.

Establish on-site childcare facilities or partner with nearby providers. This reduces commute complexity and allows parents to be close to their children during the workday.

4

Offer backup care and support flexible arrangements.

Contract with backup care providers for emergencies—sick children, school closures, nanny cancellations. Recognize that families use diverse care models (nannies, family members, co-ops) and structure benefits to accommodate multiple approaches, not just traditional daycare.

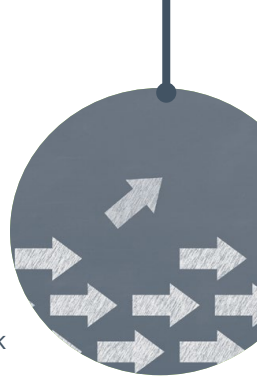
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Expand care beyond childcare.

Broaden the definition of “care” to include aging parents and family members with disabilities. Provide resource and referral services to help employees navigate the complex care landscape.



Design Career Paths for Non-Linear Journeys



Traditional career pathways assume a linear trajectory that doesn't reflect reality, especially for women. These rigid structures penalize employees who take leave, pursue lateral moves, work part-time, or step back for caregiving. Flexible, transparent career pathways retain talent and build a more resilient workforce.

ACTION STEPS:

1

Map multiple routes to advancement.

Move beyond the single-track promotion model. Show how employees can advance through technical expertise, project leadership, cross-functional experience, or people management—recognizing that excellence takes many forms.

2

Normalize skip-level meetings.

Create regular opportunities for employees to meet with their manager's manager. This increases accessibility to senior leadership and gives team members a clearer picture of career pathways and organizational opportunities.

3

Make lateral moves a strength, not a setback.

Reframe lateral moves as valuable opportunities to build breadth and versatility. Ensure these moves don't delay or derail promotion timelines.

4

Create transparent advancement criteria.

Clearly document what skills, experiences, and accomplishments are needed for each level. Remove the mystery from "what it takes" to move up.

5

Value skills over tenure.

Focus advancement decisions on demonstrated competencies and contributions rather than years in role. Establish "returner" pathways that create clear routes back to leadership for employees who have stepped back or taken extended leave.

6

Communicate pathways proactively and democratize development.

Don't wait for employees to ask about advancement. Managers should regularly discuss career options. Offer development opportunities at all levels—don't reserve training and stretch assignments for people on the "high-potential" track.

Launch Returnships That Ease Reentry

Returning to work after an extended leave can be challenging. Employees worry about being out of touch, feeling disconnected, or losing career momentum. Without structured support, this transition can lead to decreased confidence and turnover. Returnship programs provide the scaffolding employees need to successfully reintegrate.

ACTION STEPS:

1

Create structured onboarding for returners.

Develop a formal return-to-work process that includes catch-up sessions on organizational changes, project updates, and new tools. Assign a return-to-work buddy or mentor to help navigate changes and provide social support during reintegration.

2

Implement phased returns when possible.

Allow employees to gradually increase their hours or responsibilities over the first few weeks back, giving them time to adjust to the transition.

3

Provide skills refreshers and clear expectations.

Offer optional training sessions or access to learning resources to help returning employees update technical skills. Be explicit about performance standards, project priorities, and career development opportunities.

4

Protect returners from career penalties.

Ensure employees returning from leave receive equal consideration for promotions, raises, and high-visibility projects. Track career progression data to identify and address any patterns of disadvantage.

5

Normalize the transition.

Have leaders and managers openly discuss the challenges of returning from leave and model supportive language that removes stigma. When multiple employees return around the same time, facilitate peer support groups where they can share experiences and strategies.

Turn Senior Leaders into Active Sponsors

Sponsorship goes beyond mentorship. Sponsors actively advocate for their protégés, opening doors to opportunities and advancement. Since women tend to have less access to senior-level sponsorship, formal programs can help level the playing field.

ACTION STEPS:

1

Launch formal sponsorship programs.

Create structured initiatives that pair high-potential employees with senior leaders who will actively advocate for them.

2

Train sponsors on their role.

Clarify that sponsorship means using influence to create opportunities, not just giving advice.

3

Set clear expectations and accountability.

Define what active sponsorship looks like and track outcomes (promotions, high-visibility assignments for sponsored employees).

4

Prioritize women and underrepresented groups.

Since these groups often lack informal access to sponsorship, make them priority participants in formal programs.

5

Recognize sponsors for their impact.

Include sponsorship effectiveness as part of leadership performance evaluation.



Build Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) That Drive Connection and Growth

ERGs play a powerful role in helping employees feel connected to their colleagues and company. They provide informal mentorship, professional advice, and spaces to discuss workplace challenges. For women, who often have less access to sponsorship from senior leaders, ERGs can be especially valuable.

ACTION STEPS:

1

Ensure ERGs are set up for success.

Provide budget, executive sponsorship, and time for employees to participate without career penalty.

2

Align ERGs with strategic goals.

Connect ERG activities to broader organizational objectives.

3

Set ground rules to create trust.

Establish confidentiality norms and psychological safety so members feel comfortable sharing experiences.

4

Consider opening women's ERGs to all employees.

This can help build a culture of allyship to better understand challenges women face, while still maintaining spaces for women-only conversations when needed.

5

Add ERGs around shared interests.

Supplement identity-based ERGs with interest-based groups (e.g., working parents, outdoor enthusiasts) to build cross-functional communities.

Empower Managers as Career Champions

Managers are central to employee retention and career growth. When managers support career development, employees are significantly more likely to receive raises or promotions and feel comfortable speaking up and taking risks. The impact is especially pronounced for women.



ACTION STEPS:

1

Give managers time to support their teams.

Reduce administrative burdens and provide tools (like AI-assisted scheduling) to free up manager capacity for coaching and development.

2

Train managers in coaching skills.

Provide training on how to have meaningful career conversations, give actionable feedback, and support employee growth.

3

Set expectations for regular check-ins.

Require managers to have at least monthly one-on-ones focused on career development, not just project updates.

4

Create accountability for fair opportunity distribution.

Track which employees receive stretch assignments, high-visibility projects, and other development opportunities.

5

Hold managers accountable for distributing these fairly.

Provide clear advancement frameworks. Ensure managers can articulate what it takes to get promoted and help employees chart clear paths forward.

Design Bias-Free Performance Reviews

Performance evaluations directly impact promotions, raises, and retention. Research shows that evaluations are often biased, women receive more vague feedback and less actionable guidance than men, which hinders their advancement.

ACTION STEPS:

1

Standardize evaluation criteria.

Use consistent, job-related standards for all employees in similar roles.

2

Require specific examples.

Don't allow vague feedback like 'needs to show more leadership.' Require concrete behavioral examples.

3

Train evaluators on bias.

Teach managers to recognize common biases (e.g., personality-based feedback for women vs. performance-based for men).

4

Review evaluations for patterns.

Analyze completed reviews to identify disparities in ratings, feedback specificity, and promotion recommendations by gender.

5

Calibrate across teams.

Hold calibration sessions where managers discuss ratings to ensure consistency and fairness.



Invest in Individualized Professional Development

Professional development isn't one-size-fits-all, yet too many organizations treat it that way. When you invest in developing people as whole individuals with unique strengths and aspirations, you send a powerful message: we see you, we value you, and we're invested in your future. The key is moving beyond generic training to create development experiences that meet people where they are.

ACTION STEPS:

1

Assess individual development needs.

Don't assume everyone needs the same skills at the same time. Have managers conduct regular development conversations to understand each employee's current challenges, career goals, and learning preferences.

2

Focus on the whole person, not just job skills.

Include development opportunities that address communication, emotional intelligence, resilience, work-life integration, financial wellness, and other competencies that support professional and personal success.

3

Create individualized development plans.

Work with each employee to craft a personalized plan that reflects their unique growth trajectory, learning style, and career aspirations. Design pathways for employees at all career stages—from early career professionals to senior leaders. Review and update plans regularly.

4

Provide dedicated time, budget, and cross-functional learning.

Make it clear that professional development isn't something employees should squeeze in on their own time. Allocate work hours and financial resources for learning. Create opportunities for employees to learn about other departments and shadow colleagues in different roles.

5

Track participation and impact.

Monitor who is accessing development opportunities. If certain groups (including women) are participating less, investigate why and adjust your approach.

Equip Managers to Support Employee Well-being

Managers who check in on well-being and help employees balance work and personal demands create environments where people feel valued as whole human beings, not just workers. This drives loyalty and reduces burnout.

ACTION STEPS:

1

Normalize well-being conversations.

Train managers to regularly ask how employees are doing and genuinely listen to the answer.

2

Provide flexibility resources.

Equip managers with tools to help employees manage competing demands, including flexible scheduling and workload adjustments.

3

Offer mental health support.

Ensure employees have access to counseling, employee assistance programs, and mental health days.

4

Model healthy boundaries.

Train managers to demonstrate work-life balance themselves and discourage an always-on culture.

5

Provide caregiving support.

Recognize that many employees have caregiving responsibilities and offer resources like backup childcare, eldercare assistance, and parental leave.



Make Inclusion Everyone's Responsibility

Inclusion isn't just a top-down initiative. When all employees understand how to be active allies and interrupt bias, it creates a culture where everyone feels respected and valued.



ACTION STEPS:

1

Provide allyship training.

Teach employees concrete actions they can take to support colleagues from underrepresented groups.

2

Train on bias interruption.

Give employees skills to recognize and respectfully address biased comments or behaviors in the moment.

3

Create accountability mechanisms.

Make inclusion part of everyone's job, with specific behaviors measured in performance reviews.

4

Celebrate inclusive behaviors.

Recognize and reward employees who model allyship and create inclusive environments.

5

Make it safe to speak up.

Establish clear processes for reporting concerns and ensure there's no retaliation for raising issues.

CONCLUSION

THE BUSINESS CASE IS CLEAR. THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW.

Creating a workplace where all employees—and particularly women—can thrive isn't just the right thing to do. It's a competitive imperative. When people feel respected, valued, and supported in their development, they stay longer, contribute more, and drive innovation.

The strategies in this booklet are grounded in research and proven by organizations that have prioritized fairness and inclusion. They don't require massive budgets—they require commitment, consistency, and a willingness to examine and change longstanding practices.



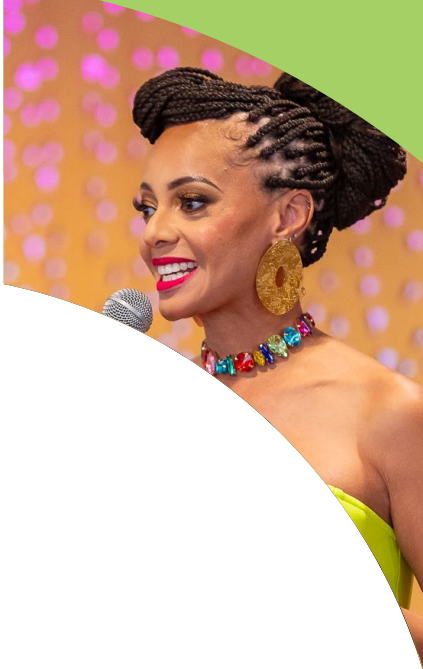
What Success Looks Like:

- **Fairness drives performance.** When employees see their workplace as fair, they are twice as likely to be motivated and significantly less likely to leave.
- **Managers multiply impact.** Equipping managers with time, tools, and training to support career development is one of the highest-impact retention strategies.
- **Inclusion starts with everyone.** When all employees understand how to be allies and interrupt bias, it creates lasting cultural change.
- **Supporting women strengthens everyone.** The strategies that help women succeed—clear advancement paths, flexible work, bias-free evaluations—create better workplaces for all.

✓ Your Next Steps:

Choose 2-3 strategies that address your organization's most pressing retention challenges. Implement them in the next 90 days. Measure progress. Listen to your employees. Adjust as you learn.

Every step toward a more equitable workplace is a step toward stronger retention, higher performance, and better business outcomes.



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