

# Women Want Five Things



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# Executive Summary

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ORKING WOMEN IN THE US, UK, AND GERMANY ARE FIERCELY AMBITIOUS.

Between the ages of 35 and 50, the vast majority of college-educated women working in white-collar professions (a whopping 91% of American women, 81% of British women, and 89% of German women) say they're driven to succeed. Fanning the flames of this formidable drive are women's heightened wage-earning responsibilities: In the 35-to-50 age group, solid majorities of college-educated women (59% in the US, 72% in the UK, and 66% in Germany) earn at least as much as their spouses earn. Women in the prime of their working lives are also "unencumbered" in terms of childrearing: A stunning 38% of American women, 39% of British women, and 41% of German women in this prime-of-life cohort do not have children.

## AMONG WOMEN AGES 35-50...

89% US  
82% UK  
90% German

say it's very important in their work or career to be able to **FLOURISH**

This report examines the flywheels of women's fierce ambition: What drives them, what inspires them to remain fully engaged and on track for leadership roles. We find that across geographies, well-qualified women have a five-point value proposition. They want the ability to:

**FLOURISH** Women flourish and flower when they feel they have agency and impact; when they have the ability to self-actualize. Flourishing is grounded in health and well-being, as well as in freedom and autonomy. When women have a real measure of control, they can manage competing demands in ways that sustain their physical well-being, replenish their energy, and fulfill their emotional and spiritual needs.

**EXCEL** Women want intellectual challenge in order to grow their mastery and ace a domain of knowledge or an expertise. But since an approving audience is what inspires mastery and the pursuit of excellence, women also want recognition.

## AMONG WOMEN AGES 35-50...

85% US  
81% UK  
91% German

say it's very important in their work or career to be able to **EXCEL**

**REACH FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE** Women find work meaningful when it allows them to model success and exceed expectations—their own, and those of their family or community. It's important to women to achieve stretch goals set before them or their team and to have lasting impact in their profession or field. Women find work particularly meaningful when it helps advance causes important to them. These causes center on improving lives through health and education, advancing social justice, and healing the planet.

## AMONG WOMEN AGES 35-50...

80% US  
75% UK  
78% German

say it's very important in their work or career to be able to **REACH FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE**

**EMPOWER OTHERS, AND BE EMPOWERED** Women seek sponsors: senior colleagues who are willing to take a bet on them and advocate for their next big opportunity. They also seek protégés: High-achieving junior colleagues who deepen their capabilities, extend their reach, and burnish their brand.

**EARN WELL** Women say it's important to them to attain financial security as well as financial independence, but also to sustain a comfortable lifestyle for themselves, their offspring, and their parents.

**AMONG WOMEN  
AGES 35-50...**

**57%** US  
**52%** UK  
**71%** German

say it's very important  
in their work or career  
to be able to **EARN well**

**AMONG WOMEN  
AGES 35-50...**

**67%** US  
**64%** UK  
**72%** German

say it's very important  
in their work or career  
to be able to **EMPOWER  
others and BE EMPOWERED**

A surprise of the research is that college-educated men ages 35 to 50 also want these five things. Women want them more, but the male and female value proposition is impressively similar. What distinguishes ambitious men from ambitious women, however, is that men are more likely to get what they want from their careers because they are clear-sighted about the importance of power and sustain their interest in going after it.

Women start their careers hungry to attain a powerful job, but lose their appetite as they age. Even for women without children, and those who are breadwinners, power loses its luster for the 35-to-50 age group.

Women do not understand that power can give them what they want. They perceive the burdens of leadership outweighing the benefits when in fact power, our data reveals, is what allows women to thrive and flourish. In all geographies, women with power enjoy the ability to reach for meaning and purpose, to empower others, and be empowered far more than women without power expect. In the US and UK, women with power are able to flourish far more than women without power expect. And in the US, women with power are able to excel far more than women without power expect.

To ensure that talented women stay on track for leadership roles, companies must work to change women's *perception* of a powerful position, offering up role models who give voice to the substantial joys and rewards of leadership and thus inspire more qualified women to stay on track through the difficult midcareer years. When women perceive that an executive role will fulfill, rather than subvert, their five-point value proposition, they reclaim their ambition for leadership. Companies can also help sustain women's ambition by giving them more of what they want. Our data show that women whose value proposition is met are much more likely to aspire to a position of power than women whose needs are not met.

Not everyone is cut out for leadership. But for companies intent on reaping their investment in top talent, it pays to give women what they want—and encourage them to reimagine power.

**EXPECTATION VS. REALITY**  
(US Women)

Women without power who EXPECT that an executive position will give them...		Women with power who HAVE in their current position...
18%	The ability to <b>FLOURISH</b>	58%
70%	The ability to <b>EXCEL</b>	87%
26%	The ability to <b>REACH FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE</b>	63%
14%	The ability to <b>EMPOWER OTHERS, AND BE EMPOWERED</b>	61%

CTI's flagship project is the Task Force for Talent Innovation—a private-sector consortium focused on helping organizations leverage their talent across the divides of gender, generation, geography, and culture. The 86 global corporations and organizations that constitute the Task Force—representing nearly 6 million employees and operating in 192 countries around the world—are united by an understanding that the full utilization of the talent pool is at the heart of competitive advantage and economic success.



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