



# Being an “Only” As a Senior-Level Woman at Work

Presented by

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# *Today's Focus*

- ▶ Challenges senior women face when we are an “Only”
- ▶ Strategies and best practices for dealing with the “Only” challenge



# Context

- ▶ Women share experiences in organizations that men don't have, including:



- ☒ unconscious bias
- ☒ subtle gender discrimination
- ☒ balancing work and family life



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# *Being an Only*

- ▶ As we advance, many become an “Only”
- ▶ “Only” – women who are often or always the only female in the room at work.
- ▶ (Anyone here today?)



# *New Research by LeanIn.org and McKinsey*

- ▶ Surveyed 64,000 women in 279 companies and found that 1 in 5 (20%) are “onlys.”
- ▶ This finding rises to 40% for women in senior or technical roles.



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# Research Findings: *Onlys Face More Challenges Than Other Women*

- ☑ Half reported that they need to provide more evidence of competence.
- ☑ Onlys are twice as likely as other women to be mistaken for someone more junior.
- ☑ They are twice as likely to be subjected to demeaning comments.



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# Research Findings: *Onlys Face More Challenges Than Other Women*

- ☑ They are twice as likely to report being sexually harassed at some point in their careers.



- ☑ The situation is worse for women of color who are *Onlys* by both race and gender.

- ☑ *AND* *Onlys* can become exhausted and come to doubt themselves.

# Case Study: *The Story of Isabelle*





# *Table Discussion*



What resonates  
with you?

# Q & A



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# *Strategies: Why We Need Women's Support*

## Networking vs. Cliques (*National Academy of Science*)

- ✓ Men are told to develop a broad network and avoid cliques.
- ✓ Research shows this works for men, but not for women.
- ✓ Success for women lies with having a broad network *AND* a clique of women -- an inner circle of 2 or 3.
- ✓ 77% of the highest-achieving women had strong ties with a clique.
- ✓ Each woman in the clique serves as a bridge to a vast number of connections.

# *Strategies: Why We Need Women's Support*

- ✓ To help keep our grounding and balance in the face of unconscious bias, subtle gender discrimination, and the challenges of balancing work and family life.
- ✓ For validation: “no, you are not crazy or alone.”
- ✓ To help us strategize about ways to deal with the challenges of being an Only.
- ✓ To help us stay focused on our goals and not on the “side show” of organizational life as an Only.
- ✓ Women lean toward “tend and befriend” in difficult circumstances; men tend to either quit or push through alone because of differences in our socialization (*Boston Marathon story*).

# *What Support Can Look Like*

- Networking meetings where common interests are discovered
- UP-TO-SOMETHING groups where women come and pitch their ideas for projects, goals, or promotions and other women offer ways they can be supportive, such as an introduction to a resource, sharing of expertise, etc.
- Book groups for professional development
- Sharing and celebrating accomplishments

# *What Support Can Look Like*

*(Continued)*

- Sharing best practices
- Strategizing for advancement or salary negotiations
- Peer mentoring/coaching
- Arranging speakers for professional development

# Q & A



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***BREAK***



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# *TABLE DISCUSSIONS*

Table Group: Share Best Practices for dealing with being an “Only” (15 Minutes)



# *TABLE DISCUSSIONS*

Individually: Complete your Action Plan

Pairs: Share your action plans

- Commit (and plan) one phone call to follow up and hold each other accountable for your action plans.

Wrap-up: Table Reports



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# Q & A



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