

# RISE



The Untapped  
Potential of  
Women in the  
Elevator Industry

A white paper by



AMERICAN  
ELEVATOR GROUP

# Introduction

This white paper serves as a snapshot of the experiences of women who work in the elevator industry today, offering an insight into the challenges women face and the important contributions they make in a wide range of roles and functions. It also provides an opportunity to consider what can be done – by businesses, industry bodies, and individuals – to increase, encourage, and empower diverse representation at all levels.

The aim for this report is to be a driver for collective change and progress in creating workplaces that are more inclusive, welcoming, and safe for women and men of all ages and backgrounds.

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# Part One: The State of The Industry

## The Survey 'Women in the Elevator Industry'

In the spring of 2022, industry publication *Elevator World* carried out an online survey to their readership. It revealed a range of numbers and sentiments on the topic of women in the vertical transportation industry. While it offers a limited window of information, we can make some general assumptions based on its findings.

### Key numbers

The survey attracted a total of 93 respondents, from a range of organization sizes. Of these, only three respondents claimed they had no female employees. 58% said they employ women in technical or field roles, such as mechanics, inspectors, helpers, apprentices. 90% said women are represented in some level of leadership roles, such as Manager, Director, VP, MD, or President.

For companies employing 100 people or less, the numbers paint a slightly different picture. 45% employ women in technical or field roles, and the percentage of companies with women in leadership is the same at 90%. However, the actual number of women in their workforce is lower, with 91% of companies saying women make up less than a tenth of their field workforce and 98% say women make up less than a tenth of leadership roles. So, while more of the smaller companies have female employees, the females are in a more significant minority compared to larger organizations.

### Notable comments

While some respondents actively run concentrated efforts to find women for specific areas in non-traditional roles, many report that although they are open to hiring women into all positions, they recruit based on merit and morals – regardless of gender. Several respondents clarify that women are given the same opportunity to apply, with the same level of compensation on offer, but there simply aren't very many female candidates coming forward.

Trade education is mentioned as a key element in terms of reaching women and other underrepresented groups earlier in their career journey, by helping to generate an interest in the industry and an awareness of the opportunities available.

In terms of potential barriers to employing more women, many respondents discuss how perception

of the industry is an important element. Some roles could be seen as too physically demanding, especially in construction and modernization, and candidates may not recognize the many different areas that they could get involved in and where they would be perfectly capable to contribute.

Recommendations included reaching out to organizations like *Women in Construction (WIC)*<sup>1</sup> or *Non-Traditional Employment for Women (NEW)*<sup>2</sup>, females in high school or college, particularly targeting young people from the age of 18 to 25, who are good with their hands and have the desire to enter a trade. Organizations like *Helmets to Hardhats*<sup>3</sup>, who help transitioning military service members into civilian careers, could also offer a pool of potential industry candidates.

A number of respondents referenced the fact that the industry can seem unwelcoming to female candidates due to it being heavily male-dominated, and that organizations need to make more effort to empower their female



employees and make them more visible as mentors, leaders, and role models, to break the stereotype.

Some respondents also pointed out that there is an element of unconscious bias when it comes to women in technical roles. As with all under-represented groups, business leaders need to actively work towards becoming more inclusive in order to create a workplace where everyone feels comfortable and welcome. Several respondents highlighted the need for working towards a fairer workplace that offers good work and family balance, as well as creating strong principles, training, and boundaries against disrespectful behavior along with zero-tolerance policies on harassment.

### Survey summary

The main learning from this survey is that female representation in the industry is in fact growing, and expected to continue doing so, thanks to planned future efforts. We can also see that there is huge potential benefit for a business to tap into the experience of the female workforce and capitalize on the experience and skills of women, but more efforts are required to capture people earlier in their career trajectory – making them aware of the opportunities to earn, learn, and grow in the elevator industry.

Many agree that change needs to come from the top, with organizations and unions focusing on hiring more women and underrepresented groups. The industry needs to provide allies in positions of power, who can help drive change and enforce the diversity that everyone will benefit from – as businesses, as individuals, and as a society.

## Industry statistics

According to public demographics, 2% of elevator mechanics in the United States are women. The average age of an employed elevator mechanic is 46,

**67%**

of respondents said their number of female employees has increased in the last ten years

**69%**

of respondents said they plan to hire more women in the future

with the most common ethnicity being White (72.3%), followed by Hispanic or Latino (16.8%) and Asian (4.2%). 5% of all Elevator Mechanics identify as LGBT. In 2021, women earned 93% of what men earned in the industry.<sup>4</sup>

## Lessons from other industries

Female labor force participation is proven to be an important driver of growth and development in any economy. In 2020, the share of women who participated in the labor force fell to 56.2%, the lowest rate since 1987, and nearly 4 percentage points below the peak of 60% in 1999. By comparison, the labor force participation rate for men was 67.7% in 2020.

Over the past several decades, women's involvement in the labor market has changed – especially as women have become much more likely to pursue higher levels of education and to work full time. However, one key impact to employment rates is the baby boom generation entering retirement in large numbers, which has put downward pressure on the labor force participation rate of both men and women.<sup>5</sup>

Let's take a look at how other industries are addressing the challenges of tapping into the potential presented by the female workforce.



## Manufacturing

The manufacturing industry is often cited as one that has made great strides in its efforts to improve its gender balance, with an approximate 30% representation of women. According to the World Economic Forum, 33% of these are at junior level staff, 24% at mid-level staff, 15% at senior level staff, and 9% are CEOs.<sup>6</sup>

However, the need for more progress is recognized. In a 2022 research study, respondents said that leadership/management training and mentorships have had the most significant impact on their career advancement. However, only 20% of manufacturing companies report that they offer leadership training, and only 13% offer mentorship programs. It's also worth noting that STEM programs are by far the most effective pathway for women to enter the manufacturing industry, with 48% of women working in industrial careers identifying as having participated in one.<sup>7</sup>

## IT

A report by Deloitte Global predicts that on average, large technology firms will reach nearly 33% overall female representation in their workforces in 2022. This is a 2 percentage point increase from 2019, which may not sound impressive, but does in fact represent notable progress. For smaller tech companies, the numbers are harder to map. Only a minority of businesses have established companywide hiring and promotion goals to increase diversity, and many don't report on their diversity data.

It is recognized that the industry will need to continue to focus on recruiting, training, promoting, and retaining women in order to improve these numbers as the industry grows.<sup>8</sup>

One key area for the technology industry to address is that of showcasing more female role models to inspire and encourage future generations to choose a career in IT. In the 2019 Women in Technology survey, the majority of respondents felt that it is the responsibility of schools and educational institutions to address the imbalance of women in the industry by fuelling a passion for technology at a young age. This was closely followed by respondents agreeing employers also hold a responsibility for inspiring a change. One way both school and employers can do

this is to present women with role models who have achieved the things they also aspire to achieve.<sup>9</sup>

## Construction

According to *Women in Construction*, women make up approximately 14% of industry professionals, a number expected to rise as more women enter construction and engineering jobs. In terms of on-site jobs, research from the Smith Institute suggests that the female workforce could be as low as 1.4%.



One of the biggest challenges for women in the construction industry is that it is still a highly male-dominated environment, where women can struggle to earn the respect of male co-workers. Achieving greater pay equality is another significant challenge, as it is for women in many professions.<sup>10</sup>

## Trucking

There are three million truck drivers in America, out of which 10% are women. Although this number is still low, the industry has seen a spike in interest from women in recent years. This is caused in part by women seeing truck driving as a path to becoming their own boss. Other factors include good earning potential, a work environment where merits speak louder than appearance, and the opportunity to take on a challenge in a non-traditional role.

While there are a number of barriers to gender diversity in the trucking industry, these are being discussed and actively addressed through several initiatives to help improve diversity across the board. These include targeted recruitment campaigns, adapting the layout and design of trucks to allow for a smaller physique, 'team driving' programs which help reduce potential safety risks for women driving alone, and facilitating the ongoing training and mentoring of women truckers.<sup>11</sup>

## NAEC and Women In Motion

Since its inception 73 years ago, NAEC (National Association of Elevator Contractors) has had a total of 15 women serve on their board. They have had two female Presidents: Lien Randle (2001-02) and Hope Evans (2021-22). In addition, three Treasurers, five Secretaries and three Executive Directors have also been female.



Rená Cozart

Rená Cozart joined NAEC as Executive Director in 2020. Early on, she was made aware of The VIEEW (Vertical Initiative for Elevator Escalator Women), a group founded by Martha Hulgán of MMH & Associates and Ricia Hendrick of Elevator World. This was a networking community

that had great impact in terms of supporting women and highlighting their value to the industry. At the request of several women owner/operators, Rená worked with volunteer leaders to revive the program in the form of Women in Motion, a program which is today driven by NAEC volunteer leaders. Rená facilitates the group on behalf of NAEC members with the mission to continue the important work of building better opportunities for women in the industry.

“Our industry has an obvious need to recruit talent,” Rená says. “We need people who are trainable, consistent, trustworthy – qualities found in both men and women from all backgrounds. By being more intentional in targeting women, we can significantly increase the talent pool to meet the industry’s recruitment needs.”

The balance between strong men and women leading the organization has been important in NAEC’s continued growth and success. Rená considers herself fortunate to be involved with NAEC at a time when there are three women on the board of directors, the supplier chair is a woman, and the organization’s president is a woman. And while that

is unusual, her aim is to consistently help create equal opportunities for women in NAEC roles. The organization’s mission is to ‘innovate and provide opportunity in the industry’. With labor being a key challenge facing so many of its members, Rená wants to play a part in creating a strong workforce that pulls in talent from the entire spectrum of people. She points out how diversity plays across a number of factors, including geography, ethnicity, and age. She’s already seeing progress in the work done by the NAEC’s NexGen initiative and considers it to play a critical part in helping to fill the talent gap, where women represent just one of the untapped categories of potential along with many minority groups that are not being addressed fully today. Her ambition is to build on this progress with the Women in Motion program to help seed the ground and cultivate the opportunity for a new generation of elevator professionals.

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“I’m optimistic about the future,” Rená says. “NexGen already has 30% female members, which is an exciting indicator, and we’re seeing great interest in what Women in Motion is doing. Our responsibility now is to make sure that we are relevant and add value. By providing mentors, a voice, and a platform for asking questions that people may otherwise not feel comfortable asking, we can help to nurture the leaders of tomorrow. It is not a matter of simply wanting to focus on diversity — it will be a necessity to ensure the continued growth and success of NAEC member companies and the industry as a whole.”

## NEII bringing together diversity and safety

National Elevator Industry, Inc. (NEII) is the premier national trade association for the elevator and escalator industry. The organization's most prominent objective is to promote a high level of safety for industry professionals, and this occasionally leads to conversations around access to relevant safety solutions for all body types.



*Amy Blankenbiller*

"We're not all built the same," says Amy Blankenbiller, Executive Director of NEII.

"Whatever our gender, all people have very different physical builds. A common challenge occurs when female technicians are provided safety equipment that is designed with the typical

male figure in mind, but challenges in properly fitting PPE are of course widely varied."

Amy references conversations with female field workers unable to comfortably wear a traditional safety harness due to the location of the chest strap. Many have also experienced a lack of suitable sizes and fit for gloves and hardhats. Uniforms or other clothing options can also be ill-fitting and uncomfortable. "When I speak to safety directors, they appreciate getting this feedback from the field

**People don't always intend to discriminate or exclude women, and there is sometimes a misdirected willingness to help.**

so they can address requests to improve safety equipment," Amy explains. "I'm delighted to see that today all the major OEMs provide inclusive PPE solutions. They all offer harnesses with adjustable straps, improved options for uniforms, and an

extended size range for equipment like gloves and hardhats. What's more, they regard this not only as a safety issue but also a staff retention issue – and rightly so."

While this is indeed a step in the right direction, Amy wants to continue to forge ahead by challenging all NEII members as well as the entire construction industry to discuss the issues and their solutions, and take advice from those who are successfully making the workplace more inclusive for all.

"We have to take incremental, meaningful steps towards change," she says. "People don't always intend to discriminate or exclude women, and there is sometimes a misdirected willingness to help – but we need to be conscious of how that 'help' could be reinforcing stereotypes that prevent women from being seen as capable of doing the job. Women need to be given the equal chance to either succeed or fail, without the assumption that they can't do something." Amy references a conversation she had with a female mechanic whose colleague wouldn't allow her to carry the ropes for a cable repair. While the male mechanic wasn't intending to discriminate, he should have given the woman the chance to carry the ropes. "We all understand this reasoning, but we can't excuse the behavior just because it sometimes comes from a good place. We need to work on culture and attitudes that help us all recognize what is helpful and what is harmful, because whatever someone's intention is, actions like these remove the opportunity for women to learn the same way another person would learn."

Amy would like to see a change in how discriminatory or derogatory behavior is addressed in the workplace – including how colleagues highlight it to each other. "If you see something, say something," she says. "Peer to peer engagement is needed to reinforce the messages coming from company leadership. So, if anyone sees someone on a job site giving a minority or a woman a hard time, everyone shares the responsibility to question that behavior."



# Part Two: Women Voices

## Elevator Mechanics

This part of the report tunes into five different roles across the elevator industry - the elevator mechanic, the service provider, the consultant, the media owner, and the manufacturer - and looks at the world from the perspective of a female representative.

For this report, we carried out a targeted focus group interview with a range of female elevator mechanics and apprentices from metropolitan and non-city areas. We have chosen to withhold their names as part of this report, in order to allow them the confidence to openly share their experiences.

### ***What women enjoy about the job***

While perceived as a typically male career, the role as an elevator mechanic does appeal to many women who have a keen interest in electronics, engineering, and problem-solving. They describe the job as demanding but rewarding in many ways – not least financially. One woman shares how money was in fact the first thing that appealed to her about the job. “I can earn the same in four years as what would take me twelve years working in another sector, like utilities for example,” she explains. Her career started by simply exploring the job as an apprentice, to see if she would like it, and found several areas where her skills and aptitude were a great fit.

**The best part of the job is when you troubleshoot something and you get things up and running again. That’s the best feeling in the world.**

Most of the women describe how the actual hands-on experience is something they enjoy. Troubleshooting equipment, solving problems methodically, and learning about different types of elevators, offer a sense of accomplishment – and they often feel like they can bring a fresh set of eyes, or a different perspective on a problem. “The best part of the job is when you troubleshoot something and you get things up and running again,” one mechanic explains. “That’s the best feeling in the world.” However, one experience all women interviewed shared, was that of rarely receiving credit for their



contribution. While this is something that is typical for the experience as an apprentice, regardless of gender, the women describe a sense of it being more common as a female. “I love when someone actually gives you credit for figuring out a problem,” one apprentice explains. “Some guys worry that it makes them look bad if they let others know a female came up with the solution.”

### ***Gender friction***

For any workplace where one gender is dominant, there will inevitably be some level of apprehension when the status quo is disrupted. While this can sometimes simply be chalked down to a general aversion to change, there are some specific scenarios that seem to play out when it comes to women in mechanical roles.

One of the women describes this situation from the male perspective, recognizing the challenge that her colleagues face. “When you’re working with a woman in the pit, you’re physically close. It’s easy for a man to feel uncomfortable. They may worry about being accused of something inappropriate, or they perhaps just don’t know how to behave around a female co-worker.” One apprentice explains how some men has been accused of sexual harassment, and they are terrified of that happening to them. “It makes them feel like they can’t speak how they normally would when they’re around other men. They don’t want to feel inhibited on the job, always watching their mouth, worrying about what they can and can’t say. It’s easier for them if there are no females around.”

This experience is echoed by the other female mechanics, who often find themselves reassuring their male colleagues that they don’t have to change just because a woman is





present. “As long as they don’t make mean comments about me, they can joke all they want and use whatever language they want,” one apprentice sums it up.

The one element that often helps these women is time. The longer they spend in their role or working with a particular set of people, the easier things become. “It often takes a while to get to the point where someone feels relaxed around you,” one woman explains. “They want to feel you out first, get to know you, figure you out. Often it takes other guys to tell each other about you, explaining that you’re cool. They’ll let each other know that here’s someone who shows up to work, and gets the job done. It helps to get to know people who will talk nicely about you behind your back.” This need for advocates and supporters in the workplace quickly becomes a solid thread that runs through all of the comments made. One woman shares how she today, after more than 15 years in the job, has been able to establish herself in her role, where she knows her customers and co-workers feel confident that they can rely on her to do a good job.

### ***Prejudice***

Many of the women have experienced a deep-rooted culture of prejudice from colleagues as well as customers. They have all had situations of being treated as unwelcome or unfit for the job at hand. One apprentice describes how a customer discouraged her from climbing on top of an elevator car, as it was ‘no place for a girl’, putting himself in a potentially unsafe situation before allowing her to do the job she was trained to do.

“To get anywhere close to the same level of trust and confidence that a male mechanic gets, you have to work ten times harder,” one mechanic says. “You have to constantly prove yourself. Often, a guy can

walk in and automatically be part of the team. As a woman you walk in and you’re part of a small crew here, a small crew there – whoever the guys are that are willing to teach you something. You often feel like you’re the odd one out.”

## **What do they think I’m here for – just to hold the flashlight?**

Another challenge the women raise is that of the difficulty to get the same experience and the same level of on-the-job training as their male counterparts. “Often you just don’t get the same ‘hands-on’ experience,” one mechanic explains. “I was working alongside a male apprentice who would get instructed to do things, while I was blanked. I thought to myself, what do they think I’m here for – just to hold the flashlight? But you have to be really careful about how you respond to situations like that. You don’t want to be seen as difficult and someone who just complains.”

That fear of being labelled as a problem colleague is one that is very well recognized by all the respondents. They have all had situations where they have chosen to hold back their criticism, not wanting to rock the boat. “When I speak up for myself, I’m seen as ‘difficult to work with’ – which is unfair,” one mechanic chimes in. “This is my livelihood, and I need to learn. I need my male colleagues to teach me the same stuff they teach a male apprentice. People need to get over the fact that I’m a woman doing this job.” One apprentice sums it up succinctly: “I’m not here just to fill the quota of race, age, or gender. I’m here to learn a trade. I don’t want to be two years into a job and still be the one holding the flashlight, watching other people learn. Let me learn it – then let me do it.”

### ***Safety on the job***

Safety is a key issue for all interviewees, and they highlight the importance of apprentices learning good safety practices from their colleagues. “A lot of people who have been doing the job a long time get comfortable. It’s easy to get complacent when you do the same thing day in, day out – but we have to remember that safety is such a huge part of what we do. We’re in the safety industry,” one mechanic says. “We all have to be on our toes. If it takes a moment longer to do the safety checks properly, it can be the difference between us coming home safely at the end of the day or not coming home at all.

However, safety on the job sometimes takes on an additional meaning for these mechanics. Several of the

women interviewed have experienced varying levels of uncomfortable, sexualized situations on the job. One of the mechanics describes being sexually assaulted by a superintendent when using the bathroom, and having to call the police. While her employer supported her, the offender accused her of making up the story. Other women have experienced men asking for hugs and physical contact on job sites, and made to feel uncomfortable when rejecting their advances.

While situations like these should never have to be tolerated, they help to highlight the importance of an anti-harassment policy, with a clear reporting structure, and a defined process for enforcement.

### ***The solution: Allies and role models***

On the flipside of these challenges, several of the women have had the opportunity to work with mechanics who were proud to have a woman on the team. They describe these men as their allies, teachers, and mentors, who simply want their colleagues to succeed and be good mechanics.

“If a company wants to invest in a woman to help ensure she becomes a mechanic, they need to pair her with a good mechanic who is willing to teach her, focus on her. And once she becomes a mechanic, she will in turn become a role model for other women,” one woman explains. “I know from experience – and from watching other women in blue collar jobs – that a woman typically puts in ten times more effort,” another mechanic chimes in. “Why wouldn’t I want to work with someone who’s that motivated?”

**A lot of women assume it’s a hard job, but it’s really not hard if you have the right training and the right guidance.**

The interviewees all agree that a role model doesn’t have to be a mechanic. It can be an office employee or a leader in a different part of the business. There are many champions, male and female, who help pave the way for more women.

### ***How to get more women to enter the industry – and stay there***

In the United States, there are a number of routes into working with elevator mechanics, such as non-traditional jobs initiatives. However, all interviewees agree that there’s not enough information available about jobs in the industry. “Young people don’t know about this as a career or that they can work in elevators,” one mechanic says. “Companies have to target high schools and start highlighting the route to these jobs. Not everybody is cut out for college, and here’s a great alternative.” They also agree that there’s not enough in the way of vocational training and hands-on skills training. With such a wide scope of fields in engineering, not all young people realize all the options they have available to them when they start exploring future jobs.



However, getting in the door is just the first step. The next challenge is to support new industry joiners and help them thrive. While all interviewees agree that the work environment can be demanding at times, they don’t want any negativity to push people right back out the door again.

One mechanic offers a piece of advice for other women looking to join the trade. “Just do it – but be prepared to apply yourself,” she says. “A lot of women assume it’s a hard job, but it’s really not hard if you have the right training and the right guidance from the mechanics who teach you. You have to know what to look for, how to read the controllers, how to work safely. My advice would always be to take the time to watch, listen, and learn.”

## The Service Provider: Karen Kennedy Dodds, Kencor Elevator

Karen Kennedy Dodds is Chief Executive Officer at Kencor Elevator, headquartered in West Chester, PA. The company is a full-service elevator business employing 100 people, servicing 3000 units across 1900 locations in six states. It was co-founded by Karen's father, Richard Kennedy, in 1981 and leadership transitioned to the next generation in 2020 as the organization joined American Elevator Group and Richard moved into a more advisory role.



*Karen Kennedy Dodds*

While Karen recognizes that many women face gender-based prejudices in the industry, her own experience has consistently been a positive one. Rather than being treated differently, she has generally felt welcomed. "It's about seeing an opportunity and taking it," she explains, referring to both the individual

employee and the business. "We want to welcome more women into the industry, and we're opening doors for younger generations of women who want to pursue a career in elevators."

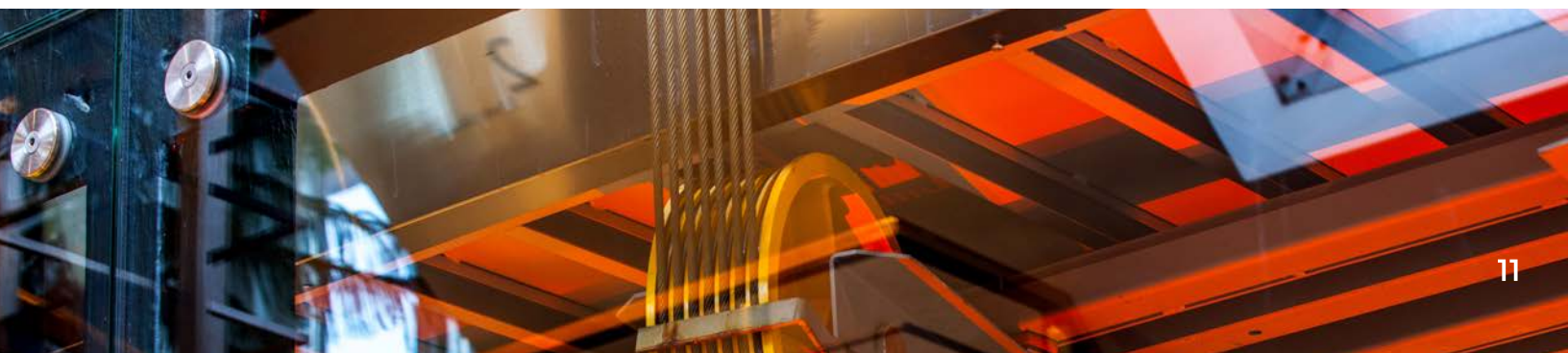
Karen explains how she employs women today, as do many other industry leaders, and would employ more if there were a larger pool of female applicants available to select from. "We want to hire women, but we can't get them to come to us," she says. Based on her experience, one major key to improving the gender balance would be to help change the perception that skilled work is just for men. "Our industry and other specialized trades have this stamp on it that says it's 'a man's job'. The reality is that it's not a man's job – it's a job, it's a career. It's a good career that anybody can do, as long as they enter into it with the necessary skills and the right mindset. If you're prepared to do the job, you're just as qualified as any man."

Kencor and American Elevator Group share initiatives to encourage, educate and recruit a diverse workforce, including women. One of Karen's main drivers as a business leader is to prevent women from seeing the industry as a threat. "Organizations like ours are welcoming people regardless of gender, and we are prepared to give them the same opportunities," she explains. "The working culture at Kencor is very much one of identifying skills and empowering people to use them."

**Our industry has this stamp on it that says 'it's a man's job'. The reality is that it's not a man's job. It's a job. It's a career.**

We have several examples of women here on our team who have started out as receptionists or admins and eventually moved on to become project managers, sales representatives, and dispatch managers," she says. "We also recently celebrated our first female CET, which was a great milestone."

Karen emphasizes the importance of diversity and inclusion in the elevator trade, recognizing the role that her business, other independents, and larger organizations play when it comes to pioneering diverse recruitment and retention efforts. "We're all achieving this together," she concludes. "If enough of us are willing to spearhead these efforts, others will follow. And that's the kind of domino effect everyone will benefit from."



## The Elevator Consultant: Kathleen Walsh, Walsh Associates

Kathleen T. Walsh is President of Walsh Associates, Ltd., a New York-based elevator consultancy and witnessing agency. The business was founded in 1981 by her father, Martin, who headed up the operation until 2013 when Kathleen took over as President. Today the company is run out of their Manhattan head office, with all the hallmarks of an agile start-up – underpinned by the values of a family business.



*Kathleen Walsh*

From a very young age, Kathleen became a key part of the business and was mentored by her father and other senior team members who quickly noted that she had a keen eye for detail. By 2009 she was independently managing testing projects for customers. “Testing is

a very nuanced thing to do,” she explains. “You can’t just hire anyone to do it. You have to know your way around the equipment and understand the time required for various tasks. It’s a genuine skill, it’s highly profitable, and I still do it today.”

When her father began stepping down from his role in the late 2010s, Kathleen admits she had not fully considered a future where she would be leading the business. However, this also meant that she did not find the transition daunting. “It happened so gradually,” she says, “and we were so busy – I just didn’t stop to question the direction I was going in. My dad was in charge, I was helping him, and even when I started doing more work, he was always there for me to answer any of my questions. I could ask him the same question ten or twenty times, he didn’t mind.”

Having had access to the support of her father and other leaders in the business, Kathleen recognizes the importance of a ‘culture of helpfulness’ and now actively nurtures this culture herself. “My best advice to anyone is: Don’t be afraid to ask questions. I’d say that to anyone,” she says. “People can ask me anything and I will do what I can to help. I don’t want anyone – especially a woman – to be embarrassed or feel belittled for not knowing something. If I can help, I will.”

When it comes to industry jobs, Kathleen echoes the sentiment of the mechanics interviewed for this paper. Many people simply aren’t aware of the many different career options available in the elevator industry, despite a tremendous need for new talent to enter the job market. “Field jobs are good jobs,” Kathleen says, “with good salaries and benefits, hours, and opportunity for overtime. But they do require new mechanics to be trained by the old guard – the people who understand the legacy systems. We need those people who have a real passion for their work, and for helping others. Their knowledge will help build the next generation of mechanics. The older guys in my business have always loved imparting their knowledge to others, and they still do.”

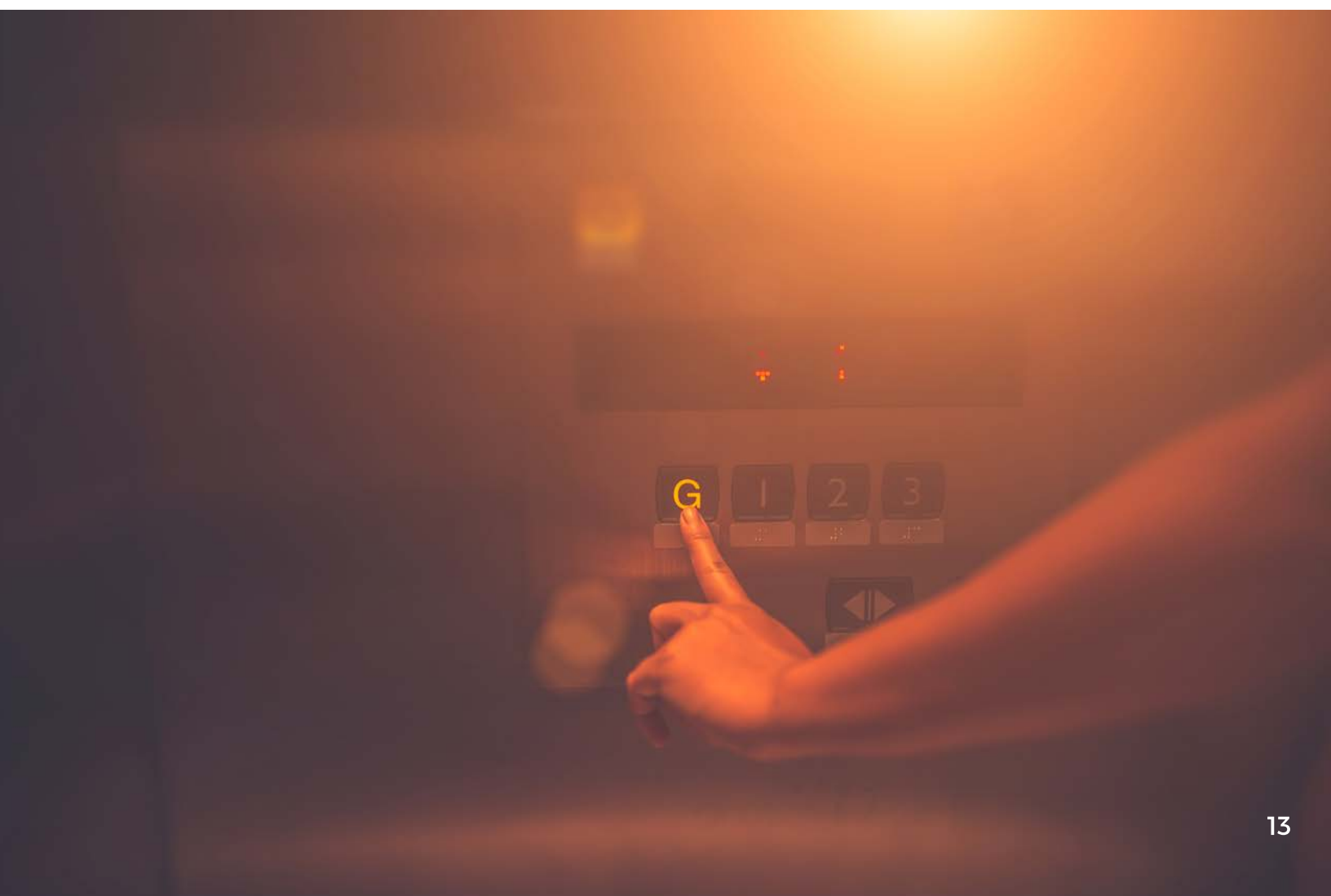
Kathleen recognizes the need for influencers and spokespeople who genuinely understand and relate to the challenges women face in the industry. “Women need to be willing to be role models and mentors for others,” she says. “But we need to avoid an ‘us vs them’ scenario. We need enlightened men who help women shine, men who can champion culture change, and who speak up against sexist or demeaning language.”

**We need people who have a real passion for their work, and for helping others. Their knowledge will help build the next generation of mechanics.**

As a woman in a male-dominated industry, Kathleen has seen her fair share of questionable behavior. Sometimes it takes the form of a debasing comment, sometimes simply being ignored or deliberately left out. “I’ve had people dismiss me, saying ‘they don’t want to speak to the secretary’. I used to get angry about it; now I just find it funny.” While demeaning and sexualized comments do occur in the workplace, Kathleen points out that context plays a key part. “People might be afraid to say the wrong

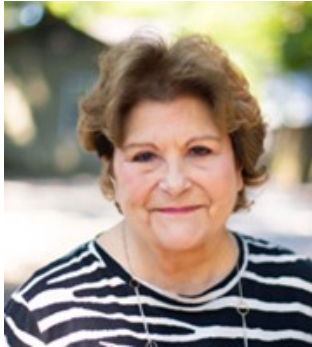
thing, but a woman can generally tell when a comment is innocent and well-intended. However, some men will think that it's fine to make sexualized remarks, because it's a 'compliment'. We all need to recognize what degrading behavior looks like and agree that it doesn't belong anywhere near a business environment."

The experience of working in the industry that Kathleen describes, is similar to that of many of the other interviewed women. She shares how she finds herself having to justify her own knowledge to a greater extent to her male colleagues, being questioned more often than a man. This creates a sense of having to constantly be on her toes, and proving herself. "Some of that thinking is my own fault," she admits. "It's all about perception. But as I have no control over what somebody else thinks about me, I need to just do my job and let my work speak for itself."



## The Media Owner: Ricia Hendrick, Elevator World

Ricia Sturgeon Hendrick is Publisher and Editor-at-large for the international trade publication Elevator World (EW), headquartered in Mobile, AL. The organization has been a family business from the outset, which means that Hendrick got involved from an early age, throughout high school, and after studying commercial art at college.



Ricia Hendrick

on companies and projects across the industry.”

Today, Hendrick’s son runs the operation alongside her. He has taken on the role as President/CEO. Throughout her 50 years in the industry, Hendrick has seen significant changes take place. “The sector seems much bigger now,” she says. “When I first started writing about the industry, there were the major OEMs, maybe five or so large independents, and thousands of small companies – many of them family-operated. Today, we’re seeing more people entering from other industries, whereas before you almost had to be born in it.”

Hendrick also reflects on the fact that women today play a much bigger part in the industry, across all areas. “In the early 1980s, when I first started reporting for EW, I could count the women on one hand – and they were usually the wives of business owners,” she explains. “Today, we see women in the field and in several top offices. They are consultants, presidents, owners, field technicians, inspectors and salespeople, you name it. And the more inclusive our industry becomes, the more everyone benefits.”

While she has experienced some gender bias throughout her time covering the industry, Hendrick describes these occasions as rare. “Usually, people are so conscious of the fact that you are writing about their company or project, that they will bend over backwards to make sure you understand. They want you to get it.” She describes a few terrifying challenges, such as riding on the top of the World Trade Center elevators and climbing a ladder on the

“When I was young, I worked in every area of the company,” Hendrick remembers, “but I loved the art best. When it became clear that my father would leave the business to me, I moved into the writing side of things, which is when I began to travel and report

outside of the Eiffel Tower to get to the machine room, but she sums it up as “nothing any girl can’t do.” For the most part, her experience has been one of being treated like one of the guys.

In terms of potential barriers to attracting more women to the industry, Hendrick recognizes that it’s still in many ways considered “a man’s world.” However, she also highlights the fact that the construction industry as a whole has evolved, with modern technology and systems making it easier for people to enter into the profession, regardless of gender. “With today’s elevators featuring such highly sophisticated and high-tech equipment, there is no reason women can’t install, maintain, and repair them. You can learn the trade, get a good education, and earn really good money in a stable industry with plenty of career opportunities. That should be attractive to both men and women,” Hendrick says. She also mentions how better access to education and training paves an easier path to learning and developing as a professional.

As for the role Elevator World plays in the future of women in the industry, Hendrick sees the media organization as a platform for the industry – both male and female. “While we’ve had a woman as editor of the magazine, I’ve never seen EW as a way to specifically promote women’s influence,” she says. “My father had great concern that I would not be accepted as a writer in a heavy construction industry, but he discovered that the industry was in fact very accepting. My father was a great writer and editor, and one of the lessons he taught me was, ‘You are not the story – they are.’ That made it easy to forget being a woman, and just focus on the job.”

As Hendrick’s own team at EW has grown from five people in the U.S. to a total of 24 worldwide, she has become an industry influencer and role model for future generations of media and trade professionals. And summing up her own experience in a piece of advice for anyone looking to make a career for themselves in the industry, she concludes: “Do what you have to do to get the job done - even if it scares you.”

## The Manufacturer: Cece Matot, Matot Inc.

Chicago-based dumbwaiter supplier Matot Inc. is a fourth-generation, woman-owned manufacturing company, which was founded in 1888 by Duffy Matot. Today it is owned by his great-granddaughters, sisters Cathryn 'Cece' M. Matot and Anne B. Matot.



Cece Matot

administration, operations and production.

Before choosing a career in the elevator industry, Cece worked as a Petroleum Geologist, a role which also featured very few women. This meant that working in a male-dominated world wasn't something she found uncomfortable or intimidating – it was simply 'business as usual'. In many ways, she was able to see her difference as an advantage rather than an obstacle.

"The good thing about being a female in the industry is that you stand out. Going to the NAEC as a supplier and being one of just a handful of women in leadership on that show floor, people tend to remember you. I always saw that as a positive thing." Being a certified woman-owned business also comes with another benefit. Many cities and industries are mandated to hire a certain number of minority businesses, including ones that are woman-owned – a practice that plays a role in helping to balance out some of the inequality otherwise experienced by minorities.

Cece is passionate about attracting young women into the industry as early as possible, to feed into more of these technical roles. "We work with a number of foundations such as Chicago Manufacturing Renaissance Council<sup>12</sup>, Chicago Women in Trades<sup>13</sup>, and Safer Foundation<sup>14</sup>. They go into high schools, and recruit post grads, to create awareness of careers in the manufacturing industry.

Cece describes how she and her sister came into the industry as young women, working their way up, learning every aspect of the business. Today Cece has been in the company for more than 35 years and has served in a number of different roles such as purchasing, IT, finance, marketing,

By speaking to young people early, we can attract both women and men, as well as different minority groups, and offer them the training they need to get up and running in the trade quickly."

In terms of hiring, Cece describes how the organization would love to recruit more women and have a good minority representation, but like many other businesses they are limited by the availability of merits and skill. "We're a business. We can't afford to hire people based on quotas. We need to hire the right candidates, and we often struggle to find female applicants to welding and production jobs," Cece explains. However, she also describes how the company's advisory board features three independent directors who are all women. "That wasn't intentional," she says, "we just loved their qualifications and found them to be the most competent. Our hiring philosophy is to find qualified people who meet our needs as a business, and if that happens to be a woman, we give them the same opportunity as we would give a man."

**By speaking to young people early, we can attract both women and men and offer them the training they need to get up and running in the trade quickly.**

Cece describes her generation as one growing up seeing women routinely treated in a way that wouldn't be socially acceptable today, and women being expected to put up with it. That type of behavior is not tolerated in any way at Matot. It's important for the organization to create a positive, safe, and inclusive culture where everyone has the power to challenge improper behavior.

"Female shop floor employees get a separate bathroom with a key, and a private changing area. We've also set up annual anti-harassment training for all employees, and we have clear reporting procedures for incidents. Our

employees get a handbook with directives and guidelines that make it clear that we don't tolerate any disrespectful speech or behavior," Cece says. She also goes on to explain how insurance providers often offer training and guidance for free, which a lot of companies don't realize. "There's no excuse not to do this. If we can do it, as a small business, anyone can."

When it comes to the workplace culture, Cece describes the manufacturing and elevator industries as being tough for women in many ways. She has experienced being overlooked and being dismissed regularly for her opinions and ideas, and she has encountered many derogatory comments over the years. "As a young woman, it can be hard to know how to handle remarks like these. Are they directed at you because you are a woman, or because you are inexperienced? Having access to a trusted male or female advisor can be critical to your success and give you invaluable feedback."

Many women are of course also subjected to indirect and overt sexual comments, which can be difficult to confront. "You often find yourself experiencing several suggestive statements from a person before you feel that you can confront them, tell them they make you uncomfortable, and ask them to stop. But ultimately, whether it is a sexual remark or some sort

of a put-down or dismissal, you do have to stand up for yourself and nip it in the bud – or it will continue. And that takes strength and self-confidence."

That confidence is something Cece describes having from a young age, and something she's needed over the years. However, she recognizes that not all women have that same ability and self-assurance to stand up for themselves – especially early on in their careers when they are younger or less experienced. "This is where it's important to have male champions in the business, who can help monitor and address negative behavior and be good role models for others," she explains. "I have had men around me who would stand up for me and speak on my behalf when I was being targeted in one way or another, so I know how important that is. It is the key to an inclusive culture. These things can't just be words on paper or directives from on-high, they need to be rooted in the business and its people, in everyday situations."

Today, Cece is a champion for women in the industry, although she doesn't see herself as a role model. Her main piece of advice to women looking for opportunities in the trade would be to nurture a sense of self-assurance. "You have to believe in yourself, in your work, and be confident in knowing that you bring something to the table. You have value. Don't let anyone allow you to think that you don't."





# Part Three: The Future We Build

## Summary of Learnings

The women featured in this report all have different experiences and perspectives, but they share an enthusiasm and optimism for the future. All agree that there are steps that can be taken to attract more women to industry jobs, while also improving the experiences of women working in the trade. One of the most powerful ways to do this is to ensure women have systematic access to *allies*, *mentors*, and *role models*.

All employers and industry organizations share a responsibility for creating safe, secure, and empowering work environments for all employees, regardless of age, ethnicity, or gender. While many of the challenges presented in this report are difficult to overcome and will require a slow journey of culture change, there is the potential to make a significant difference by simply taking consistent action today.

There are many ways in which organizations can help to bridge the gender gap and, by doing so, create

opportunities for growth. By specifically targeting women and other minorities for training, mentoring, and recruitment, the industry can begin to access an extended talent pool to help meet the ever-growing labor needs.

### Recommendations

There is no single solution to the challenges raised, but we can see the need to take parallel action on several levels to help improve the outlook of the female labor force in the industry.

# 1

### Level One: Invest in the next generation

While there may not be enough female and minority candidates applying for roles today, we can make a collective effort to generate interest in STEM subjects generally and in the vertical transportation industry specifically. Actively working with high schools, trade schools and career outreach programs has proven to influence the choice of young people to enter the industry.

# 2

### Level Two: Be a great place to work

Company culture can be a difficult thing to define and develop, but all organizations can benefit from evaluating theirs. Listening to employees – male and female – about their experiences can often be an eye-opening experience and uncover areas of potential improvement. Safety is of course about ensuring everyone has access to the right safety equipment and training, but it's also about having procedures in place that help employees feel protected from verbal or physical harm. Any organization can easily access free resources for relevant policies and education.

# 3

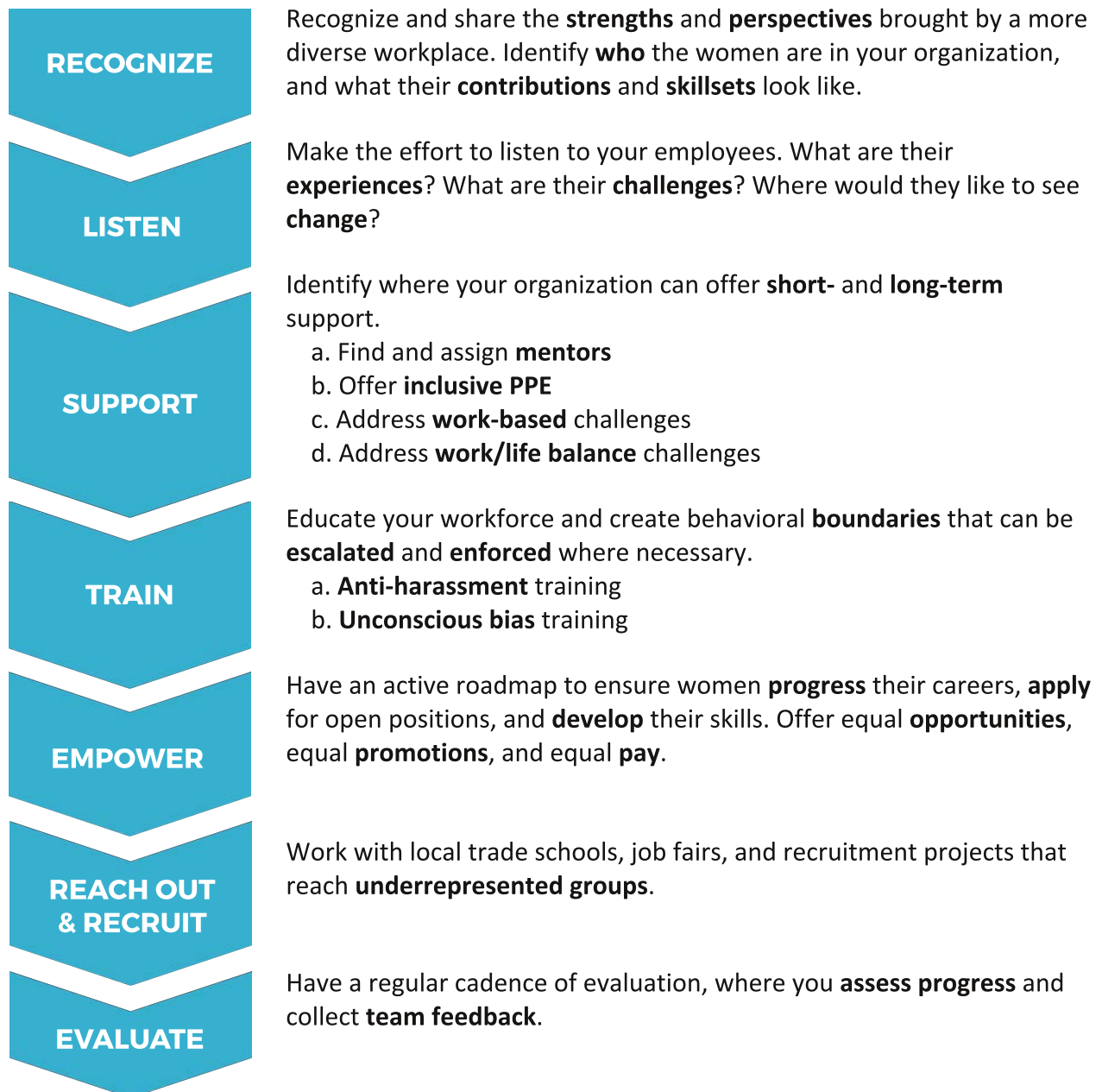
### Level Three: Champion equal opportunities

While the typical career journey often looks different for women and men, every employee deserves the same opportunities for promotion, growth, and financial reward. To remain attractive as an employer, the modern organization needs to offer an element of flexibility for employees to raise a family or care for loved ones. This can be done through initiatives such as adaptable hours, or 'returnships' for individuals returning to work after an extended career break.

## Our Shared Commitment

While some organizations have made more progress than others, we all know there is work to be done, collectively. And while we may not be able to work on all areas at the same time, there are some tangible actions that your organization can take to start making a change in the industry.

## Action List



# Make a Pledge: What Will Your Organization Do?

After reading this report, we hope you share our commitment to driving positive change for inclusion. We would like to invite you to take part in our global call to action and make a pledge to implement at least three of the activities on the action list.

Together, we all rise.

[hello.americanelevator.com/rise](https://hello.americanelevator.com/rise)



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