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EXPLORING IDEAS THAT SHAPE THE PLACES WE WORK.

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DECEMBER 2, 2016

# THIS NONPROFIT WANTS TO MAKE WORKPLACES BETTER FOR WOMEN

*As the number of women in the U.S. workforce grows. **Global Women for Wellbeing** is leading the charge to address the differences in how men and women work, lead, process, and even heal.*



According to [data\(https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/facts\\_over\\_time.htm\)](https://www.dol.gov/wb/stats/facts_over_time.htm) tracked by the **U.S. Department of Labor**, women make up 47 percent of today's U.S. labor force. By 2018, that percentage is expected to reach 51 percent, making women the majority. And yet today, less than five percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are women. As the presence of women in the workplace has increased, we've seen shifts in the policies that corporations adopt as well as how we approach workplace design. Policies and design changes include flexible hours accommodating family time, in-office daycare centers, and mother's rooms. As women become the largest participant in the U.S. workforce, it's time to address the differences in how men and women work, lead, process, and even heal.

A newly-launched nonprofit, **Global Women for Wellbeing**(<http://www.gw4w.org/>) (**GW4W**), aims to give women a voice to create better health and wellbeing for themselves, their businesses, and their communities.

On October 27, GW4W held their inaugural event in Washington, D.C. The event brought together the founders of GW4W and those new or looking to join the GW4W community. It was truly a gathering of some of the best and brightest minds in the region.

Before the event, I had a chat with **Mim Senft**, founder of GW4W and president of **Motivity Partnerships, Inc.**, and **Leigh Stringer**, a workplace strategist at

**EYP**, founding board member of GW4W, and author of *The Healthy Workplace*.

Healthy cocktails in hand – because you can't have an event geared towards women's health without a few antioxidants! – we kicked off our conversation with the how and why. How did GW4W start, why now, and what they plan to accomplish going forward?

## How Global Women for Wellbeing got its start

You could say this organization has been years in the making, but it really gained traction in January. The idea for a women-focused health and wellbeing organization came from conversations and questions posed during **Wellness Underground** (<http://www.wellnessunderground.com/>), a conference seeking to bring together and inspire those most passionate about bettering workplace culture through wellness. **Rachel Druckenmiller** – now a GW4W Young Leader – asked two questions that were pivotal in starting GW4W. First, “Why isn't there a women-specific wellness conference?” and second, “Why aren't more women in health and wellness leadership roles?” It all snowballed from there.

“To this day many organizations – more specifically health prevention and wellness organizations – are run by men,” said Mim. “While the people on the front lines are typically women. To be clear, this stance is not to discredit the amazing work men are doing in the field, especially on behalf of women. This effort is about empowering women and for women to have each other's backs surrounding women-focused topics.”

**Nancy Board** and **Deb Smolensky** – also attendees at Wellness Underground and key partners in making GW4W a reality – worked with Mim to begin conversations surrounding the lack of representation and what they thought the group could do about it.

It was five months later at the **Harvard** conference **SHINE (Sustainable and Health Initiative for Net Positive Enterprise)** that Mim, Deb, and Nancy shared their idea with others. With Leigh and several other women in attendance they realized the group was forming right in front of their eyes. They knew they had enough support to go forward.

## What GW4W hopes to accomplish

GW4W aims to change the conversation about women's health and wellness. There's enough evidence showing the importance of female leadership. In 2012, **HBR** published an article(<https://hbr.org/2012/03/a-study-in-leadership-women-do>), titled "Are Women Better Leaders than Men?". In their research they found that "women's advantages were not at all confined to traditionally women's strengths. In fact at every level, more women were rated by their peers, their bosses, their direct reports, and their other associates as better overall leaders than their male counterparts."

### The Top 16 Competencies Top Leaders Exemplify Most

	Male Mean Percentile	Female Mean Percentile	T value
Takes Initiative	48	56	-11.58
Practices Self-Development	48	55	-9.45
Displays High Integrity and Honesty	48	55	-9.28
Drives for Results	48	54	-8.84
Develops Others	48	54	-7.94
Inspires and Motivates Others	49	54	-7.53
Builds Relationships	49	54	-7.15
Collaboration and Teamwork	49	53	-6.14
Establishes Stretch Goals	49	53	-5.41
Champions Change	49	53	-4.48
Solves Problems and Analyzes Issues	50	52	-2.53
Communicates Powerfully and Prolifically	50	52	-2.47
Connects the Group to the Outside World	50	51	-0.78
Innovates	50	51	-0.76
Technical or Professional Expertise	50	51	-0.11
Develops Strategic Perspective	51	49	2.79

*Source: Zenger Folkman Inc., 2011*

GW4W has set out to be a beacon for mentorship, research, and advocacy. With plans for cross-disciplinary mentorship for women of all ages, GW4W is also set up to be a legacy organization to provide support for the next generation of women. The conversation also goes beyond the U.S. GW4W already has members in China, India, and Japan.

“It’s about shared wisdom,” said Mim, speaking about the group’s mission. “We want to share stories of leaders young and old, shedding light on women and their success.”

GW4W wants to create a network to share stories, define needs, and – based on those needs – put the right people in the room to make deliberate, profound connections. All of this happens while also raising funds for research specifically geared towards women’s health.

## What this means for the built environment

Leave it to me to make this about workplace. But I think it’s important that we talk about the implications.

Today we’re working with more tangible evidence to help us understand cause and effect in the built environment, where we spend 90 percent of our time. With more women-specific research, businesses and architects can begin to pinpoint how space and policy can leverage human capital that’s inclusive of both genders.

“The **Active Design Guidelines** [developed by **Center for Active Design**] and two new building standards [the **WELL Building Standard** and **FITWEL**] are full of research that demonstrates in very practical ways how the built environment can influence our behavior by encouraging us to move, reducing our stress, even improving our sleep,” said Leigh. “The built environment is often the ‘silent partner’ in the discussion about health and wellbeing, but a very influential one. As an industry, we’re catching on to this.”

“It wasn’t until fairly recently that we found out than women have different symptoms than men when having a heart attack,” Mim. “We react to stress, shift work, medications differently than men. There needs to be more research focused on women’s health and wellbeing issues. Unfortunately, there is very little funding available.”

It takes organizations like GW4W and studies that are already underway, like the **Health and Human Performance Survey**, to help us better see the holes in what we know and don’t yet know.

Leigh shared that EYP recently had staff in all offices take the Health and Human Performance Survey. The survey was developed by the same team that brought us the **Cognitive Function Study (COGfx)**. The survey features Health Performance Indicators (HPIs) – born from and very similar to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – to provide quantifiable measurement of positive and negative drivers on human health.

“Overall the women in our practice were more likely than men to suffer from being worried, tense, or anxious, and were less likely to get a good night’s sleep,” said Leigh. “We know that people in general are most creative when they are relaxed.”

Designers must understand these factors so that they can provide spaces where people can blow off steam or feel at ease, as well as spaces that support our natural sleep and waking cycles.

Again, GW4W is trying to shed light on these examples and provide an outlet for women to share and be heard. I don’t believe there is anything more appropriate or more powerful than health for women, by women.



*From bottom left: GW4W Leaders Deb Smolensky, Rachel Druckenmiller, Leigh*

*Stringer, Mari Ryan, Mim Senft, and Nancy Board.*

## How you can get involved

If you'd like to learn more about GW4W, please check out their website [here](http://www.gw4w.org/)(<http://www.gw4w.org/>). Membership is open and ready for you to join. Membership currently runs on an annual basis, and they have kept rates low to keep the organization open for all socioeconomic backgrounds. Also, be sure to follow them on Facebook for events, updates, and more.

Their second event is around the corner in Atlanta on January 19, so be sure to sign up!

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