

What Women Really Want From Their Employers

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Insights from four successful female leaders.

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Last year, I received the iconic [Turquoise Pantone 1837 Blue box](#) as a bonus gift from a Fortune 500 company. Inside was a handwritten, congratulatory note and a gift certificate for \$1,500 to Tiffany & Co. It provided a woman's name and phone number to call for personal concierge service, along with an option to take the gift certificate directly into a store to select a piece of my liking. It was the most memorable bonus gift I had ever received.

I emphasize memorable because I have earned a performance bonus of \$1,500 or more several times throughout my professional career, and while it's incredible to receive "unexpected" cash, or achieve a bonus that you have been chasing, it was the creativity and personalization of this gift that made me feel appreciated and empowered.

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It's no secret that working women seek flexibility and want to be rewarded and judged on deliverables, as opposed to how much time we spend at the office. We also seek equal pay,

in particular for women of color. While these issues continue to play out, it is promising to see more companies shifting their efforts to prioritize company culture, as evidenced by examples like [this terrific, supportive note](#) that a Chicago-area CEO sent to his employees to demonstrated that he understood they have personal lives.

So, what else do women *really* want from their employers? I checked in with four female business leaders, authors and TV personalities on the topic, and here are their ultimate insights.

1. Go beyond meeting my expectations.

"Enlightened employers go beyond meeting the basic needs of their employees and seek to truly understand how to engage them," says [Denise Lee Yohn](#), brand leadership expert and author of the book *FUSION: How Integrating Brand and Culture Powers the World's Greatest Companies*. "By connecting what's personally important to someone with the purpose and values of the organization, companies create meaningful relationships with employees and align their efforts with the brand."

Yohn elaborates, "An example would be how Airbnb opens the café in its headquarters to employees' families, even for dinner. This helps working parents, as they don't have to worry about rushing home to prepare a meal or to spend time with their children. And it is a terrific expression of Airbnb's brand mission -- to help you feel that you belong anywhere - and its core value of hospitality."

2. The value of my work is personal to me.

Carrie Bobb, President of [Carrie Bobb & Co](#), a real estate firm that works with women-focused brands such as Soul Cycle, DryBar and Sephora, remarks, "Exceptional employees, the most valuable assets for an employer, want to know they matter and that the work they are creating is meaningful and will last beyond their time spent at the company. It must be personal. During extremely difficult situations or in the midst of managing a crisis, it is critical to have empathy. Not just express empathy, actually have it. There's a difference. Often in large corporations, there are so many people involved in the messaging itself that the heart can get lost in translation. Employees want to be heard and understood, and they can tell the difference between a manager expressing the message the company wants to deliver and a manager actually expressing they care for the individual."

3. Ask my opinion.

[Jenna Wolfe](#), the host of Fox sports show *First Things First* and a former *Today* lifestyle correspondent, offers a sincere and direct perspective. "I've worked in television for 23 years, the bulk of which have been as a sportscaster in a male-dominated field," she

explains. "The happiest of them have been when I felt appreciated, respected and valued. I want to know that you need me, that you want me and that I make a difference. Ask me my opinion, let me sit in on content meetings, listen to my ideas and show me you'll actually implement the ones which can help us grow. Don't get me wrong — a raise is nice. An extra vacation day never hurts. And I'm always down for a gift card to any sports apparel store. But for me, as a woman who comes to a sports office every day well read and well prepared, there's nothing that makes me happier than commanding the respect of the people I work with."

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4. Everyone likes to feel included.

Gina Smith is the president of Rauxa, a woman-founded and led advertising agency owned by Publicis Groupe, and says she prioritizes being empathetic to a diverse group of women. She says, "We have always operated from the perspective that every employee deserves empathy, transparency and the knowledge that everyone's ideas are valid regardless of who they are. So it's not just about meeting the needs of female employees -- although that's critically important -- but also about age, experience, gender, orientation, color and every other area of inclusion."

Each of these testimonies reinforces that women want to feel valued, respected and understood, and there are numerous ways for employers to demonstrate that. Meaningful, thoughtful and personal gestures will go a long way and create a lasting impression. As a company founder of a female agency, I personally love to reward my team with personal gifts or self-care items that they would not spend on for themselves, such as a massage or yoga membership, and by empowering them to take on more of a leadership role.

For the curious, with the Tiffany's gift certificate, I purchased a Paloma Picasso necklace that reads "LOVE," a value that I prioritize in both my work and daily life. I wear this necklace almost every day and I never forget where it came from. In today's fast-paced business world, it's key to treat your employees like people, not transactions, because everyone can always use a little more love, all while moving up the leadership ranks.