



# Getting to Growth

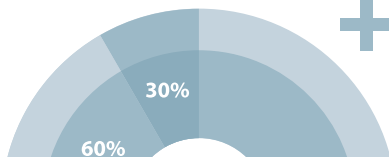


## The Data Behind Women in Staffing

ASA recently dedicated research resources to learning more about the women who play an integral role in running the nation's staffing companies—from the c-suite to branch offices. The research results presented here will help shape a new association interest group dedicated to women in leadership and future leadership roles.




*By Cynthia Poole*



**Women in Leadership:  
ASA Initiative, Series**

This is the first in a two-part series about women in the staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions industry, and their contributions, leadership roles, and influence. Coming in a future issue of *Staffing Success*: a closer look at a new interest group established by ASA focused on women in leadership and future leadership positions throughout the industry.



**T**here's no shortage of research on the topic of gender inequality in the workplace—including disparities in salary, professional development offerings, and opportunities for advancement and leadership. However, until now, little research has focused on the staffing industry. Is there gender parity among salaries in the industry? Are there more barriers to advancement for women versus men in staffing? What do female staffing professionals think about the path to leadership positions in the industry?

To answer these questions and many others, ASA conducted an online survey among staffing professionals late last year. The response was quite good: 1,648 individuals in the industry participated—62% of them women and 38% men. Here is a look at the survey results, which will help fuel strategies toward narrowing the industry's gender gaps and maximizing growth opportunities for women. >>>



## Demographics: Staffing Industry Gender Differences

	WOMEN	MEN
GENDER	<b>62%</b>	<b>38%</b>
AGE		
21–34 years old	<b>26%</b>	<b>17%</b>
35–49 years old	<b>42%</b>	<b>42%</b>
50+ years old	<b>32%</b>	<b>42%</b>
EDUCATION		
Trade school/some college/associate's degree	<b>39%</b>	<b>24%</b>
College or graduate degree	<b>55%</b>	<b>72%</b>
DUAL-INCOME HOUSEHOLD	<b>63%</b>	<b>52%</b>
SALARY		
<\$100,000	<b>68%</b>	<b>42%</b>
\$100,000+	<b>32%</b>	<b>58%</b>
INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE		
>20 years in the staffing industry	<b>20%</b>	<b>30%</b>
Managing/supervising	<b>78%</b>	<b>92%</b>



## Staffing Industry Introductions: Women vs. Men

OVERALL		WOMEN	MEN
<b>33%</b>	Friend/family/word of mouth	<b>30%</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>26%</b>	Staffing company	<b>29%</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>20%</b>	Employment ad—among managers	<b>22%</b>	<b>17%</b>



## Analyzing the Demographics

The demographic differences among staffing professionals are like those of employed U.S. adults overall, with women underrepresented on various levels. Women make up about half of the U.S. population, nearly half of the workforce, and more than half are college-educated—yet they account for a small percentage of leadership positions.

ASA survey results show that female staffing professionals tend to be younger and less highly educated, and generally have less experience in the industry than their male counterparts. Age may be the simple and most likely underlying factor for less education and experience: Women working for staffing companies are more likely than men to be 21 to 34 years of age (26% vs. 17%), and less likely to be age 50 or older (32% vs. 42%).

Looking at education, more men than women in the staffing industry have a college or graduate degree (72% vs. 55%), while more women in the industry attended a trade school, some college, or have an associate's degree (39% vs. 24%).

As with women across other industries, female staffing professionals are more likely than men to be in a dual-income household and generally report having salaries that are less than those of their male counterparts.

Additionally, women tend to have less experience than men working in the staffing industry, with significantly fewer (20%) reporting more than 20 years in staffing versus 30% of men. Fewer women in the industry also report having experience managing or supervising employees. Nearly eight in 10 women (78%) have supervised, compared with nine in 10 (92%) of their male counterparts.

## Tracking Entry to the Industry

ASA survey results reveal that word of mouth, employment ads, and outreach by staffing companies are the top ways female job seekers began their career in staffing.

Interestingly, there are differences in how men were introduced to the industry versus women. More men report becoming aware of staffing through a friend, family member, or word of mouth, while more women say they found out about the industry through a staffing company.

Female managers are more likely than their male counterparts to have been introduced to the staffing industry through an employment ad.

## Climbing the Corporate Ladder

As in other industries, advancing to more senior staffing company positions appears to be more difficult for women than men. This can be attributed—at least in part—to the level at which women tend to enter the industry versus men. Significantly more men than women started their staffing careers with a manager title or higher level (38% vs. 17%). Currently three in four men (78%) are at a manager level or higher compared with just over half of women (56%).

## Examining Barriers and Challenges

Few staffing professionals, according to ASA survey results, agree that it is more difficult for a woman to advance in the staffing industry than a man (14%). Perhaps not surprisingly, significantly more women agree with this statement (19%) than their male counterparts (6%).

The most frequently mentioned barrier to advancement in the industry is the lack of available positions or opportunities (19%). Nearly one in five staffing professionals (18%) have taken a break from the industry at some point in their career. Women are more likely to hit pause for maternity leave or to take care of family, while a greater number of men did the same in favor of a job opportunity in another industry.

There are also some staffing professionals (13%) who say they've consciously taken themselves out of the running for career advancement, as well as those (8%) who say they have no interest in progressing in the industry.

Other ASA research confirms that training and professional development are key factors in retaining personnel. Overall, more than half (55%) of staffing professionals agree that they need additional training to advance in their careers—women (58%) are more likely than men (49%) to agree with this.

Half of survey respondents (51%) say they have a professional development plan that supports their growth as a leader in the staffing industry; fewer women (48%) than men (55%) have a plan in place.

## Looking Toward the Future

Despite some disparities, most staffing professionals say their future in the industry is bright. The majority (63%) believe their opportunities for advancement are limitless; however, fewer women (60%) than men (69%) agree.

And while staffing professionals have a positive outlook, they don't necessarily think the professional road ahead will be an easy one. Overall, only 35%

of staffing professionals say that “nothing is holding them back” from advancing in the industry—much less than a majority. Even fewer women (31%) mention this sentiment than men (41%).

What do staffing professionals think they need to advance? More than two-thirds (68%) agree that mentors and coaches are critical to career advancement, though only one-third (33%) have a mentor or coach. According to the survey

## Targeting Titles: Few Women Begin as Managers in the Staffing Industry



	FIRST JOB		CURRENT JOB	
	MANAGER AND ABOVE	OTHER TITLES	MANAGER AND ABOVE	OTHER TITLES
Overall	25%	75%	64%	36%
Men	38%	63%	78%	22%
Women	17%	83%	56%	44%

## New: ASA Women in Leadership Interest Group

A coming issue of *Staffing Success* will continue the conversation by highlighting the newly formed women in leadership interest group, created to address the challenges and opportunities that women face in the staffing industry. Learn more about goals of the interest group (formerly the women in leadership taskforce), new resources for women leaders and emerging leaders, and how you can get involved.

“I'm honored to be leading the new women in leadership interest group,” says Genia Spencer, president of Team-People LLC. Spencer notes that both men and women are encouraged to join the group by updating their ASA Central profiles on [asacentral.americanstaffing.net](http://asacentral.americanstaffing.net), or by emailing [sections@americanstaffing.net](mailto:sections@americanstaffing.net).





**51% of staffing professionals surveyed say they have a professional development plan that supports their growth as a leader in the industry; fewer women (48%) than men (55%) have a plan in place.**

results, women are just as likely as men to have a mentor. However, women staffing professionals are more likely to be mentored by women and their male counterparts are more likely to be mentored by men.

Among other factors staffing professionals see as being beneficial to their staffing industry futures: One-third say their character, work ethic, persistence, and dedication have helped them to advance—with no significant difference by gender.

Other factors they noted include

- A desire to learn and understand the industry (13%)
- Networking and good people skills (11%)
- Experience (11%)
- Great managers/leadership (8%)

### Developing Staffing Industry Leaders

ASA survey results confirm that perceptions and challenges regarding gender gaps persist in the staffing industry. However, these are tempered by quite a bit of optimism regarding advancement and opportunity.

The results the association culled, combined with the copious and in-depth research ASA has conducted on employee engagement and workforce trends, support the following recommenda-

tions—which will be the focus of part two of this *Staffing Success* series on women in leadership.

- Explore mentor programs—or if your company already has a mentor program in place, reassess its effectiveness. Mentors and coaches often volunteer their time and do the heavy lifting along with the mentees once a program is in place.
- Ensure all corporate staff—from the c-suite to the branch offices—have a professional development plan along their desired career path. Leadership should check progress periodically and help make needed adjustments.
- Offer training and professional development opportunities across all company levels, not just for managers and above. Remember to include soft skills training that can help encourage promotions to leadership positions.
- Recognize and reward leadership at all levels of the company. Positive reinforcement supports a workplace culture that encourages growth among all employees, and can help create more growth opportunities for women. ■

Cynthia Poole is the director of research for ASA. Send your feedback on this article to [success@americanstaffing.net](mailto:success@americanstaffing.net). Engage with ASA on social media—go to [americanstaffing.net/social](http://americanstaffing.net/social).

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