



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP



What inspired you to pursue a career in the group retirement industry?

I fell into the group retirement industry almost 25 years ago. I came from a high-tech background and, when that industry experienced the tech bubble burst, I looked for something more stable and closer to where I lived. My intention was to focus on my skill sets: communications and marketing. The content was less important. But I had an “aha” moment when I joined Manulife. I realized group retirement plans are widely misunderstood and that presents an opportunity for someone who loves communications, marketing and relationships to help drive understanding of their value. That inspired me to stay in the business and later to move into client-facing roles.

What industry changes would you like to see to better support women?

I see things now that didn’t resonate as much when I was younger, including how increased longevity affects retirement savings. Women are living longer and we don’t necessarily put ourselves first — but we have to because an estimated 60 per cent of women could have an income shortfall by the time they hit age 95. At that point, things are not controllable, your resources are limited and you’re not going to be gainfully employed. Our industry can encourage women to pay attention and address the impact of longevity.

How can women build a strong network and support system to advance their careers?

Women own their careers. There are many supportive things we can do but, ultimately, women have to take action to advance their careers. So, join professional associations such as the Canadian Pension & Benefits



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Erica Hall
Vice-President,
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Institute and Association of Canadian Pension Management. Participate in networking events in your community and online — for example, through LinkedIn groups that help connect you with mentors. Align yourself with successful women who can share valuable advice while helping you navigate your career path and see the impact you can have on this industry.

What role should organizations play in supporting women in leadership?

Organizations need to actively create an environment that supports and empowers women in leadership and there are many ways to do that. One reason I’ve stayed at Manulife so long is because I felt very supported here. When I joined, women were largely concentrated in administration and operations roles, but Manulife helped many of them move into different areas. We have mentorship and sponsorship programs that build connections with experienced executives. We offer targeted leadership development programs and training opportunities for women to build skills and

confidence. We’re implementing flexible work arrangements to accommodate business needs and help all employees balance career and personal responsibilities. We’ve also created an organizational culture that values diversity and inclusion. We have a Global Women’s Alliance and employee resource groups focused on women in technology and we support Women’s Day celebrations across all our locations.

How important is diversity in leadership?

Diversity brings a multitude of benefits to an organization and society as a whole. In leadership, it allows for enhanced decision-making thanks to different perspectives, experiences and insights. It drives performance, with more inclusive leadership teams generating better financial results. It allows us to be more reflective of our customer base, which helps us meet the needs of all our customers. And, very importantly, it helps attract and retain top talent.



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