

Introducing the Ambition Project by American Express



An open letter from the six women of the American Express Executive Committee reflects on the company's progress, shares new commitments and programs and calls on leaders everywhere to proudly back women's ambition.

Over the past two days, the six of us hosted our fourth Global Women's Conference. Through a variety of fireside chats, workshops and networking events, we united nearly 250 of the company's top executives around a common goal – to find meaningful ways to continue advocating for women's advancement.

Beyond this, the conference was a time to celebrate the incredible strides women and men have made together at American Express.

Our journey began two years ago, when our Executive Committee surveyed the most senior women at our company. Only a third had ever publicly described themselves as ambitious. In addition, while women were well-represented across key senior positions, only one of them reported to the CEO. In that moment, we recognized we needed to talk more openly about how we could fully back our women colleagues in achieving their ambitions.

So, we introduced targeted programming focused on empowering women to own their ambition, including:

- Roundtable sessions with leaders around the globe;
- Networking events to strengthen our community; and
- An internal newsletter to hold ourselves accountable against our progress.

Today, there are six women reporting to the CEO – leading more than 50% of our workforce. Moreover, during the same period women serving on the company's Board of Directors doubled.

This progress extends across the company:

- More than 100 women have been promoted or joined the company at the executive level or above;
- Eight women, a record number, are currently serving as country managers in key markets; and
- Globally, American Express women are now paid at parity to their male counterparts.

Most importantly, two-thirds of our most senior women now have the confidence to publicly say “I am ambitious.”

We recognize there is still work to do. But, these are meaningful milestones for American Express - demonstrating the power that vocal leadership, a dedicated community and collective ambition can have on women’s overall advancement.

LOOKING AT THE DATA

Today, we are taking our learnings beyond American Express with the launch of Ambitious Insights commissioned by American Express, in partnership with The New York Women’s Foundation – a global study on women’s relationships with ambition.

Our research surveyed professional women around the world and interestingly found that women outside of American Express are facing the same challenges we saw in our internal survey:

- 31 percent said they are proud to call themselves ambitious; and
- 32 percent said they were very confident they could actually achieve those ambitions in their careers.

Beyond this, the external research showed what many of us already feel – ambition is not a simple thing. It exists across many dimensions – we aspire to successful careers, financial independence and skills, while also being healthy, being great parents and having strong personal relationships.

Success in our careers without success in the rest of our lives is not achieving our ambitions.

CREATING AN AMBITIOUS CULTURE

With this in mind, we have worked together to launch a signature initiative called **The Ambition Project**. Over the coming year, we will:

- Share blog posts and videos of our colleagues from all levels and backgrounds who have been ambitious for their teams, families and communities;
- Host external leaders and influencers for candid conversations about ambition;
- Expand our existing shadowing program globally, to give women of all levels access to advocates in senior positions; and
- Share key learnings beyond the company, publishing our research on the topic and continuing our annual internal survey of our colleagues’ relationships with ambition.

Through this program, our hope is that leaders everywhere will recognize their responsibility to nurture their colleagues’ ambitions, and that future generations of women will have the backing they need to say, “I am ambitious.”

LOOKING AHEAD

The Ambition Project will launch ahead of International Women’s Day (Sunday, March 8) – a time to recognize the incredible achievements of women around the world.

In celebration of the day, on Thursday, March 5, American Express will host 24 events at our offices, across 20 countries, with many of our senior leaders traveling globally to participate in local activations. In addition, the following day, select offices will pay ambition forward through service events with women-focused nonprofit organizations.

This International Women’s Day and beyond, we are calling on leaders – of all genders and levels – to take the time to understand the ambitions of the women they work with, celebrate their achievements, create an open dialogue and find actionable ways to advocate for women to embrace and achieve their ambitions.

When we focus on “us” in “ambitious,” we all win.

GETTING INVOLVED

As we embark on The Ambition Project over the coming year, we will continue to share our learnings to drive women’s collective success and address the unique challenges women face in the workplace.

We would love to start a conversation about these efforts. For more information, reach out to ambition@aexp.com and join the conversation on social media using #theambitionproject by @americanexpress.

The Women of the Executive Committee

Anna Marrs, President, Global Commercial Services

Denise Pickett, President, Global Services Group and Global Executive Sponsor, Women’s Interest Network

Elizabeth Rutledge, Chief Marketing Officer

Jennifer Skyler, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer

Laureen E. Seeger, Chief Legal Officer

Monique Herena, Chief Colleague Experience Officer

*Ambitious Insights is a study commissioned by American Express, in partnership with The New York Women’s Foundation, based on a sample of 3,026 women (not affiliated with American Express) ages 21-64 with a college degree or higher and employed full time in the following markets: U.S., Australia, Canada, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, and U.K. Completed interviews were weighted by age to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the individual market populations. The anonymous survey was conducted using an online panel January 10-16, 2020.