

WJA Releases Results of Gender Equality Survey

The survey focuses on workplace issues where gender could be a factor

FOR RELEASE (April 29, 2019) -- The Women's Jewelry Association's Gender Equality Project released the results of its first survey, which asked members of the gem, jewelry, and watch industries to comment on workplace practices where gender could be a factor.

WJA engaged MVI Marketing, a trade and consumer research company that works exclusively for the gem, jewelry and watch industries, to assist in designing a questionnaire intended to gather the most useful information on this topic. MVI conducted the survey in fall 2018, and ensured confidentiality for survey participants. It also designed the survey so that there were two sets of questions – one for owners and one for employees.

"The goal of the survey results is to help WJA better understand the most pressing gender-related issues people in the industry encountered, so we can create programming and initiatives tailored to those issues," says WJA Executive Director Bernadette Mack.

The survey results show overall that employees and owners report widely differing awareness regarding nearly every gender-related workplace topic, indicating the need for education and support for both groups (see box below). As well, employees are likely to think gender topics "extremely important" more often than employers do. Exacerbating the problem for employers is that many employees are reluctant to report occurrences of gender discrimination to their bosses because they fear a negative impact on their jobs – or other retaliation.

To address these results, WJA has several projects already underway and will initiate others.

* The survey indicates an overall lack of understanding about employment policies that cover gender-related workplace issues. As a result, WJA will provide increased and improved training and materials to employers and employees alike. (Note: WJA has already provided seminars at trade events and an online webinar detailing the various laws and regulations governing gender discrimination, in partnership with the Jewelers Vigilance Committee.)

* Employees at smaller companies are far less likely than employees at large companies to understand gender-related company policies – 92% of employees in companies with over 1000 workers know their company's policies, while only 48% of employees in companies with 1-5 workers know them. Thus, WJA will particularly focus on providing education and support to small businesses owners and employees.

* Of the total employee respondents, 30% report they have been deprived of equal opportunities for advancement; and 38% say they have been affected by pay disparity. To counteract this problem, WJA will provide training on negotiation and self-advocacy skills.

* Employees surveyed also do not feel comfortable reporting occurrences of gender-based workplace issues more than 50% of the time – most often due to concerns about how such reports will impact their employment and/or a fear of retaliation. As indicated above, WJA will offer employees training on self-advocacy skills. WJA will also explore with owners how to communicate to employees that they can report problems without risk of losing their jobs or retaliation.

* Nearly half of employees responding to the survey say they have witnessed discrimination or harassment in the workplace. As a result, WJA will offer bystander training in the future, which involves teaching witnesses how to recognize, intervene, and help victims to report and seek support.

The survey was deployed world-wide and 586 individuals participated – 98% from the U.S. Of the respondents, 240 are employees and 346 are owners/executives/board members/major shareholders (called owners throughout the survey results). Two thirds of owners and 91% of employees who responded are women. A majority of both groups are industry veterans (10+ years) and a large number are over 50 (69% of owners; 42% of employees). Among owners, 93% manage companies with 15 or fewer workers. Retail is the largest specific industry sector that responded (45% of owners; 33% of employees).

The association received a JCK Industry Fund grant that helped underwrite the cost of the WJA Gender Equality Survey, its seminars/webinars, and enhancements to its existing mentorship program. The grant will also assist the association in offering skills training in workplace negotiation.

“We are developing gender-equality-focused tools and programs that will contribute to the future overall health and image of the industry,” says WJA President Jenny Luker. “The work we’re spearheading is educating business owners and executives about the importance of maintaining a bias-free work environment.”

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Box:

Gender Equality: Different Perspectives

Here are specific topics where gender discrimination awareness diverged between employees and owners in WJA’s gender equality survey:

* 49% of employees report they have witnessed or are aware of gender-based discrimination; vs. 7% of owners.

* 30% of employees say they are deprived of equal opportunity for advancement due to gender-related issues, but only 2% of owners report they have received complaints.

* 50% of employees report being subject to a gender-related hostile work environment (including at trade shows), but only 9% of owners report they have received complaints.

* 38% of participating employees say that they have been affected by gender-related pay disparity, but only 2% of owners say they have received complaints.

* 23% of employees say they’ve experienced sexual harassment, but only 5% of owners report receiving complaints.

* 16% of employees say they have been victims of unwanted sexual advances; but only 3% of employers have received complaints.

About the Women’s Jewelry Association

The Women's Jewelry Association mission is to help women in the jewelry and watch industries advance and develop professionally through networking, education, leadership development, and the provision of member services. For more information, visit www.womensjewelryassociation.com.

About MVI Marketing

MVI Marketing LLC (MVI) provides consumer and trade market research, strategic consulting and digital marketing services to a global client list in the luxury goods space with a primary focus on jewelry and accessories. For more information, visit www.mvimarketing.com.

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