



VOICES OF WOMEN AT WORK: The Milwaukee Experience

Comparative Survey Analysis: TEMPO Members vs. Emerging Women Leaders
February 2026

Executive Summary

This report presents a comparative analysis of survey responses from two distinct groups: 132 TEMPO Members — Milwaukee's senior executive and C-suite women — and 80 Emerging Women Leaders (EWL) — mid-level to senior professionals on the rise. Together, 212 women shared their experiences with career advancement, workplace barriers, gender equity, and organizational support. The data reveals both shared challenges across career stages and striking generational and experiential divergences that carry important implications for employers, TEMPO, and the broader Milwaukee professional ecosystem.

Who Responded: Snapshot of Both Groups

	TEMPO Members (n=132)	Emerging Women Leaders (n=80)
Career Level	65% Executive/C-Suite	51% Mid-Level, 38% Senior Mgmt
Age Range	43% ages 45–54; 27% ages 35–44	69% ages 35–44; 20% ages 25–34
Top Industries	Business & Prof. Services (24%), Finance/Insurance/RE (23%), Nonprofit (21%)	Nonprofit (24%), Business & Prof. Services (19%), Finance/Insurance/RE (16%)
Race/Ethnicity	80% White, 11% Black/African American	84% White, 9% Black/African American

Both groups skew predominantly white, mirroring known disparities in Milwaukee's professional leadership pipeline. The EWL group is notably younger and earlier in their careers, making their responses a leading indicator of what's coming for Milwaukee's workforce — and where interventions matter most.

Career Advancement: Ambition vs. Saturation

How Important Is Advancement?

Importance of Advancement	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
Average Rating (1–5 scale)	3.2 / 5	3.9 / 5
Very/Extremely Important	49%	70%
Not Important / Slightly Important	22%	6%

EWL members are markedly more ambitious and advancement-focused than their TEMPO counterparts. This gap is expected given career stage, but the significant share of TEMPO members (22%) who no longer prioritize advancement warrants attention — it may signal satisfaction within their position, burnout, or a ceiling effect.

Advancement Timelines

Timeframe	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
Actively seeking promotion	17%	25%
Want to advance in 2–5 years	32%	61%
Not interested in advancement	41%	7%

⚠ Alarming: 41% of TEMPO Members Are Not Seeking Further Advancement

Over four in ten TEMPO members — the region's most senior women — are not currently pursuing advancement. Given that many are already at executive or C-suite levels, this may reflect career fulfillment, but also raises questions about retention, succession planning, and whether Milwaukee's leadership pipeline has room at the top.

⚠ Watch Signal: 25% of EWL Members Are Actively Seeking Promotion Right Now

A quarter of Emerging Women Leaders are actively seeking their next move. If their organizations are not ready to meet this ambition, Milwaukee risks losing this talent — either to other companies or other cities.

Barriers to Advancement: Where They Converge and Diverge

Personal Barriers Experienced

Barrier	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
Burnout/dissatisfaction concern	26%	29%
Personal obligations (caregiving, etc.)	21%	26%
No realistic path visible	10%	17%
Passed over for promotion	10%	11%
No barriers reported	15%	8%

Burnout and personal obligations rank as the top two personal barriers for both groups — a through line across career stages. EWL members are significantly more likely to report seeing no realistic path forward (17% vs. 10%), and less likely to report no barriers at all (8% vs. 15%).

Organizational/Structural Barriers

Structural Barrier	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
Work-life balance demands	25%	31%
Limited leadership development	15%	24%
Bias in promotion decisions	15%	12%
Lack of sponsorship/advocacy	17%	15%
Limited network access	6%	10%
No barriers	15%	7%

Key Theme: Work-Life Demands Persist Across All Levels

Work-life balance is the single most cited structural barrier in both groups, confirming that this challenge does not resolve as women advance — it evolves and persists. For EWL members, limited leadership development emerges as a second critical gap, reflecting the importance of structured growth opportunities for women who haven't yet reached the top.

Organizational Support: What Women Are Actually Experiencing

Q11 — Workplace Agreement Statements

Statement	TEMPO Agree/Strongly Agree	EWL Agree/Strongly Agree
My contributions are recognized fairly	75%	73%
I feel encouraged to pursue stretch assignments	74%	78%
My org provides a clear path to advancement	38%	46%
I am provided with sponsors for career growth	34%	44%

Recognition and encouragement scores are relatively strong and consistent across both groups — a positive finding. However, the most structural supports — clear advancement paths and formal sponsorship — score dramatically lower, with fewer than half in either group confirming these are in place.

⚠ Alarming: Only 34% of TEMPO Members Have Sponsors — At the Executive Level

Among Milwaukee's most senior women leaders, two-thirds report they are NOT provided with sponsors to assist in their career growth. At the executive/C-suite level, sponsorship is less about promotion and more about board access, peer networks, and enterprise influence — and this gap suggests significant missed opportunity.

What Would Move the Needle: Advancement Influencers

Practice	TEMPO % Agree/Strongly Agree	EWL % Agree/Strongly Agree
Flexible work arrangements	83%	94%
Compensation equity	91%	86%
Targeted leadership development	90%	89%
Clear advancement criteria	77%	86%
Mental health & burnout prevention	72%	88%
Inclusive culture	73%	85%
Formal sponsorship	68%	76%
Caregiving support	50%	66%

Practice	TEMPO % Agree/Strongly Agree	EWL % Agree/Strongly Agree
Employee Resource Groups	29%	43%
Re-entry programs	37%	55%

Across nearly every category, EWL members score higher than TEMPO members on what would influence their advancement decisions — reflecting both greater urgency and greater unmet need. The largest gaps appear in flexible work (94% EWL vs. 83% TEMPO), mental health/burnout prevention (88% vs. 72%), and re-entry programs (55% vs. 37%).

Standout: Flexible Work Is the #1 Priority for Emerging Women Leaders

94% of EWL members say flexible work arrangements would influence their decision to pursue advancement — the highest-rated factor in the entire survey. For organizations hoping to retain and advance the next generation of Milwaukee’s women leaders, flexibility is non-negotiable.

Gender, Equity, and the Feeling of Being Held Back

Has Gender Limited Your Opportunities?

Frequency	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
Sometimes/Often/Always	65%	61%
Never/Rarely	34%	39%

Nearly two-thirds of women in both groups have felt their gender limited their opportunities at work. This consistency across career stage is striking — women are not simply shedding this experience as they advance.

Equity vs. Male Peers

Area	TEMPO: Somewhat/Much Less	EWL: Somewhat/Much Less
Visibility for promotion	45%	34%
Recognition of accomplishments	36%	32%
Access to mentors/sponsors	38%	22%
Support from managers	35%	21%

⚠ Alarming: Senior Women Feel More Equity Gaps Than Junior Women

TEMPO members — the most senior women in Milwaukee — report feeling LESS equitably treated than their male peers compared to EWL members across all four dimensions. This counterintuitive finding suggests that the higher women rise, the more pronounced the equity disparities become, particularly around visibility for promotions (45% of TEMPO vs. 34% EWL) and mentorship/sponsorship access (38% vs. 22%).

Retention Risk: Leaving Organizations and Leaving Milwaukee

Considered Leaving Organization Due to Lack of Clear Path

Response	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
Yes — currently considering leaving	16%	35%
Yes — previously considered, stayed	32%	31%
No	52%	34%

⚠ Alarming: 35% of EWL Members Are Currently Considering Leaving Their Organization

More than one in three Emerging Women Leaders are actively thinking about leaving their employer right now — specifically because they don't see a clear path to leadership. This is a five-alarm retention crisis for Milwaukee employers. Combined with the 31% who have previously considered leaving, that means 66% of EWL members have at some point been on the verge of walking out the door.

Considered Leaving the Milwaukee Region

Response	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
Yes — currently considering leaving Milwaukee	12%	17%
Yes — have considered in the past	30%	31%
No	58%	51%

Nearly half of EWL members (48%) have considered leaving Milwaukee to advance their careers — compared to 42% of TEMPO members. The Milwaukee region is at real risk of losing its next generation of women leaders to other markets. Notably, EWL members are more likely than TEMPO members to be currently entertaining that move (17% vs. 12%).

Mentoring: A Tale of Two Roles

Mentoring Participation	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
Serving as a Mentor	64%	23%
Being Mentored	14%	49%
Not participating	22%	29%

The data reflects a natural pipeline relationship between the two groups: TEMPO members are primarily giving back as mentors, while EWL members are primarily receiving mentorship. However, 29% of EWL members — nearly one in three — are not currently participating in any mentoring relationship, representing a significant gap in the support network.

Most Desired Mentoring Format

Mentoring Format Preferred	TEMPO Members	EWL Members
One-on-one executive mentoring	58%	48%
Group mentoring cohorts	28%	33%
Sponsor matching programs	14%	19%

Both groups prioritize one-on-one executive mentoring above all else. EWL members show relatively stronger interest in group cohorts and sponsor matching — formats that build peer networks and institutional advocacy simultaneously.

Overarching Themes

1. Burnout Is the Universal Barrier

Across both groups and across multiple question formats, burnout and dissatisfaction with expanding responsibilities surfaces as the top concern. It shows up in personal barriers, structural barriers, and in the strong demand for flexible work and mental health support. Milwaukee employers must treat burnout prevention not as a wellness perk but as a retention strategy.

2. The Pipeline Is Leaking at the Middle

EWL members are ambitious, advancing quickly, and — 35% of them — one foot out the door. The mid-career stage is the most critical intervention point. Employers who fail to provide clear paths, visible sponsorship, and flexible conditions risk losing their best talent before it ever reaches the executive tier.

3. Sponsorship Is Broken at Every Level

Fewer than half of women in both groups confirm they have sponsors supporting their career growth. This is a system-level failure. TEMPO's Mentor Awards program and EWL's mentoring track are bright spots, but formal sponsor-matching programs — where advocates actively open doors, not just offer advice — remain underbuilt.

4. The Equity Gap Widens at the Top

Counter to the intuition that bias decreases as women reach senior levels, TEMPO members report feeling more underrepresented and less equitably treated than their male peers compared to EWL members. The experience of systemic inequity does not fade with seniority — it evolves and, in some dimensions, intensifies.

5. Milwaukee Must Compete for Its Own Talent

Nearly half of EWL members have considered leaving the region. Milwaukee's value proposition as a place to build a career — particularly for women — must be actively constructed and communicated. Organizations, civic institutions, and networks like TEMPO have a collective role to play in making this city a place where ambitious women choose to stay.