

**PLUS:**

VISUAL BREAKDOWNS OF KEY FINDINGS AND FIGURES.

# INSIDE THE NUMBERS: WOMEN IN RESTAURANTS

*New report from  
WiRL dives into  
women executives'  
thoughts and  
standing with pay.*

T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S



ADOBESTOCK / JUSTURE

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ASSOCIATE EDITOR  
OF WiRL

Callie Evergreen  
SENIOR EDITOR

Tory Bartelt  
ART DIRECTOR

Peggy Carouthers  
EDITOR AND  
VICE PRESIDENT OF  
THE CONTENT STUDIO

Ya'el McCloud  
EDITOR

Abby Winterburn  
EDITOR

Drew Filipski  
EDITOR

Jocelyn Winn  
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# Women in Restaurant Leadership Data Survey Analysis

The influence of female role models in the foodservice industry is undeniable. From the brilliant, joyful, and timeless Julia Child to C-suite leaders like Erin Kaylor—president and CFO of BIGGBY Coffee and a McDonald's veteran—and Heather Leed Neary, CEO and president of Taco John's, powerful, intelligent, and innovative women are shaping the industry more than ever before. Even today, there is still stigma around women's ability to be leaders both in the kitchen and the boardroom. Even if they are proving those very assumptions wrong at every turn.

Not long ago, the culinary world offered few visible paths for women beyond the home kitchen. While biases still exist, the industry's growing visibility and cultural influence have created new opportunities. The rise of the Information Age has turned chefs and restaurateurs into household names, and women

have been at the forefront of that shift—from early trailblazers like M.F.K. Fisher, Buwei Yang Chao, and Ruth Fertel to today’s innovators such as Pinky Cole, Stephanie Izard, and Christina Tosi. Their work has not only reshaped perceptions of women in foodservice but also inspired a new generation—so much so that, according to U.S. News, half of the students at the Culinary Institute of America now identify as women.

This growing presence has significant economic implications. A 2017 McKinsey report identified women as an untapped source of economic opportunity, noting that fully closing the gender gap in the U.S. labor market could add \$4.3 trillion to the annual GDP by 2025—19 percent higher than business as usual. For the food industry, the case for gender diversity is especially compelling:

it expands the talent pool, sparks innovation, deepens customer insight, and helps close the “ambition gap”—the tendency for women to self-limit career pursuits due to societal stereotypes. Yet at the time of the report, men were still more likely to be promoted and to earn higher pay, underscoring how much work remains to be done. As recently as 2024, men were still making more than women, and even more so as employees attained higher leadership roles. A National Restaurant Association (NRA) 2022 survey reported that while 63 percent of entry-level and 69 percent of midlevel restaurant employees were women, only 38 percent were at the executive level. And from a sample size of the top 50 restaurant chains by sales, only five CEOs, 10 percent, were women. Although Glassdoor reports some 76 percent of job seekers value a diverse workforce when evaluating companies and job offers, closing the wage gap remains extremely slow.

Pay inequity only slightly improved in the United States over the past 20-some years. In 2003, women earned 81 percent as much as men. In 2024, women earned an average of 85 percent of what men earned, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of median hourly earnings of both full- and part-time workers. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 granted equal pay for women—the same year Julia Child’s first cooking program aired on public television—will its centennial arrive before it is realized?

According to Oysterlink’s 2025 Restaurant Industry Statistics, traditional restaurants make up 73.33 percent of the total \$1.5 trillion in projected US industry sales for 2025. That’s almost 4 percent of the country’s gross domestic product. It’s not for lack of profit availability, then, that’s preventing women from being paid equally. And it’s certainly not a lack of ambition.

Helping to shed light on this disparity, bias, and institutional devaluation of women’s work, in 2023, *QSR* and *FSR* magazines created Women in Restaurant Leadership (WiRL), a national society and networking

**A McKinsey report identified women as an untapped source of economic opportunity. Fully closing the gender gap in the U.S. labor market could add \$4.3 trillion to the annual GDP.**

ADRIAN STOCK / JACOB J. AMARAL

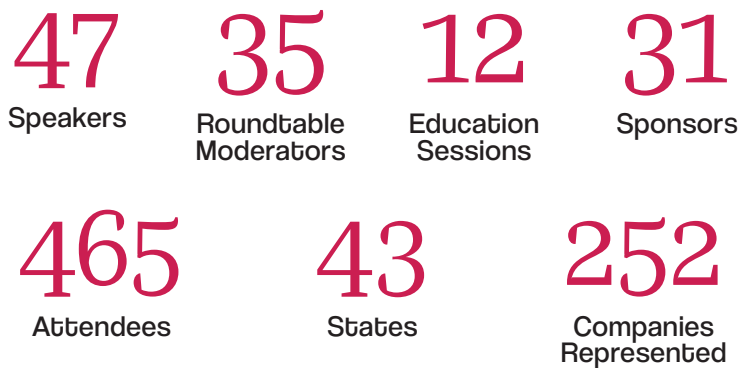


group that supports, educates, and uplifts women in restaurant leadership. Its mission is to create a safe environment for women to connect, learn from one another, foster mentorship opportunities, and gather career advancement advice and tips. Each year, women in restaurant leadership gather at the flagship event, Together Summit, for a one-day conference of workshops, keynote speakers, and networking opportunities.

At this year's February Together Summit in Nashville, as shown below, attendees represented 43 states, 252 companies, and myriad executive titles.

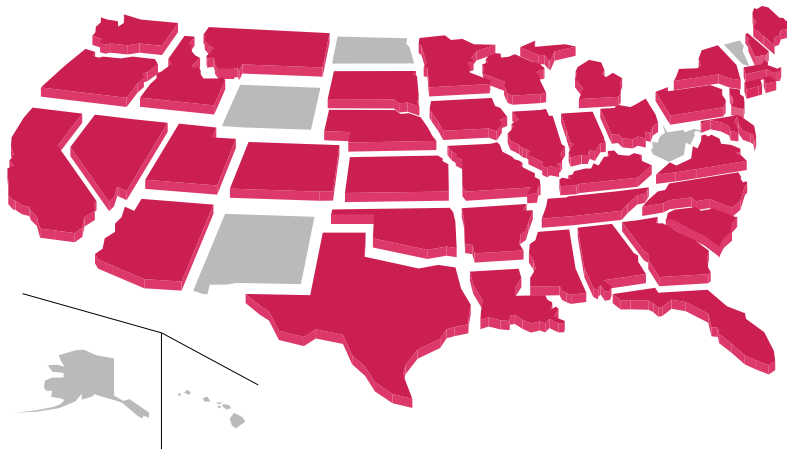
## WIRL 2025 CONFERENCE BREAKDOWN / NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

### RUNDOWN BY THE NUMBERS;

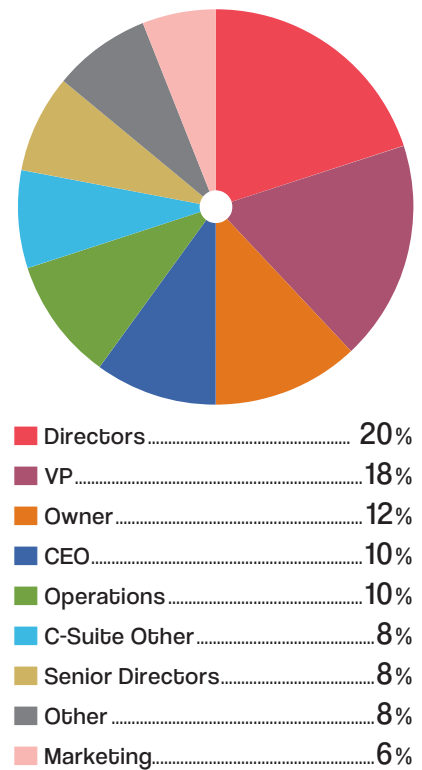


### CONFERENCE ATTENDEE BY STATE:

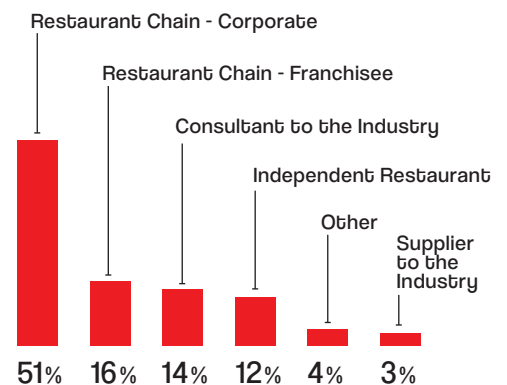
Alabama.....10	Illinois.....13	New Jersey.....8	Tennessee.....44
Arizona.....4	Kansas.....9	Nevada.....4	Texas.....38
California.....51	Kentucky.....7	New York.....26	Utah.....8
Colorado.....13	Massachusetts.....10	Ohio.....4	Virginia.....5
Connecticut.....7	Minnesota.....5	Oklahoma.....4	Washington, DC.....11
Florida.....28	Missouri.....15	Pennsylvania.....26	Wisconsin.....4
Georgia.....40	North Carolina.....13	South Carolina.....7	Other.....39



### CONFERENCE ATTENDEE BY TITLES:



### COMPANY TYPES REPRESENTED:







This year, in a joint effort with Women of Restaurants, Technology, and Hospitality (WORTH), WiRL offered a volunteer survey to those registered to collect data to understand the compensation, benefits, and experiences of executives in the restaurant industry. The 27 questions, with open-ended options to explain further where applicable, included concrete data such as age, state of residence, title, years of experience, salary, and employer type. The survey also covered subjective data such as whether participants feel they were ever passed over for a promotion because of gender, desired changes to compensation practices, and if they're satisfied with their performance-based bonuses, work-life balance, and career advancement opportunities.

Out of the 465 attendees and 200 WiRL conference registrants, 62 responded to the survey. Of those 62, three were men,

which for this analysis will constitute the outliers. All other participants self-identified as female. Performed online, the complete dataset remains intact with no changes or additions to the original answers.

The top three titles for all conference attendees comprised Directors (20 percent), VPs (18 percent), and Owners (12 percent), and the top three company types represented were Corporate Restaurant Chains (51 percent), Franchisee Restaurant Chains (16 percent), and Consultants to the Industry (14 percent). For the survey participants, the majority of respondents were women in the Restaurant Operator category, almost half at the C-Suite job level, followed by CEOs (16 percent), CMOs (11 percent), VP of Operations, Chief People Officer, and VP of Business Development (two each for 4.4 percent). The remaining survey participants included "head of" roles, including CVO Co-Founder, Attorney, and Marketing and Sales Coordinator. The three men's roles were F&B/Hospitality Insurance Consultant, CRO, and CGO.

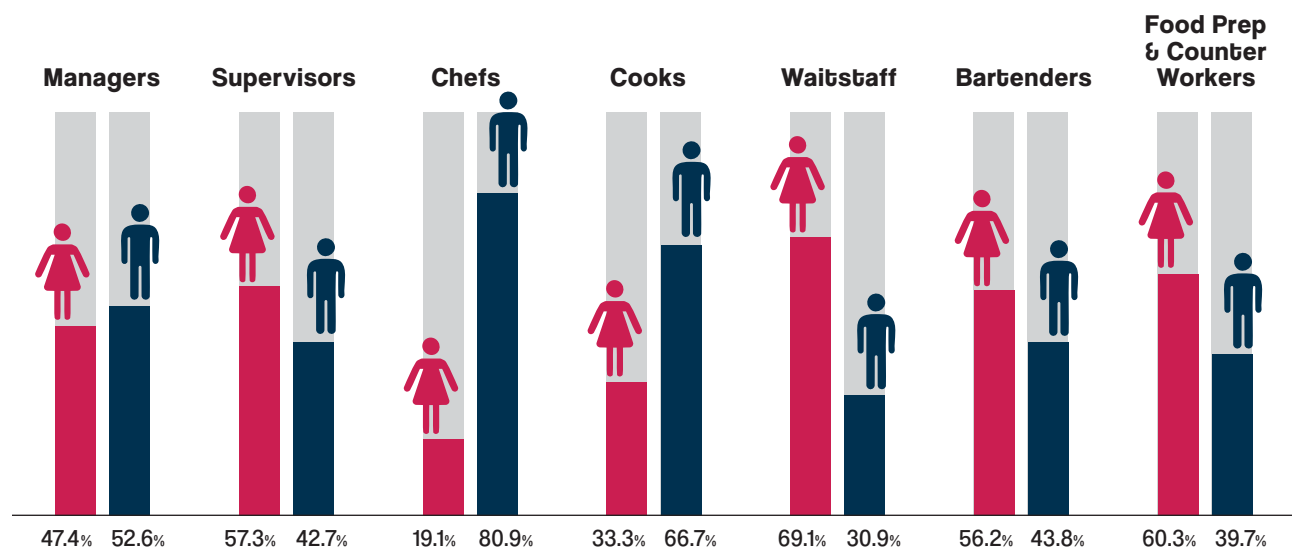
Let's dig in to see how our data correlates with the industry at large.

## Age, Experience, And Role

Of 700,000-plus restaurant and food service outlets in the US, the research firm Oysterlink reports women represent 54.7 percent of the workforce, higher than the 48 percent of women in the total US labor force. Men make up 45.3 percent of the industry and 52.4 percent of the national labor force. For a breakdown of gender by position, see the chart below from Escoffier School of Culinary Arts research. Like the respondents in our survey exemplify, higher-level positions are the ones that typically receive the most accolades, awards, and, usually, highest pay.

## GENDER REPRESENTATION IN VARIOUS RESTAURANT INDUSTRY POSITIONS

■ FEMALE ■ MALE



FIGURES: ADOBE STOCK / ALEX

2024 Restaurant Industry Demographics: Diversity Among Owners and Employees - Escoffier

The U.S. Census Bureau reports women make up 50.52 percent of the total population, so women are still underrepresented in restaurant ownership, albeit more inclusive than the wider private sector. At the end of 2024, according to Escoffier, almost half (47 percent) of all restaurants were at least 50 percent women owned—compared to 43 percent of businesses in the private sector overall.

**Employees aged 16–24 represent 40 percent of the restaurant workforce, while 60 percent of restaurant workers are under 35, compared to the 35 percent across all industries.**

Like any industry, everyone has to make their way up the ladder. Given that one in three Americans had their first job experience in restaurants, and **6 in 10 adults** have worked in restaurants at some point, it's no surprise that 8 in 10 restaurant owners started their industry careers in entry-level positions, and 9 in 10 restaurant managers started in entry-level positions, according to the NRA.

Experience travels with age, and Oysterlink found that employees aged 16–24 represent 40 percent of the restaurant workforce, while 60 percent of restaurant workers are under 35, compared to the 35 percent across all industries. Indeed, the NRA reports that restaurant and foodservice employees are three times more likely than the total US workforce to be under the age of 25, whose wage gap is smaller (for workers ages 25–34) than for all workers 16 and older. In 2024, for instance, women 25–34 earned an average of 95 cents for every dollar earned by a man in the same age group—a five-cent gap—versus the gender pay gap among workers of all ages of 15 cents, according to Pew Research. In our dataset for restaurant leaders, only three respondents are aged 25–34. Eleven are 55–64; twenty-eight are 45–54; seventeen are 35–44; and three are 65-plus.

Our data confirms the age and experience correlation, assuming respondents have risen through the ranks along with the pay gap. Forty respondents have 16 plus years of experience, eighteen respondents have 11–15 years of experience, two respondents have 5–10 years of experience, and two respondents have less than five years of experience.

Of the female respondents, 40 are restaurant operators, 11 are vendor suppliers to the industry, five are consultants to the industry, two are franchisors, and one represents an association. To reach this status level, certainly, there were some hard-won years of realizing the ropes.

And part of retaining that employee over a lifelong career has a lot to do with pay. If an employee can earn a decent, fair wage and meet the demands of the cost of living across years, that employee assumedly would be more likely to stay in the industry. The foodservice industry is a notorious stepping stone, however, for quick cash and career purgatory as the generations figure out where they want to land. As of January 2024, the annual restaurant industry turnover rate was **79.6 percent across 10 years**. And 9 in 10 restaurants have fewer than 50 employees. Further, the NRA reports for 2025 that the average restaurant employee tenure is around 110 days. The transient nature of the industry makes it that much more impressive when leaders, such as the women surveyed in our dataset, rise to great heights across decades.

## Show Her The Money

Based on the answers to our survey questions, women in leadership roles are, for the most part, happy with their share of the pie. The more subjective elements would need to be investigated further to see if satisfaction rates would stay the same if they knew for sure if men were making more and/or if they had to advocate for earning more versus salary being established from the outset of hiring.



### How would you describe your satisfaction with your current salary?

The overwhelming majority report being either very satisfied or satisfied with their current salary. Interestingly, only one respondent reported being dissatisfied, leaving the rest citing “neutral,” which begs perhaps an apathetic perception of pay that is stereotypically the opposite of the male outlook of income.

**To the best of your knowledge, is your compensation equitable to your male or female counterparts in a similar position?** Interestingly, again, a little over half of our respondents believe they are getting paid equitably with their male counterparts. Twenty were unsure, and only nine responded no.

**Do you believe there is a gender-wage gap in your company?** In line with equitable compensation, about two-thirds (42) of our respondents do not think there is a gender-wage gap at their companies, while 14 report yes, and 6 are unsure.

### Equal Pay Day was March 25, 2025.

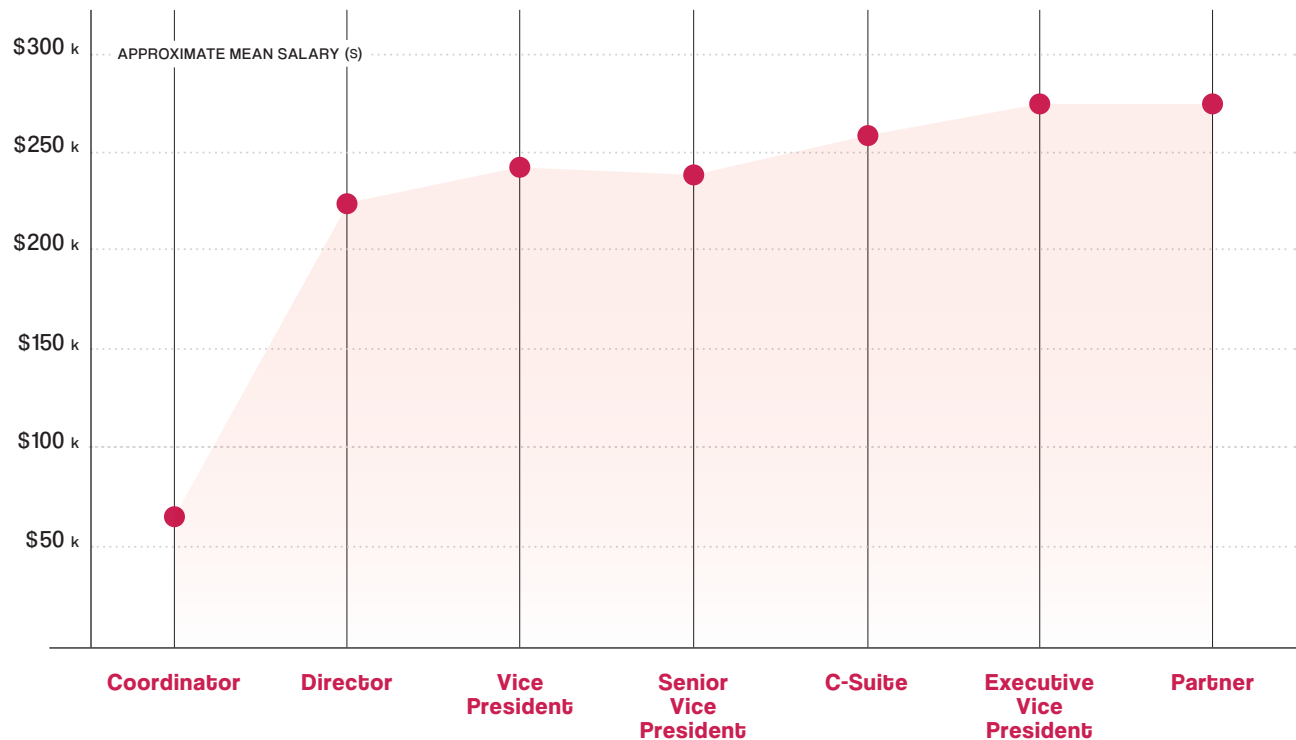
This date represents how many additional days into the year women must work to earn what men did in the previous year in the United States.

2025 GENDER PAY GAP REPORT (GPGR)  
PAYSCALE RESEARCH



## AVERAGE SALARY BY JOB LEVEL

[Author/AI-generated]



If pay is proportional to performance, then the numbers indicate our restaurant industry leaders are rewarded for this attained success of their respective charges. Our dataset reveals 98 percent of respondents clustering in the annual earned income range of \$200,000 to \$275,000. Every respondent with 16 plus years of experience sits in the top two salary ranges; the single low salary came from someone with fewer than three years' experience. Thus, years in the industry are linear with job level. Twenty-nine females reported earning \$200,001 to \$250,000, 29 reported over \$250,000, and one reported less than \$75,000. So the median salary for our female dataset is \$225,001, and the mean salary is \$246,865. That is compared with the very limited subset for men in our survey, with a mean salary of \$258,334 and a median salary of \$275,000. Yet even in our small study, the pay gap is real.



Of participants who reported on pay scales compared to men said men have likely earned more than them at some point if not now.

In our dataset, when participants were asked about pay scales compared to men, those who offered an explanation said men have likely earned more than them at some point if not now. The responses ranged from all male counterparts making more, having no female executives in their company at all, no benchmarking for scales, a lower base pay but larger bonuses, and their company having already “right-sized” women’s compensation. Clearly, there’s been a lot of forward momentum in closing the gender wage gap for our dataset, but a lack

of transparency or consistency can undermine confidence in equality. If pay is a top indicator of long-term retention, then it’s worth looking at the trajectory.

The **NRA reports** it costs restaurant operators around \$5,900 per most replacements, including hiring and training new staff. And to hire and training a new restaurant manager averages \$15,000 per new hire.

According to the **NRA**, tipped waitstaff at full-service restaurants earn a median of \$27.00 an hour, with an upper quartile of \$41.50 and a lower quartile of \$19.00. The Institute for **Women's Policy Research** reports out of the 2.2 million servers in 2023, 65 percent were women and 34.5 percent were men. Women earned 78.6 percent of male pay for full-time, year-round jobs.

Minimum wage and cost-of-living increases, labor shortages, and concurrent consequences to workflow and efficiencies make the hiring and retaining process for labor an ongoing concern. One of the top reasons to get the payscale right from this entry-level/server role is that it becomes a woman's base salary. If every raise or promotion is contingent on the previous base pay, starting at a deficit can literally affect her for a lifetime. According to **McKinsey research**, women in their early careers trip on a "broken rung," failing to get a promotion out of their entry-level job at the same rate as men, where for every 100 male employees promoted from entry-level jobs to managerial roles, only 87 women received a similar promotion.

**One of the top reasons to get the payscale right from this entry-level/server role is that it becomes a woman's base salary.**

And, again, foodservice workers are growing their companies and their profits, so it's not for lack of performance or funds. The **NRA cites** between April 2024 and April 2025, 45 percent of restaurant operators reported an increase in same-store sales, indicating a positive trend in revenue growth. In January 2025, the **Restaurant Performance Index (RPI)** rose to 101.1, indicating expansion, driven by improvements in same-store sales and customer traffic, and more than 80 percent of restaurant operators anticipate their 2025 sales to be higher or about the same as in 2024.

## Performance-Based Compensation

If quantifiable results were always how companies compensate, the data shows that women bring in the profit margins, effective decision-making, and innovative ideas. In its **State of Women in the Restaurant Industry report**, Lunchbox found that teams with more women performed better and, according to data analytics led by **Tenth Revolution**, 87 percent of the top 500 companies led by women report above-average profits.

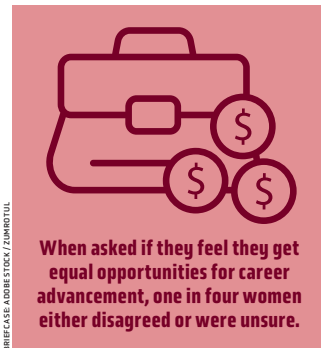
When it comes to those extracurriculars that companies present on paper to show true net salary, most of our respondents are pleased with their add-ons, but noted that the compensation packages differ in structure, such as base versus bonus LTIs. Unclear or undocumented package protocols mask potential disparities and thus make it less likely that these issues are known at the outset to an employee.



**How would you rate your overall satisfaction with your benefits package?** About two-thirds (43) of our data-set respondents expressed overall being “very satisfied” or “satisfied” with their benefits packages, which were indeed robust, from health, vision, and dental insurance to retirement plans, pension, stock options, parental leave, and even company cars. There doesn’t seem to be a significant correlation between those who reported “no” or “unsure” with the amount or quality of benefits packages, as many have as many or only slightly less than those who reported satisfaction.

**Do you believe that men and women in similar positions at your company receive comparable benefits?**

The majority of respondents reported yes to comparable benefits, while nine answered unsure, and five answered no.



**Do you receive any performance-based bonuses or incentives? If yes, what percentage of your annual salary do your bonuses represent?**

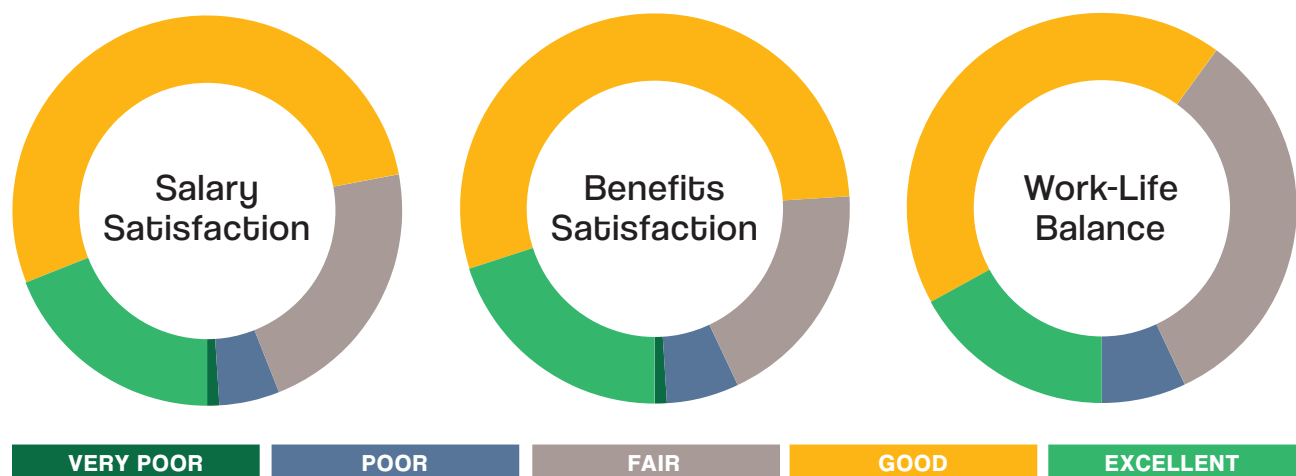
The overwhelming majority (85 percent) said yes, while 9 respondents (15 percent) said no. There is no pattern for the percentage of annual salary. It ranges anywhere from as low as zero and 11–50, 75, 150, and uncapped. Thus, the majority percentile receives an average of 26.25 percent.

When asked if they feel they get equal opportunities for career advancement, one in four women either disagreed or were unsure: 43 females (76 percent) said yes, 10 (18 percent) said no, and 6 (6 percent) reported unsure.

We drilled into the correlation between salary, benefits, and work-life balance to levels of satisfaction in the following chart.

**DISTRIBUTION OF SATISFACTION LEVELS**

[Author/AI-generated]



Our dataset reveals a perceived inequality in promotion and raise mechanisms, often requiring self-advocacy that may disadvantage women. Even among those who feel equality exists or are unsure, they still expressed doubts or acknowledged visible disparities. Of the respondents who said men and women are not given equal opportunities, several telling explanations were given. One female respondent explained



she earns around 80 percent of what her male counterparts in similar positions earn. From the men, the implied disparity comes in an affirmation that he's always been treated the same as other men at his company. A common thread is that there is a lot of disparity based on years of service to the company versus experience or ability. An important nuance is also reported that some companies don't give raises on any type of schedule; rather, you have to ask and justify why you deserve a raise, which likely affects women differently than men and/or favors certain personality types regardless of gender.

When asked if they've ever been passed over for a promotion they were qualified for, respondents were split among 36 who said yes, 21 who said no, four who said unsure, and 1 who preferred not to say. The data assumes positive perceptions to define "qualified," that is, respondents believed they are/were qualified for said position.

Those who were passed over for a promotion tend to have slightly lower median salaries compared to those who were not. Both groups have respondents in the \$200 to \$250K range. While not dramatic, there may be a link between being passed over and being in a lower salary tier. Promotion experience may also correlate with job level, which in turn affects salary and onward to reflect length of tenure and perceived value by leadership. The survey did not ask about race, but three respondents grouped race with gender as to why they might be passed over for promotions.

Of the respondents, 16 gave reasons they believe they were passed over for a promotion by a man. Despite having the same experience and position, these respondents felt overlooked because they were told women are seen as more difficult, excluded from the 'boys club' of golf outings and social events, not taken seriously by their white male peers, and sometimes even undermined by other women who felt threatened by them.

One respondent says all C-Suite promotions have been males for the almost four decades she's worked at her company. Even when respondents clearly made it known they would like the position, they report being passed over for a male, sometimes at a junior or less experienced level. And when a woman was promoted, a male complained in a meeting that the company is only promoting women now.

So while the industry is booming and women lead the pack percentage wise by employment, they are still deeply devalued and underpaid. Ironically, when asked to rate career advancement opportunities at their companies, 43.5 percent of our respondents rated the opportunities good, 24.2 percent rated fair, 21 percent rated excellent, 8.1 percent rated poor, and 3.2 percent rated very poor. Several respondents noted the correlation between male bonding and forming relationships to the rate of being promoted. The male counterpart's camaraderie and his potential to succeed outweighed the female counterpart's proven track record of results. Pay, then, seems proportionate to communication and outward ability to socialize, which females in our group did not feel they were getting similar invites or opportunities to form those same relationships.



Those who were passed over for a promotion tend to have slightly lower median salaries compared to those who were not. Both groups have respondents in the \$200 to \$250K range. While not dramatic, there may be a link between being passed over and being in lower salary tier.

# Location, Location, Location



Opportunities for advancement and thus increased earning potential sometimes correlate with where employees live and work. In more rural areas, the cost of living might be less but the commute to work adds extra expenses. In more urban areas, there might be a greater number of places to work, but the competition for each job might be heightened. Regional differences in restaurant wages continue to be significant and influence industry labor dynamics.

At the Together Summit in Nashville, the overall majority of attendees were from California (51), Tennessee (44), and Georgia (40), closely followed by Texas (38). In our survey dataset, most respondents

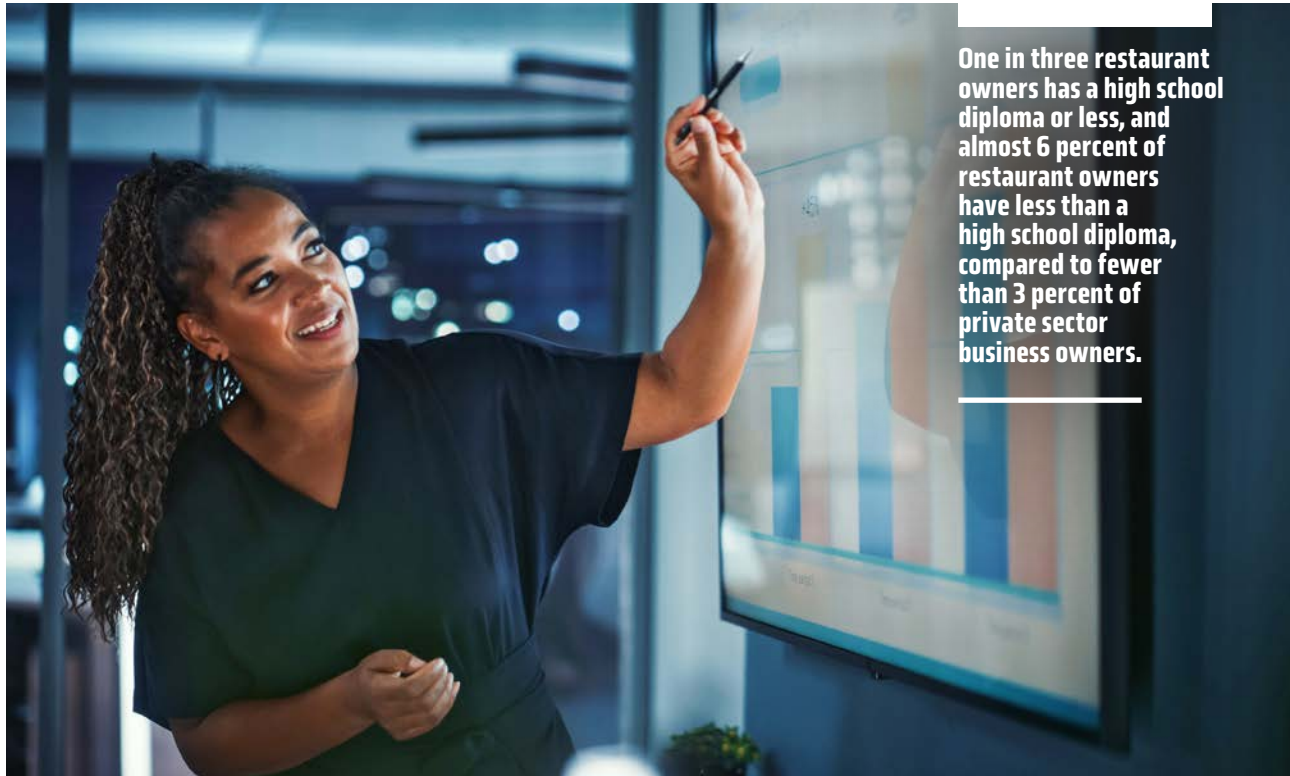
**California accounts for nearly 12.02 percent of all restaurants nationwide, while Texas and New York account for approximately 7.95 percent and 6.94 percent, respectively.**

were also from California at ten, followed by a tie for Georgia and Texas at seven, with the remaining states each at six people or under. **According to Oysterlink**, California, Texas, and New York also lead the pack for the number of restaurants per state: California accounts for nearly 12.02 percent of all restaurants nationwide, while Texas and New York account for approximately 7.95 percent and 6.94 percent, respectively. Florida, for example, which scored low in our survey in terms of the number of participants from that state, is projected to generate \$73.9 billion in restaurant sales in 2025 due to population and tourism. Texas is also seeing industry expansion due to lower operational costs, but also linear to population influx.

Certain states have favorable minimum wage laws and tip percentages that result in higher earning potential. **According to CNBC**, in 2025, Washington, California, and Oregon are the top three states where restaurant workers are likely to earn more. In Washington, the minimum wage for restaurant workers is \$16.66, plus tips that average around 17.8 percent. California, with its competitive job market and high cost of living, also provides \$16.50 minimum wage, with tips averaging 17.3 percent. Oregon offers a minimum wage of \$15.95, plus tips that average 19 percent. Duly noted, of course, that these examples are from entry-level positions front of house, but it would follow that higher-level executives would track on the same field, such as female operator-owned incomes.

**According to the NRA**, as of April 2025, the restaurant industry has a higher rate of female business ownership than the overall private sector in 35 states: Montana (57 percent), Georgia (57 percent), Louisiana (57 percent), Rhode Island (56 percent), Mississippi (56 percent), and Tennessee (55 percent) have the highest proportion of restaurants that are at least 50 percent owned by women.

# Education



In many fields, the level of education plays a significant, if not pivotal, role in job advancement. For the restaurant and food service industry, however, education barriers seem minimized in comparison and level the playing field with better entrepreneurship and job accessibility. It does not, however, level the compensation field. The research firm Statista **reports** in the academic year 2020/2021, about 860,760 male and 1.2 million female students earned Bachelor's degrees in the US. By 2031/2032, it's predicted that 975,020 men will earn Bachelor's degrees and may still make more than women, given both have Bachelor's degrees, men earned approximately \$107,315 US per year compared to women's \$77,099.

The majority of our respondents hold Bachelor's degrees (34), less than half earned Master's degrees (18), three finished high school only, four completed some college, and three earned a doctorate. Educational attainment in this industry also tends to be lower, partly because many workers are still in school when they start out, as shown in the visual below. Our data corroborates this trend, with the majority of our dataset of high school graduates reaching the highest average job level of C-Suite, along with or even bypassing some of their more educated respondent cohort at the SVP, EVP, or VP roles.

As for owners, **according to the NRA**, in 2025, one in three restaurant owners has a high school diploma or less, and almost 6 percent of restaurant owners have less than a high school diploma, compared to fewer than 3 percent of private sector business owners. A high school diploma is the highest education for 28 percent of restaurant owners and 18 percent of private sector business owners, and 24 percent of private sector business owners have a postgraduate degree, compared to just 9 percent of restaurant owners.



Based on the number of years in the industry and level of education, our dataset confirms that, for the most part, restaurant leaders have earned their way through the ranks into leadership positions, mostly with a bachelor's degree or less. It's an industry filled with opportunity for hands-on learning and on-the-job training. Our dataset feels that experience and a proven track record can count toward education and thus promotions and equal pay.

## The Ubiquitous Work-Life Balance

There is no valid or reliable gauge to know with accuracy if women and/or women with children are being overlooked for advancement or compensation because of their family status. Our dataset implies that women have taken on the roles of both primary caretaker and executive without officially sacrificing either, but also not without a burden.

Every respondent in our survey answered yes when asked if they have access to flexible work arrangements, such as remote work and flexible hours. When asked if they believe men and women have equal access to these arrangements, the majority also said yes, while two cited unsure and two cited no. Interestingly, when rating their work-life balance, six said excellent, fifteen said fair, thirty-four said good, six said poor, one said very poor. Thus, for the females in our dataset, only 25.8 percent said their work-life balance has been affected by gender-related expectations and stereotypes, which means the majority reported no effect.



Data shows that when females have company support for greater flexibility, it came from a hard-won, long-term fight to attain those rights.

Of those who reported yes or unsure, their explanations indicate both a literal and figurative price to pay for that flexibility. Our data shows that when females have company support for greater flexibility, it came from a hard-won, long-term fight to attain those rights. Further, when women do have equal flexibility, it comes with the cost of judgment. Women with children explained they feel a skewed work-life balance juggling being a primary caretaker and the demands of an executive position and feel they are expected to "do it all" and work harder. Based on the replies from respondents without children, their work-life balance is also affected in feeling they need to do more and work harder. The female respondents without children state they have to cover for parents and always be available to fill in. The unspoken expectation and burden on child-free women parallels working mothers who cite being both permitted and penalized for



ADOBEE STOCK / VALERIE APPELHAGEN

needing scheduling adjustments. Work-life balance is a complicated datapoint and sometimes perceived as a double standard. Are men being singled out for either having or not having children or does it come into play in terms of promotions, work-life balance, or their decision-making to seek higher-level positions? Stereotypically, no.

## Recs For Compensation



So where to begin when it comes to moving toward an equitable compensation profile? Remember, in 2025, **the uncontrolled gender pay gap is \$0.83**, unchanged from 2024, meaning that women collectively earn 17 percent less than men. Yet it is possible to close the gender pay gap, as McDonald's set out to do in 2021 when it reported doing just that across its company-owned restaurants and corporate employees systemwide. **According to Global Chief People Officer Heidi Capozzi**, they did this by countering systemic biases that negatively impact women and people with other marginalized identities, continuing to hire, promote, and retain world-class talent, offering highly competitive learning, development, mentoring, and sponsorship programming, as well as joining the Catalyst Gender and Diversity KPI Alliance DEI advocates.

Our survey respondents also offered five helpful areas to take job architecture out of the shadows and into the light of day, the most frequently cited idea being transparency. **Worldat-Work** defines pay transparency as "the degree to which employers are open about what, why, how and how much employees are compensated—and to what degree they allow employees to share that information with others."

**Wage gaps and pay inequity have been found to be reduced in organizations that use salary transparency.**

**According to Forbes**, wage gaps and pay inequity have been found to be reduced in organizations that use salary transparency, and could be reduced by a projected 40 percent by broadening that transparency protocol and following market compensation. Pay gaps begin at the start of a woman's career, so even when they do get promoted or a raise, it's based on that aforementioned broken rung. **Further, women negotiate their pay less frequently and urgently than men**, so transparency would level that playing field as well.



The next overarching idea is that compensation should be based on the role rather than what an employee is willing to settle for, which could look like more pay percentage on performance versus base salary, and roles being assigned a compensation range. Our data shows that female leaders want a shift away from arbitrary or negotiation-based compensation to one of performance- or role-based structures.

Gender equity and representation are next in line, with our respondents saying they want women to be considered for larger company CEO roles and compensation based on the same role and experience. Committing to gender diversity and equity goes beyond pay and also means equity for leadership opportunities, which in turn, assumedly pay more. Perhaps equity could also come in the form of access to fostering partnerships and relationships that reveal a more balanced knowledge of each employee.



Our respondents agree, wanting talent and experience to decide. Fostering a culture that rewards capability and potential versus only years served allows companies to advance people to jobs they can grow into.

As in many fields, expertise at one's job and life experience can qualify employees as time served, so to speak. Our respondents agree, wanting talent and experience to decide. Fostering a culture that rewards capability and potential versus only years served allows companies to advance people to jobs they can grow into. In much the same way that the majority of our respondents have 16-plus years of experience, the texture and performance of those years can become a deciding factor. When it comes to hiring, it's often very hard to teach integrity. Drive. Work ethic. Self-awareness. Empathy. The behavioral and personal effects of each individual employee can be a solid indicator of success. Restaurant management software leverages technology to quantify personality traits, letting the employees self-describe their strengths, weaknesses, desires, goals, and the like. Taking a more holistic approach to hiring might mean placing many more women in leadership roles to great success.

And a final thought is to enforce systemic and proactive pay reviews for ongoing analysis of wages at all levels and gaps, and even asking for input when designing compensation packages.

**According to Forbes**, increasing women's monetary independence is a trickle-down effect bringing positive results for the collective society. By way of conditional relationship, the if-then logic of rhetorical theory, if women earn as much as men, they can build longevity careers, better help support their families, and afford childcare; those children are less likely to grow up in poverty, thus requiring less reliance on public assistance and thus less taxpayer burden. From inclusive work environments and policy implementation to taking actionable steps toward countering inherent bias, together we can make the industry more welcoming to women and minorities at all job levels, navigate career advancement, and break longstanding barriers.





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# Where Tech Meets Hospitality, Women Are Leading the Way

The best of the foodservice industry comes together to uncover new data.



Cristal Craven (left) and Sara Davis

For years, the foodservice industry has asked: How has gender equity evolved—and what does that mean for restaurants? SynergySuite, a founding sponsor of Women in Restaurant Leadership (WiRL), partnered with *QSR magazine* to explore how gender impacts compensation, benefits, and negotiation for women in leadership roles.

Sara Davis, senior director of marketing at SynergySuite, and Cristal Craven, global director of Strategic Partnerships, share insights on the intersection of tech, foodservice, and gender equity—and where the industry is headed.

“SynergySuite has proudly supported WiRL since day one, because visibility matters,” Davis says. “We have talented women across our global teams—from UI/UX designers to product and marketing leaders—and we’re committed to continuing the conversation around equity in our industry.”

In 2025, *QSR magazine* conducted a study with WORTH (Women of Restaurants, Technology, and Hospitality), where Craven is a co-founder, surveying nearly 200 women in food-

service leadership roles. The findings confirmed challenges in advancement and negotiation—but also highlighted progress. “We didn’t see the data out there specific to our industry, so we created it,” Craven says. “The results confirmed what we suspected, but also gave us hope. There’s still work to do, but women are doing better financially than many of us realized.”

The foodservice industry is one of the most diverse workforces in the U.S., with 60 percent of management roles held by women, according to the National Restaurant Association. However, while women and people of color make up much of the hourly and frontline workforce, representation drops significantly in executive roles. It’s a structural issue—but it’s also a leadership one. And leadership is evolving.

“As operators, we’re starting to rethink what effective leadership looks like,” Craven says. “It’s not just about being tough or working 80-hour weeks—it’s about building resilient teams, setting clear priorities, and having the tools to lead well.”

That’s where technology comes in—not as a diversity solution, but as an operational one. “One of the things I love about what we’re building here at SynergySuite is how we get to help real people,” Craven says. “The goal isn’t just automation—it’s empowerment. Our new AI-powered features, like smart forecasting and suggestive ordering, don’t just save time—they give back control and clarity to managers. That’s how we help bring balance back into foodservice leadership.”

Both tech and foodservice remain male-dominated at the top but offer lessons for each other.

“In restaurants, there are a lot more women—but they’re often not given the chance to advance,” Davis says. “I think the restaurant sector could learn from tech in terms of upward mobility. On the flip side, tech could learn from restaurants about people-first culture and hospitality.”

It’s easier not to challenge the status quo—but both industries are proving how much they can thrive by embracing diversity and equity.

“Everything we’re doing with our product is geared toward giving managers—men or women—the ability to have more balance in their lives, be more effective at their jobs, and focus on leadership and brand building,” Craven says. Ultimately, it’s about building better workplaces—for everyone. —By Ya’el McCloud

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