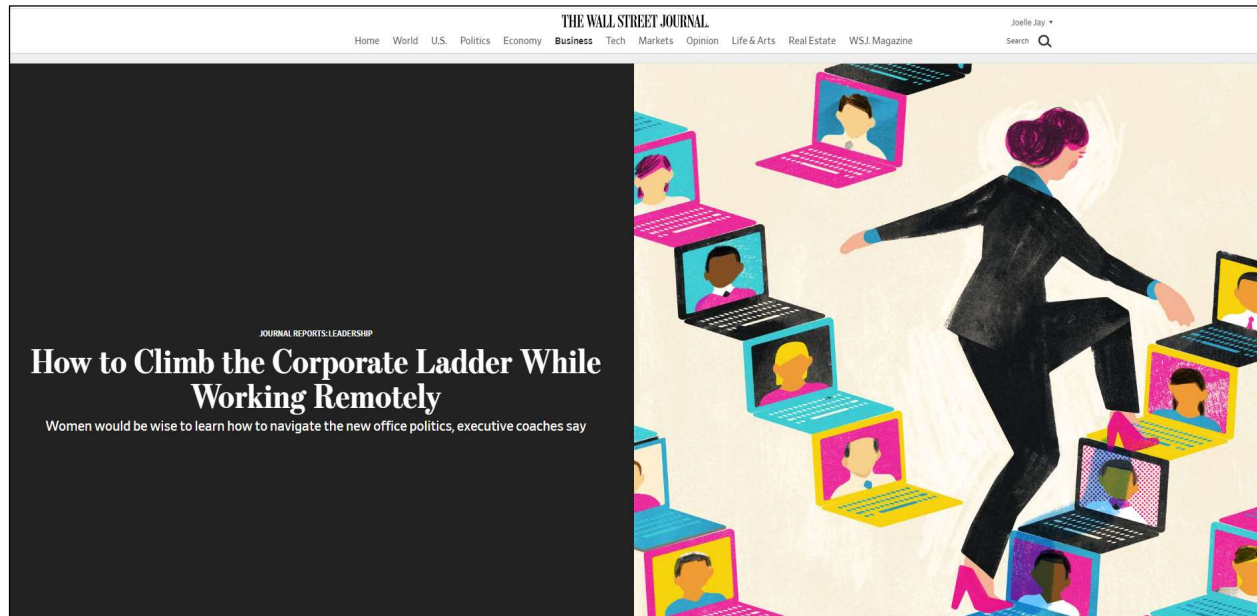


# How to Climb the Corporate Ladder While Working Remotely

By Joann S. Lublin



Office politics hasn't gone away just because a pandemic forces millions to work away from the office.

Even in a radically altered work environment of endless Zoom calls with children underfoot at home, women need to raise their visibility during virtual meetings, find ways to strengthen bonds with work allies and impress their higher-ups by exceeding expectations, according to executive coaches and leadership advisers.

Campaigning fairly for career advancement requires “managing relationships, advocating for ideas, and accepting and asking for favors,” says Kathryn Heath, a managing director of FlynnHeathHolt Leadership, a leadership-development unit of consulting firm BPI group. “That becomes even more crucial for women—and harder—when they don't interact face to face.”

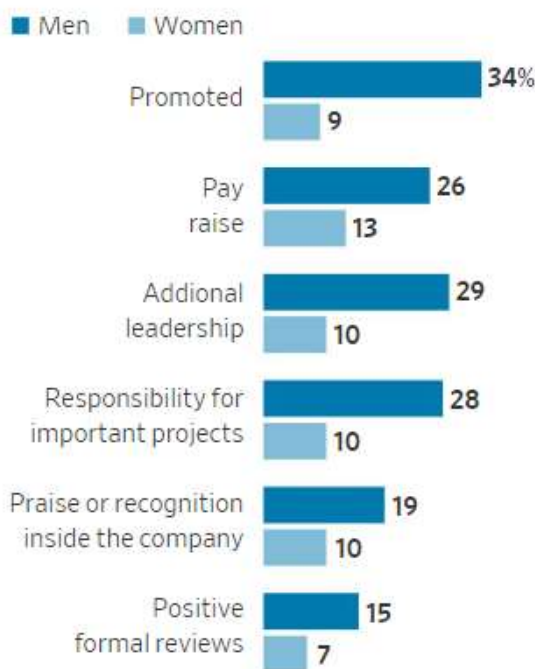
One FlynnHeathHolt [study](#) shows that women get judged more harshly than men for politicking at work—and that can make them reluctant to do so. But Ms. Heath encourages female clients to be influential players during Zoom sessions by simply preparing strong viewpoints and making authoritative statements, like “Here's my plan.”

Winning bigger jobs and pay by influencing others while working remotely can also be particularly tricky for women because the home setup often magnifies work-life conflicts, studies show.

Just 29% of women say working from home during the coronavirus era has positively affected their career, compared with 57% of men, according to a July poll of 1,051 adults in the U.S. [The study](#), conducted by Qualtrics for Boardlist, a marketplace for female and minority corporate board talent, also found a sizable gender gap in promotions among remote-employed parents. Only 9% of women with children at home had been promoted in this new remote-work era, but 34% of men with children at home reported getting promoted during the same period.

### Virtual Gender Gap

Parents with children in the home who have seen these positive career developments while working remotely.



Source: Qualtrics July 2020 survey of 620 salaried U.S. employees with children at home, conducted for BoardList

Another gender gap emerged in the proportion of mothers assigned responsibility for important projects while working remotely compared with fathers—10% versus 28%, the Qualtrics report says.

One pregnant middle manager at a financial-services firm recently got passed over to head a coronavirus task force there.

“She would have done it,” says Stefanie Mockler, the woman’s executive coach.

Ms. Mockler says this client later learned the boss feared that the high-profile assignment would put more stressful pressure on the expectant mother.

In certain respects, remote work could level the political playing field. Online meetings limit men’s chances “to engage in Machiavellian tactics of manipulation” such as staying late when the boss does or using ingratiating body language during physical meetings, says Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, chief talent scientist at [ManpowerGroup](#). That’s why he says he expects most men will be eager to return to

their offices—where they “can navigate politics in their favor better.”

Women working remotely often struggle to demonstrate their contributions because they lack face-to-face encounters with career gatekeepers, says Andrea Kramer, a partner at law firm McDermott Will & Emery LLP and a gender-bias specialist. She recommends that women devise techniques to be seen and heard virtually. Doing so sometimes requires extra effort.

Caitlin Brodie, a managing director of [Carlyle Group](#) Inc., helped a low-key female colleague at the private-equity firm stand out by extolling her work prowess during a March videoconference with an institutional client that was considering an additional Carlyle fund investment.

Citing training she received at Carlyle about the strategic use of language to help counter unconscious gender bias, Ms. Brodie says she introduced that upper-middle manager as a driver of results with outstanding analytical abilities. “I helped her get her own seat at the table,” Ms. Brodie says.

Stacey Nash, a vice president at insurance, investment and online banking giant USAA, embraced a different approach to enhance her visibility once her employer mandated most employees work from home. She says she boosted her confidence by wearing formal business attire and standing throughout important videoconferences while working from her home in San Antonio.



PHOTO: USAA

Stacey Nash, a USAA vice president, wears business apparel to prepare mentally for working from home.

Ms. Nash also texted and phoned colleagues to enlist their support before conferring virtually about high-stake decisions affecting her area. Her politicking paid off. This spring, Ms. Nash gained wider operational duties at USAA’s bank, including oversight of risk-management programs. She more than doubled the number of staffers under her command.

The promoted executive also forged a mutually beneficial alliance with Ron Fox, the bank’s chief compliance officer.

Ms. Nash called Mr. Fox 10 days after her duties increased in April, and suggested “we work together to ensure we were both successful” at reducing risk. Gaining his support allowed her to generate results faster, she adds.

“Our work partnership enhances the bank’s compliance and operations, and should also benefit our careers,” Mr. Fox says of working with Ms. Nash. This month, USAA elevated her to senior vice president.

Women working remotely could excel at office politics in another way: “Do more than their boss expects,” says Joelle K. Jay, an executive coach.

That’s why she counseled Tasha Matharu, corporate secretary of S&P Global Inc., the credit ratings, benchmarks and analytics firm, to solve problems fast and flexibly following its office shutdown.

Ms. Matharu had to organize S&P’s first fully virtual annual meeting in just over a week. She coped well because she knew how “to adapt quickly to different or evolving working conditions,” she says.

S&P’s first fully virtual meeting of its board ended the same May day. And Ms. Matharu made sure the directors’ session ran smoothly, too, such as by carefully orchestrating when management presenters “entered” and “exited” the online boardroom.

Ms. Matharu's boss, S&P General Counsel Steve Kemps, says he was especially impressed by how she handled "a highly complex and unprecedented situation for shareholders and the board." He soon persuaded the top brass to promote his lieutenant and boost her salary.

Mr. Kemps adds that he pushed for her advancement during the pandemic because Ms. Matharu had demonstrated "broader leadership and accountability over the course of her tenure." Her promotion to senior vice president took effect Sept. 1.

*Ms. Lublin, former management news editor at The Wall Street Journal, is the author of the forthcoming "Power Moms: How Executive Mothers Navigate Work and Life."*



[Joelle K. Jay, Ph. D.](#), is a Director with the [Leadership Research Institute](#) and an executive coach specializing in leadership development. She strategizes with business leaders to enhance their performance and maximize business results. Her clients include presidents, vice presidents, and C-level executives in Fortune 500 companies such as Microsoft, Google, and Adobe. She is the author of [The Inner Edge: The 10 Practices of Personal Leadership](#) and [The New Advantage: How Women in Leadership can Create Win/Wins for Their Companies and Themselves](#). To connect with Joelle, go to [www.JoelleKJay.com](http://www.JoelleKJay.com) or email [Info@JoelleKJay.com](mailto:Info@JoelleKJay.com).