



Lisa Lloyd, Sept 22nd 2020.

## The 'pink collar' recession: What you can do to reduce the impact

Lisa Lloyd talks us through her views on the 'pink collar' recession and the impact on women that coronavirus has had. Importantly she shares advice on how we can reduce the long-term damage caused.

Women are a vulnerable labour cohort. Contrary to previous economic downturns where the impact on men has been the focus, Covid-19 appears to be significantly affecting women, and this has become a worldwide concern. Female-majority sectors such as hospitality, travel, education, and retail have been hit hardest and face ongoing challenges. Add to that the enhanced care responsibilities for children, the elderly and health-vulnerable, along with reduced childcare options, and we begin to understand the problem.



The casual, part-time reality of female-majority industries means women often organise caring roles around their work, and when they need to, make the sacrifice of putting family first. Going forward, with reduced employment opportunities, women also face the challenge of re-entering the workplace. Taking the brunt of the Covid crisis, “Women make up 48% of the workforce, yet accounted for 61% of those furloughed or laid off” reports Nancy Wing in Forbes (24 May 2020).

We need to work actively to reduce the again-widening gender gap that society has been so aware of the need to reduce over recent years. Such a call to action can be seen in Women Rise For All, launched in April in support of the UN Secretary-General’s call for solidarity and an urgent response to the socio-economic impacts of Covid-19. The global advocacy urges leaders in all countries, across sectors, to address the human crisis. Their July event to explore this can be viewed [here](#).

### **So what can we, as women, do to reduce the long-term damage of the pink collar recession?**

First and foremost is seeking ways to share childcare responsibilities with your partner or others to create space for you. Not only do you need time to be able to focus on yourself and work on re-entering the job market, but creating mental space to reflect, consolidate, plan and develop is essential. Women can appear very good at juggling a number of balls, both the logistics and the emotional burden, but it can take its toll on our mental health as well as economic prospects. We need to be able to put one or two of these balls down in order to prioritise certain things. Your future is one of these things. Now may be the catalyst to rethink your career and take charge. Evaluate your current options and how you can add a few more to the table.



Was your job right for you or was it something that evolved without conscious direction? This could be a great opportunity to take control and plan where you want to go next, identifying your strengths and talents and exploring how you can use these in a different way. It was when my time-limited position with my previous employer came to an end that I was forced to rethink, and I started up my own business. Problems breed opportunities and women are creative. The flexibility I need with childcare and the ability to focus on what I love means I've never looked back.

Don't eliminate dreams because you don't yet have the skills or experience. It's time for women to take ownership of their careers. Believe in your vision and communicate your aspirations and needs clearly, including the value in what you can provide. Embrace learning and developing new knowledge and skills. Not only does this boost your CV but it develops the much-needed confidence for returning to the workplace.

Many of us can experience imposter syndrome at times, feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt and intellectual-fraudulency, despite proved success or competence, and we need to be mindful of the impact this can have. Women tend to be less assertive so working on self-belief is vital. Do not believe the negative thoughts you tell yourself; women are much harder on themselves than men. You need to believe in your talents and contribution before you can convince others. Start by being clear about your strengths; consider taking a free online assessment such as Stand Out ([here](#)). Be prepared to take risks and try new things. Treat others who inspire you as coaches and seek their advice. And join organisations such as Yellow Eve that aim to help empower, inspire and bring women together for mutual support!

Working on the communication of your strengths and skills, particularly emphasising those where women excel, can help you stand out. Highlighting evidence of your female-dominant traits of emotional intelligence such as empathy, social responsibility and interpersonal relationships clearly demonstrates to prospective employers the value of employing you. Unconscious bias that has historically been evident in the workplace with double standards about how male-attributes such as assertiveness, self-confidence and stress-tolerance are needed for success need to be challenged. We should consciously celebrate and prove the advantage women have in many circumstances.

Companies need a balance of genders and it's time to be proud about who you are. According to Dr Shawn Andrews in her book *The Power of Perception* (2018), the reason we don't see more women in senior business roles is "... Nothing to do with women's skills and competencies. It has everything to do with our perceptions of women as leaders, as workers, as mothers, and as wives... Perception is reality - and it's powerful."

Get active in projects outside of your usual day-to-day routine. As caring responsibilities begin to reduce with children returning to school, child-care resuming and fewer relatives being vulnerable, find opportunities to get involved with different activities. These might be about networking, community development, honing skills and making a contribution to something bigger than your own circumstances. This not only meets your emotional needs for meaning and purpose, social connection, contribution to the wider community, control, competence and attention, but it demonstrates your value.

You might also consider mentoring girls and younger women to help them navigate their way through the world as a female, challenging perceptions and stereotypes.

## **Shaping the future**

More businesses will have to start to adapt to a new reality, looking at how to offer flexible work options to suit employees' personal circumstances and how to reduce the gender gap. So, when you're looking for an employer, look at what progress they're making towards female representation at leadership level and compassionate employment opportunities. It's not about the company being perfect but about being purpose-led and socially responsible. And then decide if it's right for you.



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