

# The Three R's of Leadership Development for Women in Sport

Engaging more women as leaders is critical if Canada is to be successful as a world-leading sport nation. Other sectors are stepping up to the plate when it comes to actively engaging more women in leadership positions, and research clearly demonstrates the benefit in terms of innovation, governance and performance.

Knowing we need more women in leadership positions in Canada's sport and physical activity sector is one thing; getting and keeping them is another. The following three "Rs" will help organizations create a deliberate path to long-term leadership development. From community clubs to national multi-sport organizations, these concepts can be applied to intentionally cultivate a welcoming and rewarding environment for women leaders.

## Recruit:

Start early to ensure young women have leadership on their radar. Consider who has the skills and interest to pursue leadership opportunities, but don't limit yourself to the star athletes. Expand your definition of leadership by seeking out leaders who are great listeners, deliberate in their communications, and bring their best effort consistently. Support young women to be certified as coaches and officials, and encourage them to consider sport management in post-secondary education.

Within your organization, take stock of existing leaders to identify gender gaps within technical teams, coaching staff, boards of directors, etc. Consider opportunities to promote from within and identify outside women leaders interested in new opportunities or volunteer roles to address the leadership gaps. Create an inviting environment by considering the language, imagery, and reward systems used formally and informally within your organization. Provide leadership development opportunities to build current and future leaders' skills, knowledge, and confidence.

## Retain:

Strategies to recruit more women leaders must be paired with comprehensive retention strategies. Proactively link leaders with mentors and sponsors who will provide advice and promote their successes. Young leaders in particular benefit from women mentors to turn to for advice and inspiration. Host monthly breakfast meetings where women leaders can exchange ideas and discuss emerging issues, or consider hiring leadership coaches to support the development of your brightest stars.

Research provides compelling evidence that leaders are looking for more than fair compensation when determining where to work. Beyond reviewing your organization's policies to ensure gender equity in pay scales, consider personalized "reward packages" that could include day-care support, flexible hours, working from home, educational advancement, new challenges/responsibilities, job sharing, and other innovative practices to retain your great leaders.

## Recognize:

Acknowledging leaders is an often overlooked but powerful motivator that can inspire the woman being recognized and others who learn about her expertise and contributions. Organizations can use a variety of strategies: a personalized card from the Board acknowledging the impact of her work; invitations to share her knowledge and experience during team or professional development events; and nominations for positions on other Boards or Committees, or for recognition awards such as CAAWS' list of Most Influential Women in Sport and Physical Activity or your city's community service or business awards.

In this competitive environment where talented individuals can make the difference to performance and success, organizations must be deliberate about their recruitment, retention and recognition strategies. All leaders must support policies and practices that will create a positive environment where current and future women leaders feel supported to transition into new leadership roles.

*Written by Dina Bell-Laroche, Partner, Sport Law & Strategy Group*

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

CAAWS Women and Leadership Workshops

[www.caaws.ca/leadership](http://www.caaws.ca/leadership)

CAAWS Women and Leadership Network

[www.womenandleadershipnetwork.ca](http://www.womenandleadershipnetwork.ca)

Actively Engaging Women and Girls: Addressing the Psycho-Social Factors Publication [www.caaws.ca/CS4L](http://www.caaws.ca/CS4L)

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity

Association canadienne pour l'avancement des femmes du sport et de l'activité physique



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