Below are answers to audience submitted questions from our four amazing panelists.

- Wendy Adams, '98, '05, '17, '19
- Angela Gray, '97, '02, '14
- Lisa Hayes, '96
- Sherry McCrady, '03

1. What advice do you have for mothers who want to advance their careers, but are dealing with roadblocks related to having a child - for example, limited childcare options, childcare costs interfering with paying for career advancement courses.

Some advice for mothers would be to possibly offer to do babysitting for a friend on the weekends in exchange for child care while you have class, taking classes online, or asking 2-3 friends/family to help with child care to spread it out so they don't feel overwhelmed.

My advice to mothers who want to advance their careers but have roadblocks is for them to not give up! If there is a will, there is a way. I suggest looking into childcare assistance programs such as, Children’s Home and Aid or family and friends to assist with childcare. Also, I suggest searching for cheaper class options such as online or community college.

It’s not always easy being a working mom, no matter what career field you work in or where you call home. One of the keys is finding the right resources that can work for you and your family. Look for assistance at your local schools, churches and non-profit organizations. If you have the ability to reach out to family and friends or if you can network with other mothers to come up with a plan that covers your needs that can help reduce the stress and financial strain. Other options to consider is asking your employer to work a flexible work schedule that might include four 10-hour days instead of five 8-hour days or a start and end time that allows you key times to drop off and pick up your children. You can also find out if telecommuting a few days a week works for your employer.

Research educational opportunities from intuitions that provide classes geared towards working adults who are full time and often have families. Get information, research reviews, get an appointment with someone at that institution that can answer a many questions that you may have.

2. What are some common mistakes women make when entering a predominantly male career path?

Some common mistakes that women make in predominantly male career paths is coming into the career trying to emulate or manage in the style that they perceive a male would instead of just being themselves. A lot of trust can be established by allowing others to see your authentic self and leadership style. Be true to yourself.
I have not had enough experience to comment on this question considering I am in a predominately female career. However, I will say that you must work twice as hard to show your male counterparts that you are just as qualified if not more to do the job.

This is a great question – working at Boeing I have seen major changes with women in the workplace. When I first started you heard a lot about the “good ole boys club”. These were men that were identified as the next Managers, Directors and CFO’s because of who they knew, where they went to school, who they were related to and their ability to be in the right place at the right time. Although times have changed, we still see the need for additional changes in the Aerospace industry. Currently women hold 7.8% of Aerospace engineering jobs and 20% of key management roles. So what are the common mistakes women make – the first one I would point out is wanting to be liked or accepted by everyone. Women have a difficult time saying “no”. So we end up spending time on tasks that others will get the credit for and less time on more significant and relevant tasks and activities. I’m not stating don’t assist others – just make sure you pick those you want to assist, get credit when credit is due and make sure your tasks are prioritized and completed on time.

Another common mistake is taking on too much; sometimes we just want to show that we can do any work and all work. It’s much better to be proficient at a few things than to be overwhelmed and spinning with too many tasks. Remember, manage your tasks timely, effectively, efficiently and ask for help when you need it. If you take on extra assignments make sure you take jobs that will help you to reveal your talents and ones that demonstrate your competence.

3. What advice do you have for someone who has "lost their spark" after graduation and starting a family that can help them get back in the game of pursuing their passions etc.?

Advice to get that spark back is to include ambitious women in your circle. When we surround ourselves with individuals that are goal-oriented, it impacts us in ways that we might not realize. Typically, goal-oriented women often encourage and motivate others.

I would suggest researching the career to “light that fire” again through YouTube, Pinterest, and Google to get that spark again. You may want to consider volunteering in the field that you are interested in. You must tell yourself that it is your time and season to pursue your dreams and goals.

It’s tough when you have personnel matters on your plate and your focus on pursuing a career or a passion becomes secondary. It’s really tough on women because we want to be “super woman” everything to everyone. There’s nothing wrong with taking a break when other factors come along but when you know you want more it’s time to make a change. My mother always told me that “when mama’s not happy nobody’s happy”. That really stands true because most woman are the heart and soul of the family and if
you’re not in a good place than it can affect those around you. If you are ready to return to the work force and have lost your “spark” try a few of these tips to get back in the game:

- Get dressed like you are going to work.
- Maintain communication with peers, family and friends discussing what you would like to pursue.
- Create a plan with a timeline.
- Keep active - Physical activity is a must.
- Carve time out for yourself – Join a book club, ride a bike, learn a craft or volunteer.
- Update your resume and apply for jobs you are passionate about.
- Attend conferences, seminars, trade shows, or events that interest you.
- Don’t get discouraged if things don’t work out at first. Keep trying and don’t give up – you’re worth it.

Discover what grabs your attention and truly maintains your focus and interest. Also create a list of skills you’ve developed over the years as a wife, mother, neighbor, friend, etc. and see what jobs/careers/ position match those skills you may have.

4. I am a regular middle class full-time working mother - no special job title or connections anywhere. What can a person like me do to cause real change for the black & non-black POC community, women's equality efforts, etc...?

Don’t ever apologize for being a full-time working mother. Titles are just a means to career advancement. Anyone with a passion for the community and a vision can put in the work to seek real changes for equity. The Racial Justice committee with the YWCA is a great place to start. Meetings are held on the 3rd Monday of each month at 4:30. Reach out to Dorothy Hummel of the YWCA about your interest and attend a meeting. Additionally, you would read books on equity or start a book club using these books as the catalyst for conversations around social justice.

You don’t have to have special connections or fancy titles to make a difference. The first change you can make is by not being silent during inappropriate conversations about POC. You may consider donating to the Alton YWCA. They have several programs and events geared to end racism and discrimination among POC. You may want to consider attending protests in support of racial equality.

You are actually what we need in our non-profit organizations and community service events - someone who wants to make a difference. You do not need a fancy title or a successful job to make a difference. Your desire for change is coming from inside you and the best thing for you is to “embrace” it. If we want to make changes in this world, we have to create a new story and tell that story by our actions, our values and our beliefs. That story should reflect what happens to you is happening to me, and my wellbeing is attached to your wellbeing. We are all in this together – no one is alone and we all are equal. Change does not happen overnight but simple random acts of
kindness makes small ripples and speaks volumes of creating that story. It sounds like your passion is black & non-black POC community and women's equality efforts, take some time to find the right organization that you can participate in to start volunteering – there is no better time than the present.

Find agencies and/or organizations that focus on the type of change and impact you desire. So many agencies and organizations seek support or volunteers and they are more interested in people with a genuine heart, desire and dedication, no titles required.

5. During this time of unsettlement in our world, what advice/suggestions would you like to share regarding Social Justice?

- REMEMBER--THIS IS A MOVEMENT NOT A MOMENT!
- Change takes time and diligence.
- Take a look inward and recognize our own biases so that we can be aware of them and work daily toward being a better person that treats all human beings fairly.
- When you see injustice, DON'T REMAIN SILENT
- Be open to learning from others about their story.

My advice as Social Justice continues to unfold in America and throughout the world is to keep current what is going on such as reading current events, watching news outlets, and looking at social media. Continue to speak out and make “Good Trouble” as the late great John Lewis would say by speaking up when something is not right.

Another great question – Let’s see I'll start off by stating there are several types of inequalities in our society related to social justice. If you want to participate in one of those movements you need to find the one you’re your passionate about. My advice or suggestions are to educate yourself on that particular movement, make sure you understand what the cause is and what they want to achieve. Work on your own habits and beliefs so you are representing the movement in a positive way. Volunteer your time and if possible donate to the cause. Being a part of social justice means we need to focus on diversity, the awareness of the diversity in our communities and foster equity and justice for everyone.

Educate yourself in understanding people, and history starting with your own country and expand your understanding to the people and history of the world. Increasing your understanding of different cultures and seeing all people as human more than different from you. Expand you empathy through your understanding. Most importantly, don't be a bystander in the face of injustice, prejudice, and inhumanity. Stand up. Speak up. Educate. Encourage. Vote.
6. **How do you think women specifically will be impacted by COVID in the next several years with regards to their professional goals, advancement and leadership opportunities?**

I think it impacts everyone and not just women. Some women who may not have had to work previously may need to secure employment to help keep families afloat. If companies downsize, women may be targeted and lose employment first because of social constructs.

The COVID epidemic is so new to all of us. It is difficult to predict how it will impact women in several years. I hope women continue to strive for excellence as it relates to their goals, advancement and leadership opportunities.

COVID-19 will impact women the hardest. I wanted to truly understand how they would be impacted so I went to a recent article from Times Magazine regarding this topic. This article stated that women are ten times more likely than men to stay home from work with sick children, and there are five times as many single mothers as single fathers in the United States. With over 40 million children in pre-K through grade 8 in U.S. public schools, and more in charters, private schools and day cares, a great deal of parents—mostly mothers—are facing missed work days.

Women also disproportionately hold jobs in industries with poor protections, such as paid family leave and paid sick leave, without which they can’t afford to miss days of work to care for children or elderly relatives—let alone themselves.

Two-thirds of tipped restaurant workers in the United States are women, who already face low-wages, unreliable hours, and few benefits.

Women are disproportionately represented in fields that will expose them to infection, including professional care-giving roles for the elderly and nurses. Only 30% of surveyed nurses said that their employer has sufficient Personal Protective Equipment stock on hand to protect staff if there is a rapid surge in patients with possible coronavirus infections.

For women with no social support system, the economic hardship of this pandemic could be even more immeasurable. Further, domestic violence is known to increase in times of economic hardship and the heightened risk of sexual abuse and teen pregnancy. When you pull all these facts together it will affect women tremendously not just in the work place but mentally and physically.
7. I’d love to know how the panelists differentiated themselves and stood out in their fields, particularly as they advanced into leadership positions, given the gender gap.

I don't really know how I stood out. I've always treated others the way I want to be treated. I try to approach everything with integrity. I have always moved in silence and just did what I felt was the right thing to do. Never do anything for accolades do it to feel good about yourself.

In my field, it is mainly women. In my situation, there a race gap instead of a gender gap. I am the only black Social Worker and only 3 in our district. I look for opportunities to gain more knowledge and expertise so that I can grow as a Social Worker.

Let’s see – to differentiate myself from others in my field, I focused on the following: Doing more than what was required, finding outlets to add value, using my creative spirit, inspiring others, being a team player, taking credit for my work and for any mistakes, teaching others how to succeed, applying critical thinking and valuing the resources of others. Remember – you never get to the top of your profession or stay there without the assistance of others.

My past jobs as a teacher, social worker, therapist, and life coach, my volunteer work, educating myself on people, history, and community is what I credit to my ability to diversify my skills in both mental health counseling and as a relationship coach. There are men in my field but I've experienced more women than men in my field.

8. How do you stay energized?

I feel energized by traveling the world. This always helps me to get re-centered and focused. Participating in community service projects always helps energize me and allows me to feel connected to my community.

I try to stay energized through prayer, exercise, and keeping positive. It helps too that I have summers off to regroup.

This is the first time anyone has ever asked me this so I had to think about it. I believe it first starts with a good night’s sleep - I try to get at least 7 to 8 hours of sleep. Next, I start my day off with a prayer of thanksgiving and reading a few inspirational stories. I’m not super good about exercising each day but it’s on my plan to at least do something. I also look at my calendar very early in the morning to make sure I know what the day has in store for me. I also know that I need to be flexible for things that just happen. I try to take breaks throughout the day and keep my work day at a maximum of 9 hours. I’m a firm believer that it’s important to be a well-rounded person and not let one thing drive who I am. One of the most important aspects that keeps me energized is to reach out to two or three family members or friends daily; that can be a text, by phone or a visit. The final thing that energizes me is doing something I’m passionate about it can be just watching a good movie, riding a bike, hosting party or cooking dinner.
My work is not just a career but I believe it is a calling, innate to who I am, how I see the world and myself in the world. I believe I was purposed to do what I do and my gifts and talents support it.