

Laurie R. Weingart, PhD

Richard M. & Margaret S. Cyert Professor of
Organizational Behavior and Theory

Tepper School of Business
Carnegie Mellon University

University of Cincinnati Medical Center
Grand Rounds

November 4, 2022

The “I Just Can’t Say No” Club



Linda Babcock
James M. Walton
Professor in Economics
at Carnegie Mellon
University



Brenda Peyser
Former associate dean
of Carnegie Mellon’s
School of Public Policy
and Management



Lise Vesterlund
Andrew W. Mellon
Professor of Economics
at the University of
Pittsburgh



Laurie Weingart
Richard M. and Margaret S. Cyert
Professor of Organizational
Behavior and Theory at Carnegie
Mellon University

**A non-promotable task
matters to your organization
but will not help your
career**



The No Club's Top 10 NPTs



Helping others
and filling in



Organizing and
coordinating
the work of
others



Editing,
proofreading,
and compiling
the work of
others



Logistical
planning and
special events



Committees,
committees,
committees



Recruiting



Onboarding,
training, and
mentoring



Helping
coworkers with
their personal
problems



Resolving
conflict among
coworkers



Office
housework:
getting coffee,
cleaning up,
taking notes...

Identifying whether a task is promotable



Is the task **instrumental** to improving the organization's bottom line?



Is your performance on the task **visible** to others?



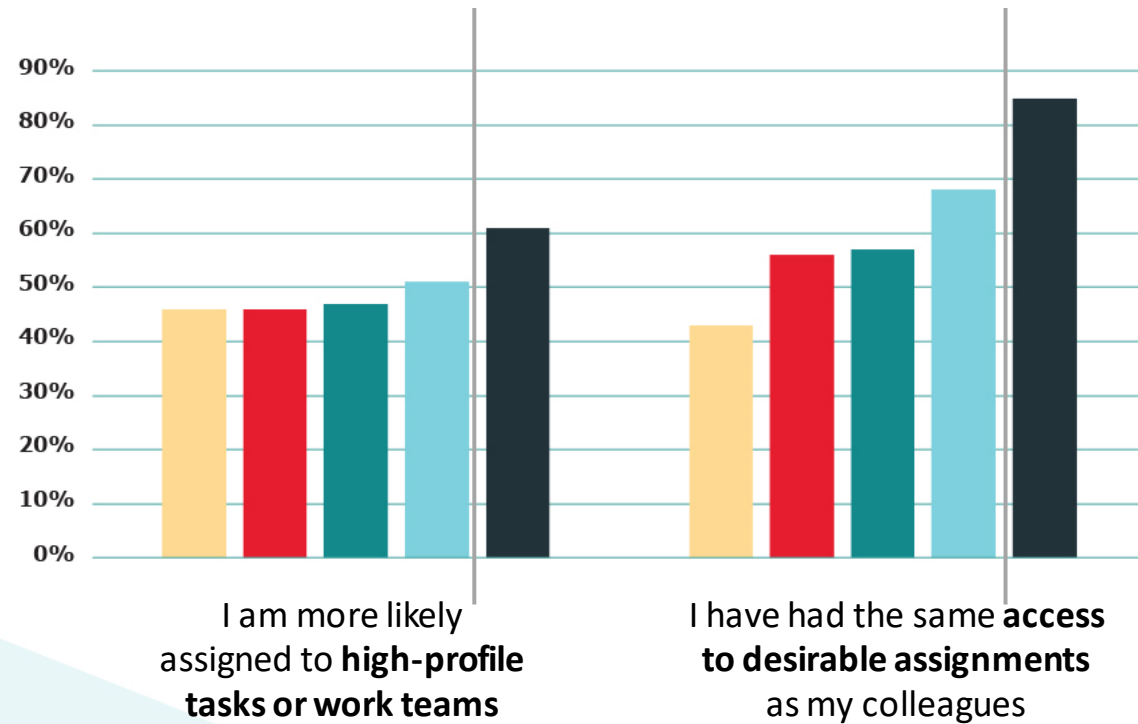
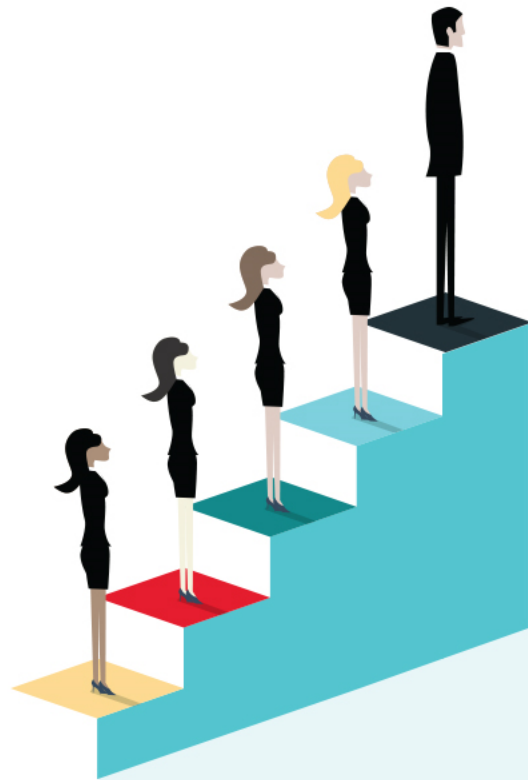
Does the task **require specialized skills** to perform, or can anyone do it?



Indirectly Promotable:
Does the task let you **develop useful skills or relationships** that could lead to promotable tasks in the future?
(Beware!)

Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from 3000 Engineers

As compared to my colleagues with a comparable role, seniority, and experience...

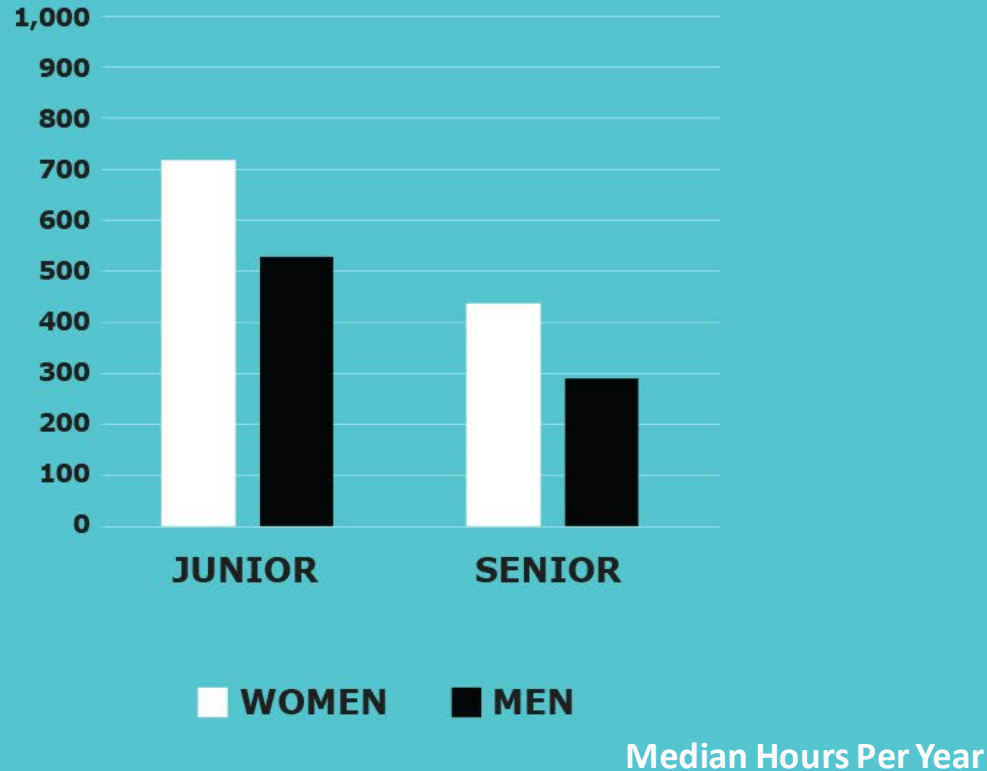


■ AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN ■ ASIAN-AMERICAN WOMEN ■ LATINA WOMEN ■ WHITE WOMEN ■ WHITE MEN

Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from a Consulting Firm

Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from a Consulting Firm

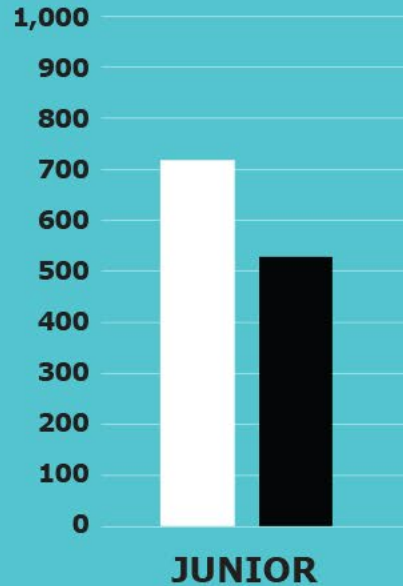
Non-Promotable Work



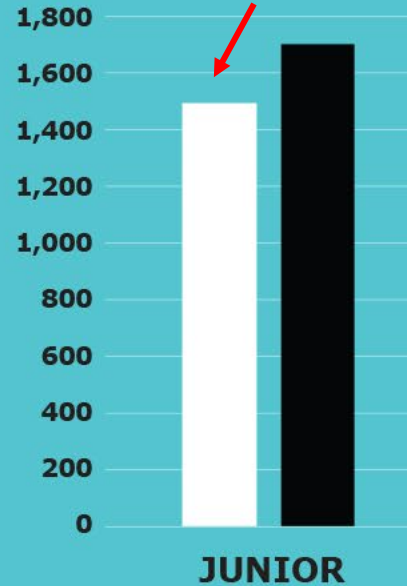
Regardless of seniority, the median woman worked **200 more hours per year** on non-promotable tasks than their male colleagues.

Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from a Consulting Firm

Non-Promotable Work



Promotable Work



■ WOMEN ■ MEN

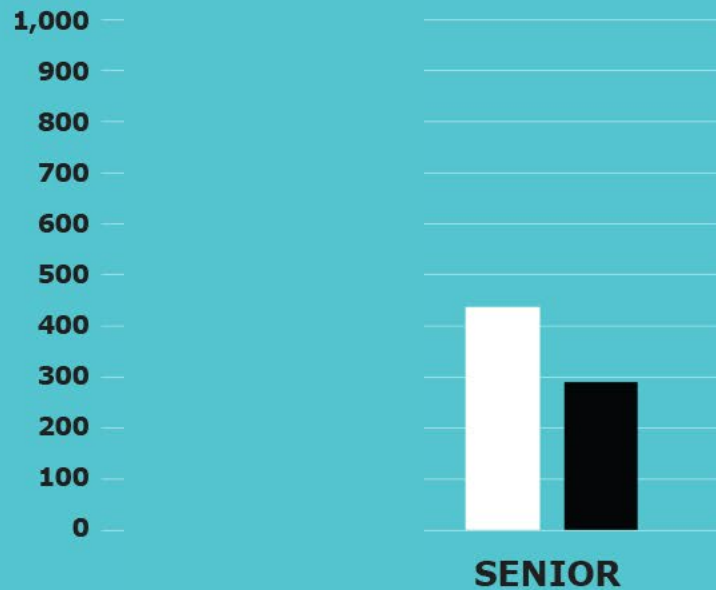
■ WOMEN ■ MEN

Median Hours Per Year

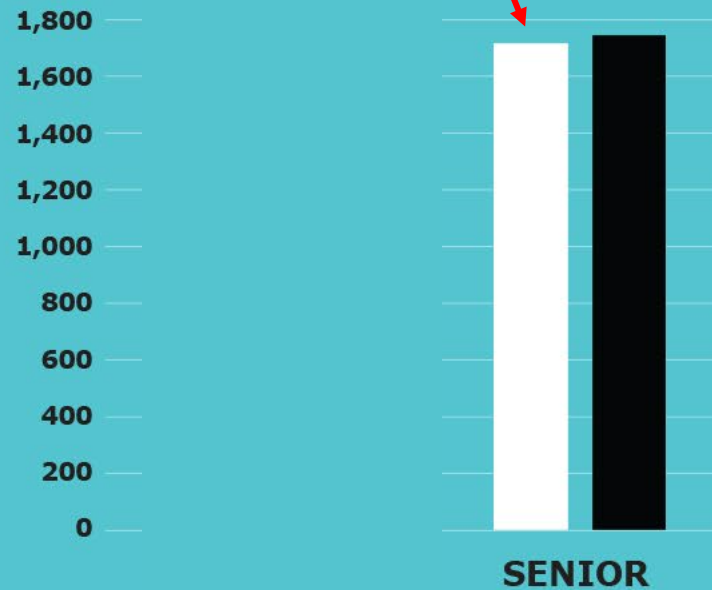
At the same time, the median **junior** woman worked **250 fewer hours** on promotable tasks than their male colleagues.

Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from a Consulting Firm

Non-Promotable Work



Promotable Work



■ WOMEN ■ MEN

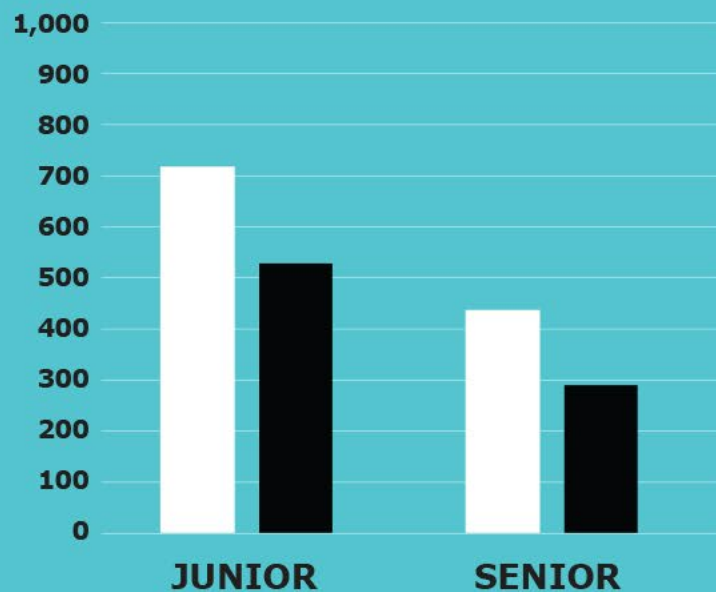
■ WOMEN ■ MEN

Median Hours Per Year

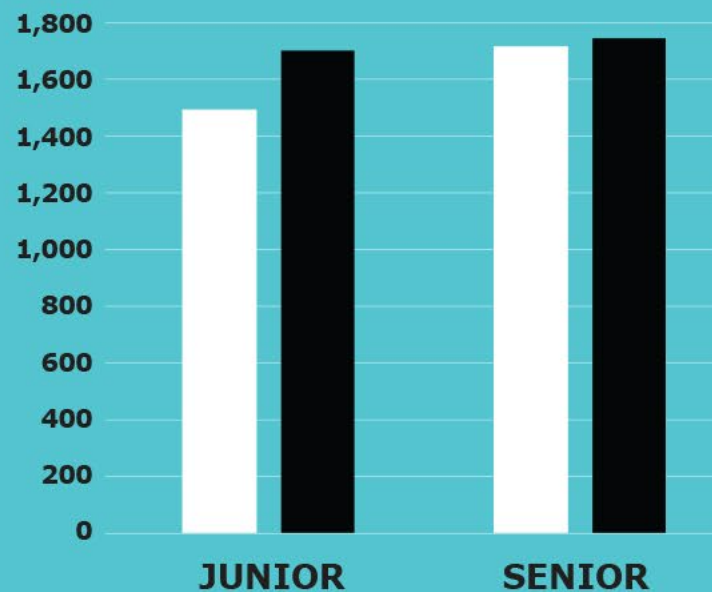
The median senior woman worked **250 more total hours** to make room for her excessive load of non-promotable work.

Women do more NPTs than Men: Evidence from a Consulting Firm

Non-Promotable Work



Promotable Work



■ WOMEN ■ MEN

■ WOMEN ■ MEN

Median Hours Per Year

Work-Work Imbalance

Harms Women and Their Careers

Career
stagnation

Loss of
confidence

Job
dissatisfaction
and turnover



Work Overload

Harms Women and Their Careers



**Work/Family
imbalance**



Stress, burnout

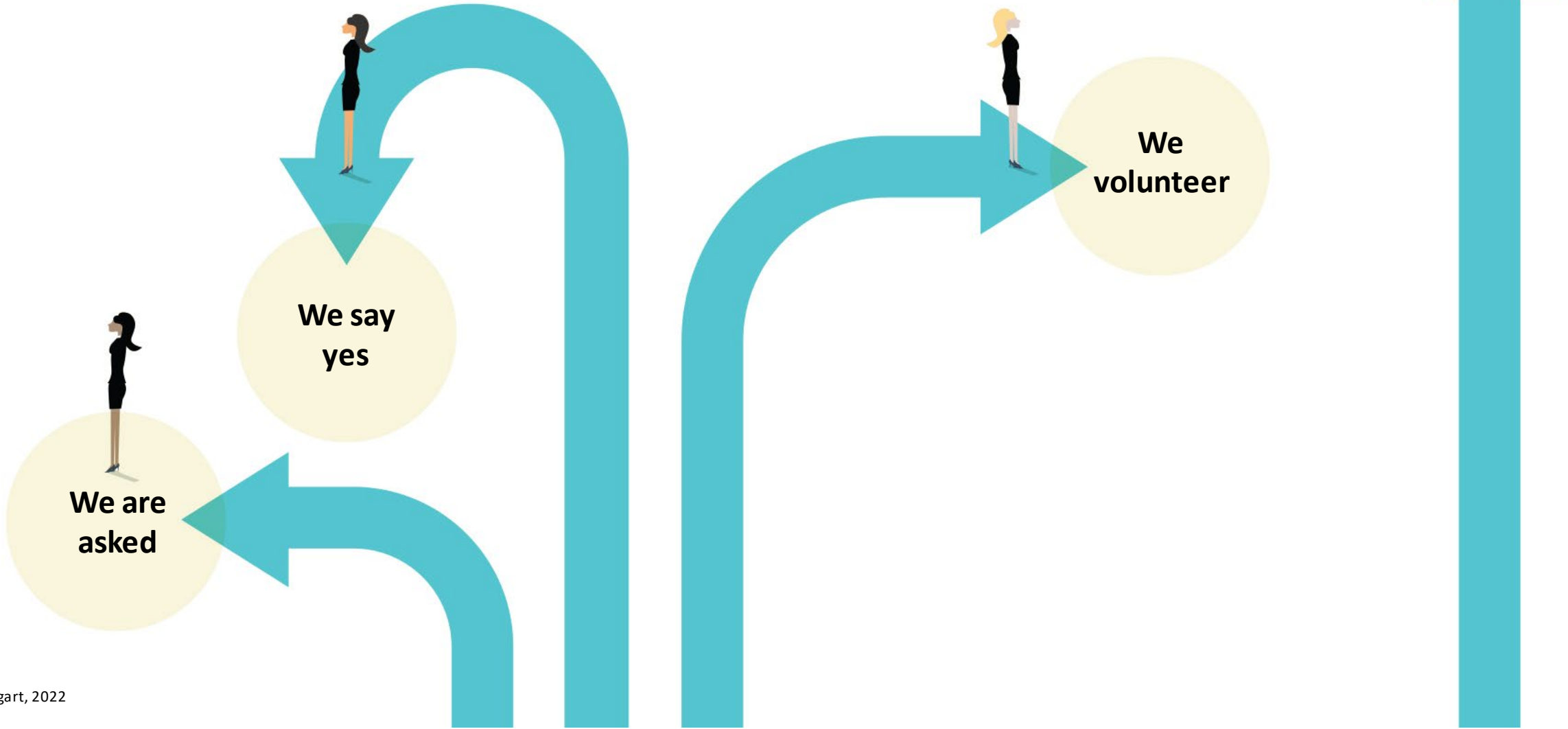


**Withdrawal,
resignation**

Overburdening Women with NPTs Harms Organizations

Ineffective use of talent pool
Lost performance, productivity
Culture of Inequity
Loss of talent

How do women end up doing the bulk of NPTs?



Who will write up the report?



Example: An employee review committee

Research Study

Gender and Volunteering to do an NPT



A woman is 50% more likely to volunteer than a man

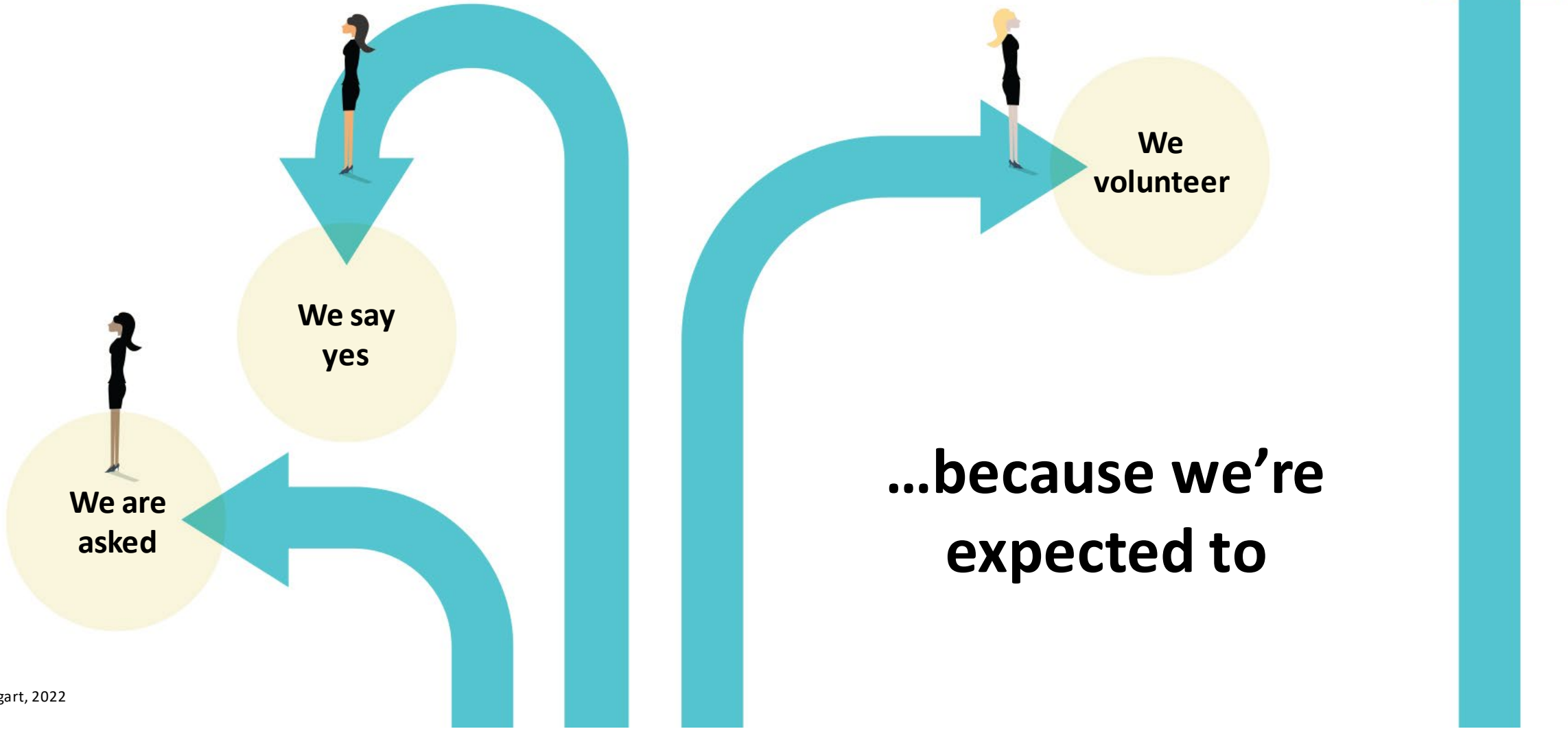
Why do women volunteer more?



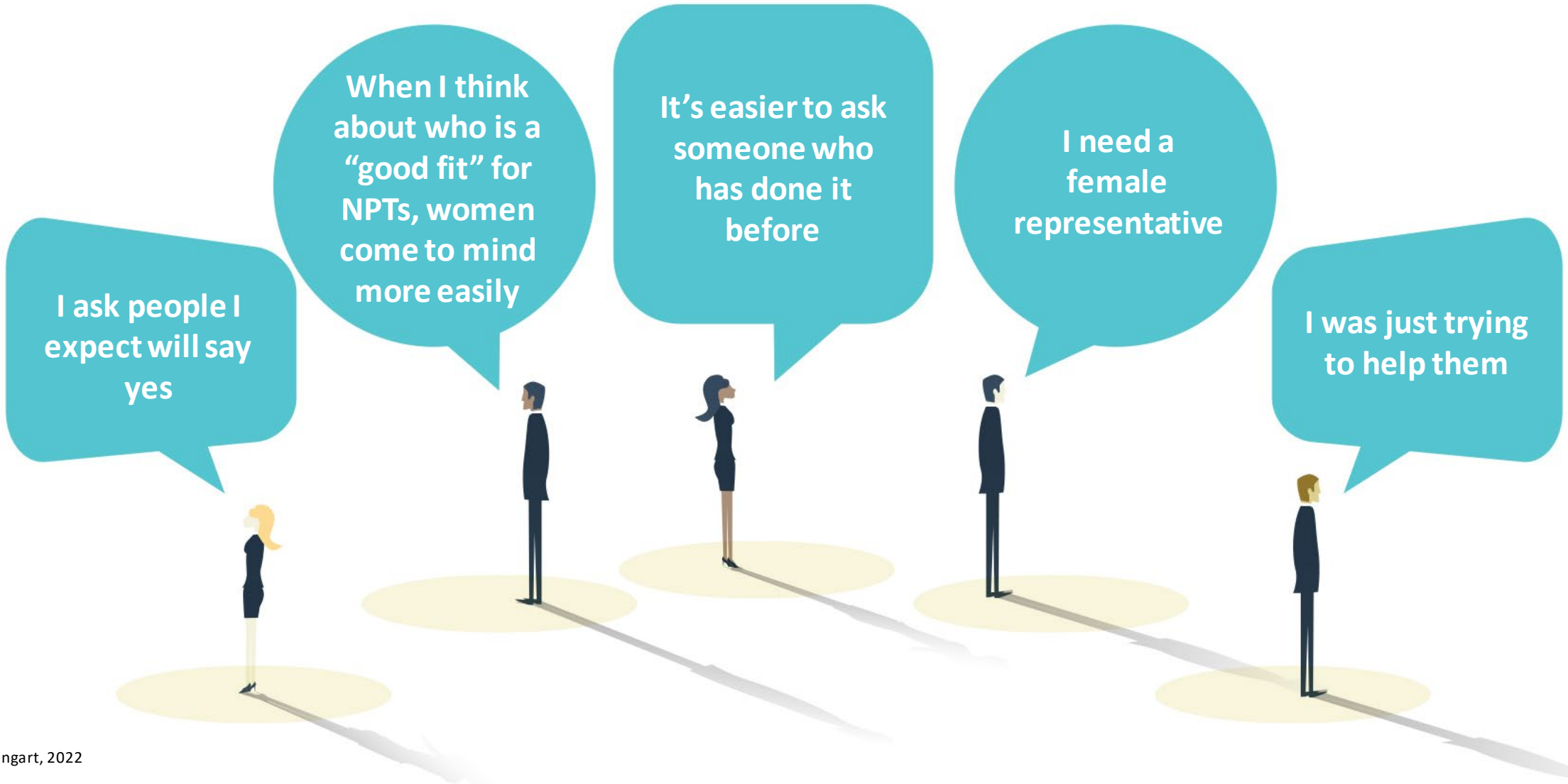
Who is asked?



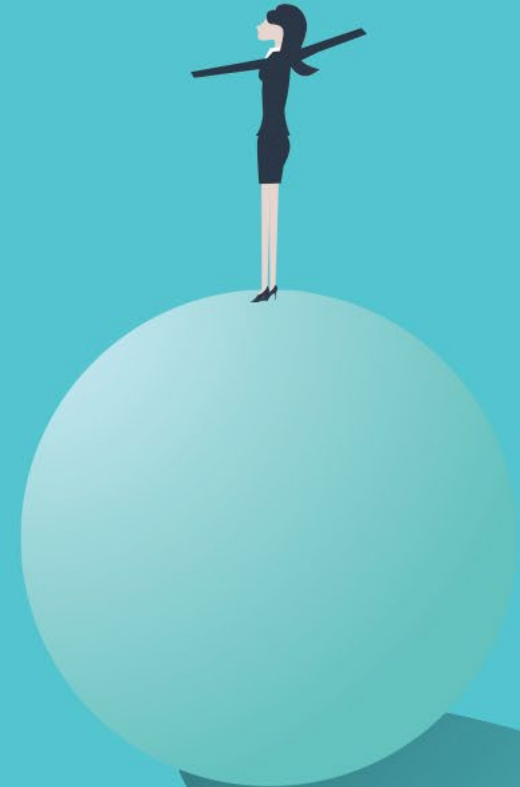
How do women end up doing the bulk of NPTs?



Why do we ask Women to do NPTs?



Individual Solutions: Strategies for Balancing your Workload



Before saying “yes” or volunteering



**Get the information
you need to
understand the task**



**Consider
who is asking
you**



**Don't
underestimate
the cost of
saying “yes”**



**Don't get
cornered into
saying “yes”**



**Remember
the future
you**



**Beware of
your triggers**



**Ignore the
Diva moment**



**Consider
your implicit
“no”**

Saying No

Avoiding negative repercussions



**Offer an alternative
that solves their
problem**



**Put conditions on
your yes**



**Turn a request for
help into a
negotiation**

Right-size your NPT Load (aka optimize your work portfolio)

Assess

How do you spend your time?
How do others spend their time?
What does your organization expect?
How do you want to spend your time?

Adjust

What can you let go?
Who can take it on?
Who will help you make the change?



Choose NPTs that are right for you



**NPTs that
fulfill you**



**NPTs that
leverage your
expertise**



**NPTs that
provide a
good return
on your time
spent**



**NPTs that give
you a mental
break**



**NPTs that fit
with your
current
assignments**

Fixing the Problem



How Individuals Can Seed Change

CREATE AWARENESS

Present the issue in relatable terms

Tie the issue to important organizational goals and values

Identify and mobilize your allies



TAKE ACTION

Recommend new ways of allocating tasks

Interject before a woman is voluntold

Mentor early career colleagues

How Managers Can Fix the Problem



CHANGE HOW NPTS ARE DISTRIBUTED

Random assignment
Taking turns
Assign tasks strategically



REASSIGN AND REDISTRIBUTE CURRENT NPTS

To optimally leverage specialized skill sets



INCREASE THE TALENT POOL

Identify more people who can do NPTs
Train new people to do NPTs



EDUCATE YOUR EMPLOYEES

On the promotability of various tasks
How to balance their work portfolio







AVOID CULTURAL TAXATION

Don't overburden members of underrepresented groups

How Organizations Can Fix the Problem



-  Set expectations and enforce standards for doing NPTs
-  Provide incentives for doing NPTs
-  Redesign jobs so that NPTs for one role become PTs for another
-  Reconsider what is and is not promotable

Benefits to Organizations that Fix the Problem

More efficient workforce utilization

A more equitable and supportive culture

A more engaged and satisfied workforce

Greater ability to attract the best talent

Retention of valuable employees



Join *The No Club!*

Available via all
major booksellers

"Valuable tips for changing the status quo [and] sound guidance for sparking change in organizations."
—Kirkus Reviews



thenoclub.com

©Laurie R. Weingart, 2022