

COMMERCE

How women executives are redefining luxury's boys' clubs

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Private aviation is one sector that is predominantly led by men. Image credit: Wheels Up

By SARAH RAMIREZ

NEW YORK Relationship building, curiosity and self-advocacy are essential qualities for women looking to excel in luxury sectors where executive leadership is predominantly male.

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During a panel moderated by Jen Woodring, vice president of customer experience and brand partnerships at [Luxury Portfolio International](#), at the Women in Luxury eConference on June 2, women executives shared their experiences in different industries dominated by men. While more women are climbing the ranks in these fields, challenges remain in the workplace.

"If we don't like the boys' club and if we don't like that idea, the only way we're going to allow that is by us being ourselves," said Dominique Giovine, vice president, franchise division at [Mot Hennessy](#), New York. "We can balance that seesaw."

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Climbing the luxury ladder

Male-dominated industries are those with workforces comprised of less than 25 percent women, as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor. Examples, particularly in the luxury sphere, include finance, aviation, automotive and wine and spirits.

While Ms. Giovine does have reports who are women at Mot Hennessy, many of her employees work closely with distributors and retailers without coming in contact with other women. These experiences mirror her own, as Ms. Giovine explained she currently deals with one other woman despite dealing with upper management teams across 28 distributors.



As workplaces slowly become more diverse, so do marketing efforts. Image credit: Mot Hennessy

The aviation industry is also predominantly male, from entry-level to the C-Suite. When Stephanie Chung, chief growth officer at [Wheels Up](#), began her career as a ground handler at Boston's Logan International Airport, she was one of a handful of women.

Wall Street has a well-known reputation for being a boys' club, but Marie Driscoll, managing director for luxury and retail at [Coresight Research](#), began her career in the research department where there were more women.

In these situations, women have often been encouraged to exhibit "overtly male" characteristics. However, being inauthentic can also make it challenging to build supportive relationships in the workplace.

Instead, Ms. Giovine encouraged women to find common ground with their male counterparts. When she began her first role at Mot Hennessy in Georgia, she decided to learn about two sports college football and golf so she could more easily participate in social conversations.

Establishing relationships with male peers in authentic ways can be vital when business decisions are being made behind closed doors.

"You may not be in the room when the promotions are available and the leadership team is talking about who should take that, who we should be put there, who can interview for it," Ms. Chung said. "You better have a lot of good male allies and they're out there to make sure that they're also good to speak on your behalf when you're either not in the room or haven't quite tightened up the confidence yet."

While not every situation necessitates that credit is doled out, as long as the overall team or business is forging ahead, women should strive for their professional successes to be acknowledged, according to Julie Wagner, CEO of the [Beverly Hills Conference & Visitors Bureau](#).

The panelists also agreed that strong work performance is nonnegotiable.



There is growing awareness of the obstacles women face in the workplace juggling multiple roles. Image credit: Wheels Up

"Be yourself and do the work, because nothing speaks louder than performance," Ms. Giovine said. "It transcends everything."

Ms. Driscoll recommends that young professionals embrace learning about data and finances related to their businesses and industries, arguing that it helps employees differentiate themselves.

"Within luxury there are multiple facets, so the more you plug into that, the more well-rounded you're going to be,"

Ms. Wagner said.

Workplace progress

As more women pursue higher education than men and more households rely on dual incomes, awareness about gender equality and the obstacles women face in the workplace is growing.

The speakers touched on how they have influenced their male colleagues' perspectives, while in other situations they faced challenges balancing career opportunities with responsibilities such as motherhood.

A number of luxury companies have also worked to help advance women throughout their organizations.

LVMH Mot Hennessy Louis Vuitton's EllesVMH effort aims to support gender balance at every level of the conglomerate. Since EllesVMH was launched in 2007, the company has grown its female leadership from 23 percent to 42 percent in 2020 ([see story](#)).

Italian automaker Lamborghini also recently highlighted a new set of programs, including equal pay policies and parental paid leave, meant to contribute to more inclusive and sustainable company ethics. Among the automaker's priorities are gender equality and the generational gap ([see story](#)).

"As far as the future, and what that holds and will the boys' club always exist?" Mot Hennessy's Ms. Giovine said.

"Well, I think it's going to be a new club in the future.

"Change is happening now."

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