



The Workplace is Changing: Thomas Friedman Predicts Seismic Shifts Will Offer Opportunities for Women Who Have Left the Workforce in Droves

Friedman and best-selling authors Malcolm Gladwell and Ijeoma Oluo share forecasts for post-pandemic workplaces at the National Workplace Summit, presented by the Conferences for Women

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May 6, 2021— Although millions of women have left the workforce amidst the global health and economic crises, the rise of remote work in a newly “super-digitized world” will create opportunities to bring women back to work, Pulitzer-Prize winner Thomas Friedman said today at the National Workplace Summit, presented by the [Conferences for Women](#).

“This last year we probably did about 10 years of digitization in one year and digitization ... means that people are going to be able to do more kinds of work,” Friedman, a best-selling author and foreign affairs columnist for the *New York Times*, shared along with other predictions for the post-pandemic workplace. “I just have to believe that that’s going to create more opportunities for women.”

He also said that workplaces will look different because modern workers will need nonstop education and training because of rapid-fire changes in technology and

industry. “The old model of learn, work, retire is really disappearing. Your ability to learn how to learn and to love to learn is actually your new pension,” he said, quoting future-of-work strategist Heather E. McGowan. “That will be the source of your security as an employee going forward.”

With many employers planning for a new work-life in a post-pandemic world, one of the big challenges they face is addressing significant setbacks unleashed by Covid. One in four women is considering leaving the workforce, according to [a 2021 Deloitte report](#)—with those groups most significantly impacted including working mothers, women in senior management positions, and Black women.

To help managers respond to these and other new challenges, the Conferences for Women brought together thought leaders to discuss the trends that will drive the future of work.

Malcolm Gladwell, five-time *New York Times* bestselling author, said that younger workers are driving changes through a networking over hierarchy mentality – and leaders need to respond to that.

“What it means to be an effective leader in 2021 is to be sensitive to those kinds of variables, to understand that strategies that may have worked brilliantly ten years ago or five years ago, or even two years ago, don’t work that well anymore,” Gladwell said.

He said that leaders can help bring women back into the workplace by giving them new opportunities.

“What we really need to do is to embrace the notion that people can reinvent themselves and that reinvention actually probably makes you better off in a new job,” he said. “Allowing people to remake themselves and what they are pursuing is the greatest gift we can give them.”

Ijeoma Oluo, author of *The New York Times* best-selling *So You Want to Talk About Race*, said the recent crises merely have amplified issues that have existed for generations. She said that workplaces need to be restructured because “much of business is not designed for women,” an unequal division of labor exists at home, and jobs traditionally done by women are less valued.

“The conditions that are forcing many women, especially women of color, out of work have existed for the entire history of this country,” Oluo said. “What we need is workspaces that really value the unique contributions of women of color, from entry-level on up.”

The 2021 National Workplace Summit is presented by Cisco and sponsored by Bristol Myers Squibb; Fidelity Investments; Gilead Sciences; Google; State Street Corporation; and Workhuman.

“Cisco is proud to sponsor today’s national Workplace Summit, which has provided powerful and practical tools for leaders during these changing times,” said Fran Katsoudas, EVP and Chief People, Policy & Purpose Officer at Cisco. “We know that women in the workplace have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic, so supporting and developing women leaders right now is critical.”

The nonpartisan, nonprofit Conferences for Women hosts annual events in California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Texas that attract more than 50,000 attendees. Its mission is to promote, communicate and amplify the influence of women in the workplace and beyond.

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