

# Profiles

## AP Profile: Gioia Ghezzi

*Of the 1100 women consultants working at McKinsey, close to 400 hold positions at the EM level or above. They are a remarkable group of women who encompass a wide variety of backgrounds and who represent virtually every practice and office around the world. With this edition of the McKinsey Women's Website, we inaugurate a new series of EM and AP Profiles to augment our stories of women Partners (the Road to Partner series). We welcome your [suggestions](#) of individuals to be featured (using our "feedback" form).*

*We begin with a London AP who joined McKinsey after a decade in industry. A physicist by training, Gioia Ghezzi had her three children while holding top posts in research and development, and scientific publishing. She came to McKinsey five years ago.*

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### What brought you to McKinsey?

I was happily working in scientific publishing but wanted to get an MBA because I felt it would prepare me for the round of corporate acquisitions my company was undertaking. So I went for the degree, quite sure I would stay in publishing.

While I was in school, two things happened. First, I realized how I missed *thinking* as opposed to *doing*. Second, the corporation I was working for put itself up for sale, which promised to be a long process. I knew I had to leave and that I did not want to go to a second-tier publisher. I began to see consulting as a good opportunity that offered the chance to think, and on a variety of projects.

Once I decided on consulting, of course, it had to be for McKinsey!



### You began your academic career in physics. What attracted you initially to a science?

I loved the fact that it was difficult. And I also loved that it allowed me to indulge my childhood curiosity about how the world works.

After graduation, I went to work in research for IBM in Rome. They gave their scientists freedom to pursue their interests and passions, and they also exposed people to responsibility very early. By the time I was 28, I was managing many people, all older than me, and I was working on large projects, traveling all over.

## Was it difficult being in such a male-dominated environment?

Truthfully, one big challenge came from those few women in the generation ahead of me. They fit the stereotype of the 'bulldog,' very aggressive and always using swear words for every comma. I think they had no choice but to be that way when they came in.

For myself, I found the environment open and anti-establishment. It was common for younger people to manage projects overseeing senior scientists earning five times their salary. It was fine, so long as the scientists considered you smart and competent.

Unfortunately, after five years there, IBM discontinued their European R&D.

When I went into publishing at Academic Press, I also found that the company wasn't very

hierarchical. It was run in a very open-minded way. I was putting scientific journals on the web, meeting with top scientists, managing publications. It was a great position, where I could just go to Boston and have lunch with the top thinkers at MIT and Harvard.



## After a decade in top posts where you had Profit and Loss responsibility, was it tough to 'start over' as an Associate at McKinsey?

I have an interesting story about that. I had an interview with a very senior director in London, and when I arrived at his office, fresh as a rose, he said, "It took quite a while for our secretaries to find a time slot to meet. Do you realize if you come here, you won't have a secretary again?" And I responded with the truth. I told him I don't care about the external signs of power. It's the *content* that really excites me. If I have the opportunity to do interesting, challenging work, that's enough. I recognize that I will know as little as any other new Associate and I'll try to learn.

Also when I interviewed, a FIG Partner asked how I thought someone with three children would cope in consulting work and whether there was anything McKinsey could do to help me. I responded that I'd like to be located in the office closest to my home, and he kindly proceeded to make that happen. It helped enormously in those first few years.

**What challenges did you face as a newcomer?**



One of the things I found hardest to get used to, after years in the corporate world, was that it seemed like there was no way to judge performance. Coming from a P & L position, my performance had been judged on whether I did or did not make my targets. It was difficult to adjust to our form of evaluation. Also, I was accustomed to knowing everything about my company and its finances, so I initially found it puzzling to not know the bigger picture or what was in the pipeline. But I came to accept and adjust to all this.

At first, I was unsure of how far I could push the boundaries. For example, if a certain task was assigned but, in the natural course of things, I felt another analysis would be more valuable, I didn't know if I should carve out time to do it. Would they say it was fantastic, or that I'd wasted half a day on something that wasn't useful?

By and large, I *did* find that people were very interested in my ideas.

**Looking back, what was best about that time?**

Well, of course, the usual thing that happens at McKinsey happened to me; I found quite amazing people to work with. It was such a diverse group that there was room for different kinds of success and types of personalities. I felt that I fit in.

Also, believe it or not, it was a lifestyle improvement, because I traveled less as an Associate than in my previous job, although I didn't have as much control over my schedule.



**How did you handle the transition to EM, and then AP?**

I started as an EM in December two years ago – and was just designated an AP.

I really loved being an EM. I could plan ahead as much as possible, which enabled me to control my schedule. But my first engagement was difficult. It was quite a distance outside of London, so I had a bizarre lifestyle. I left at six in the morning, saw my three children for an hour or so in the evening, and then worked until midnight and repeated the whole thing. It was tiring, but I did enjoy the fact that I had the freedom to choose when to occasionally work from home.

And as an AP, I've already witnessed an enormous spike of demand on my time. I'm becoming pretty good at saying no to things that don't fit into my program. But I have a weakness for the work, the content excites me, and I love working with my clients, so...

**What advice would you give others, based on your experiences?**

I would suggest that they establish credibility quickly, in terms of what they can deliver. Once you do that, you can start 'working around the edges.'

I had to make it clear to my teams, after a while, that being at home first thing in the morning and again in the evening was a priority. I lived a block from the office then, and whenever possible I would take an hour at home, and then come back.

**Speaking of balance, how did you manage to meld three children and a husband who also works in a demanding field with a McKinsey schedule?**

I always spent an enormous amount of money on childcare, without questioning the financial side of it. I have both a nanny and a housekeeper so they can provide back-up for each other. And my husband is very helpful. He commutes and has long hours, but his schedule is more predictable.

I never did work part-time, partly because I couldn't afford the cost of childcare if I did.

But I have to admit that, in terms of balance, there are things I miss. I don't have the spare time for fitness and reading. I used to read a lot, and now I don't anymore. And I'm afraid my body is sort of decomposing from the lack of exercise.



**What drew you to the London Women's Initiative?**

That's been a passion of mine from the very beginning.

In 2002, I saw through the website that there was material available on communications skills, so I organized an office-wide event for women. It was an extraordinary success in that it answered a need for the women to come together. In January of 2003, I organized a second event, which again was very well received.

**What kinds of concerns and questions do you hear from junior women in the London group?**

Most often, the questions are about how to literally make it all work, organizationally. They ask about how to say no, how to choose what to do and what not to, how to design a program, and how to be realistic.

I suggest that they follow their passions, while being as strategic as possible in developing distinctive knowledge. The sooner you're known as someone who is good at something specific, the better chances you'll have work waiting for you when you return from maternity leave.

My bottom line advice is to just have fun and to be careful not to take things too emotionally or personally. Enjoy yourself!

**Does that apply to you?**

Absolutely! I love what I do, and I enjoy the people.

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# Healthwise

## Instant Fitness: staying healthy on a McKinsey schedule

Dubai Associate Heba El-Gabaly works out on the weekends. NYO BA Hayden Odell rises early to get in a morning run whenever possible.

Sarah Fahey, a San Francisco EA, makes sure she exercises before she does anything else, while New Yorker Esther David, Director of Firm Personnel Committee Support, builds heart-pounding stair climbs into her daily commute to and from work. And Pittsburgh Associate Ozlem M. Yuksel shoe-horns an occasional 20-minute hotel room aerobic session into her hectic schedule.



Admits Ozlem, “I have an inherent aversion to gyms, which makes it tough to work out when I’m on the road.”

For Firm members around the world, staying fit while staying on track professionally can be a challenge.

“It takes a lot of determination, and patience, as well as a multi-faceted approach since our schedules are crazy and always changing,” observes NYO’s Odell.

In fact, Toronto Associate Tamara Paton has come to accept the reality that a regular, daily exercise break may be the impossible dream, at least for now.

“If I acknowledge that something will always come up, it’s easier to remain flexible and not get frustrated about the limited control we have over our time,” shrugs Paton. Despite that, she’s managed to run nine marathons in the last five years.

But for all these women, fitness is not a luxury. It’s a necessity.

“It takes dedication and moderation to stay healthy and fit. I think it’s not only realistic to do it while moving up in one’s career - it’s *imperative*. Being fit is mental as well as physical, and you’ll go a lot farther if you take the time to acknowledge that,” says Fahey.

So what’s the solution for people working long hours, far away from home?



The good news is that fitness, new studies confirm, can be achieved in a variety of ways through a number of activities, all of which are available to just about anyone, and anywhere.

[One recent study](#) revealed that the mere act of fidgeting provides a calorie-burning boost. Mayo Clinic physician and researcher Dr. James Levine followed two groups of people at work. The group that was constantly in motion – getting up from the desk,



ping, or simply moving around – blazed through an additional 350 calories every day, as compared to their more sedentary counterparts. That’s enough to produce a weight loss of 30 to 40 pounds in one year.

In addition, exercise physiologists find that many short workouts are just as effective, or even better, than the all-out sweat session.

“Look back at the way people lived over the course of history, and you can see why little bits of exercise are more efficient,” suggests Jae Gruenke, a Manhattan-based certified trainer who runs her own business, [Intelligent Exercise](#). Her clients are mainly time-crunched, high-powered women who don’t have time for long-hours at the gym. Many found the latest research reassuring.

“When two groups of women were compared, one who did a continuous 30 minutes of exercise, and another group who broke their sessions into three snippets of ten minutes, those who did the three sessions actually maintained a higher metabolic level, a greater calorie burn,” explains Gruenke.

“It seems that fewer sessions actually give your metabolism a bump a few times a day. It makes sense when you consider that before the industrial revolution people didn’t have one concentrated bout of activity a day, they had bursts of activity all the time,” she adds.

Health club fitness director and personal trainer Ross Tucker advises his clients to build ‘bursts’ into their day by multitasking, sneaking in a few exercises every time there’s a transition between activities. Tucker’s [full-body workout \(see sidebar\)](#) is doable in bits and pieces right in the office.

Both he and Gruenke insist that fitness is simply a matter of habit. They advise clients to choose the right habits from among a menu of stay-healthy options that include:

- **Homemade road warrior kits:** Anyone can ‘build’ a portable gym capable of delivering a strong aerobic and weight training punch. All that’s needed are two small devices: a jump rope and a set of flexible elastic bands. Jumping rope is an effective aerobic workout, while the bands - sections of flexible rubber tubing or lengths of elastic - provide variable resistance that can target virtually any muscle group. Best of all, both devices weigh only ounces and require mere inches of

### **Trainer Ross Tucker’s instant office workout**

Yonkers, New York-based Fitness Director and personal trainer Ross Tucker works with private clients from early morning until late at night, helping people squeeze conditioning into the hours that surround their workday. But he also encourages them to sneak in workday ‘fitness breaks,’ by outlining an in-the-office full-body workout. Optimally, each exercise should be done 12 to 15 times.

**Chair squats:** Start in a seated position and stand up, then lower yourself back down to the chair.

**Chair extensions:** Seated in a chair, lift your lower leg until it’s aligned with the knee, then hold the leg straight out for a count of three, contracting the muscle as much as possible.

**Dead lifts:** Standing straight up with your knees slightly bent, bend at the waist until your upper body is parallel with the floor, and then straighten up.

**Straight arm pull-ins:** With your arms extended up in a ‘Y’ position, draw your elbows back to your lower back, squeeze and return.

**Push-ups:** Place hands on floor and lower body. Push back up.

**Side arm raises:** Slowly raise your arms straight out to the side for a count of eight until slightly above the shoulders, then lower just as slowly.

**Dips:** Place your hands at the edge of the chair. Lower your body as close to the floor as you can, bending your arms only at the elbow. Push back up.

suitcase space.

For a full primer on jump-rope aerobics, visit Georgia State University's [fitness page](#).

The 'thera band academy' offers an [illustrated list of exercises](#) tailored for a variety of fitness levels, or visit Bally Fitness's tutorial on [aerobic bands](#).

- **In-room hotel services**: Many hotels, realizing that business travelers don't always have the time or inclination to hit the fitness room, are devising new alternatives.

Most [Hilton Hotels](#) can dispatch a personal trainer to a room for a fee. Better yet, they provide a free fitness kit, which includes a yoga mat, elastic bands and resistance tubes, hand-weights, and a training guide. The kit must be returned before checkout.

[Westin Hotels](#) run continuous workout programs on their in-house television channel. The routines, which can be done in bed, incorporate yoga and Pilates moves, and require no equipment.

[Marriott Hotels](#) offer three in-room fitness options for free. One, is a "portable exercise device and video routine" that provides a 15-minute, full-body aerobic workout.

Some selected hotels, including Manhattan's [Holiday Inn Wall Street](#) will actually deliver a stationery bike to the room.

Of course, for those who'd prefer to go it on their own, there are standard exercises that work anywhere. A full list, along with photos, is available at [ExRx.net](#).

- **Stair aerobics**: People like New York's Esther David find climbing stairs alone is a terrific workout and a multitasker's dream. "I like to do two things at a time. I don't buy that argument that if you're working sixty hours a week, there's nothing else you can get done," Says David. Gruenke agrees. She cites a study that compared stair-climbers with those who did a similar amount of standard aerobics. The climbers came out ahead. "It wasn't what any of us expected, but the people who just climbed stairs were found to be more fit in just about every way," says Gruenke. Stair climbing delivers the same aerobic punch as running, and the weight-bearing exercise is particularly good for women. In addition, climbing just six flights each day can take off 18 pounds a year.
- **Desk-side breaks**: You don't have to leave your office, or even get off your chair, to buff up. Among the best all-over toners, easy to do behind a closed door, are squats. For a standing squat, hold the back of your chair, and place your feet shoulder-width apart. Then, bend your knees to lower your body as if you're about to sit, until your thighs are parallel to the ground. Slowly rise to your original position.

You can also try a standing squat using the wall for support, by lowering yourself into a sitting position and then returning to an upright position. Check the photos at [changing shape.com](#) to ensure you're using the correct form. To increase the difficulty, hold two small water bottles or books of roughly equal weight. For a guide to specific exercise and proper form, visit [Travel Fitness](#).

- **Stretches**: Basic yoga stretches require nothing more than a bit of knowledge and a few minutes of

time.

For beginning [tips](#) review the photos and text at Yoga Everywhere.

Stretches are indispensable if you're flying regularly, particularly on flights that last more than five hours, where blood clots are a real risk. Follow Boeing's [illustrated guide](#) at or review the [videos](#) at [medicdirect.com](#). Stretching may not seem like a high-energy workout, but its effective at warming the muscles, preventing injury, getting the blood flowing and increasing resting heart rate, particularly when stretches are done in rapid succession.

Stretches can be done from a seated position, as shown [here](#).

- **Isometrics:** If all else fails, the simple act of tensing and relaxing muscles can count as exercise. To be effective, an isometric position needs to be maintained for at least six seconds, and repeated at least five times. Since isometrics can elevate blood pressure they are *not* recommended for anyone with hypertension. Also effective: the isotonic exercise, where tension remains uniform throughout the move, as when a dumbbell is slowly lifted and lowered. Isotonic conditioning is used by practitioners of the new '[super slow](#)' style which uses fewer repetitions at a much slower pace to achieve quicker results. For an example of the isometric routine, visit the [HGTV](#) explanatory page.

Fitness routines, like diets, work best when they're balanced and, often, when consumed in smaller, more frequent portions. It's something San Francisco's Sarah Fahey already knows.

"Shorter sessions work better for me," concludes Fahey. "I think I get more benefit from every little boost of exercise I get. I'll even go to the gym to log 10-15 minutes on the treadmill. It's amazing how much better you feel after just getting the heart rate up and breaking a sweat. I try to do that a minimum of four times a week. In a really busy week, three is three times better than none!"

The short sessions can be capped with an energizing weekend session. But Gruenke suggests that weekend warriors only take on truly enjoyable diversions.

"I tell my female clients to find a skilled activity they really like, preferably, something they loved as children, whether it's martial arts, skating, dancing, or a once-a-week juggling class," she says.

When the week draws to a close, you can settle in for a self-congratulatory peek at the online [fitness calculator](#), which tells you just how many calories your activities have burned. And, of course, it helps to remember Hayden Odell's conclusion, shared by scientists, that "exercise makes you a happier person."



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