
March 8th, 2021

IWD2021

Women in the workplace



So it's been 110 years since International Women's Day was officially celebrated globally, and 25 years since, the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 which was a historic conference for the international women's rights movement. More than 30,000 civil actors and 3,000 NGOs participated in collaborative forums and panel discussions, during which, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton declared, "Human rights are women's rights, and women's rights are human rights." However, decades after those powerful words echoed throughout the conference halls, women and girls' rights are still not guaranteed. So where are we?

Being a Director of a well-established Regional Recruitment Group: Progressive Recruitment Specialists, JobsTT, and ProgressiveJobsGT INC, I thought my insights / research for this year's #Commit to Challenge should focus on Women in the Workplace. So a review of several recent insightful reports from SP Global, the World Bank, ILO, and ODI allows some key takeaways to be gleaned. But before we get there – maybe some personal themes that I have come to use on my journey to where I am now...

- ✓ Family support
- ✓ Having positive female role models in many aspects of teen life: Sonya Moze and Sr Paul D'Ornellas
- ✓ Having an amazing network of like-minded peers from the teen years [many of whom are Captains of Industry Internationally AND the majority of us are still in touch]
- ✓ Being academic helped but having teachers who kept challenging me was key to building self-esteem. So being on the Maths Olympiad team and gaining entry to pursue an Engineer Degree in a male-dominated top-ranked University seemed like a normal part of the adventure
- ✓ Building networks with amazing men and women throughout my early career on various projects and working for MNCs who valued performance over status and gender.
- ✓ Meeting a life partner who considers me equal and embarking on a scary but fulfilling venture into Entrepreneurship.
- ✓ Daily, taking on the immense challenges of raising a family/juggling extra-curricular and work obligations/running my own business and staying sane – better having fun.
- ✓ Working with an amazing team of highly motivated Professionals [60% female:male ratio by the way]



I think I have been lucky but also these factors have been important building blocks in supporting me to always feel confident that I can perform at whatever level / in whatever arena I choose. However, this does not represent the experience of millions of women globally and more importantly regionally.

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So What's the Reality for Women in the Workplace?

- i. **Women consistently earn less than men** on average between 10 – 30 % less
- ii. Female employees are more likely to work in **temporary and part-time jobs**, are less likely to be promoted, and are concentrated in occupations and **sectors with lower barriers to entry**. Women and girls also do the vast majority of **unpaid care and housework**.
- iii. **Women's earnings often decline when they have children**.
- iv. Men of all ages with children are more likely to **have higher earnings than men without children**, which is not the case for women in any age group.
- v. Female-owned businesses are **generally smaller and employ fewer people**.
- vi. Women in the workforce tend to be better represented in the more client-facing industries with the best performers being : **financials, healthcare, and real estate** and the worse being: IT, utilities, energy and industrial. The good news is that the relative % in these weaker industries is **slowly improving** as skills and experience is gained to fight the layers of bias.
- vii. **Women's representation on Boards has significantly increased** over the years as there has been much attention placed there. However, Latina America and the Caribbean are the **least progressive** in this area compared to all other International Regions. **Women's participation on Boards improves the likelihood of there being a greater % of women at the Executive Level** – as they are seen as good professional role models – however, just focusing on selecting more women at the Board level does NOT imply that the effects trickle down to all levels of the organisation.
- viii. **HR Practices still support / foster an unconscious bias** that may hinder the career advancement of women.
- ix. And then there's the **Coronavirus pandemic** just to make things more challenging; McKinsey's Women in the Workplace 2020 study found that 1 in 4 women are considering stepping back in their careers or leaving the workforce entirely – they've called it "an emergency for corporate America".

It's estimated that it will take another 100 years [and probably more now as a result of COVID-19] to achieve gender equality. The burden of the COVID-19 crisis has been particularly placed on women. Women everywhere have faced a range of issues including: restrictions of movement, reduced income, challenges in accessing health services, increased burden of care, increased violence against women and reduced services for violence prevention and protection. Recession and the pandemic actually push gender topics down the priority list and women have been more impacted by job losses during the pandemic – mainly in part to the types of jobs they hold eg hospitality.



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So what can be done to challenge this trend - and ensure that companies retain their female talent and close the gender gap...

1) At an **organisational level:**

- ✓ **Family-Care policies and a focus on work-life balance** : especially in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic
- ✓ **Flexible working policies** in terms of hours, days, and work locations : as women still bear the brunt of childcare responsibilities and home care duties. These duties have been exacerbated in the pandemic with support systems closed eg day care and having to isolate from parents and in-laws who could assist with childcare.
- ✓ Some companies have set up '**pandemic relief**' schemes for paid leave or Adhoc days off to allow employees to re-charge
- ✓ **Employee Assistance Programme systems and policies** to deal with the increasing levels of stress experienced by women in the workplace – the threat of burnout is REAL and will have dire consequences on women's advancement.
- ✓ **Promote Professional mentoring and Networking**
- ✓ From a **Recruitment Perspective:**
 - address the Gender Pay gap & Gender Biases with Assessments and practices when implemented that will close the gaps
 - create gender diverse recruitment teams ensuring diverse candidate pools
 - conduct transparent evaluations
 - conduct structured competency based recruitment and performance evaluations
 - review Language of Job Descriptions
 - set targets for gender balance at all levels within the organisation and especially at the management level
 - use Data to back up training and professional development
 - develop and implement an equal opportunities policy and anti-sexual harassment policy.
 - Ensure all staff access gender equality training

2) At a **national level,**

- ✓ Governments can play a critical role in levelling the playing field for women's economic opportunities.
- ✓ Sound job strategies to reduce gender inequality in the world of work start with careful country-level diagnostics to understand local priorities and key constraints to and opportunities for women's work.
- ✓ The private sector is a major source of jobs and therefore essential to engage for equality in the world of work.
- ✓ Significant data and knowledge gaps pose major challenges to evidence-based policy-making and need to be addressed.



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While success stories are encouraging, a focus on gender equality is still all too rare. My **#Choose to Challenge for 2021** goes out to each of us to commit to this agenda in their own small way and start being the Change. **What does this look like in practice – constant messaging and action to back up:**

-parents and guardians and teachers promoting gender equality at all times & building general self-esteem [this goes for the boys too that they can be whatever they choose and not get locked into stereotypical gender roles as well, and their roles in healthy relationships]

-schools and tertiary institutions encouraging and facilitating gender equal programmes eg STEM programmes, and drama and culinary skills for all students

-organisations committing to gender pay equality and equal recruitment policies

-all employees prioritising respect in the workplace and calling out wrongful behaviour, policies and practices eg **#Me Too**

-women in senior roles mentoring men and women : it's about everyone crossing the finishing line and achieving the best they can be and not who finishes first

-NGOs and agencies lobbying GORTT and the relevant Ministries to make the required policy changes : education, labour and gender based violence.

Whatever current role you have – commit to a change in 2021. For me it will always be:

-supporting my children to be better citizens and human beings,

-supporting my employees to develop themselves professionally and personally,

-coaching and encouraging our clients to implement gender equal policies and recruitment practices in their organisations and calling out practices that need to be improved on and I look forward to my children, grandchildren and employees not needing another 100 years for gender equality to be achieved.



Carolyn de la Rosa,
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