

**AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM
SPEECH BY HER EXCELLENCY
PROFESSOR THE HONOURABLE KATE WARNER AM
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART, WEDNESDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2016**

Good morning everyone.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land – to pay respect to those that have passed before us and to acknowledge today's Tasmanian Aboriginal community who are the custodians of this land.

I would like to acknowledge among you Alderman Sue Hickey, Lord Mayor of Hobart, Jane Hutchinson, CEO Tasmanian Land Conservancy.

I have been asked to talk today about my personal story as a way of inspiring you to want to achieve higher levels of leadership within your own work/communities, whilst also providing you with practical advice to help you do so.

My personal story? Again? Really? I did a quick count of how many Tasmanian audiences have heard my personal story in the 20 months of so that I have been Governor: Women in Agriculture; Australian Local Government Women's Association; Unions Tasmania Women's Conference; Women Chiefs of Enterprise international; the Training Consortium of Tasmania; the Royal Hobart Hospital Women's International Day Breakfast; Rotary International Women's Day Luncheon at Howden; the same at New Norfolk; and an Up Close and Big Forum in Burnie. While I have tried to take a different angle in each of these speeches the basic story is the same.

It usually starts with 17 year-old me (sometimes a bit earlier – schoolgirl me being encouraged by my parents to apply myself at school, to matriculate, go to University and have a career which would enable me to be independent). Then graduating in law, working as an articled clerk and Judge's Associate, marriage, babies, barriers babies brought to working in the legal profession, casual tutoring as the only option, postgraduate study, poorly paid casual lecturing and finally, by the age of about 32, a full-time one year contract as a lecturer, the only female academic in the Law School.

Then promotion to senior lecturer, Associate Professor and then Professor, with stints of being Dean and Head of School. So, a rewarding academic career as teacher, researcher, and Director of Law Reform Institute; and then Governor.

All of this filled out of course with the inclusion of a few anecdotes about juggling the responsibilities of child care, domestic responsibilities and social life – making use of every minute of the day. Interspersed with a few ‘Dad jokes’ at Dick’s expense. I have suggested there is a serious side to Dad jokes (and the Mere Male column in *New Idea* magazine). The reason we find them funny is that it is quite okay for men to be incompetent at domestic chores, in fact it’s endearing and rather attractive. Society has a different reaction to similar stories in relation to women. All this because the idea that domestic chores and child care are women’s work is deeply embedded in our community psyche. It’s what women are good at and men aren’t. Is this changing?

My daughter Meg, who has three children, writes a blog, its most popular items dealing with the trials of motherhood, such as a poem which is also now a song, ‘Eat your dinner’. Here is an extract:

I think I’m going to shout again,
Or maybe I will cry,
While three annoying little s...,
Refuse to eat their pie.
I haven’t baked in any carrot,
Or sneaky peas or beans,
Forget the goodness, just fill up,
Or else I’ll have to scream.

This thought that we are being more honest about what it is to be a mother reminded me of the wonderful writer Elena Ferrante and her portrayal of motherhood in her Neapolitan novels. But I am getting off track. I am supposed to be talking about leadership, inspiring you to higher levels of it and providing you with practical advice about how to achieve it. Because I am increasingly asked about leadership, I have tried to read something of the theory around it. This quickly led me to understand why the organisers have asked presenters to relate their personal journeys rather than talk about leadership in theory!

In the effort to say something new, can I somehow tie in a little about leadership theory with my experience? What is being a leader? And what is leadership? There are myriad definitions; and lists of attributes of a leader and styles of leadership.

At its most basic a leader is 'a person who leads or commands a group, organisation or country'. And leadership is the action of leading a group or people or an organisation or the ability to do this'. More helpful is: 'Leaders set direction, build an inspiring vision, and create something new.' (That quote is from James Manktelow and Amy Carlson, of the UK leadership training group MindTools).

But this description is exactly why I have not aspired to be a leader! Of course, it means different things in different contexts: military leadership, religious leadership, political leadership, community leadership, organisational leadership.

And the University is another context. I became an academic by default. But I found I loved research and I found teaching both challenging and rewarding. I did not, however, teach or research so I could set direction, build an inspiring vision or to create something new, which is apparently what leaders are supposed to do. But I did hope to ignite the interest of my students in the law. One can be an excellent academic: a prolific publisher; win large research grants; and teach very competently without being a leader in that sense. To be promoted to the level of Associate Professor or Professor, Universities do require a demonstration of leadership in four major areas of academic activity: research and scholarship; learning and teaching; administration; community engagement.

I could, I guess, tick all those boxes. However, university administration and leadership in that area was my least favourite part of the job as an academic. I had served as Head of School and Dean for a few years, but rather than embracing these leadership roles, I did that as a duty and resented the fact that it took time away from teaching and research.

I am telling you all of this to give you some understanding of why I have not ever seen myself as a leader in the setting-direction, visionary-kind-of-way. I was very happy to leave that to the Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Pro-Vice Chancellor and Deans.

I did help create and build the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute as its Director for its first 12 years. But I had other models to follow, to learn from and to adapt to meet our local conditions. And it was really only when I was asked to present papers on such things as designing a law reform inquiry and running a small law reform body that I reflected on how we made the Institute work effectively.

I have also led research teams, and successfully applied for grants as team leader, but this is because I have been able to come up with a few good ideas which have attracted the interest of funding bodies. Ideas which I hope have benefits and outcomes as well as outputs, and which may lead to things being done differently. So I guess my leadership has been of a very focused kind.

This is very different to the kind of leadership and vision demonstrated by the current University of Tasmania Vice-Chancellor, Peter Rathjen. An article in *The Australian* on 30 August this year explains his vision of long-term structural reform in what *The Australian* has described as a 'depressed and government-dependent state'. (I felt a bit defensive about that description). We have, among other deficits, the poorest higher education rates in the country, the worst Year 12 completion rates. Rathjen argues that the state's economic future lies in higher value industries which can only come from a combination of innovation (new knowledge and new ways of using existing knowledge) and from human capital that is capable of using that knowledge. He states: 'The great transformation that will take place will be a result of the increases in education and innovation that this will make possible.' So that's the vision. What is the plan?

The plan includes associate degree courses, which will attract up to 12,000 new students into the University during the next decade. And major infrastructure projects in Burnie and Launceston which will generate 3000 jobs during the construction phase and, when up and running, 420 direct and indirect jobs and \$30 million in additional economic activity from consumption by students. He argues that by bringing the campuses into the heart of the cities, we will add life, dynamism and economic opportunity. The idea is that by having seamless borders between community and university and integrated civic and cultural activities, the locals will be engaging with the University even if they don't know it. Similar thinking lies behind the Theatre Royal redevelopment in Hobart and the Melville Street student accommodation and Underwood Centre project. So it is an education-led transformation.

The Chancellor, Michael Field, shares the Vice-Chancellor's vision. I happened to be chatting to him at a graduation ceremony last month and mentioned the frequent requests I get to talk about leadership. He recommended his favourite book on leadership, Ronald Heifetz's book, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*.

Maybe, I thought, this would help me formulate some ideas about leadership that I could share with you today. Maybe too it would help me in my current role. As chair of the Underwood Centre Advisory Committee I would like to help achieve its mission of a sustained increase in educational attainment. And I would like to do my bit in empowering women and challenging the dominant social norms that support rigid gender roles and stereotypes. So I guess I do have some vision. But do I have a plan?

Ronald Heifetz's version of leadership is some comfort to me. He moves away from seeing leaders as visionaries and saviours to stressing leadership as an activity as opposed to a position of authority or a set of personal characteristics.

He says that leadership often involves challenging people to live up to their words, to close the gap between their espoused values and their behaviour. He says most of us pass up daily opportunities to exercise leadership. We stay within our area of expertise.

Why leadership is dangerous: Heifetz argues that we often confuse leadership with authority. We look to people in high places and bemoan their lack of leadership. But opportunities for exercising leadership do not depend on position. Leadership can come from any place within or even outside an organisation. We all operate within a scope of authority, in professional, civic and even family roles. As long as you act in the scope of your authority meeting expectations, things will run smoothly. But leadership often means challenging your authorisation. When you do that it often meets with resistance. You may appear dangerous to people when you question their values, habits or beliefs of a lifetime. You place yourself on the line when you tell people what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear.

Why leadership is difficult: Heifetz draws a distinction between technical challenges and adaptive challenges. Problems we can solve through the knowledge of experts or senior authorities are technical challenges. They may be complex such as a broken leg or a broken carburettor, but experts know exactly how to fix them. Problems that require leadership are those that the experts cannot solve; these are adaptive challenges and the solutions lie not in

technical answers but in people themselves. The dietician can recommend a weight loss program but she can't stop you eating chocolate and chips. Adaptive challenges include such social problems as family violence, poverty and low educational attainment.

Most problems do not come clearly bundled as technical or adaptive but include elements of each. So losing weight is a combination of the technical aspect of getting a dietician's recommendation and the adaptive challenge of following it. The real work of leadership usually involves giving the work back to the people who must adapt, and mobilising them to do so.

Tactics for survival and success: successful leaders tend to emphasise personal relationships and you need to keep relationships central in your efforts towards change.

Don't go it alone: find partners. Keep the opposition close – work as closely with your opponents as with your allies and don't forget the uncommitted and wary people in the middle.

Acknowledge their loss: when you are asking people to participate in adaptive change you are asking a lot.

Accept casualties: some people may be unable to go along with the change.

Accept responsibility: for the problems you are trying to solve. Don't blame others.

There are four major strategies of leadership to approach problems as adaptive challenges: diagnose the situation in the light of values involved in the situation (confront the problem); avoid authoritative solutions; regulate the stress to others that is involved; shift responsibility from the leader to the primary stakeholders.

What do I take from all of that? Everyone can be a leader. But to be one you will need to move out of your comfort zone, and say what people need to hear rather than what they want to hear. Leadership is dangerous. And leadership is difficult. It is not about meeting technical challenges but meeting adaptive challenges. It is about tricky things like changing attitudes and behaviour.

Another writer on leadership attracted my attention, Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor at Stanford Graduate School of Business, whose latest book is titled *Leadership BS*. In his work he analyses power structures, not on the basis of how everybody feels organisations should be but on how the evidence suggests they are. He challenges the portrayal of leaders as modest, authentic, truth-telling and trustworthy as a myth and wishful thinking. Bosses are not modest, leaders are bound to lie, authenticity is overrated and the gap between aspiration and reality is one reason that trust in leaders and leadership has evaporated.

So it is the coercive, manipulative and unpleasant Machiavellian who rises to power, not the empathetic, generous and open person who gains respect and rises up the ranks. If that is the reality in some cases, it is surely not invariably so, and not the kind of leader one would want to aspire to be. On a Primary School class visit to Government House last week I was chatting to a Grade 5/6 teacher who told me they had a wonderful Principal. So with leadership in mind I asked the teacher what makes the Principal wonderful. She responded, 'She is empathetic, warm, *calm*, organised and efficient, amusing and smart. When she goes I will.' So there, Jeffrey Pfeffer!

A leader does not have to be unpleasant, conceited, aggressive and manipulative. And anyway surely you are confusing leadership with authority. Recalling Heifetz, I did want to ask the teacher, 'How does your Principal cope with adaptive challenges? Does she mobilise staff to adapt? Does she push teachers to operate beyond their current norms and expertise?' All things that Heifetz requires of a leader.

In my leadership research I have also read about 'impostor syndrome', which is an inability to internalise accomplishments, a belief that they are over-valued and a persistent fear of being exposed as a fraud. This is something that is said to be particularly common among high-achieving women. However, it is important to know that research has shown that 70% of all people feel like impostors at one time or another. I have to say it is sometimes how I feel when standing on the stage during the National Anthem or when driving along in the Vice-Regal vehicle with the flag flying! So if you sometimes feel a fake, that you are not as smart or talented as people give you credit for, talk about it and remember that lots of other people feel similarly.

I am not sure that my reading about leadership has helped me to develop some useful ideas to pass on and inspire you. But from my personal experience I have two pieces of advice.

Firstly, watch the leadership style of others. You can learn an awful lot about what to do and what not to do by reflecting on how others operate. Consider, is that a leadership style/strategy you admire or would like to emulate? Or is it one you would like to avoid? Calmness is good, but it can be overdone. A colleague was relating to me the other day her first weeks as Head of a Law School on the mainland. She started in the role two weeks before the start of term to discover that there was no one to teach one of the core first year units. The previous head was unflappable to the point of being comatose and swept all issues under the carpet, ignoring complaints on the basis they would probably go away.

Second, watch how other people conduct themselves in meetings. What can you learn? I have observed that men tend to dominate in meetings. In fact one of my University colleagues calls this 'boys competing to show who is the cleverest'. You may well not want to be part of this game (and I will come briefly back to the question of whether women need to lead like a man to be successful in a minute). However, on the other hand you do need to make yourself heard when you have something useful to contribute. What if all the speakers seem to be missing the point or 'the elephant in the room' is ignored? Remember Heifetz's point, to be a leader, one leading adaptive change, you need to move out of your comfort zone and tell people what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear.

A useful trick I learned from a friend and colleague's conduct in meetings was how to use self-deprecation to challenge or seek elaboration of an issue. He would say something like, I am terribly sorry to be slow to grasp the point or I just don't understand the relevance of this ... Could someone please explain it to me. Or what am I missing here ... At the risk of appearing obtuse why are we not talking about ...

This will often cause the meeting to agree the point is irrelevant, the argument flawed or the matter that is being ignored should be discussed.

Don't forget to be grateful, say thank you and praise your colleagues. It has been noted that the socially intelligent practices that have allowed a person to rise to a leadership position, namely, empathy, sharing and open-mindedness, can vanish when one gains the power a leadership position provides.¹

Why can't a woman be more like a man? I promised to come back to the issue of whether women need to lead like men to be successful. Roxane Gay, author

¹ Daniel Keltner, 'The power of saying thank you' , 22 May 2016,

of *Bad Feminist*, has talked about this. She critiques advice from women leaders such as Sheryl Sandberg, CEO of Facebook, whose unspoken advice in her book *Lean In*, is that women should embrace masculine qualities (self-confidence, risk-taking, aggression etc.). It seems, Gay says, ‘as if Sandberg is advocating, “If you want to succeed, be an asshole”’.²

Instead, Gay argues, we should make the workplace environment itself conform to a broader range of personality types and leadership styles. There is value in bold, loud leadership but workplaces need to recognise that there is more than one way for employees to contribute effectively. How do we create workplaces that consider introverted and quiet leadership as equally valuable as the bold and loud variety? To do this we have to abandon old ways of thinking and recognise employees as possessing a flexible and rearrangeable portfolio of skills, experiences and achievements.

I like the idea that it should not be necessary for women leaders to be more like men; the workplace itself should adapt encouraging and embracing a range of personality types. (But this is not so helpful for the here-and-now if you are not so comfortable with ‘leaning in’ and speaking up.)

An article describing two gender equality international research studies reports that men and women are equally qualified in hard and soft business skills; but confidence is a significant leadership difference (for example women are less likely to rate themselves as highly effective leaders compared with men) and there are personality differences (in inquisitiveness, sensitivity and impulsiveness). It also points out that organisations with more women in leadership roles perform better financially than those with fewer women in leadership roles.³ The article’s title asks the question: *Should a Woman Act More Like a Man to Succeed at Work?* Its quick answer is no – except when it comes to confidence. It argues that women need to do a better job of declaring themselves and becoming their own advocates – speaking and acting confidently and mentally promoting themselves to a future-focused role. The article concludes by saying that the solution lies not in a leader aspiring to be more like a man or more like a woman, it’s about recognising diversity in leadership styles – the same point that Roxane Gay makes.

² Roxanne Gay, ‘Women shouldn’t have to lead like men to be successful’ *Fortune*, 12 February 2015, <http://fortune.com/2015/02/12/women-shouldnt-have-to-lead-like-men-to-be-successful/> accessed 31 August 2016.

³ <http://www.ddiworld.com/global-offices/united-states/press-room/should-a-woman-act-more-like-a-man-to-succeed> accessed 31 August 2016 from DDI, Development Dimensions International.

To conclude: we are still stuck with rigid gender role stereotypes in which women are seen as best suited to child-rearing and men best suited to leadership roles. This *is* changing slowly. We can see why Dad jokes should not be funny (even if they still make us smile) and we allow Mums to be self-deprecating and complain about child care without them incurring criticism.

I'll finish with the last lines from Meg's poem:

Okay okay, I'll take the pie
And chuck it in the bin.
Here have the Cheerios
I'm going to get a gin.