

**FEARLESS FESTIVAL 2022 DINNER
(FORMERLY THE AMWU WOMEN'S FORUM)
OPENING ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
WREST POINT, SANDY BAY, FRIDAY 12 AUGUST 2022**

Good evening and thank you for inviting me to open this Women's forum and to be one of your hosts.

I pay my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I stand for a future that respects and acknowledges Aboriginal stories, culture, language and history.

I would also like to acknowledge among us:

- The Honourable Madeleine Ogilvie, MP
- The Honourable Rebecca White MP, Leader of the Opposition
- Commander Debbie Williams APM, Tasmania Police

May I welcome all the young women here from years 10/11/12 and all other guests. I hope that the events over the past two days inspire you to continue your education and training, to enter a trade, to join the construction industry, police or emergency services, or to seek other vocational opportunities. Tonight you will hear about a range of work options from an impressive variety of speakers.

I would like to talk to you all about my legal career and from it offer you some advice, which, I hope may help you think about your own future.

I have been working for many years, 40 to be precise. I had one year away from paid work after the birth of my first daughter when, as a family, we went to England for my academic husband's study leave. After my second daughter was born, I had a shorter period of leave. I was actually given 6 weeks' sick leave by my law firm. Birth was then regarded as a sickness! I finished work on a Friday, my daughter was born on Sunday and I was back to work six weeks later.

There was little flexibility then. Part-time work in private law practice was not yet an option and working from home was not an option in the '90s and 2000s.

Thankfully, we have moved forward and many employers and Tasmanian law firms now negotiate flexible workplace and flexible work hours for women with children.

Some of you here this evening may know the work option you want to take. If you are not sure, do not worry. You may believe that choosing a career path at your age is the only career decision you will ever make. However, you can change your mind, and you can change your career. You can always change your degree or job, do another apprenticeship, or even re-train.

It may surprise you that I never had a work path aim. I was not one of those people who know from a young age that they want to be a doctor, plumber, fireman, engineer or chef. Nothing was planned, apart from wanting to further my education and to go to university, as I did well at school. I certainly had no burning desire to be a lawyer.

When I started University, I didn't even know what I wanted to do. Science was out, not being very good at maths. That is the case with many lawyers I know! I also knew I didn't want to be a teacher or a nurse. I did think about social work.

I enrolled in Arts in my first year because it was a generalist course with subjects of politics, history and psychology. In second year, I enrolled in a combined Arts/Law degree, because my friends were doing law. Not a very good reason!

Fortunately, I liked most of my law subjects and I was very interested in psychology.

After I finished the five-year combined degree, I started Honours in psychology. I thought I wanted to be a psychologist at that point. But during my honours course, I decided psychology was not for me. I withdrew and started the legal practice course the following year. I had finally decided the law path was for me at the age of 22.

I started legal practice in 1982 with a Hobart law firm. It was a male dominated profession then. There were only a handful of women practising as lawyers in Tasmania. There was no female judge, nor female magistrate. There were very few female partners in our law firms or in positions of seniority in our profession

to look to as mentors. Now, that has changed and there are many women role models for young women lawyers.

I did admire two well-known women lawyers: the first is our first female High Court Judge, former Justice Mary Gaudron. She delivered many significant constitutional judgments, the most famous of which was the Mabo case, which recognised the rights of indigenous Australians to their land under the principle of 'native title'. Throughout her career, she sought to uphold the rights of the disadvantaged. She believed in equality and was an advocate for women throughout her career.¹

The second is the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg. She was the second woman to be appointed as a justice to the US Supreme Court. For more than a decade before her first judicial appointment in 1980, she led the fight in the courts for gender equality.

When I started working as a lawyer in my early twenties, not in my wildest dreams would I have seen myself as a partner in a law firm, a federal magistrate, judge or governor.

I believe that I have been very lucky by having been in the right place at the right time throughout my career. Though, there is a saying that the harder you work the luckier you get.

I did not see myself as a leader. I always underestimated myself. Throughout my career, I lacked confidence from time to time. I am sure many of us here share that feeling. I had the classic motivation of the fear of failure, rather than any drive for success.

This is typical of many girls and women. Research demonstrates that we are generally less confident than boys and men. In a KPMG Women's Leadership Study, entry-level working women reported the lowest levels of confidence, illustrating a strong need for confidence-building, at the beginning of their careers.

On confidence building, may I share with you an author, who has influenced me. Mary Ann Sieghart wrote a book called *The Authority Gap*² and interviewed two

¹ <https://www.supremecourt.vic.gov.au/for-the-media/leading-from-the-bench-women-jurists-as-role-models>, accessed 12/08/2022.

² *The Authority Gap* Mary Ann Sieghart Penguin Random House 2021

other women I admire. Janet Yellen, the 78th US Treasury Secretary, the 15th Chair of the US Federal Reserve and the first woman to hold both roles admitted, “...I do a lot of preparation. I don’t wing it...I don’t feel super-confident, no matter what position I’ve been in...”³

The second, Christine Lagarde, the French lawyer, politician and President of the European Central Bank told Mary Ann, “of course, it is part of the confidence issue to be overly prepared and to be rehearsed, and to make sure that you are going to get it all and not make a mistake.”⁴

Both these immensely capable and brilliant women put in hours of preparation for meetings or speeches to be absolutely sure of their ground.

I find it helpful to read these quotes at times when I am feeling uncertain, so they may help you too.

Personally, I tried to overcome my lack of confidence with one aim and plan — working hard and always preparing. This is what happened in all my work. With court work, I spent hours on preparation, staying up late, getting up early. With my judgments, I wrote and edited many drafts and hard work helped me.

I had setbacks throughout my legal career and you will probably have set-backs. As junior counsel in an inquiry into the Lemonthyme and Southern Forests, a male tribunal member treated me rudely throughout the Inquiry. I believed I had done nothing to justify his attitude towards me. Needless to say, I was the only female at the busy Bar table. This upset me at the time, but I had to be strong, resilient and take it on the chin.

In addition, I experienced unconscious gender bias. One example was when the male partners of my law firm “assumed” that I did not have partnership ambitions because of my gender and because I had children! There had never been a female partner in the 100-year-old firm.

What have I learned over the years? Well, I would like to share with you my list of eight tips:

1. Despite setbacks, always keep your head down and continue working hard and never give up. Always keep your dignity when setbacks occur.

³ Ibid page 101

⁴ Ibid page103

2. Be brave and take risks. Personally, I took a risk of leaving my law firm partnership of 14 years with a guaranteed income to go to the Tasmanian Independent Bar. I did not know if I would get much work and what income I would earn. Taking that risk led to a very happy and useful time as a barrister and led to my appointment as a federal magistrate, judge and, I expect, my appointment as Governor.
3. If you fear something, try to fight the fear because the more you fight something you fear, the easier it gets.
4. Seek and find mentors and sponsors you admire and seek their advice and guidance to gain inspiration, support and ideas. It is always good to find someone you trust and can talk with. This does not need to be a formal arrangement. It could be as simple as a catch up for coffee, now and again, for advice. However, always make up your own mind and stand by your own judgment and decisions.
5. Always prepare well, and this will increase your confidence and your courage to speak up. If you are underconfident, challenge yourself to speak up and take on harder tasks.
6. Build relationships. You can communicate and network on an informal basis with telephone calls, lunches or coffee catch-ups. Common sense and good judgment about people helps.
7. Attend programs, workshops, or forums such as this to learn from other women how to make the most of your talents.
8. Try not to take yourself too seriously. Try to have a bit of fun. A sense of humour is valuable.

In conclusion, as I said earlier, try not to worry if you are not sure what you want to do right now. Try to focus on what feels right for you. Mentors can be useful in helping you decide on your next steps. You may even find that someone here tonight or over the past two days inspires you to follow a specific path.

I look forward to talking with as many of you as I can this evening. Good luck for your futures.

Thank you.