

**WOMEN SUPPORTING WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP FORUM 2021
OPENING ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
HOBART FUNCTION AND CONFERENCE CENTRE, ELIZABETH ST PIER
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Be Brave

Good morning to you all. I am delighted to be here today at your Leadership Forum.

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

Today, we shall be hearing from leaders, who will share their expertise, their challenges and their achievements. I am sure we have all had challenges and set-backs during our working life, which hopefully, we have overcome.

I am particularly delighted to be here with Grace Tame, who has demonstrated great courage in speaking out and causing a change in the law, which had silenced survivors of sexual assault. She has inspired others to speak out about what has happened to them. She has influenced and shaped our national public debate about sexual assault. She is a brave woman in this 21st century.

I would like to start by talking about another brave woman in a different time, the late 19th century, Jessie Spinks Rooke.

We can learn from these brave women, who have both been inspirational leaders, and catalysts for significant change.

I would then like to focus on some barriers to women's career progression, and finally some modest tips.

Brave and Inspirational Role Model

Jessie Spinks Rooke made a brave contribution as a leader in Tasmania. Her grave was recently discovered in the Burnie Cemetery by Rodney Croome. He is another brave Tasmanian, a leader in homosexual law reform and for our

LGBTQI community. He was instrumental, with the Burnie Lions Club in restoring the forgotten grave of Jessie Spinks Rooke.

Jessie was a leading advocate for women in the 1890s. She campaigned fiercely, in the face of male opposition, for women's right to vote in Tasmania. Her motto was *Agitate, Educate and Legislate*.

Jessie and a fellow advocate spent months travelling around Tasmania in horse drawn carts and in freezing temperatures to gather signatures on a petition for women's right to vote. They obtained thousands of signatures. Their petition was presented to Parliament and it came up against fierce opposition.

In September 1895, in a debate on the Suffragist Bill, the Legislative Council member for North Esk, Henry Rooke (no relation) opposed the Bill and was reported in *The Tasmanian*:

“He strongly opposed bringing women down to the vortex of politics ... The whole idea of woman suffrage was absurd in the extreme, as it must result in women coming into the House [of Assembly]. [The members] did not want women in politics; their proper sphere was in the home to minister to man's comfort after he had undergone a hard day's work in politics and business.”¹

Another Councillor, William Dodery, was more blunt in his opinion that, I quote:

“Women should not bother about politics, as they knew nothing of it.”²

When the Tasmanian Upper House said no to reform, Jessie went around Tasmania again with a second petition. She did not give up and got on with persuading and advocating, no matter how hard it was. *“She believed that everyday Tasmanians would embrace her cause if only they could hear her message.”*³

It took over 11 years of her campaigning for the vote to be achieved. On the 16 September 1903, the Tasmanian Parliament eventually passed legislation allowing women the vote.

¹ *The Tasmanian* (Launceston), Saturday 7 September 1895 page 9.

² Ibid.

³ The Advocate “Comment” | Rodney Croome 17 September 2021 page 22.

We can learn from Jessie's leadership that perseverance and persuasion, albeit over many years, can achieve change. She was not deterred by male opposition and never gave up. She was a brave woman of her time.

Barriers to Women's Career Progression

There are structural barriers to women's career progression, such as lack of flexibility in the workplace, and subtle barriers, such as gender stereotyping.

Sexism and sexual harassment, lack of assertiveness, family responsibilities, lack of access to networks, and cultural resistance are some of the many barriers to career progression.⁴

For my own part, throughout my legal career, I was subjected to sexist comments. I have been sexually harassed. I was not given flexible work options. I spoke up on only one occasion about harassment, when I was essentially not taken seriously. I suffered from a persistent lack of confidence.

I may be showing my age, but this is a lighter anecdote I want to share. When I was starting out in my first position in a law firm in the early 1980s the male partners of my law firm imposed on me the honorific Miss, as I was using Ms because I had not changed my maiden name when I married and, they clearly did not approve of Ms.

The partners actually had a meeting to discuss this. They decided to give me two options, Mrs or Miss, certainly not Ms! I did not feel I had any say, so I chose Miss. Incredibly, this led to a client proposing to me. He apologised and explained that he checked with the receptionist that I was in fact a "miss" and I did not wear a wedding ring. After this, the partners reluctantly relented and allowed me to use Ms. This is amusing now, but at the time I did wonder what I was getting into, as the legal profession was dominated by male lawyers with less than progressive attitudes.

I have thought about whether I would have spoken out if these things had happened today. I hope so. At the time, in the 80s and 90s, I did not feel that there was a safe option to do so. Due to my young age and the feeling of a power imbalance, I felt that if I spoke out my career would have been impacted negatively. I also was not sure anyone would listen. One option was to leave

⁴ Overcome barriers to Female Leadership <https://www.stkate.edu/academics/women-in-leadership-degrees/bar...accessed> 17/10/2021.

my employment and obtain work at another firm, which I was not sure would be any different.

It is disappointing that the Australian Bar Association acknowledges that harassment, including sexual harassment is still today a widespread problem in the legal profession.

On the positive side, I did introduce a sexual harassment policy in my law firm. I would like to think that I made some modest changes to its culture and I overcame barriers through hard work and persistence. I became the first female partner. We later appointed two more female partners and there was a change to more flexible work practices.

Whilst it can be difficult, challenging the culture in your workplace, calling out inappropriate behaviour and instances of gender discrimination is essential for driving change in attitudes.

We can all work to promote equity in our workplace and we should ask men to participate in gender equality programs.

I turn to talk about leadership style.

In this regard, I really like a quote of Jacinda Ardern:

“One of the criticisms I’ve faced over the years is that I’m not aggressive enough or assertive enough or maybe somehow, because I’m empathetic, it means I’m weak. I totally rebel against that. I refuse to believe that you cannot be both compassionate and strong.”⁵

To me, this criticism encapsulates gender stereotyping and ingrained attitudes against women.

The issue of leadership style and gender bias are inter-linked challenges to overcome. Women’s leadership style is generally different to men’s and, arguably, not as valued. The women’s traditionally categorised feminine leadership qualities are empathy, compassion and truthfulness.⁶

⁵https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/jacinda_ardern_954467

⁶ <https://cew.org.au/topics/women-in-leadership/> page 2

A Bain & Company survey completed in 2011,⁷ but still cited today,⁸ revealed that underlying views about women's style affect perceptions of their ability to lead. It found that women are held back because:

- Men in senior roles are more likely to appoint or promote someone with a style similar to their own;
- Women undersell their experience and capabilities; and
- Some leadership teams do not value the different perspectives that women bring to the team.⁹

Whilst the survey found that men and women have different styles, they both deliver on the job and make strong leaders.¹⁰

Mary Ann Sieghart in *The Authority Gap*¹¹ was delightfully blunt about the issue of leadership perceptions when she wrote,

“... maybe a reason why women are not rated as highly as men as leaders is ...they are often not as confident – or maybe, they're not as full of bullshit.” She further suggested that, “we need to stop mistaking confidence for competence. They are two utterly different things.”

For her book, Mary Ann interviewed Janet Yellen, the 78th US Treasury Secretary, the 15th Chair of the US Federal Reserve and the first woman to hold both roles. She was one of the most powerful women in the world. She ran the American economy, yet she felt like an imposter in the job. She was quoted, “what am I doing here...I've felt like, I can't do this.”

She also 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...”¹²

Similarly, Christine Lagarde, the French lawyer, politician and President of the European Central Bank admitted, “I would often get nervous about presentations or speaking, and there were moments when I had to screw up my courage to raise my hand or make a point, rather than hanging back.”¹³

⁷ What stops women from reaching the top? Confronting the tough issues 2011 Bain & Company Inc.

⁸ <https://cew.org.au/topics/women-in-leadership>

⁹ What stops women from reaching the top? Confronting the tough issues 2011 Bain & Company Inc.

¹⁰ Ibid page 12

¹¹ *The Authority Gap* Mary Ann Sieghart Penguin Random House 2021

¹² Ibid page 101

¹³ Ibid page 85

Christine 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.”¹⁴

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.

Mary Ann Sieghart argues that men tend to project more confidence in their views than women because they have been socialised from childhood to boast, speak up and self-promote, while girls have been penalised for the same behaviour.¹⁵

She suggests wisely that we need to learn the value of the entire range of behaviour and to listen just as carefully to the quiet contributor to the meeting as to the blusterer.

There should be diversity in decision makers and objective assessment criteria, to ensure that unintended bias does not affect appointment and promotion processes.¹⁶

Different leadership styles should be celebrated in the workplace. I suggest that we learn from leaders we admire and develop the leadership style that we are most comfortable with.

I turn briefly to the importance of seeking support from a mentor or sponsor, who may break down barriers for us when excluded from influential networks by connecting us with senior individuals. It makes good sense to build good relationships with senior colleagues.

Mentoring can help build confidence not only for the mentee, but for the senior women mentors by having our views heard and our support valued by junior colleagues.

The mentor/sponsor does not necessarily need to be a formal arrangement. It could be as simple as a catch up for coffee now and then for some advice. Both the mentee and the mentor can benefit from the relationship. In my experience

¹⁴ Ibid page103

¹⁵ Ibid page 104

¹⁶ Ibid page 15

as a mentor, I found that I became friends with many of the young practitioners I mentored, and through friendship, I have learned a lot from them. I also hopefully kept up to date with the thinking of our younger colleagues.

Good leaders support and encourage colleagues to take leadership roles.

In conclusion

What can we learn from leaders spanning over 100 years from Jessie Spinks Rooke to Grace Tame?

Jessie's attributes are shared by today's leaders advocating change, including Grace. They are prepared to speak out for their cause. They are brave and they do not give up.

We can learn from them to be resilient. You will have set-backs, but persevere and never let these defeat you.

Like Janet Yellen and Christine Lagarde, always prepare well, which should increase your confidence to have the courage to speak up.

Seek and find mentors and sponsors or role models you admire and seek their advice and guidance to gain inspiration, support and ideas.

Attend female leadership programs or workshops, like this forum, to learn from other women how to make the most of your talents.

Learn from leaders and develop a style of leadership with which you are comfortable.

Support other women if a man is interrupting them in a meeting. Call out any inappropriate behaviour in the workplace.

Finally, I congratulate the senior women in our State Service for joining together to support other women to develop their leadership capacities. I am sure the leadership of senior women in the State Service is contributing to the meeting of targets for representation of women in senior executive positions.

In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, "for our own success to be real, it must contribute to the success of others."

I wish you all well for the rest of your forum.