

# Foreword

*Elizabeth Broderick*

In my mind I see a world where men are as easily able to care for loved ones as women, where leadership is shared equally, where our sex does not dictate our educational choices, where gender stereotypes are a relic of the past and where each half of humanity embraces and respects the other.

While we may have reached a stage where young girls are able to view the world in terms of endless possibility – as a picture of their own making – the realities they confront as they move through life means that the picture starts to contract; all because we’ve yet to discover what a gender equal world might actually look like.

We used to think, of course, that access to education was the door through which women would enter the world on an equal footing with men.

Experience shows us that simple access is not enough – that we also need to dismantle the stereotypes and relationships which limit the social and professional realities of girls and boys (and ultimately women and men) if we’re to achieve genuine and lasting change.

It’s a message contained in the powerful short video *#equalfuture* by Oscar-winning screenwriter and director Jane Campion. On some developmental attributes girls start off ahead in life – they tend to walk earlier, they tend to read earlier. But as the statistics show, the bias built into systems, institutional structures and social norms mean they end up behind.

We have some work to do.

We know women and men have changed but our institutions, political leadership and our ways of working have adapted little. It’s as if this construct known as “work” has been handed down from on high over generations with instructions – “this is work, don’t mess

with it”. But if work is a human construct and it’s not working, then it’s up to each of us to change it.

My eight years as Australia’s Sex Discrimination Commissioner has taken me from Launceston to the Kimberley, from rural communities to factory floors and from boardrooms to submarines.

I’ve heard stories that have touched me deeply, made me angry and given me huge hope for our capacity for systemic change.

I have heard some appalling examples of how gender stereotypes enslave both men and women. I have also heard about the barriers individuals face when trying to dismantle them.

Gender equality is not a battle of the sexes. It is not a zero-sum game. It’s a battle for equality. A battle women and men must wage side by side. It matters to me. It matters to you. It matters to our children. It goes to the heart of who we are and how we live.

Women talk to me about men who “get it” and men who don’t.

As Narelle Hooper and Rodin Genoff reinforce, these “new men and new women” have certain things in common. They:

- recognise that a more gender-equal society benefits everyone;
- treat each other with respect;
- share the care (looking after your kids is not “babysitting” and caring for the home is not just “women’s work”); and
- are mindful of the longer term impact of their decisions on employees, customers and the community – as well as future generations.

The path to gender equality is a long and winding road. It’s a journey characterised by persistence. For many of us still in the workforce and running businesses who’ve grown up with traditional attitudes, these must be challenged. It requires a journey of listening and reflection. It doesn’t just happen.

Listening respectfully to each other’s stories and perspectives is the starting point. I’ve seen this in working with the Male Champions of Change. When the Male Champions wanted to learn more about violence against women I didn’t just overwhelm them with the statistics. I brought in two courageous survivors, Rosie Batty and Kristy

McKellar, to tell their stories, to help the men understand about “the pieces that are taken from you that can never be reclaimed ... like the joy of seeing your son grow up.” And the stories of struggling to hold down a job, while hiding the bruises – the difficulty of finding your car keys that your husband has hidden, the silence and the shame. It’s stories that move people to action.

For the first time in history we have a unique opportunity for men and women to come together shoulder to shoulder as equals.

I’ve seen the transformative power of this.

Men such as Joe O’Keefe, co-chair of the Women’s Empowerment Principles Leadership Group, and president of Pax World, whose fund screens for gender equality in its investment decisions.

Women such as June Oscar and Emily Carter, who live in the beautiful Kimberley region in North West Australia. They organised a women’s bush camp following 10 suicides in 10 months. They didn’t wait for government to step up. They needed to find their own answers, to shape the solutions that would work for their community, their way. June and Emily and the good men and women who supported them are protagonists, not passive recipients. They challenged the assumptions and beliefs that many had held dear and in the process reimaged normal.

Narelle and Rodin have made a powerful contribution by showing us the talent, human and innovation benefits that are delivered when we build diverse and inclusive teams.

Gender diversity achievers are gender diversity leaders. They create environments where individual creativity and initiative are able to flourish, they’re open, and they are inclusive in order to make the most of the individual diversity we humans have. They also have equity and a sense of fairness as core values.

So get ready for the world of New. It’s coming. I hope you enjoy the ride!

*Elizabeth Broderick*

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