PART THREE

LEADERS

This part of the manual outlines what you can do, as a leader or group of leaders, to help drive gender equality in your workplace.

It is divided into three key sections:

1. **Preparation**: practical background information to help you get started.
2. **Action**: ideas that you can put into action at work.
3. **Future Focus**: the different ways you can follow up on the ideas we have presented and help maintain a culture of equality and respect.
1. PREPARATION

As we highlighted in part one of this manual, a broader organisational approach with top-level support and structural and policy changes will achieve the best results. But if the leaders in your organisation set the right tone in meetings, act as positive role models for gender equality and respect, and manage teams with an awareness of gender equity, the outcomes will be even better.

WHAT LEADERS NEED TO UNDERSTAND

As a leader in your organisation, you’ve no doubt read part one of this manual and are now familiar with the terms, issues and concepts relating to gender equality. However, before you move forward, it’s important to ensure the other leaders in your organisation have a firm grasp of the following concepts:

• gender is socially constructed
• the terms ‘equality’ and ‘equity’ mean different things
• we are all biased when it comes to gender
• both men and women win if we create more equal workplaces
• flexible work practices should be for everyone, including men, and this may require them to overcome traditional gender expectations and even unconscious bias. You should point out that employers have obligations under the Equal Opportunity Act to provide flexibility for parents and carers – but the new way of thinking is that flexibility should be for everyone
• parenthood actually gives employees an advantage by teaching them skills that they can also bring to the workplace
• bystander action makes a difference – if somebody in your team comes to you with a complaint or observation, you need to take it seriously
• the gender pay gap in Australia is currently above 18 per cent and widening – ask other leaders what your organisation is doing to address this
• setting targets and quotas for how many women work at senior levels has pros and cons
• ‘getting the job’ solely based on merit is a complex idea

• achieving respect and gender equality in the workplace is directly linked to broader societal issues, like preventing violence against women – what can you do, as a leader, to promote respect for women?
• many people don’t believe we still have an equality issue to address in Australia – you will need to know your stuff to counter their claims.

Remember: refer your colleagues in the leadership group to Part One of this manual if they haven’t already read it.

WHAT’S THE BEST WAY TO START?

With everybody on the same page (as far as knowledge is concerned) your next step should be to start productive conversations with other leaders about gender equality, as these have to happen before any change can be achieved. People need time to reflect on their biases, explore new ways of thinking, and consider how things like gender targets or new policies could impact the business.

A simple and effective approach is to:

• explain why the organisation should move towards achieving gender equality (you might invite a senior leader to one of your meetings to help articulate this)
• meet with other leaders to discuss the issue of gender equality – strategise, fill in checklists and be open to exploring how you can all improve
• participate in face-to-face training on gender equality and respect, or on bystander action
• be accountable for the goals you set yourself during these sessions (you can discuss them with your supervisor and set specific timelines)
• gather some simple resources to lead your team through some respect and equality discussions/activities.
WHAT ARE WE CURRENTLY DOING AS LEADERS IN THIS ORGANISATION?

It's helpful to gauge how much you and the other leaders in the business know about the issues and determine if you are currently doing anything proactive to promote gender equality. Talk with other leaders about the organisation’s focus on gender equality and give them a simple checklist to fill in with you. Stress that this checklist isn’t about ranking them or their teams in terms of knowledge or performance – it’s about wanting to provide the information and support needed to fill the gaps.

Here are some examples of what you could include in your checklist:

• have I ever talked with my team about gender equality?
• have I shown bias or made a decision at work based upon someone’s gender?
• is gender equality covered in induction training for new staff?
• do I provide equal access to flexible work arrangements?
• do I step in and provide feedback if I hear staff making sexist assumptions or comments?

THE LAW IN REGARDS TO WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY

Although Australia does not have a comprehensive Bill of Rights, there are a number of federal and state laws that contain human rights protections - and it’s important that you and the other leaders at your organisation are aware of this. At the federal level, for example, there are a number of anti-discrimination laws that make it unlawful to discriminate on a number of particular grounds. One such law is the Sex Discrimination Act, 1984 (Cth).

This Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person on the basis of:

• sex
• marital status
• pregnancy or potential pregnancy
• breastfeeding
• family responsibilities.

The Act also makes it unlawful to sexually harass another person.

More recently, the Australian Government introduced legislation into Parliament (in March 2012) to improve the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace (EOWW) Act.

The new Act is called the Workplace Gender Equality Act and the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency is now the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

The principal objectives of the amended Act are:

• to promote and improve gender equality (including equal remuneration between women and men) in employment and in the workplace
• to support employers to remove barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the workforce, in recognition of the disadvantaged position of women in relation to employment matters.

The aims of “removing barriers to participation” and “promoting equality” fit in well with your role of leader. As a manager of a team, you can do a lot to get people thinking and talking about better ways of working and how you can achieve an equal playing field in your organisation.

Another aspect of the new Act is consultation. The more consultative you are with other leaders and all the different people on your respective teams, the better the outcomes. Don’t rely on people to speak up or complain if things aren’t fair and equitable. If you don’t ask people why they aren’t accessing opportunities, or start conversations about potential barriers, you won’t make any progress. Consultation is the answer and there are lots of different methods:

• informal conversations
• focus groups
• brainstorming in meetings
• raising gender issues as discussion points at planning days
• using social media or email to initiate conversations
• inviting people to physically write down ideas about gender equality via notes on the work fridge, or on noticeboards.
I once asked my manager why we couldn’t discuss this gender stuff at our team meeting and he said,

‘I don’t want to stir up trouble.’

This shuts down consultation and doesn’t make things better. People have a lot of ideas to contribute, but they give up if they feel they’re not being heard

– Danni, 35
WHAT KIND OF LEADERSHIP IS REQUIRED FOR US TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY?

There is a high probability that you and most of the leaders in your organisation have never had to look at things through a gender lens. For you to all start doing so will require a shift in your thinking, attitudes and behaviours. This will entail:

- an understanding of what it means to manage a team with a gender lens
- knowledge of which policies impact gender equality
- positive role modelling to prevent problems
- how best to respond to problems/complaints about gender inequality.

AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT MEANS TO MANAGE A TEAM WITH A “GENDER LENS”

The term “lens” helps us imagine putting on a pair of glasses that allows us to take a broader view: a view where the experiences, needs and realities of being a working woman are added to the perspective of men. This may mean that you consult more to include women’s views and perspectives and that you initiate conversations with men about gender equality in the business.

As a manager, try to ensure you:

- encourage people to challenge the way things have always been done and suggest different approaches (these may have been based on male norms)
- place equal value on discussions about the similarities and needs of men and women, parents and non-parents, rather than only a focus on differences
- consider and discuss with colleagues the existing pre-requisites for being viewed as a high performer, promotion, leadership opportunities in your team – ask them, “Do these criteria favour one sex over another? If so, how can they be realigned?”
- think and talk about what flexible work options are appropriate for the men and women on your team
- view existing policies, procedures and documents with a critical eye that picks up insensitivities or bias towards men or women
- challenge gender stereotypes by asking questions and raising awareness in respectful ways
- initiate conversations by switching things around, where possible – perhaps ask people, “What if it were a man/woman experiencing that? How would it be different?”
- generate discussions about fairness and inclusion as keys to achieving gender equality.

My boss made a big deal of my team winning the State Basketball Comp. He even organised a cake! I really appreciated it, because there’s never any acknowledgement in my workplace that women play sport – it’s all about the men’s footy and cricket. I know it was only a small thing, but it gave us all something new to talk about and it inspired other women to speak about the sports they play, as well. Some of them had never talked about this at work before!

– Jane, 53

KNOWLEDGE OF WHICH POLICIES IMPACT GENDER EQUALITY

It is helpful to work with people in HR to develop broad statements about diversity and gender equality, under which your policies can sit. The obvious policies to consider are:

- gender equality
- equal opportunity
- sexual harassment
- parental leave
- carers leave
- flexible work.

However, everyday procedures for how work is allocated, how performance is monitored and how acting positions or other stepping-stones to leadership are negotiated also have a major impact. This is ongoing work and can’t be “fixed up” in a month or two – but start the process of questioning, consulting, and reviewing and you’ll find the way you do things will become fairer over time.

You may want to consider championing a ‘Family Violence Leave Policy’ in your business. This is a major health issue for women of every background, education, level and role at work. Within the population of women who have experienced violence, or are currently experiencing violence, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that two thirds are currently in the workforce. This means that a significant number of Australian workplaces will be impacted by women’s experiences of domestic and family violence.
For further information, see the ‘Domestic and Family Violence – A Workplace Issue, a Discrimination Issue’, developed by the Human Rights Commission, located in the Resources Pack as document A13.

Volunteering some of your time to contribute to policy development is a significant contribution by a manager to the organisation.

POSITIVE ROLE MODELLING TO PREVENT PROBLEMS

As a manager and leader, you are in a great position to prevent problems by:

- talking about gender equality often, in inclusive solution-focused ways (not always as a problem)
- inviting women to have a greater voice in how the team operates until there is equal input
- setting clear and simple guidelines for respectful behaviour in the team and ensuring that isn’t undermined by the presence of alcohol at social functions (you remain a role model at all times)
- challenging negative or inappropriate comments
- following up with individuals who don’t treat others respectfully
- promoting social connectedness within the team by encouraging collaboration
- checking in with people and asking about their experiences
- apologising if you get it wrong sometimes; this is far better than avoiding the issue to avoid making mistakes
- rewarding people who change their views and move with the times.

This may include being very specific about behaviours. You might like to make a list and include things like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpful behaviours</th>
<th>Unhelpful behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offering to and asking for help</td>
<td>Interrupting while others are talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking politely to one another</td>
<td>Speaking with a sarcastic or cynical or critical tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking enthusiastically about goals</td>
<td>Assigning blame when a problem arises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging others’ efforts and contributions</td>
<td>Criticising someone behind their back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requesting feedback for improvement</td>
<td>Reacting to things as if they are meant personally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asking “what we need to do” when problems arise</td>
<td>Saying what won’t work without offering suggestions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You may want to seek some advice from the WGEA about how you can be a manager or leader who champions gender equality. See their website at: www.wgea.gov.au or call them on (02) 9432 7000 or 1800 730 233.
RESPONDING TO PROBLEMS AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT GENDER INEQUALITY

As a manager, it can be challenging to feel under the spotlight if someone complains about unfavourable treatment. Try to see it as a way of showing you are committed to a positive outcome. Don't be defensive or try to deny there's an issue. Tackle it in a respectful and positive way.

Follow these simple steps:

• listen and thank the person for bringing the problem to your attention
• don't promise an immediate solution – tell them you do take it seriously and will get back to them in 48 hours, once you have looked at the best options for tackling the issue
• seek help from a leader, manager or your HR department as to the best process
• consider seeking external advice from an advisory body (as well, not instead of, internal help)
• record the facts, dates, and details and keep this information up to date
• collate some options for possible ways forward
• meet with the person again and discuss options – seek their input
• outline the process that will be followed and a timeline
• check in with them as to how they are feeling about it – offer employment assistant programs (EAP) or appropriate support, if needed
• ensure you don’t treat them differently or exclude them during this process – people should never feel punished or regret speaking up
• keep in mind that the person can choose to escalate the issue to a formal complaint at any time – it's their right to do so. Do not try to dissuade them
• follow up on everything you said you would do
• ensure the issue has been thoroughly dealt with and that the organisation has learnt from it – don’t waste the experience, as it’s likely to happen again
• ask for feedback at the end of the process to learn how the person felt it was handled.
TALKING ABOUT WOMEN AS LEADERS

You often hear people say things like, “oh, I think women can make really good leaders”, which suggests that perhaps this is an exception. In fact, a recent US study has shown that women actually make more effective leaders than men in terms of getting things done, being positive role models, taking on challenges, ensuring that people act with integrity, and delivering results.

The study’s findings challenge the assumption that it’s only possible for women to excel at “nurturing” competencies, such as developing others, inspiring and motivating others, relationship building, collaboration and teamwork. Women did perform better in these areas than men, certainly. However, the competencies with the largest positive differences were: taking initiative, displaying integrity and honesty, and striving for results. These are not “nurturing” competencies and women leaders actually performed better than men in these areas.

What do women do that creates this difference in leadership effectiveness? One of the most commonly reported responses in the study was that women believe:

*In order to get the same recognition and rewards, I need to do twice as much, never make a mistake and constantly demonstrate my competence.*

The characteristics we usually associate with women (such as warmth, superior communication skills and empathy) are not contradictions of good leadership – in fact, research shows that women are taught to nurture these characteristics as children, and they become skills that make them a more approachable and understanding leader. Female leaders have proven to be highly driven and resilient; they are passionate about looking toward the future and improving their workplace. While all this is interesting, it does (unhelpfully) reinforce the stereotype of women leaders as being soft or inherently different in style from men.

Not all women find it easy to be empathetic and communicate confidently – just as a lot of men struggle with the stereotypical male characteristics of being strong, decisive and assertive. These biased assumptions can undermine our natural strengths. In fact, women who are assertive at work and have the confidence to make tough decisions are often viewed in a negative way by society, as we are taught to believe that these qualities are undesirable in women.

We need to free ourselves from traditional ideas about what it takes to be a great leader and re-imagine roles in ways that bring out the best in people and allow them to play to their individual strengths. The reality is that some men will be kind and nurturing leaders and some women will be pragmatic, competitive leaders – and vice versa. Leadership is not the domain of one personality type, any more than it is the domain of one sex.
2. ACTION

Once you’ve had conversations with other leaders and have gained their commitment to gender equality, they’ll undoubtedly turn to you and ask “what now?”

It’s a great question, and one that requires some strategic thought. What are the best ways for you and other leaders to introduce this initiative within your teams? How do you infiltrate every part of the organisation?

STARTING DISCUSSIONS ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY IN TEAM MEETINGS

Ideally, you will be able to work with your team to develop a shared understanding on the kinds of behaviours that undermine gender equality. This shared understanding prevents many problems down the track and is much easier than managing complaints and distressed people. It tends to work best if you run this as a discussion, instead of simply saying: “you can’t say this about people”.

List the undermining behaviours on a whiteboard and ask:
• what assumptions underlie this?
• how can they be harmful?

You can view some ideas that one organisation came up with on the following page.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour that undermines gender equality</th>
<th>What assumptions underlie this?</th>
<th>How can it be harmful?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A group of men laugh about a female colleague's body | • we have the right to judge  
• this is fair game to talk about in a professional environment  
• it doesn't matter, as no one is offended or uncomfortable. | • it is likely some of the men are in fact uncomfortable and wouldn't initiate this, but they don't know how to avoid it  
• it perpetuates the put downs of women and poor behaviour of this kind  
• if a woman overhears this, it impacts on her self esteem and feeling of safety at work – even if they are not the target  
• if the target hears about it, it offends them deeply, lowers productivity and will likely have a negative impact on mental health. |
| Commenting on a colleague's caring responsibilities: “Oh, he won't want to come to the conference. He isn't very serious about work: he's got kids and is only doing a nine day fortnight” | • parents are either committed to work or to kids – they can't focus on both  
• ‘hands on’ dads aren't interested in getting ahead  
• it's okay for women but not men. | • limits people's career opportunities, earning capacity, impacts reputation or image in the business. |
| Complimenting people on their appearance inappropriately (even if it's meant to be flattering): “Wow. Your **** look great in that top” | • I have the right to pass judgement on how you look  
• you're interested in whether I/we think you are sexy or not  
• people’s level of attractiveness is a relevant issue in the workplace  
• I have the right to comment on any aspect of you, even if it has nothing to do with your job. | Everyone is different, but it may:  
• feel humiliating to the person  
• cast the person in an inappropriate sexual light at work  
• downgrade the importance of how they do their job  
• make people angry and resentful  
• show others in the team they could be commented on next. |
| Sexist jokes or blonde jokes. Jokes about men being pigs, or obsessed with sex. | • women don't mind if we put them down  
• you can say anything if you're “just joking”  
• repeated put downs don't impact on people  
• it's biology  
• men are just made that way, they're all the same, they can't change  
• if you don't go along with this, you're no fun – social penalties will result! | • it's boring and at times hurtful  
• it supports the myth that women are less intelligent/capable  
• poor role modelling. It doesn't help other/younger men understand that sexism has a harmful impact over time  
• perpetuates a dangerous myth that men can't control themselves and they aren't responsible for what they do. |
| Men or women creating cliques that exclude others (e.g. in a team of 6 women and 2 men, the guys are left out of things) | • the differences between men and women are too large to overcome. We don't have anything in common  
• men can't understand (or don't care about) the things women are interested in. | • suggests individuals better not step forward and say, “I don't like that” – the power of the mob. |
SOME EXERCISES TO USE IN TEAM MEETINGS

Once your team has identified, considered and discussed gender inequality, you’ll need to reinforce the lesson by conducting a series of exercises:

**Exercise 1: “If I Had a Daughter/Son…”**

Split the team in two and give each group a slip of paper. Written on one is, “If I had a daughter, I’d hope…” and the other says, “If I had a son, I’d hope…”

Ask the teams to generate a list of ideas. Compare them as a large group afterwards and discuss any differences and biases that emerge – this will really demonstrate that they weren’t consciously thinking about bias during the exercise, but it still has an impact. This is just a little eye-opener for your team and usually works well.

**Exercise 2: Ideas for Inclusion**

The difference between habit and good work practice is taking time for critical reflection, asking:

- how did we tackle that?
- why did we do it that way?
- what were their obstacles and challenges?
- how can we do it better in the future?

Ask your team to generate some practical ways that people can spend scheduled time together to reflect on their work and swap ideas – this may only be one hour a month.

When you have a list of ideas (e.g. cross team meetings once a month, pairs of buddies or mentors meeting with colleagues to offer support, breakfast get-togethers for planning), ask them to apply a lens of INCLUSION. This means they are to ask themselves “How could we have included everyone equally?” This inevitably leads to discussion about barriers to inclusion, how to ensure part-time employees feel included, and how to include those with caring responsibilities, etc.

Ensure that the ideas generated are genuinely inclusive and appeal equally to both the men and women in the group. You might form a working group that represents the team to ensure these events actually happen and that they promote equality and fairness.

**Exercise 3: Media Discussion**

This is a simple exercise where you ask team members to bring in an old magazine from home to the next meeting. When you’re all together, ask them to work in teams of two or three and flick through the magazine, tearing out pages where they see gender stereotypes of men and women.

Ask them a few questions to get the discussion flowing:

- what impact do you think these images have on girls and young women as they grow up?
- what effect do they have on boys and young men?
- to what degree do these images and stereotypes impact on how men and women are perceived and treated at work?
- how can we overcome the negatives associated with how the media represents men and women?
- are there brochures, posters, or images in our workplace that should be adjusted?

The idea is to get people thinking about how the media is both constrained by social/cultural norms (they use these images and ideas because it’s what we as readers expect) and how it’s also responsible for perpetuating these stereotypes (what people see is what they come to expect). This discussion will lead to consideration about what images you currently have around the workplace, and what you may need to change. Ask them to view brochures, posters, etc., with a critical eye.
There are also some case studies you can discuss with your team that effectively illustrate gender inequality:

**Case Study #1: Anna**

Anna had worked in the same role for two years when she became aware that a significant gender pay gap existed at her organisation. She decided she was going to address this by asking for an increase in salary at her upcoming performance review. However, when the day came and Anna sat down in front of her manager, her confidence about asking had waned. She had remembered overhearing somebody in the office talking about her once, saying: “Oh, Anna’s husband earns a packet. She doesn’t even need to work” and she suddenly felt uncomfortable asking for more money. Anna walked out of her review without asking for a pay rise.

**Questions to Ask:**
- why did Anna lose confidence?
- how might people describe a woman who is pushing for more money? And how might they describe a man?

**Points to Make:**
- women are generally not encouraged to speak up and be assertive, particularly about sensitive issues like money – there may be feelings of guilt that they don’t deserve it, as well as a fear that they’ll be perceived as aggressive or pushy
- by not speaking up, Anna is perpetuating this stereotype, and disadvantaging women who come after her.

**Case Study #2: Mike**

Mike’s mother has been diagnosed with leukaemia and will be undergoing chemotherapy soon. Both Mike’s parents are elderly and his father is in complete denial about what’s happening. Mike approaches his manager to ask for some flexibility with his hours, or even the possibility of going on carers leave. Although his manager is sympathetic, he’s worried that Mike’s team will miss his leadership if he’s absent from work. He asks, “How long are we talking about here, Mike?” and also “Don’t you have a sister?”

**Questions to Ask:**
- what beliefs and assumptions underlie this conversation?
- if Mike was female, do you think he’d be asked if he had a brother?

**Points to Make:**
- it’s much more difficult for men to ask for flexibility – even if it’s something like carers leave – as there are assumptions based on gender that dictate our response to their request. In this instance, just like Mike’s manager, we might be surprised that he would want to fulfil the carer’s role, as we automatically assume that one of the women in Mike’s life will take care of his parents
- men are sometimes penalised for taking time off work, both in reputation and with career advancement – they rarely ask for flexibility and are reluctant to ask for leave.

**Case Study #3: Group of Managers**

A group of managers has been discussing what activity the organisation can do for its annual Christmas party. Having reached a shortlist, they send an email to all employees, asking them to decide between:
- paintball
- indoor rock climbing
- a shopping bus tour.

**Questions to Ask:**
- what are the managers trying to do here?
- what would you think if you received this email, with these choices?

**Points to Make:**
- the inclusion of a “shopping bus tour” seems very tokenistic here, and is perhaps pandering to a gender stereotype – who’s to say the female employees all love to shop? Similarly, there would be lots of men who wouldn’t be keen on sweating and straining their way up a wall with colleagues holding a rope below
- inclusion is about asking people what they want and reaching compromises.
MAINTAINING MOMENTUM AND REINFORCING THE MESSAGE

Introducing new concepts or initiatives to any group of individuals will usually require some follow–up action – and no matter how switched–on your team may be, you’ll need to return regularly to the topic of gender equality for it to really sink in. People will leave the initial team meeting with lots of new thoughts and ideas buzzing around their heads, but it’s very easy for these to be forgotten once their focus returns to their daily tasks, or when things get really hectic at work. As a leader, it’s important for you to maintain momentum and keep reinforcing the message of gender equality to your team and across your organisation.

Here are some ways you can do that:

• share positive stories about competitors, clients, and industry groups who have made inroads towards gender equality – inject a sense of competition and the suggestion that your organisation will be left behind if you don’t address gender equality. It’s true – you will be

• keep raising awareness of the initiative through internal communications – think about starting a monthly newsletter or email that is focused on gender equality. Ensure it features good news stories, as well as raising issues still to be addressed. Ask female leaders to write about their experiences (both positive and negative). Celebrate business successes with a gender–related dimension or link. Utilise screen savers, sales team message boards, display posters in common areas, use the intranet to reinforce positive gender messages

• embed gender equality messaging into regular, routine business communications from the CEO and leadership team, keep highlighting positive role models, and reinforce the position that your organisation is an industry leader and shaper in the area of gender equality.

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES AROUND PARENTAL LEAVE

Taking parental leave and then returning to work can be both a positive and stressful time for both women and men, as they may face significant workplace prejudices and misperceptions about the impact being a parent has on their focus, attitude and performance. They also have external changes happening at home, like sleep issues, and new skills to learn. These things will eventually right themselves, but support at work certainly helps. Think about whether you’ve ever heard (or said) comments similar to these at work:

Talk to your team about some agreed ways to speak up if they notice inequities or sexist behaviour occurring – or even if they feel people are making assumptions and should rethink their approach.

Invite everybody in your team to say things in the future such as:

Hang on. We might be making this about gender, and it needn’t be

We’re making this sound like a job only a woman/man could do. It needs to be open to both sexes

Let’s not assume they won’t be interested in that opportunity just because they have three kids.

A 2014 report by the Australian Human Rights Commission revealed that one in two women in Australia (49 per cent) reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace during their pregnancy, parental leave, or on return to work. Over a quarter (27 per cent) of the 1,000 men surveyed in the report experienced discrimination when requesting or taking parental leave, or when they returned to work.\textsuperscript{49}

MAKING SMALL CHANGES FOR BIG IMPACTS DOWN THE TRACK

Talk to your team about some agreed ways to speak up if they notice inequities or sexist behaviour occurring – or even if they feel people are making assumptions and should rethink their approach.

No, she’s just back from parental leave and I need somebody who’s really focused for this project...

Look, I’d consider him for this role, but he’s got a newborn at home

No, don’t bother including her in this. She’s having a baby next month and she won’t be around much after that...

A 2014 report by the Australian Human Rights Commission revealed that one in two women in Australia (49 per cent) reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace during their pregnancy, parental leave, or on return to work. Over a quarter (27 per cent) of the 1,000 men surveyed in the report experienced discrimination when requesting or taking parental leave, or when they returned to work.\textsuperscript{49}
The research also found that discrimination takes many different forms, ranging from sexist attitudes and comments through to dismissal. It needs to be addressed properly, as it’s not only damaging to your employee’s mental and physical health, it’s also detrimental to your business. Of mothers who experience discrimination, 91 per cent don’t make a formal complaint – but 32 per cent of them resign from their job because of it. If you allow discriminatory behaviour to occur, you’ll lose valuable people.

Even requesting parental leave may carry a stigma – and men, in particular, often don’t ask for it for fear of career penalties. These may include a missed promotion, creating the impression that they’ve stopped taking their career seriously, or that fatherhood has suddenly made them unreliable, and they’re no longer “a team player”. Very few young fathers in Australia take extended leave at the time of their child’s birth, with only 9 per cent of those who do taking longer than six weeks.50

You have the power and influence, as a leader, to break down these prejudices and reduce the stress for parents transitioning in and out of work. You can do this in a number of ways:

1. **Help to explode the myth that working parents are a liability to a business**

   Research actually shows quite the opposite, and you should share these facts with other leaders and your team. Parenthood gives both men and women an advantage by teaching them skills that make them more efficient and productive at work. These skills include:
   - the ability to multi–task
   - being flexible and adaptable
   - great time management and efficiency capability
   - a sense of responsibility and more determination to succeed.

   There is more information about the skills that parents can bring to your workplace on page 13 in part 1 of this manual.

2. **Work to gradually improve every part of the parental leave process**

   Start with the request for leave process. Be receptive, positive and reassuring when somebody asks you for parental leave. Ensure they have the appropriate paperwork and talk to HR about their options so you are well informed.

   Remember, this is a celebratory time in someone’s life: don’t make him or her dread any part of it, or fear repercussions for taking time away from work.

   When an employee puts in a request:
   - determine key dates (both start and end of their leave)
   - provide the right forms and information
   - work out the best and most effective handover strategy – seek their opinion, and invite their full participation
   - consider employment assistant programs (EAP) options to help them with this transition if there are other challenges
   - ask if they’ve thought about what kind of arrangements they would like when they return to work (i.e. part–time, flexible hours, or a graduated return)
   - tell them that you’d like to keep in contact during their leave, keeping them abreast of what’s happening at work – reach an agreement about how regular this contact should be, and in what form it should take (a phone call, email, etc).

3. **During parental leave, keep the employee regularly informed of events at your organisation, without distracting them**

   Give them choices about how much contact with work they would like. Being a new parent can be challenging, so ask how they’re managing and what they are enjoying. Be aware that men also need support during this major life experience: one in 10 men with new babies will experience something similar to Post Natal Depression, but may not identify it as such or seek help.

   This part of the process is a bit tricky as a manager: you don’t want to intrude on this time or apply pressure, but it’s also important not to let the employee feel isolated or cut-off from their employment. Ask them to any social functions you have at work, but ensure it’s a low pressure situation.

4. **Look at the return to work process at your organisation and determine how you can make the re–engagement easier for returning employees**

   This is a critical period: 35 per cent of women indicated they had experienced discrimination when they got back to work.
   - arrange for a ‘back on board’ buddy for their first few days back – they will need an update on what’s been happening
   - provide private places where women can express milk or breastfeed
   - set realistic performance targets – be mindful of the readjustment they’re making
   - create a support group of other employees who have also returned from parental leave
   - think about a ‘return to work bonus’: a financial incentive to return to work, which can go towards childcare or something suitable.
BEING A GOOD ROLE MODEL

This includes respectfully correcting people who make inappropriate comments. It’s important that this is done in a way that is not humiliating for the offender or victim. Consider the differences in these two responses:

A staff member says: Jill won’t give Mark too hard a time. She’ll be his Mum, like always, and she’ll just treat him like one of her kids. He’ll be sent to his room if he doesn’t meet deadlines!

Response 1: Manager looks stern, and says: That is inappropriate. Jill will be operating professionally as a manager with Mark, and the fact that she is also a parent is totally irrelevant.

Response 2: Manager smiles, but says: I’m sure Jill will be as professional as she always is and Mark doesn’t need a mother figure at work. Personally, I believe the patience I’ve developed raising kids comes in handy when I have to manage anyone who is being uncooperative. It’s a life skill.

Notice how the second response subtly sends the message that parenting is not a negative – in fact, there are lots of transferable skills, and women do know how to separate professional and family issues.

However, if the person making the comment is a serial offender who has been corrected many times, you or their manager should arrange a one-on-one conversation. In this conversation, you can:

• explain the problem you have observed
• ask them what impact they think their behaviour has on others
• ask them about the attitudes or experiences that underlie this behaviour
• suggest they edit themselves and are more aware of respect and gender equality at work
• be clear that a marked improvement in behaviour is expected
• follow up with a positive email a week or so later if there has been an improvement, or a more formal warning if there is no improvement.

USING PERFORMANCE REVIEWS TO BOOST EQUALITY

As a leader or manager, it’s highly likely you conduct regular performance reviews with members of your team – or you might even have weekly one-on-one meetings that focus on individual performance. Start introducing gender equality into this review process. These private meetings are the perfect opportunity for you to speak with individuals about gender issues and seek their thoughts about how gender expectations, assumptions, and inequity may be affecting them and the organisation as a whole.

Some ideas include:

• talking to men about flexibility, asking about the ways they are balancing home and work
• asking both men and women the same questions and offering the same feedback
• asking open questions like: “Tell me about...” or “can you explain...?” rather than assuming what is important to them
• gauging interest about mentoring opportunities
• being mindful of talking to women about attributes such as likeability and ‘being nice’ in ways that you wouldn’t with men – research has shown this is a big issue
• asking for people’s views on how the team and the broader organisation is going in terms of gender equality
• acknowledging and rewarding inclusive team behaviours.

USING EVENTS TO RAISE AWARENESS

Take the opportunity to raise awareness about gender equality, where possible. Organise a guest speaker, bring people together for a walk or morning tea, and participate in fundraising or poster campaigns.

Some ideas for event days include:

• World Day of Social Justice (20 Feb)
• International Women’s Day (8 March)
• Harmony Day (21 March)
• Men’s Health Week (third week in June)
• Week Without Violence (third week of October)
• Reclaim/Take Back The Night (usually last Friday night in October)
• Movember (this is a chance to talk to men about how male stereotypes aren’t helpful. Check out the website https://au.movember.com/ for workplace initiatives)
• White Ribbon Day, preventing violence against women (25 November)
• United Nations Human Rights Day (10 December)
ACTIVELY WORKING TO REMOVE BARRIERS AND INCREASE WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION

Some ideas on how to do this are listed below:

• start conversations about what makes it difficult to participate fully and access opportunities – these are different in every workplace
• don’t be afraid to raise issues around meeting times, annual leave, allocation of work, work outside of hours, social events for discussion
• ensure the issues that are brought to your attention are dealt with properly
• improve your induction program to promote gender equality and respectful behaviours.

Ensure the basics are covered, such as:

• provision of a plain language explanation of the gender equality policy statement or similar
• steps for raising an issue or making a complaint
• access to diversity/gender equality training (online or in person)
• face-to-face explanation by an organisational leader or manager about fairness and inclusion, and a discussion about encouraging women into leadership (e.g. a simple approach, like saying: “You are probably aware that women are frequently stereotyped as ‘warm and friendly’ and leaders are stereotyped as ‘tough and strong’. Given this, women may find it hard to progress professionally – as will men who do not ‘fit the mould’. This doesn’t benefit women, men, or our organisation. Therefore, our approach is to [approach]”).

Promote evaluation as a leader:

• explain the importance of gathering data, so you can monitor how the organisation is progressing
• if surveys need to be completed, do them as a team during a meeting
• attend focus groups with your team and encourage them to speak up, rather than viewing their comments as criticism – stay solution-focused.
3. FUTURE FOCUS

What are the follow-up steps for you, as a leader or manager? What’s next for other people in the leadership group? It’s important that they aren’t just kept informed, but are actually charged with some responsibility to help maintain the changes.

TALKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT FLEXIBILITY

One of the big issues of the future for leaders is flexibility. Leaders can be brought together to talk about the practical implications of managing the need for flexibility at work. The future is not just providing more flexible work options for women with children, it is providing these options across the board – and that can be challenging for some leaders. They will need to discuss the degree to which this is possible and do some work on the ‘how’ aspect.

For further information on how to handle (and make) requests for flexible workplace arrangements, refer to the Fair Work Ombudsman’s fact sheet, which is document A14 in the Resources Pack.

Policies do not necessarily translate into practice. Often, barriers to increased flexibility reflect negative attitudes of employees (who fear stigma) and managers (who fear losing control). To make progress, organisations need to challenge assumptions, shift attitudes and build a flexible workplace culture.

Flexibility solutions need to be team-based, not just individualised. Progress also requires men (especially male leaders) to embrace, utilise and role model flexibility in all its forms. Only then will flexibility be normalised for employees of either gender or any background.

– The WGEA
If my organisation was fair and supportive about women, I imagine I’d treat an offensive remark differently. I’d probably say something like, ‘Okay, that was awkward’, the person would feel embarrassed and probably apologise, and we’d move on.

But women are constantly feeling under fire in my workplace and are denied chances to get ahead or grow in our roles, just because we’re female.

So, yes, I do complain if I feel discriminated against. If I keep complaining, maybe some of the leaders will eventually do something!

– Kirsty, 23