

EQUAL FOOTING

*A practical manual to help you promote
gender equality at your organisation*

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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This manual is divided into 4 parts:

PART 1: THE BASICS

Aim: To help you familiarise yourself with terms, issues and concepts relating to gender equality. This is essential reading before you move on to the part of the manual most relevant to you and your role.

Recommended for: Everyone.

PART 2: ORGANISATIONS

Aim: To help you start shifting culture and behaviours at a collective, all-inclusive level. This section is the lengthiest, as this is where you should be making the biggest investment if you want to achieve sustainable change.

Recommended for: CEOs, HR Managers, Diversity and Inclusion Managers, Training and Development Managers.

PART 3: LEADERS

Aim: To help leaders manage teams by using a lens of gender equality and respect, rather than seeing it as a separate issue or problem to address.

Recommended for: Leaders, Managers, Supervisors, anyone who has staff reporting to them.

PART 4: INDIVIDUALS

Aim: To help you and other individuals understand the important issues around gender equality, learn how to start useful conversations, and behave in ways that make a real difference.

Recommended for: Individual staff members, managers who want to share ideas with their staff.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE 'EQUAL FOOTING' PROGRAM

This manual is based on a program that was run in the first half of 2015 with eight organisations from the business community in Melbourne. These organisations included banks, retail, hospitality and technical-focused businesses, as well as two community-based organisations.

The 'Equal Footing' program was funded by the Victorian Government, via the Office for Women and Equality, Department of Premier and Cabinet, State Government of Victoria.

An organisation called En Masse developed and delivered the program and has prepared this manual so that you can cherry-pick the aspects that are most useful to your organisation.



A '*Background Paper*' explaining why and how the 'Equal Footing' program was run can be found in the Resources Pack (Document **A01**)



You can also have a look at the outcomes from this research project at the VicHealth website: www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

WHAT'S BEHIND THE INVESTMENT INTO GENDER EQUALITY AND RESPECT PROGRAMS IN WORKPLACES?

The short answer is that we want to change the way Australians think and act on a broad scale (both in and outside of work).

There is clear room for improvement in Australia in terms of how we think about men and women: 1 in 5 people still think men should be "head of the household", for example. While we can't go into homes and ensure people complete training programs, we can reach them through their work.

'Equal Footing' has been designed to help workplaces understand gender discrimination and inequality and what can be done to tackle the issue in a practical and sustainable way. Its primary goal is to achieve better diversity and fairness in the workplace but, as with all gender equality programs, it also has its eye on the bigger picture. Equality in the workplace will help lead our society towards greater respect for women, which will, in turn, help us combat one of the biggest problems affecting Australian women's health today: violence.

Research has clearly shown that problems like violence against women will only improve when societies shift their beliefs and attitudes and accept that men and women are equal. While this imbalance in power and economic resources remains unchallenged, Australian women will continue to have less opportunity, gain less respect and be more likely to find themselves in abusive relationships.

There were more than 65,300 reports to police of family violence in Victoria in 2014. Around one-third of these involved children, and many more went unreported.¹ Research shows that countries where there is a significant gender power imbalance tend to have corresponding problems with family violence.²

The 'Equal Footing' program doesn't focus specifically on violence against women, but it does promote respect and reinforces the mantra that both men and women should be treated fairly and equally. This is an essential foundation if we're to successfully challenge the larger gender-related issues faced today by society.

You can roll out the complete 'Equal Footing' training in your workplace, or just choose parts of it. Refer to [Page 43 in part 2](#) for a step-by-step guide to gender equality training.

The most important thing is that you are taking action – as an organisation, team, and individual – towards achieving gender equality at work.



The background of the page is a teal-colored overlay on a photograph of a library. On the left, there are several tall bookshelves filled with books. In the lower-left corner, the back of a person wearing a white lab coat is visible, suggesting they are reading or working in the library. The overall tone is professional and academic.

PART ONE

THE BASICS

This part of the manual will help you familiarise yourself with terms, issues and concepts relating to gender equality. This is essential reading before you move on to the part of the manual most relevant to you and your role.

QUESTIONS YOU WILL BE ASKED – AND HOW TO ANSWER THEM

You might be reading this manual because you're the CEO of an organisation, a Human Resources Manager, a team leader or manager, or an employee. Regardless of your role, you're clearly interested in effecting change within your workplace when it comes to gender equality.

To achieve this, you'll need to engage people – and that means having lots of conversations about this topic. So, it's important you feel completely confident that you understand the basics, including being able to answer the following questions:

- what is 'Gender'?
- what is the difference between 'Equality' and 'Equity'?
- what is 'Bias'?
- what are the advantages of gender equality at work (and beyond)?
- what about 'Flexible Work'?
- but aren't working parents less focused and more distracted?
- what is 'Bystander Action'?
- what is the 'Gender Pay Gap'?
- is setting targets and quotas for women's participation and advancement a good idea?
- what is 'Merit'?
- won't gender targets and quotas mean women will 'take' men's jobs?
- what if people don't believe that we have an equality issue to address in Australia?

You will find answers to each of these questions on the following pages.

WHAT IS 'GENDER'?

The state of being male or female with reference to social or cultural differences rather than biological differences

The word 'gender' is often mistakenly used when referring to a person's 'sex' – so it's understandable if you're confused about its meaning. Although the terms are related and are often used interchangeably, they are actually two very distinct things. Someone's 'sex' is the biology that defines whether they are male or female, while their 'gender' refers to society's expectations about how they should think and behave as boys and girls and then as men and women.

As the writer, philosopher and feminist Simone de Beauvoir once wrote, "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" – and the same is equally true of men. Gender is a social construct: something that is taught to us by the society or culture we live in. We are introduced to the concepts of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' from birth and these tell us who we are supposed to be, what kind of roles we can and can't perform, how we should act and respond to whatever life throws at us – even how we should dress.

Societal expectations about gender are reinforced every day of our lives – whether it's in the media, by our family, in our community, or in the workplace – and sometimes in very subtle ways. This has resulted in the creation of gender stereotypes that we're all expected to fit into – even though most of us realise they are overly simplistic, don't reflect our individuality, and help perpetuate unfairness and inequality between the two sexes.

Gender stereotyping incorporates things like personality traits (the assumption that men are confident and aggressive, women are submissive and nurturing), behaviours and skills (women are better carers for children, men are more adept at household repairs and mowing the lawn), career paths (construction workers are men, secretaries are women), even how we should look (women are short and petite, men are tall and imposing).

This becomes problematic when adherence to gender stereotyping gives some people power or control over others – specifically, that men should be 'in charge' of households, organisations, or our society as a whole.

Gender stereotypes are very hard to overcome, as they are so ingrained within our culture. In fact, members of both sexes who don't follow gender stereotypes are often punished (for example, assertive or strong women can be labelled 'bitches', and men who lack physical strength seen as 'wimps').

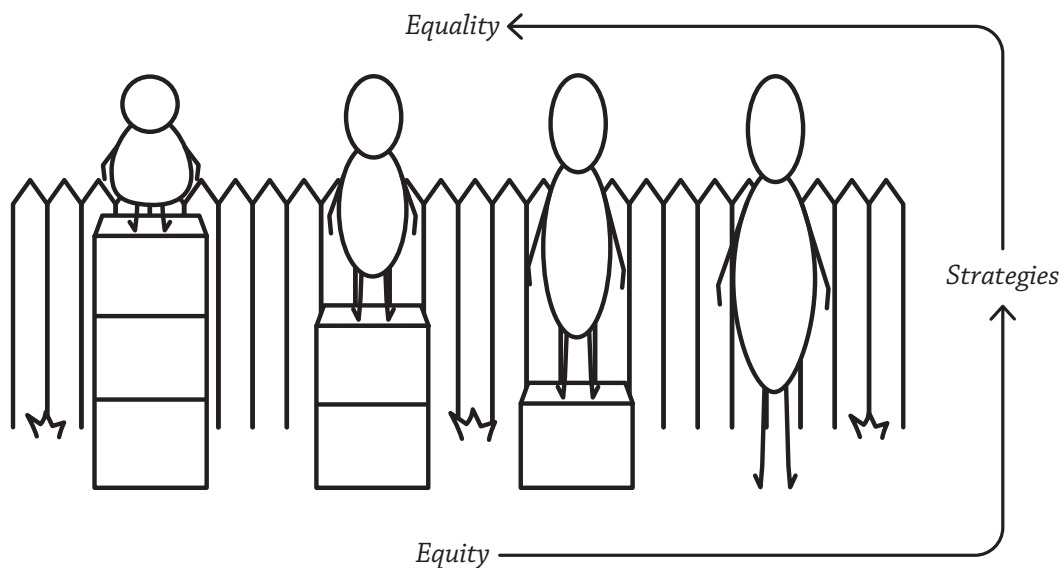
WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'EQUALITY' AND 'EQUITY'?

It's been said that "equity is the process; equality is the outcome" – but what does this mean, exactly?

'Equality' is about ensuring everybody has equal opportunity to reach their potential and receive equal treatment. The ultimate aim is equality of results. Within the context of gender, this means ensuring equality for men and women in all aspects of their lives, be it in society, the workplace, in education or in the community and, in regards to the law, without allowing gender stereotyping to affect or restrict their rights and choices.

'Equity' is about recognising and enacting the strategies that are needed to achieve equal outcomes. This means providing access to the resources, opportunities, power and responsibility people need to reach their full potential. Equity is all about fairness and justice, and recognising that some people are disadvantaged and may require additional help to reach the same level as the majority.

A useful analogy to demonstrate the notion of equity is to imagine being in the standing room area of the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Grand Final Day. To ensure everyone has the chance to view the game equally, we employ equity strategies – in the figure below, the equity strategy is represented as a milk crate to stand on and watch the game with an uninterrupted view. Equity is recognising that some people are shorter than others, through no fault of their own, and they'll require an additional crate to see properly and be on the same level as everybody else.



WHAT IS 'BIAS'?

Inclination or prejudice for or against one person or group, which may be unconscious

Society's ingrained attitudes about gender have led us, inevitably, towards 'gender bias': a prejudice (either overt or hidden) based on someone's sex that influences our beliefs, behaviour and decision-making.

Gender bias stems from our expectation that people will conform to the gender stereotypes associated with their biological sex – for example, that a man will show strength in a certain situation while a woman may become emotional, or that women make better parents because they are usually more nurturing than men. These assumptions can be harmful.

In most cases, we aren't being malevolent or deliberately discriminatory when we show gender bias – it's something we do automatically, without realising it. This is called 'unconscious bias', and we often reveal it when we're forced to react impulsively and emotionally to a situation without giving our response any analysis or thought. Most of us are biased because gender stereotypes are so consistently reinforced by society and the media that our subconscious has accepted them as fact.

A good example of unconscious bias is some recent American research that found almost 60 per cent of corporate CEOs in the US are over six feet tall – a remarkable statistic when you consider less than 15 per cent of the US male population is over six feet. Clearly, people don't set out to hire a tall male CEO, but their unconscious bias tells them that a tall man makes a strong leader, so they are irresistibly drawn to the gender stereotype.³

In Australian workplaces, treating somebody unfairly based on their sex is punishable by law – but that doesn't stop gender bias from occurring (although it's subtle, or not officially acknowledged, as nobody wants to be dragged into court). The key here is to recognise when you lapse and make a hasty judgment based on gender bias.

When gender bias happens at your workplace (and it will), you need to pause, step back and review. For example, the next time a group of colleagues is assessing resumes for a job position, discuss "the kind of person" you're all expecting to fulfill the role. Question one another: it will raise your awareness of any biases you may be carrying, probably without realising it. Simple changes like using a more formal rating system while interviewing can reduce the impact of our social instincts or personal feelings resulting in an unconscious bias for or against someone.



You can do a quick unconscious bias test by visiting Harvard University's 'Implicit Project':
www.implicit.harvard.edu/implicit

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF GENDER EQUALITY AT WORK (AND BEYOND)?

Most people associate 'gender equality' with improving the situation for women, both socially and in the workplace. It's a valid assumption, as women continue to earn less than men, are under-represented in leadership roles, and are less likely to spend as long in the workforce. But gender equality isn't only about women. The truth is that men are also victims of gender assumptions and inequality at work.

One of the best examples of this is flexible working hours. Flexibility is a key driver of employment decisions for many men, particularly those who are older and approaching retirement and (most especially) young fathers. Of this last group, 79 per cent would like to choose their start and finish times, and 37 per cent had seriously considered leaving their organisation because of a lack of flexibility.⁴ Due to expectations about gender roles, there is a definite culture within Australian workplaces that it's acceptable for female employees to ask for flexibility but men shouldn't, as they would create a perception that they aren't "serious" about their career. In fact, fear of future career penalties is the main reason why men remain silent on this subject.

Similarly, in many organisations, men are offered emotional support less often after personal trauma (e.g. a divorce or separation) and are referred to employee assistance programs less often than women. Of men returning from paternity leave (a month or less), 27 per cent reported that they experienced discrimination.⁵

The overreaching point is that by breaking down rigid gender roles and creating a more equal and fair workplace, both sexes will benefit. Women will have greater opportunity to succeed (hopefully in roles that have historically been viewed as "male") and men will no longer have the pressure of constantly proving themselves, or of being seen as the strongest or best.

The goal of gender equality in workplaces is that everybody – both men and women – can pursue any career, be remunerated appropriately, and be free to exhibit attributes and behaviour without them being viewed as "feminine" or "masculine".

WHAT ABOUT FLEXIBLE WORK?

There is growing evidence and awareness that allowing people some flexibility in when, where and how they work makes for a happier, healthier and more productive workplace. Supporting this is a recent study that found the majority of Australian firms believe flexible working has a positive impact on employee health and morale, with 59 per cent reporting that employees feel healthier and 64 per cent reporting an increase in energy and motivation. In addition, 79 per cent of Australian small and medium businesses reported higher levels of employee productivity due to flexible working practices.⁶

Flexible work requests may include arrangements around starting times, a reduction in hours worked, changed patterns of work (split shifts, job-sharing), or even the work environment itself (working from home).

Australian employers have a legal obligation under the *Equal Opportunity Act (2010)* to provide flexibility for several groups of people in their workplace. An employee may request flexible working arrangements if they:

- are a parent or have responsibility for a child of school age (or younger)
- are a carer
- have a disability
- are 55 or older
- are experiencing violence from a family member
- provide care or support to a member of their immediate family or household who is experiencing violence from a family member.

However, as already identified, gender expectations still weigh in heavily when discussing flexible working. Male employees with families often have to challenge rigid gender stereotypes to gain flexible conditions – and, even if it's offered, they can be reluctant to use it for fear of career penalties, such as a missed promotion or the perception that they aren't "a team player".

A 2012 Diversity Council report titled *Men Get Flexible! Mainstreaming Flexible Work in Australian Business* was based on the surveying of fathers of small children all over Australia, and found that:

- 79 per cent would prefer to choose their start and finish times, but only 41 per cent currently do
- 79 per cent would prefer to work a compressed working week, yet only 24 per cent actually do
- 56 per cent would prefer to work part of their regular hours at home, while only 13 per cent currently do
- 37 per cent have seriously considered leaving their current employer, due to a lack of flexibility
- very few young fathers take extended leave at the time of their child's birth, with only 9 per cent taking longer than six weeks.⁷

Female employees with children (or even those who are planning to have children) often suffer from a lingering assumption that their priority is actually "running around after their kids" or they'll be unreliable and "missing in action" for some of the working week. This means that many professional women miss out on promotions, struggle with career advancement, and often aren't taken as seriously as male colleagues.

Flexibility at work is an increasingly important issue for many professional people – even those who aren't parents. To recognise this, many businesses find that providing flexibility to all employees is beneficial, as it doesn't breed resentment among those who don't fit under a specific category.

The issue of trust is another hurdle when talking about flexibility. This isn't easily overcome, even when employees who have been granted flexibility complete their work on time and to a high standard. Many employers and managers are naturally inclined to want to monitor their people and would prefer them to be physically at their work desk, preferably from 9 to 5.

The move towards greater flexibility in the workplace will take time, and requires a further shift in thinking. A big part of this shift includes overcoming the gender stereotyping that still surrounds this issue.

There are several things you can do at your organisation to help this process along:

- offer flexible hours and working conditions to all employees and actively encourage fathers to accept them
- make sure leaders within the organisation take on flexible hours, as they will act as role models for other parents and break the perception that a change of hours could damage their career
- give parents (and fathers, in particular) the opportunity to share their flexible working experiences with other working parents.

WHAT ABOUT WORKING PARENTS?

People may ask, aren't working parents less focused and more distracted? This is a common assumption and it is one of the main reasons why people are hesitant about asking for flexibility at their workplace. Employees of both sexes can be professionally penalised by the perception that parenthood makes them less reliable, less committed, less competent, and less focused. This is most often levelled at working mothers – or even women who have become pregnant.

In a US study of employers' recruitment practices, mothers were less likely to be interviewed for positions than fathers or childless women and were rated as deserving lower salaries than childless women. Closer to home, a 2014 Australian government study revealed that nearly one in five women who recently had a baby reported workplace discrimination related to their pregnancy. The most common types of discrimination were pregnant women missing out on promotions and/or being excluded from training and development opportunities. Pregnant women also reported being left out of long-term projects and were often excluded from any decisions about the hiring and delegation of tasks for their maternity leave.⁸

However, research shows that working parents are actually assets to a business, not liabilities. In 2012, the Federal Reserve Bank of St Louis initiated a study to assess the impact of having children on highly skilled women. The study looked at the amount of research published by more than 10,000 academic economists (both male and female) over a 30-year career to find out how parenthood affected their productivity. The research paper (published in January 2014) showed that both women and men with at least two children are more productive across their careers, on average, than those who have only one child, and parents of one child are more productive than those with none.⁹

These results suggest that parenthood doesn't cause employees to take their eyes off the ball – in fact, it gives them an advantage by teaching them the skills they need to be more efficient and productive at work. This is particularly true of working mothers, who still spend more time with their children than fathers and are more involved in making the day-to-day decisions at home.

The skills that parents bring to the workplace include:

- **multi-tasking** – parents have to be expert planners. A woman with two or more kids manages multiple schedules, coordinates pick-ups, play dates, school meetings, birthday parties. She's a skilled juggler
- **flexibility and adaptability** – parents need to be flexible, to roll with the punches, to change course unexpectedly. Once you have kids, you realise the world is completely out of your control and you learn to adapt incredibly quickly. This ability to think on your feet is an asset to any workplace
- **time management and efficiency** – parents need to achieve a lot within aggressive timeframes. For example, a report might need to be written by 3pm, when a working dad has to collect his child from school. Parents get stuff done, and in less time
- **a sense of responsibility, and more determination** – single-income families are becoming increasingly rare in 2015 and most women work full-time because they *need* the income. Having mouths to feed at home is a big responsibility and it forces parents of both sexes to take ownership of their lives and "to reach higher, do more, and give their kids the best they can."¹⁰

WHAT IS 'BYSTANDER ACTION'?

When a person is present at or witnesses something and decides to speak up or take action

A key feature in establishing a fair and equitable workplace is ensuring that both sexes are treated with equal respect and consideration. In keeping with this, sexist language and jokes, discrimination based on sex, or any sexual harassment is to be acted on quickly and decisively. No workplace can achieve gender equality if employees (of either sex) are being targeted in this way, and not acting upon sexist behaviour can have a devastating effect on workplace culture.

'Bystander action' is encouraging and equipping all staff to speak up and step in when they observe or hear sexist behaviour. This does not include intervening in unsafe or violent situations.

Bystanders should carefully consider four steps before taking action:

1. Is the behaviour I'm seeing or hearing sexist, discriminatory and/or sexual harassment? What do the policies and procedures at my workplace say about behaviour like this?
2. Do I feel safe to step in? Will I be supported by management if I do? Is this something I'm expected to challenge myself – or am I better off seeking assistance? Is there any risk of escalation of violence here?
3. Is taking action going to prove helpful? If I were on the receiving end, would I want somebody to step in for me? Will it make a positive difference to a person's behaviour or to the workplace culture?
4. How serious is it? How should I respond? What should I say?¹¹

There is a bigger picture here. Research has shown that constructive bystander action sets a compelling example to others. The creation of more respectful relationships between men and women can help to change the very attitudes that have created gender inequality in the first place.

Bystander action also draws an important line in the sand about what is unacceptable and appropriate behaviour in the workplace and in society. It has been cited as an important preventative technique to eliminate bigger problems like the culture of violence against women, for example.

While looking at the bigger picture, you can also think of workplaces as potential bystanders to sexism itself. A workplace that makes a strong and public commitment to gender equality and respect at work is sending a clear message to the broader community and drawing an important line in the sand.

WHAT IS THE 'GENDER PAY GAP'?

The difference between the average weekly earnings of female and male workers

In Australia, it is calculated on the average weekly earnings for full-time employees published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The gender pay gap doesn't take into account part-time earnings, casual earnings and overtime payments.

Australia has had a persistent gender pay gap. Since 1990, the gender pay gap has remained within a narrow range of between 15 and 18 per cent.

However, the Australian gender pay gap widened to 18.8 per cent in February 2015. This figure is based on data collected in November 2014, and is the biggest gap recorded between the two sexes since 1994.

The latest ABS data shows that:

- the average man working full-time earns 18.8 per cent (or \$298.10) more each week than the average woman working full-time
- the average weekly ordinary time earnings of women working full-time are \$1,289.30 per week, compared to men who earn an average weekly wage of \$1,587.40 per week
- the national gender pay gap has increased 1.4 per cent since November 2013, when the gap was 17.4 per cent.¹²

The gender pay gap is influenced by a number of interrelated work, family and societal factors, including gender stereotypes about the work that women and men 'should' do, and the way women and men 'should' engage in the workforce. Other factors that contribute to the gender pay gap include:

- women and men working in different industries (industrial segregation) and different jobs (occupational segregation). Historically, female-dominated industries and jobs have attracted lower wages than male-dominated industries and jobs
- a lack of women in senior positions, and a lack of part-time or flexible senior roles. Women are more likely than men to work part-time or flexibly because they still undertake most of society's unpaid caring work and may find it difficult to access senior roles
- women's more precarious attachment to the workforce (largely due to their unpaid caring responsibilities)
- differences in education, work experience and seniority
- discrimination, both direct and indirect.¹³

IS SETTING TARGETS AND QUOTAS FOR WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND ADVANCEMENT A GOOD IDEA?

In addition to challenging inequalities and gender stereotyping, many organisations are trying to increase opportunities for women in their workplace by setting targets and introducing quotas. Most of these targets involve leadership, management and senior roles, where women are most under-represented. Targets and quotas are an attempt to break what is called "the glass ceiling": an unseen yet difficult-to-breach barrier that keeps women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements.

Programs that mentor, support and train women to better prepare them for senior roles (and efforts to re-imagine senior roles in more accessible, flexible modes) should run alongside targets.

Gender targets are an encouraging and welcome initiative, doing much to transform the notion that the ideal worker is a man who is available for work 24/7 and is unencumbered by any care responsibilities. Exploding this myth will assist more women (in general) to enter the workforce. In turn, this will help address the gender pay gap, which is at the biggest it has ever been – now over 18 per cent and widening.

While targets are widely supported, the introduction of actual quotas has met with some controversy and resistance. During 2013, the Reibey Institute interviewed 100 of Australia's leading corporate women. Of those surveyed, 80 per cent were in favour of setting targets to help ensure women's progression through the organisation, but only 50 per cent believed quotas should be a part of a company's gender strategy.¹⁴ The reasoning behind this is the fear that women may be placed in senior roles simply *because* they are women. Some may think this is tokenistic and the fallout from it may damage women's interests more generally.

Despite these misgivings, setting quotas does garner results. In 2003, Norway was the first country to pass legislation mandating quotas for women's representation on listed company boards. The quota set a requirement for 40:40:20 representation (40 per cent male, 40 per cent female, with the remaining 20 per cent made up of either gender). The proportion of women on boards increased from just 7 per cent before the legislation to 40.3 per cent in 2010.

We talk and talk, but I have found it's only when we set measurable, serious targets that we start to take real steps in the right direction. People arc up, but it makes them accountable. When there's a target in place, it makes us ask, 'if not, then why not?' rather than just roll along as we always have.

– Mel, 34

While setting gender targets and quotas is a step in the right direction for any organisation, the concept is not without its critics and requires careful thought. Tokenism will do gender equality more harm than good, so factors such as merit should also be included in any strategy. Unfortunately (as you will read next), judging people (and women, in particular) on merit only can also be problematic.




The WGEA has excellent guidelines for setting targets at:

www.wgea.gov.au/learn/gender-target-setting-toolkit

Quotas and targets allow people to say: 'She's only there because she's a woman'.

Quotas let people say: 'She only got it because they needed the numbers'.

Gender quotas treat women as if they don't have the qualities to reach the top by themselves. They make it mandatory to select women on the basis of their gender – this does them a disservice. Women, just like men, should be chosen on the basis of their individual qualities and abilities. Gender shouldn't play a role at all.¹⁵



I always believed people should get the job on merit, regardless of their sex. Then I realised it's harder for women to show 'merit' compared to men. Women are much more likely to have taken time off work to have children and they're still predominantly the ones who have to juggle work with raising kids and doing the bulk of housework.

This isn't taken into account when a potential employer looks at their CV.

It also limits their ability to do the things that improve someone's 'merit', like taking on extra work, business travel, attending meetings and writing reports out of hours, finding mentors, studying further – even professional networking is more difficult. Men simply have more time to do these things, so of course they are going to seem like better job applicants.

'Merit' isn't quite as simple as I thought it was.

– Ben, 34

WHAT IS 'MERIT'?

The quality of being particularly worthy or able, and deserving praise or reward as a result

In the workplace, the 'question of merit' is most often raised during recruitment or promotion. Within the context of gender equality, it involves eliminating gender from any human resources decisions, so that candidates of both sexes can be assessed purely on their skills, experience and ability.

While this seems to support equality in the workplace, using the 'ability card' assumes that everyone has already had equal opportunity to begin with. The reality is that female job candidates are more likely to have been already disadvantaged in their careers and their CVs may not stack up when compared to that of a male candidate. This could be because:

- women are often steered towards roles and responsibilities deemed 'suitable for a woman' during their career
- women remain much more likely to be the ones juggling work with home duties and responsibilities, and this juggling has inevitably had an impact on their career advancement. They may have taken extended leave from work, reduced their hours, or even changed roles to be able to manage their 'unpaid work' at home.

Judging people on merit is all very well in theory, but it doesn't take into account that men and women don't come from an equal playing field. Women are unlikely to have comparable career experience to men, mainly due to gender bias and gender-based assumptions. And how can you measure something if it's not there?

Another criticism levelled at the concept of merit is that it's usually only raised when somebody is considering appointing a woman – men are rarely subjected to the 'on merit' test. Some take this criticism further, suggesting that merit is only used when women are seeking a senior role to which a man ordinarily would be appointed.

Be aware that merit can be a gendered concept.

WILL GENDER TARGETS AND QUOTAS MEAN WOMEN WILL 'TAKE' MEN'S JOBS?

Yes, this sounds a bit overreactive (and a little churlish, given that men already occupy most positions of power in organisations), but there is a real possibility of this occurring in some business contexts. If an organisation rushes into making changes (perhaps because they are long overdue, or a new leader wants to set targets), it can cause resentment, fear, and create a sense of injustice among male employees.

We were told by our new General Manager that the business would be 30 per cent female by 2020. He was thrilled to announce it, but we were all just standing there in shock. Our workforce is only 3 per cent female at the moment, so how exactly is this going to work?

If a woman applies for any job, is she going to get it automatically, just so we can reach these targets? Meanwhile, we've been slogging away for years and all our chances of moving up in the business will disappear overnight because of a bloody quota. How is that fair?

– Sunny, 38

It's important that leaders not only explain the targets and why they are a crucial part of the organisation's strategic direction, but also explain how they will be achieved. Fair and transparent processes are vital in these situations.

It's wise to listen to people's concerns, rather than just brushing them off as negative thinking. There's usually a collaborative way forward if you talk about things honestly.

WHAT IF PEOPLE DON'T BELIEVE THAT WE HAVE AN EQUALITY ISSUE TO ADDRESS IN AUSTRALIA?

We all have different experiences and there are undoubtedly people in your organisation who genuinely don't think there's still an issue in Australia with gender inequality – and that probably reflects their life experience and deeply held beliefs.

Here are some questions you might pose to them:

- why is there still a gender pay gap favouring men in all industries in Australia (and globally the picture is much the same)?
- why are there so few women in top positions in organisations in Australia?
- why is it still women who give up work and income to raise children, and only rarely is it men who do this?
- why do older women constitute the single largest group living in poverty in the world (and Australia is no exception)?
- why do one to two women die each week in Australia from domestic violence?
- why do men continue to struggle to get flexible working arrangements so they can share more of the domestic work and childcare responsibilities?

WHAT TO SAY TO THE DOUBTERS

When you are talking to people who dismiss or put up roadblocks to gender equality, it's wise to have some evidence-based facts and stats on hand. This can prove helpful when you hear statements like:

1. *But we solved gender inequality years ago...*

"In a 2013 study based on over 17,000 Australians, 19 per cent still think that men should be 'head of the household' – that's about 1 in 5 people who believe men should have more power than women at home. In regards to public life, 1 in 4 people believe men make better political leaders than women.¹⁶ Does that sound like we've achieved gender equality to you?"

2. *This 'gender inequality' stuff is nonsense. My manager is a woman...*

"Women make up half the workforce in Australia but hold just one-quarter of management positions – so I'd suggest that your female manager is an exception, rather than the rule. Even if a woman finds herself in a management role, she often has to deal with outmoded, socially constructed ideas that 'men make better executives'. This assumption is an unfair (and untrue) gender bias – female executives do just as well as men, if given the same opportunities."

3. *Gender equality is all about women...*

"Research shows that 'flexibility within their role' is one of the top employment drivers for men. It's what men look for and want in a job – but they're hesitant to ask for flexibility at interviews or in negotiations as it's still viewed as a 'woman's domain' and they're wary of creating a perception that they're not committed or serious about work. Men are also much more likely to have their request for flexibility declined by managers. It isn't as though the need for flexibility doesn't exist for men: 64 per cent of fathers have a partner also in the paid workforce, and 31 per cent have elder care responsibilities.¹⁷ But they still don't ask for it. It's not only women who are imprisoned by absurd gender stereotypes. Equality will benefit men, too."

4. *The gender pay gap wouldn't exist if women asked for more money...*

"Women aren't expected to negotiate for higher pay in the same way that men do. They're expected to take a less assertive stance, purely because of their gender – and, as a result, they often don't achieve their goals, including getting paid more. Conversely, when women *do* negotiate for money in a more assertive manner, they can be negatively viewed as being 'pushy' and lacking in warmth, which also counts against them.¹⁸ So, it isn't quite as simple as women demanding more money – society doesn't really support this option."

5. **Women are responsible for the gender pay gap, as they keep choosing career paths that pay less. They also choose to work part-time, instead of full-time, and this skews the statistics...**

"There is some truth in what you're saying. Australian girls perform better than boys at school but they tend to enrol in humanities tertiary courses, which subsequently pay relatively lower wages in employment, rather than the sciences, which usually offer higher career wages. It's also true that women often seek jobs that provide greater flexibility for part-time work, so they can accommodate family responsibilities. So, yes, both of these things are influential in determining that Australian women earn (on average) \$298.10 less than men each week.¹⁹

However, we need to look at the bigger picture. Let's start by talking about "choices". Do you think that the "choices" women make might be largely determined by gender expectations? Doesn't society still push women towards traditional career paths like teaching, nursing, or admin? These roles generally pay between \$50,000 and \$70,000 annually. If society shifted its views about 'gender appropriate' career paths for women, perhaps they would follow a path to higher-paying professions."

6. **Women don't work as long as men do, so why bother pushing for equality?**

"You're right: Australian women retire up to 8.5 years earlier (on average) than men do, with the average retirement age of 50.²⁰ But do women actually want to retire earlier, or do they retire because society expects them to? After all, women accrue less retirement savings and are 2½ times more likely to live in poverty in old age than men. Currently, the average superannuation payout for Australian women is just one-third of the payout for men: \$37,000 compared with \$110,000.²¹ If society was more accepting of older women remaining in the workforce, it is likely that a lot of them would postpone giving up work, especially given the financial realities they'll face when they do retire.

There is also a persistent perception within society that a woman's career "use-by date" occurs earlier than a man's. Many older women find themselves pushed to the periphery within organisations (especially when they occupy client- or customer-facing roles) because their age is viewed as less attractive, or less dynamic.

A 2015 survey of 14,000 Australian women has revealed that almost half believed they had personally been discriminated against because of their age, and 62 per cent believed employers were more likely to hire a candidate under the age of 40."²²

After 20 years in client services, I was told informally that I 'didn't really fit' with the new branding and young, fresh image. As a 60 year old woman, I felt my looks, age and gender were being judged above my years of acquired knowledge, my abilities, and my strong work ethic. I have never heard that kind of thing being said about older men: they are usually praised and highly valued for their experience.

– Liz, 60

7. Achieving gender equality won't make any difference to this business...

"That's not true, actually. Australian companies where women are most strongly represented at Board or Senior Management level are also the companies that are doing better and are the most profitable. A January 2015 study by McKinsey & Co. (*'Diversity Matters'*) looked at financial results and the composition of management and boards of 366 public companies in the UK, US, Canada and Latin America. It found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 per cent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians.²³

This is backed up by 2014 research by Gallup, which suggests that gender diverse teams perform better than single gender teams for several reasons:

- men and women have different viewpoints, ideas, and market insights, which enables better problem solving, ultimately leading to superior performance at the business unit level
- a gender diverse workforce provides easier access to resources, such as various sources of credit, multiple sources of information, and wider industry knowledge
- a gender diverse workforce allows the company to serve an increasingly diverse customer base
- gender diversity helps companies attract and retain talented women – this is especially relevant as more women join the labour force around the world. Companies cannot afford to ignore 50 per cent of the potential workforce and expect to be competitive in the global economy.²⁴

It's excellent business sense for organisations to make gender equality a priority."

8. I don't think our CEO is interested in addressing the gender pay gap...

"Interestingly, research has found that when CEOs have daughters, the pay gap between males and females in their organisation shrinks. A Danish study released a report called *'Like Daughter, Like Father: How Women's Wages Change When CEOs Have Daughters'*.²⁵ The study surveyed 6,321 organisations and found that male CEOs with daughters closed the gender pay gap by 0.5 per cent in the year after his daughter's birth. If she was the male CEO's first born child, the gap narrowed by 2.8 per cent.

Responsible CEOs should be willing to address gender equality in their workplace, especially once they learn it will positively impact the business bottom line – but it also helps if they see it as a personal issue."

The first daughter 'flicks a switch' in the mind of a male CEO, causing him to attend more to equity in gender-related policies, including wages.

9. Gender targets and quotas are rubbish and never work...

"There are differing schools of thought about gender targets and (particularly) quotas, with many fearing that the forced hiring of women is tokenistic and will actually damage the push for gender equality. However, there is no doubt that targets and quotas work when introduced. In 2011, the Australian government set a target to have a minimum of 40 per cent women on government boards by 2015.²⁶ As of 30 June 2012, women held 38 per cent of government board appointments.²⁷ When Norway introduced mandatory quotas for women's representation, the proportion of women on company boards increased from just 7 per cent in 2003 to 40.3 per cent in 2010."

In March 2015, the Victorian premier, Daniel Andrews, announced a state government gender target, promising that at least 50 per cent of all future appointments to paid government boards and the courts would be women. The commitment was prompted by findings that female representation on government boards had slipped to 35.6 per cent in the previous four years. It will be interesting to see how this unfolds and whether it actually turns the tide of what we identify as normal governance structures.

10. Men make better managers as they're more likely to have studied management and business at Uni...

"When it comes to university, it's true that more men study management-related courses than women – although not by much. In 2012, 11 per cent of men studied in this field, compared to 9 per cent of women.²⁸ But when it comes to VET courses (those offered through TAFE, etc.), nearly one-third (29 per cent) of women study management and commerce, compared to only 15 per cent of men. That's a ratio of women to men of about 2 to 1.²⁹

Looking at the bigger picture, women are actually better educated than men in Australia. Of Australian women aged 25-29, 41 per cent have achieved a Bachelor degree or above, compared to only 30.6 per cent of men. Almost two-thirds (62 per cent) of women with a postgraduate degree were employed full-time, and just over half (53 per cent) of women with a bachelor degree were employed full-time.³⁰

However, despite being more educated, women only account for less than 1 in 4 professionals in top management roles in Australia. In 2014, it was found that only 17.6 per cent of ASX200 directorships are held by women and only 5 per cent of ASX200 chairs are women.³¹ Clearly, once employed, well educated and qualified women are being disadvantaged because of their sex.”

11. *She's shown real results, I suppose, and everybody here really likes her... but I reckon he deserved to be made manager more. He looks like a real gun...*

“Men are more likely to be promoted on the basis of potential (how good they’re going to be) and women more likely to be promoted on proven performance. A study showed that in a woman’s performance review, the issue of likability and personality was found in 71 of 94 reviews, compared to only 2 out of 83 reviews for men.”³²

12. *I'm sick of working mothers raving about discrimination. It doesn't happen! Just look at the stats...*

“An Australian Human Rights Commission study found that one in two women (49 per cent) experienced unfair treatment around maternity, but only 8 per cent complained within their organisation and 10 per cent took it to a government agency. In contrast, almost one-third chose to avoid confrontation by looking for another job – or even resigned. Interestingly, 27 per cent of men who take parental leave (just 1 month or less) also experienced discrimination when they returned to work.³³ So, you can see that the stats aren’t representative of what’s really going on, as most working parents (both women and men) fail to report discrimination when it happens.”

13. *It's a choice for women to stay at home raising kids. They can't expect to return to work after a long break and start at the top...*

“There’s no doubt a woman’s career trajectory is impacted when she takes years away from work to have and raise children, but the ‘lost’ time doesn’t completely explain the disparities in pay and career advancement that occur when she returns to work. What really causes the damage is how she is negatively viewed and perceived by colleagues and management. There is a persistent attitude and assumption that having children means women (and, to a lesser extent, men) become less committed to their careers and are suddenly not as reliable or focused. This is not true. In fact, parents bring a whole set of advanced skills to a workplace.”

14. *Why should it be left up to me to do something about this?*


“Individual attitudes are crucial in achieving gender equality at work. If achieved, the workplace will set a good example for society as a whole. We need to learn to respect women more, and this means speaking up and being proactive about equality.

Almost half (47 per cent) of Victorians who had observed sexism, discrimination or violence against women reported “either saying or doing something in response, or taking some other form of action”. Thirteen per cent wanted to do something but didn’t for various reasons. But over 98 per cent of Australians expect their employers to ensure that women are provided with the same opportunities as men, and to ensure that none of their female employees are treated unfairly or harassed.”³⁴



A research summary on *Violence Against Women* is available from the VicHealth website, along with other publications on this topic:

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/violence-against-women-in-australia-research-summary



I worked on this for 9 months all by myself. Finally, after bringing gender equality up at lots of meetings, our Human Resources Manager met with me and she agreed to put equality firmly on our organisation's agenda.

I wish I hadn't soldiered on for so long on my own. Things moved really quickly once we'd adopted an 'all of organisation' approach.

We enlisted four others to help us and we're making real progress. People can be quite avoidant about initiating change, but this is a shared responsibility now. The whole business is involved.

– Paula, 30

