

Collaborating to create #balanceforbetter

By [Anna Curzon](#)

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Each year on 8 March, International Women's Day, I get invited to attend events that celebrate and discuss gender diversity in the workplace. They're often rich with intelligent discussions about women and work, a topic I am immensely passionate about.



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But all too often, I sit up on stage, look out to the crowd and I think, 'where on earth are all the men?' There are many supportive men on gender diversity (I know quite a few) but there is still work to be done as I often find myself singing to a choir of women who already know that gender diversity is a business priority.

It's irrefutable that having a gender balance leads to better business outcomes, greater profitability and value creation. Better balance between women and men means broader insight, more empathy, and fresh ideas.

Gender diversity is not only a women's issue. It's a human issue. And the majority of our business leaders today, in particular in technology, are men. The only way we are truly going to make headway is to have the men standing with us to create a business environment where women can thrive.

Collaboration is vital

I believe collaboration is vital to have as part of any gender diversity discussion and would even go so far as to say it's negligent if this isn't on a male or female business leaders' agenda.

However, I think it's easy to point fingers and we all need to look at how we can create more inclusive environments. It's critical we have discussions in an open forum, and that organisers of events and support groups create positive opportunities for discussion that encourage men and women to attend and work together.

It worries me that the 2018 McKinsey and Company report on Women in the Workplace shows that progress hasn't just slowed, it's stalled. All the while, companies are reporting that they are highly committed to gender diversity. It's a frustrating paradox. We didn't open the door to diversity, only to turn around and shut it behind us.

Recently, I was introduced to the term moral-licensing through Canadian author Malcolm Gladwell's podcast Revisionist History. I can't help but think that the phenomenon might be at play here. It describes the subconscious decisions we make to engage in prejudice behaviour, because in the past we did something virtuous.

Moral-licensing became a popular theory in 2009, describing those who voted in US President Barack Obama, and subsequently reverted to racist behaviours.

Fostering an inclusive and respectful environment

When I think about it in this context, I think about the companies who have hit a quota of females and assume the job is done. But token acts of egalitarianism do not mean you have an egalitarian workplace. It's box-ticking and it's bad for business.

I encourage every business leader to introduce a diversity plan and to really think about fostering an inclusive and respectful environment for diversity to thrive.

Here's where I think is a good place to start:

- Women need to feel supported in the workplace, they need allies to feel confident enough that they can share their beliefs, their values and their views. Our leaders need to re-engineer working environments to make them a safe, supportive place.
- We need to be aware of our unconscious biases and flagging behaviour in the workplace that isn't inclusive. It's little things like calling grown women 'girls'. They're small but reinforcing behaviours and when added up, they have an impact.
- Support groups and events around International Women's Day are great, but how can we make sure we have a diverse spread in the room and it's an inclusive and encouraging environment for everyone.

I do believe the majority of businesses have the very best of intentions in this space, but leaders need to turn those intentions into actionable plans.

So this International Women's Day, I challenge you to speak out publicly about your business's progress and goals for diversity. How is your organisation tracking and what is your vision and plan for the future? What you're doing to ensure you're not giving in to moral-licensing?

Communicating this business case, setting goals and reporting on progress are key to driving change. The door to diversity will not open itself.

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