

International Women's Day 8th March 2015 – theme 'Make it Happen'

Text of speech by Donna Ribton-Turner, Director Clinical Services

ReGen – Women in Leadership

Let's start with some facts about women in Australia:

- In Australia, women are 50.22% of the population (2012 figures BoS)
- Less than 1/3 of all parliamentarians are women
- Women hold just 19.5% of board seats (2015) and 10% of company executive officers positions (ASX 200)
- Women are three times more likely to be victims of intimate partner abuse than men
- Family and Domestic violence is the leading contributor to illness, disability and death for women in Victoria aged between 15 and 44 years
- The wage discrepancy between men and women in Australia now is 18.8%, the highest since 1983. **That's right, it's getting worse, not better.**

Closer to home:

- The 2009 Census of Victorian AOD workforce suggests that it is predominantly female and aged over 40. 73% of respondents to the census held formal qualifications in health, social work or behavioural science.
- This is generally consistent with the findings of recent national data on the AOD workforce.
- At UnitingCare ReGen, 66% of Board members are female, 33% of senior managers, 33% of all managers and just under 80% of staff are female.

So generally, as in other areas, in health and in the AOD sector, despite a female dominated workforce, Boards, Directors of Nursing, CEOs and senior managers are usually men. The ReGen board is an exception to this.

According to Sheryl Sandberg, the CEO of Facebook, in her 2013 book *Lean In: Women, work and the will to lead*, one of the reasons is conditioning. She says that, 'confident young girls are seen as bossy or pushy while male peers who act the same way are praised as outgoing and authoritative'.

She goes on to say that men constantly agitate for promotion, whereas women passively wait for accolades and long for mentors to discover them.

A 2003 Columbia Business School study presented half a group of students with the real life story of Heidi Roizen, a successful entrepreneur. It included statements like...outgoing personality, vast personal and professional networks that included many of the most powerful business leaders in the technology sector.

The other half got the same story but with the name switched from Heidi to Howard.

When both groups were asked who they would like to work with, Howard was considered vastly more appealing than Heidi, who the students felt would not be the type of person you would want to work for, work with or even hire.

Even the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics social trend report found that many women lack the self-confidence to become leaders.

Women are reportedly more likely to look at a job description and identify the one or two things they were not experienced in and consider themselves not suitable for a position whereas men are more likely to identify the criteria they do meet, consider themselves suitable and either ignore the ones they don't meet or feel confident they can learn them on the job.

What is leadership?

Mahatma Gandhi said: 'I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles, but today it means getting along with people.'

If that is true you would expect women would make good leaders and there would be more women in leadership positions.

In my early career as a general nurse, if you stayed around long enough, you usually became a Charge Nurse and were given leadership roles. In fact, in the public service length of service/employment used to be grounds for an appeal if you were unsuccessful in applying for a position or promotion.

The problem was that many of these so-called Charge Nurses in my day, they were good nurses, but many of them were poor leaders. When I trained there seemed to be an abundance of army-trained Charge Nurses and their style of leadership was more about muscles and bullying than getting along with people. Unfortunately, they played to what they had experienced in male-dominated armed forces and not the traits that they could bring to the roles.

Only later in my career did I encounter good leaders who influenced my development as a worker and later how I behaved in leadership positions. The things these people (and yes, they were women) had in common was an interest in seeing other women get ahead in their careers, a keenness to share their knowledge and experience and a belief in the wealth of knowledge held by people at all levels of the organisation.

The mentoring was particularly important in my career development and there are two or three who took an interest in me to whom I remain very grateful.

I have tried to honour their investment in me by mentoring others.

But this has not always been straightforward. I have reflected over time on this mentoring role or special interest that I took in some of the people I worked with. There seemed to be two distinct types of people that I gravitated towards for special interest:

1. People who were like me who seemed to share my values and maybe personal traits; &
2. People opposite to me who possessed traits I admired but didn't have.

That meant of course that there were a whole lot of other people who, despite my varying position, I was somehow less interested in. Realising this revealed a mismatch between what I regarded as good leadership and how I was behaving. It taught me that leaders need to be interested in all people. Mentoring is something quite different and can be provided by people at any level of organisations but people in designated leadership roles like CEOs and managers need to be there for all staff equally. Their role is to help people doing well to get opportunities to advance their careers but also provide opportunities for people doing not so well to improve their performance.

Leaders need to trust in people's ability to learn, grow, change and take responsibility for themselves. I think leaders also need to accept that sometimes people have multiple responsibilities in addition to their job and that can mean contributing differently at different times in their careers. This is particularly true for women juggling work and family responsibilities.

So my Principle One in leadership is that leaders are interested in all their workers.

For Principle Two, I quote John F Kennedy: 'Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other'.

Leadership is a skill that can be learnt and people in leadership roles have a responsibility to help others learn that skill. Given the under-representation of women in leadership positions in Australia, our leaders have a responsibility to provide opportunities for women to share in leadership roles and be paid accordingly. It is ok for us to expect it from them.

We need to identify our champions amongst our male leaders and colleagues.

Principle Three is collaboration and sharing power which, I think, is a strength for women and a reason to expect more women in leadership positions.

However, my **Fourth Principle is standing in your own power.**

Sometimes it is just your job to make a decision and women's aptitude for consultation can get in the way of making the difficult call when required.

Here, transparency and an understanding of your self is crucial. For example, I know I like to please people and I don't like conflict, so I've had to put effort into learning about dealing with conflict and challenging dynamics. I still don't like it, but I'm better at it than I used to be and I've stopped avoiding it hoping that it will go away. It never does, it just gets worse.

Researchers have identified 16 common leadership traits and American author DM Malone in his book *Small Unit Leadership: A common sense approach*, translated them into commonly understood terms:

- Persistence
- Conduct
- Decisiveness
- Dependability
- Endurance
- Enthusiasm
- Humility
- Humour
- Initiative
- Integrity
- Judgement
- Fairness
- Competency
- Tact
- Commitment
- Unselfishness

Many of these traits, women excel in. In fact, according to Fabian Dattner, a leadership educator and mentor in Melbourne, women have been found to excel (compared to men) in 12 of the 16.

I'd like to finish with a brief example of leadership work here at ReGen and it will be one that is familiar to many of you, but one that I think demonstrates how shared leadership can work:

- In 2008 senior managers at ReGen convinced the Board that family work was important, not just because of the role families have in supporting clients but because families of people with AOD problems have significant needs in their own right and deserve treatment and support. So we got a commitment to Family Inclusive Practice (FIP) into our Strategic Plan with performance objectives that we were accountable for.
- That provided the platform for us to form partnerships with other services who were working with families, like sharc and the Bouverie Centre.
- We then successfully sought funding for a family counsellor from the Commonwealth Government.
- This was leadership by the designated leaders in our organisation.
- Then we pulled together staff who were interested in working with families into a FIP Leadership Group.
- We handed over power to the Leadership Group to make things happen. I was a member because I care about family work and clinical services were my overall responsibility, but our Family Counsellor was the chair of the group and the driver because she had most of the knowledge. She was also passionate about family work and a natural leader who was able to bring people along with her.
- This group were the leaders of FIP at ReGen and the model speaks to sharing power, an extremely successful leadership quality.

Thank you.