Quotes from the book
Chief Executives Unplugged: Business leaders get real about women in the workplace

Pages 5 – 11: Foreword by Fiona Krautil, as Director of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA)

“…it would be fair to say … In some areas … working women have come a long way. But it is also true that women at work far too frequently fail to reach their full potential.”

“…the Australian Women in Leadership Census suggests that there is simply not enough strategic focus within Australian companies on advancing women with leadership potential.”

"Fortunately there are an increasing number of individuals and organisations leading the way to achieving true diversity and equal opportunity.”

“…Passion and commitment - and the courage to think beyond the norm – are crucial allies in any endeavour to create positive change.”

“The next 50 years will present significant challenges for those in leadership. Something in our consciousness must shift in order for us to be able to see how to navigate the delicate balance between short-term profitability and long-term collective gain.”

Pages 12 - 21 John McFarlane, CEO at ANZ Bank

“…I do believe that you have to intervene on behalf of women. If you do nothing, nothing changes. The work environment is not pitched in favour of women; one has to actively speak out, take action and initiate programs to ensure women are operating on a level playing field.”

“Studies have shown that men recruit 90/10 in favour of men – while women tend to show no gender bias in their recruitment decisions and typically recruit 50/50.”

“It’s my experience that women want to rise to the top on their own merits. What they don’t realise is that this won’t happen without proactive action because the processes and environment do not support them.”

“Then there’s the issue of life balance. My approach has been to turn the question of life balance on its head and encourage everyone in the company male or female, to stop squeezing life around their work – and instead to ‘get a life’ and squeeze work around their life.”

“I’ve instigated a policy that all job interview shortlists must include one woman.”

“I tell staff to work ‘smarter’ not ‘harder’ and to ‘bring the whole person to work’.
Robert Franklin, CEO at Autoliv Australia

“I focus a lot on the career advancement of women from the shop floor upwards, and have put in place processes so that we grow our own talent by developing people internally.”

“We provide everyone with the opportunity to access training and education and to demonstrate their competencies through experience, we’ve found this approach has worked for us.”

“We also have a very strong commitment to providing employees with flexible work conditions that show our support and respect for their work/life balance. I encourage them to find balance and put as much effort into their life outside work as their careers.”

“In terms of work hours, of significant importance to the staff is the early finish on Fridays (2:30pm) to allow families to shop and organise for their weekends. We also offer every employee one rostered day off once a month; 14 weeks’ paid maternity leave; the option of part-time work when returning from maternity leave; access to financial assistance for formal study and study leave; the opportunity to ‘purchase’ additional leave.”

“Essentially you have to keep re-writing the rules.”

Stephen Goodey, CEO at Sara Lee Household & Body Care

“….first thing we did was to find out what aspects of diversity were important to Australians. The issues that emerged strongly for our workforce were flexibility of hours and work/life balance, as well as measures supportive of women, such as advancing career paths and child care.”

“We were conscious from the start that we had to implement strategies within a cost-down environment, so we concentrated wherever possible on things that might not cost a lot of money, but do require attention and focus. It’s often things that don’t cost a lot to implement that can be most important winning credibility for, and commitment to, programs of this type.”

“Probably our most popular reform has been flexible working hours. We’ve also introduced the ability for staff to take extra unpaid leave. We also have a regular playroom for kids, not so much for regular ongoing care, but for emergency care”.

“Of course the advances in technology have been fantastic too – they’ve made a huge difference. All our managers have laptops. Every person in the company has set goals and objectives and as long as they deliver – and they do it – I don’t care how they do it”.

“We have also implemented a number of things around work/life balance, or ‘quality of life’ issues. We have subsidised yoga classes and diet and nutrition classes. Things like organising dry cleaning and car services and little thing that freed up people to work with greater peace of mind were simple to implement, but their cumulative effect was strong.”

“When will we know when we’ve achieved equal opportunity for everyone at work? When you ask women in an organisation if there is anything stopping them from getting to the top and their answer is an emphatic ‘no’. “
“One might think there is no need for equal opportunity initiatives at a school such as ours because a large proportion of staff members are female, but it is precisely because the teaching profession is largely female and has relative low levels of remuneration that I feel it is important to uphold their dignity and ensure equitable treatment.”

“…I’ve had to take risks…such as an on-site establishment of an early child-care centre-Mary Bailey House. The impetus for the centre came when the Board and I realised we had to staunch the flow of resignations by teachers who felt compelled to give up work because of inadequate child care arrangements and/or facilities for their children.”

“….actively pursues job-sharing for teachers. Job sharing was raised as a possible way of teachers meeting both their family and teaching commitments. One of the challenges is helping parents perceive the benefits. Our job sharing initiative began with the preparation of a job-sharing policy offering flexibility to staff. Today we are open-minded when advertising positions and always consider job sharing as an option.”

“The opinions women continue to have of themselves are another challenge. Another challenge that arises is getting women to apply for middle and senior management positions in schools. Many women do not even consider promotions because of the competing pressures of work and family.”

“…men hold 97 per cent of the highest executive positions across the ASX top 200 companies. So it is clear who is making the decisions in those organisations, including who is deciding who joins the senior management team.”

“…there are historical factors at work – women still bear the brunt of child raising responsibilities…the real key to change in my view is the awareness and preparedness of the CEO to address the issue directly.”

“…whenever I attend functions about how to fix the problem of women’s (lack of) participation in senior management I meet and talk with predominantly women who are telling other women about the problems women face … typically there are very few men present, particularly men who have the power to ‘fix’ the problem. Without CEO buy-in and leadership, very little will change.”

“… I assumed women were opting out as a matter of personal choice, and not because the organisation needed to change attitudes and practices to actively support their advancement. Barriers are part of the culture of organisations and do not disappear without intervention.”