

Empowering Women to Thrive at Work in Fiji

Corporate Advice



By Caryn Walsh

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From the left: Michelle Tevita-Singh, First Lady Sarote Konrote and Beverly Seeto at the Fiji Institute of Accountants 2018 Congress at the Shangri-La's Fijian Resort and Spa in Yanuca Island on May 17, 2018. Photo: Lorraine Seeto

Organisations are ever-changing environments. Made up of people, processes, systems, policies and products. Some are more successful than others for many reasons, including focus, vision, employing talented and competent people who want the Company to succeed, innovation and discipline.

And a key success factor is equal treatment and gender representation at all levels. Gender equality. The outcomes are well known.

Companies with a strong track record of gender diversity are 15% more likely to have higher earnings than their peers.

Among all fortune 500 companies, those with the highest representation of women on their boards significantly outperform the others.

Gender equality in organisations in Fiji

Indicators that assess gender equality in Organisations include equal pay for equal work (including superannuation and bonuses), promotional opportunities and career advancement, equal benefits and development options to engage in further study, for example. But in most countries, this does not occur.

2016 research into perceptions of gender equality by the Fiji Women's Forum found 61 per cent of respondents felt that men and women had equal rights in Fiji, while 36% disagreed.

More women than men agreed with the statement (66 per cent women, 56 per cent men).

Source: <http://egov4women.unescapsdd.org/country-overviews/fiji/gender-equality-and-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-priorities-in-fiji>.

To verify these findings, I spoke with 21 of our clients in Fiji and it seems the outcome is not quite so decisive.

More than half I talked to believe gender inequality at work is alive and well.

Only a third believe both genders are treated equally at workplaces in Fiji.

Either way, in most countries we have a long time to wait until gender equality in workplaces is truly addressed.

Research undertaken by weforum.org recently indicated that it will take 80 years for women

around the world to achieve economic equality with men. (Source www.weforum.org)

Gender inequality – impacting business and society overall

Failing to strive for gender equality denies women basic human rights and significantly reduces their economic potential.

Poverty, low salaries for women, economic inequality, disregard of women to contribute significantly to leadership in some countries, a lack of opportunity for women (specifically those living in rural regions) affect not only women, but children, families, villages and society overall.

Women in remote areas, hindered by geographical location, distance to travel to work, looking after children and attending to aging parents are often the most affected. The resources women draw upon are often determined by rules, norms and practices that limit their access to, and control over, resources...women's dependency or lack of autonomy in the household, though not synonymous with income poverty, affects their economic self-sufficiency and decision making capacity.' Source: <http://egov4women.unescapsdd.org/country-overviews/fiji/gender-equality-and-women%E2%80%99s-empowerment-priorities-in-fiji>

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Challenges to gender equality

Internationally there is major commitment, under the United Nation's 17 Global Sustainable Development Goals (also known as transforming the world), to incorporate gender equality as a strategic universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

These goals tackle the root causes of poverty and unite us together to make a positive change for both people and planet. G20 leaders have formally committed to bringing an additional 100 million women into

the workforce by 2025. (<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030.htm>)

Clearly positive steps, but there are challenges.

A recent study by the World Bank in 173 countries discovered that 155 countries still have some form of legal discrimination against women.

This ranges from a lack of property rights, the inability to confer citizenship to children and the need to obtain a man's permission to obtain basic forms of ID, for example.

In some countries, today, women are still not allowed to vote or to drive. The latter can significantly hinder a female to get to work, be paid and ultimately, support her family.

Empowering women at work makes good businesses and economic sense

Diversity—from gender diversity to culture, age, and race—fosters creativity and innovation.

Mighty organisations like PriceWater house Cooper, Disney and L'Oreal are looking to benefit from a diverse and inclusive work environment, as all businesses should.

Men and women will inevitably have different experiences and backgrounds and approach their work and business differently. diversity, challenging each other respectfully and collaborating with people who think differently breeds creativity and often results innovative ideas that push Organisations forward.

Soft skills and emotional intelligence is proving a key competitive advantage for women in business.

A 2016 study published by the global consulting firm Hay Group found that women outperform men in 11 of 12 key emotional intelligence competencies.

These competencies included emotional self-awareness, empathy, conflict management, adaptability, and teamwork—all essential skills for effective leadership

in the workplace.

Source: Hult International Business School.

Good leaders generally mean happy people, which mostly means happy profits.

Empowering women to thrive at work

When clearly, gender inequality, in business, relationships, leadership and communities still thrives and businesses of all sizes have a key role to play in addressing this issue.

As an organisation, we take this seriously and we see our role is to help businesses address this gender inequality that leaves many women floundering and lacking in confidence to thrive at work and in life overall. To meet this challenge, empowering women to thrive at work, a 12-stage program, was borne and is currently being run internationally.

Congratulations Fiji Institute of Bankers for being the first organisation in Fiji to run parts of this Program for its 600 members, recognising the importance of advancing women at all levels.

Empowering women to thrive at Work is not aimed only at women in leadership, but women in all roles. Administration, sales, technology, leadership.

Any role, any level. The philosophy behind this initiative is to help women around the world, thrive.

A 9 stage women's online empowerment Program, Be Unstoppable, is being uploaded for women around the world to access, as I write this column.

Women struggle with common problems and our intention is to help women at all levels in society (not only business), thrive.

Empowering women to thrive at work can be adapted to focus on empowering women in leadership roles, empowering people at work and Organisations can choose 12 or fewer topics to empower their female staff.

The 12 key skills (topics) for women to master at Work

- Leading with Impact as a female boss
- Leading a Top team – Creating and Sustaining High Performance
- Personal and Professional Empowerment as a Woman
- You, the Emotionally Intelligent Woman
- Communicating Assertively and with Confidence
- Having Courageous Conversations – dealing with difficult people and situations
- Increasing resilience in a working environment
- Powerful Presentations – Stand and deliver!
- Negotiating Effectively
- Conflict Resolution – Think Win Win
- Self-care and Work-Life Balance as a Woman
- Goal-Setting: Creating the future you want.

Let's work as businesses in Fiji (and around the globe) to address gender inequality in our organisations, communities and society overall. In line with the United Nation's 17 global goals for sustainable development, by working towards achieving these goals (including gender equality) we set the tone and direction for development and aid world-wide, for the next 15 years.

By regarding genders as equal and achieving the global goals, we will give the world a chance to end poverty and ensure that people's human dignity and rights are respected, regardless of whether they are male or female.

Your organisation has a key role to play.

One topic each month

In future *Fiji Sun* publications, we will feature these topics..

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