



# WOMAN OF INFLUENCE

Learn from 12 of Australia's most inspirational  
business women how to command respect,  
stay driven and get promoted.

Gillian Fox



*“Woman of Influence is the book that I wish I had as a woman starting out in the workforce. It’s a behind the scenes guide to what it takes to succeed as a woman in business. Whether you’re a woman who aspires to leadership, or just a more satisfying career, you must read this book.”*

**Helen Kellie, Chief Content Officer, SBS**

*“Woman of Influence is a must read for every woman wanting to advance their career. It is a frank and inspiring career primer that gets you thinking about what you need to do differently to succeed in business. Gillian’s ability to extract the meaningful insights and stories from these 12 incredible women is testament to her deep understanding of the real challenges and opportunities women face in business today.”*

**Karen James, CEO, Author, Public Speaker**

*“Gillian’s book Woman Of Influence brings us a series of interviews, simply crafted and evocatively presented, providing useful observations about growing as a person, developing one’s career and overcoming those uncertainties that, as Gillian shows here, many of us struggle with. The women in this book are all high performers and successful senior executives. Best of all, this book shows they are real people too, living fulfilling lives.”*

**Rob Lourey, Group General Manager - Human Resources, Navitas Limited**

*Every year I meet many young women who are looking for mentors to help them build their career. This book is as valuable as any mentoring conversation I’ve ever been involved in. I’d say to young professionals - absolutely go and hunt for a mentor, but until you find the right person for you, go and read Woman of Influence today.”*

**Amanda Ianna, Registrar, NSW Registry of Births Deaths & Marriages**

# WOMAN OF INFLUENCE

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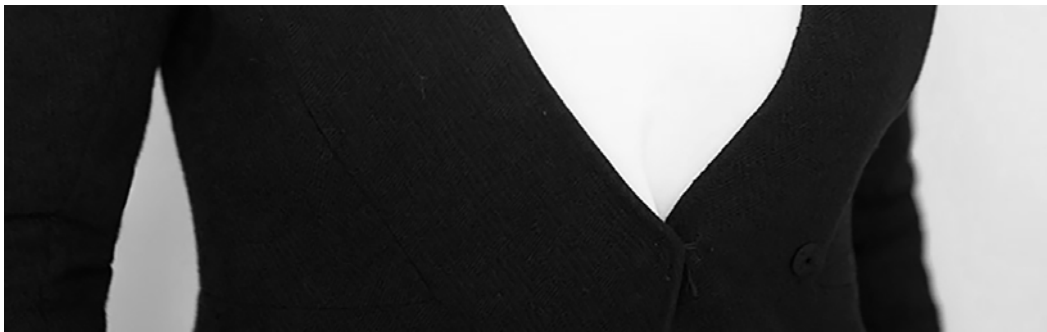
Learn from 12 of Australia's most inspirational business women how to command respect, stay driven and get promoted.

Gillian Fox



## INTRODUCTION

by Gillian Fox, Managing Director,  
Gillian Fox Leadership Development



# INTRODUCTION

Every year I work with hundreds of emerging female leaders helping them to command respect, stay driven and get promoted.

As part of every Women's Career Advancement Program, we feature a female CEO as a guest speaker. I've seen time and time again how inspirational it can be to hear the real story of how they made it to the top.

It can be intimidating to see women like Gail Kelly or Sheryl Sandberg in the press. Their achievements are impressive, but it can seem like they're a galaxy away from the career challenges that you're facing. This is why the real stories from these CEOs are so powerful.

Here are some of the practical insights I think you'll enjoy:

## The power of attitude.

Almost every woman speaks about the importance of the right attitude. Jane Huxley "eats optimism for breakfast" (see page 5), and Dr. Simone Ryan says "Attitude is the be all and end all. It is absolutely everything" (see page 65).

## You can grow your leadership skills.

Tracey Fellows, now CEO of REA Group, talks about how: "People who worked for me early in my career would probably laugh to think I had any natural ability as a leader." (see page 31)

## No one finds it easy to deal with criticism.

When times get tough, Jane Huxley, CEO at Pandora, still needs to write "It's not personal" on a page in front of her (see page 5).

## Imposter syndrome never goes away.

Despite reaching the top of Mizuho Financial Group, Tokyo, Debra Hazelton talks about the days she fears that "I'm soon to be found out as a fraud" (see page 93).

## If you want something, you must ask.

Launa Inman tells the story of how she landed the CEO job at Officeworks, simply by asking for it (see page 17).

I'm sure this advice within will change the way you look at your career and your life. For that, I can only thank the amazing women that we interviewed. In making this incredible project come to life, my thanks go to Jane Huxley, Launa Inman, Tracey Fellows, Janine Allis, Marina Go, Simone Ryan, Amanda Lacaze, Debra Hazelton, Alex Birrell, Helen Trinca, Jodie Fox and Ruth Medd.

Finally, as you get value from a piece of advice within, I'd encourage you to say thanks on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or LinkedIn. We all owe it to these women to recognise their insight, honesty and generosity.

**Gillian Fox**

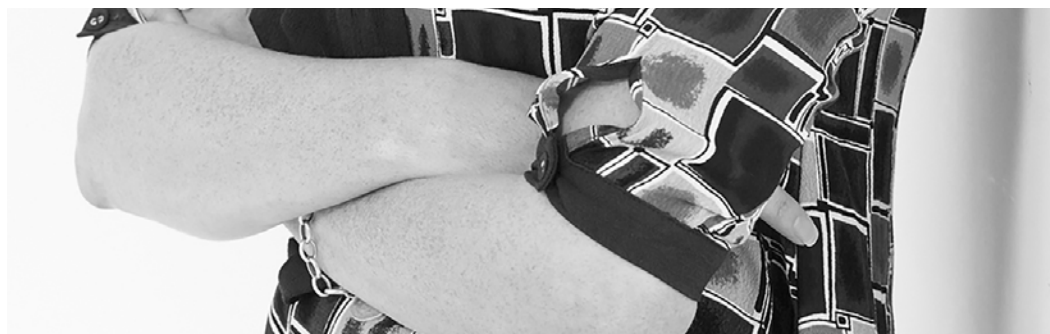
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## FOREWORD

by Angela Priestley, Publisher,  
Women's Agenda





# FOREWORD

I firmly believe story telling is key to inspiring the next generation of female leaders.

Women don't just want to know that great, influential and inspirational careers are possible. We also want to know how other women have made them possible.

We want to hear the honest stories behind how common career barriers have been overcome: how women have balanced their leadership ambitions with children at home; how women have pushed through unconscious (and conscious) bias at work; how women have managed being 'the first' in a certain position; and how women have brought different leadership attributes into what were once (and many cases still are) male-dominated industries and boards.

In this book, we're offered stories for all of the above. Not just ideas and tips for managing leadership careers, but real examples from women who've done it their own way.

The women featured in the following pages have the kind of leadership success we should and do celebrate. They're the people we talk about when looking for notable mentions of those who've done extraordinary things. But we don't only want to celebrate their success; we want to find ways to build on their success. To lift a whole new generation of female leaders to even greater heights, and ultimately achieve gender balanced executive teams, boards, and committees.

This book cuts to the chase and goes straight to the questions women want answered. It covers everything from mentoring, to managing media scrutiny, dealing with setbacks and even how to get more out of social media networks.

Gillian couldn't have picked a better line-up of women to feature, some I've personally had the pleasure of hearing from and interviewing myself for my work on Women's Agenda, all who've been extremely generous and honest in what they've shared. These women remind us that it's ok to encounter career challenges and that it's perfectly normal to experience moments of self-doubt.

What matters is having the right attitude, asking for what you want, and continually working to expand your leadership skills.

Of course, Gillian could very well have been interviewed herself for a book like this, and is often featured in the media giving great advice on how to accelerate a career. As such, she knows the questions to ask, and where to push and probe her subjects on the issues that matter to aspiring leaders. She knows the information women want to capture from the stories of others, and has worked hard to pack as much advice as she can into one book.

What I love about Gillian's work is that she ensures the interviews read like conversations, giving you deep and genuine insight into the stories of others. These are frank and honest conversations that'll make you feel like you're sitting at the same table and sharing a cup of tea with the women featured. It's a chance to dip in and out of the careers of some of the country's most inspirational businesswomen.

As former *Billabong* CEO Launa Inman says on the advice emerging female leaders need to hear today: "The most important thing is working out where you want to be in five and ten years' time. If an article was going to be written about you by a top magazine, how would you want it to sound career-wise, family-wise, philanthropically and so on: how would you want it to read?"

Learn from the stories these 12 women tell. Get the respect you deserve. Stay driven. Achieve that next career goal. And start living today the story you'd want told about your own career in the future.

**Angela Priestley**





1

## JANE HUXLEY

Managing Director Australia  
and New Zealand, Pandora  
Internet Radio



Some people swear by Weetbix, but in the Huxley-Carr household it's all about optimism for breakfast. There are few people as relentlessly positive as Jane Huxley. While retaining her trademark sense of humour, Pandora Radio's Managing Director believes there's nothing more important than owning your own attitude.

A junior staffer at Microsoft when the company's Australian office was the size of a kindergarten class, Jane rose to become Director, Office & Windows, over a 16-year tenure. Jane later moved to senior roles in telecommunications and media, including CEO and Publisher at Fairfax Digital.

*Pandora is a personalised internet radio service established in 2000. Its Music Genome Project analyses listener preferences, allowing individuals to create up to 100 unique 'stations,' each offering a tailored selection of tunes to suit any mood or occasion.*



[au.linkedin.com/in/janehuxley](https://au.linkedin.com/in/janehuxley)



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## Jane, you have a strong background in technology, media and telecommunications. How have you cultivated your career?

Retrospect is a beautiful thing when you're talking about your career.

It wasn't until maybe 15 years in that I was fortunate enough to meet a mentor who said, "Right, mate, we're going to need a plan for the next 10-15 years."

So it wasn't until about halfway in that I started planning my career. You don't come out of school knowing what you're going to do for the next 30 years.

I think people are a little bit fearful of that: "Oh my God, I should know." Even choosing your degree at university or subjects at school, there's this great unspoken assumption that you should know what you're doing.

## What can women learn from your pioneering days at Microsoft?

If you get in at the start of something, you grow with that company. The boats rise with the tide. I started out in a very junior support role and ended up 16 years later in charge of an almost billion-dollar business.

## What are some other advantages they might discover in small, frontier businesses?

In a small business that's growing, you get the opportunity to try a lot of different roles. When I talk to people about their careers now, I say, "You might start out in support, but have a go in marketing, have a go in sales, have a go in business development, have a go in partnerships."

*"Most days, I still don't know what I'm doing. That never really goes away."*

If you're in a company for a long time, try and traverse that entire organisation. That broader experience is one of the things that you can leverage to move industries as you go on in your career.

## Many people would avoid being known as disruptive, but it's your bold calling card – could you please unpack your disruptive vision?

At Microsoft, the vision – the big, hairy, audacious goal – was a computer on every desktop and in every home. We didn't think it was going to be possible. We really didn't. "Gosh, you're crazy. They're \$15,000. Nobody knows how to use them. That's crazy to think that there's going to be one in every home, let alone on desktops where IBM is king." I saw that change.

Now when we leave home, we're wearing 4 computers on our way out the door: Fitbit, phone, smart watch etc.

At Vodafone, we disrupted the landlines. Back then people were like, "Oh no, I need a phone in my house." Now most people don't have a phone in their house unless it's providing broadband. The phone is dead.

At Fairfax, we were disrupting from within: a set of businesses inside a very traditional media company disrupting ourselves.

Now at Pandora, we're here to disrupt through radio. We are a better version of radio. My goal is to be running the largest radio network in Australia by the end of the year.

What stitches those things together is disruption. My mother will tell you that my school reports featured the word 'disruption' a lot. You can create a career out of what you did worst at school.

**A common feature among female 'change agents' is inner certainty and poise. What's the foundation of your self-confidence?**

I have a bizarre confidence. It's the type of confidence that I try to pass on to my children, my girls, now. It does start very early on in the home, where you are validated. It starts with the people that you surround yourself with. It really starts with having a great appetite and a thirst for learning and reading and seeing other people being successful.

The ability to articulate things really quickly, distil a lot of information and share it more broadly; these were things that came to me very early on in school.

*"As I say to my kids in the morning, we eat optimism for breakfast. You get to choose, every day as a human, how you're going to live that day."*

I built confidence on the back of those building blocks. I have a strong belief that it doesn't matter what happens, I can talk my way out of it. Or I can talk about where we're going, how that looks, how that will feel when we get there.

**Many women lack your self-assurance, Jane – even very accomplished women. Are there practical strategies you employed early in your career?**

A lot of that assurance comes from functional skills that I had to learn along

the way: presentation skills, negotiation skills, change management, selling skills. It's a combination of what you learn in a classroom, what you learn in a training environment, what your mentors and coaches teach you, and what you bring from your childhood. All of those things have come together for me and created opportunities.

As I say to my kids in the morning, we eat optimism for breakfast. You get to choose, every day as a human, how you're going to live that day.

You get to be wrong. You get to get out of bed really cranky, running late or whatever it is, and you get to choose again in the day how you're going to respond to the things that are happening around you.

Insecurity is a painful, in some cases debilitating phenomenon. How can less experienced women extinguish their own negative energy?

Women in particular, but a lot of people who lack confidence, are living life inside their own head. I really think that a lot of what we believe is going on in the environment is not happening at all.

It's a mental game that you're playing with yourself that sets you up for failure. When I talk to people about the issues that they're having, they'll articulate the problem and I'll say, "Okay, how much of that did you just make up? How much of that is there actual evidence to support? Let's look at the data."

Confidence is about recognising where the issues really are. We love a little bit of negative self-talk. It's partly lack of confidence, but a lot of the issue is in our heads. Separate the two and stay with the facts where possible.

Jane, can you recommend any specific behaviours or actions that have helped you gain control over your emotional responses in the workplace?

I was in the senior leadership team at Microsoft, unable to separate the personal and the professional. I was taking personally everything that was

being said or done. I was manufacturing things being said about me that weren't true, weren't happening. My CEO at the time matched me with a mentor who taught me how to separate the personal from the professional. That was the turning point.

I had to develop a set of techniques I could call on when I was in a meeting.

*"I'd write on the page in front of me: 'I.N.P.' It's not personal. I would look down at that and repeat in my head like a mantra..."*



You can feel when you're getting emotional. It first manifests in your body: stiffening of the shoulders, lump in the throat, twinge behind the eyes; defensive or aggressive, it comes through your body. I learned to recognise those signals and say: "You're going in the wrong direction, sister. Pull out."

I'd write on the page in front of me: "I.N.P." It's not personal. I would look down at that and repeat in my head like a mantra, "It's not personal. It's not personal. It's not personal." Over time I trained myself to be able to switch mindsets on the fly. It's a powerful thing.

My mentor also said, "When you're coming to work, just before you enter, look up at the top of the building. What does it say? It says Microsoft. The day that it says Huxley is the day that it's personal. If it doesn't say that, it's not about you."

The day we moved into our building, I put a Pandora sticker on the door. Every day, all these years on, as I walk in, I look at the word Pandora and I think, "Today it's about the business." Without doubt, that was the turning point in my career. It's been 25 years since I got that tip. It's good to share it.

### **What do you wish someone had told you at the beginning of your career?**

What I know now that I wish I'd known then is that it's all about mindset. If only I'd had that little gem earlier: about what mindset is, how powerful it is, how to change from one mindset to another, how to respect other people's mindset.

I've learnt that now, but when I look back on 25 years, the power of your mindset is what I've been learning all along.

### **You must have recruited a lot of good leaders over time – what do you look for?**

I've recruited a few bad ones as well! It's hard to get right. The whole process of interviewing and discovery is flawed. You're just seeing a snapshot of somebody's best self. I'm looking for potential. I'm looking for alignment between the heart and the head.

I ask about reactions to a certain event and you really start to see if there's alignment. I'm looking for people who can listen. I'm looking for people who can think.

I quite often start an interview with, "You know, in this day and age of mobile phones, telecommuting, working everywhere and being able to be

connected 24/7, why is there still peak hour? Why is that?” That’s the start of a great conversation. Immediately, the people I’m looking for will say, “Huh, give me a minute.” They start thinking. Where they go after that will tell me that they go to the data or the heart. It’s a way of drawing people out: bizarre questioning that will lead you to a point where you reveal whether or not you’ve got the behaviours that I’m looking for. Another good technique is to ask how they plan Christmas Day. Boy, that reveals a lot about a person!

### **Why do emerging businesswomen need to think very carefully about who’s around them?**

I would not be in this current role, or most of the roles that I’ve been in, had it not been for my network. People underestimate why it’s so critical to start building that network early on in your career. LinkedIn now makes this easy.

### **Where can these women find more value in their network?**

My network helps me in a lot of ways. It helps me find the right people to hire in my company. It has found me jobs, coaches and mentors, plus people that I’ve worked with previously. All of these things exist in some kind of network.

I spent a long time running the Fairfax businesses and the Sydney Morning Herald was one of those. I was addicted to checking the news every day, and I still am, but as I left Fairfax and started to build out my own business with Pandora, I substituted the LinkedIn home page for the Sydney Morning Herald. I found that using LinkedIn as my source of news, views and information – in my very curated collection of people – was feeding me things I needed to know for my business.

### **What specific benefits does your LinkedIn network provide?**

What things should I be reading? What should I know? What should I be learning? What’s coming next? What’s the horizon? Where is technology going? Who are the good people? Where are they moving around? I need that for my professional life. My network is inside of LinkedIn – and I’ll emphasise again, my carefully curated collection of contacts – feeds me the information that I need to know.

You don’t accept anyone who sends you an invitation. You take an interest in people who are going to give you information you need: marketing intelligence, for example.

### What should other women consider when building their LinkedIn connections?

Mutual benefit. I will look at what you've done, what you've said, what you're sharing. I will look at whether or not I know you, who you're connected to, and then I'll make a judgement call on every single connection.

A network is not about numbers; it's about the quality of the people. I protect my network ferociously. You are not in my network to get the people that I know. I'm really protective about that.

### What strategies have you used to develop business relationships with influencers, especially people more senior than yourself?

When you sit down with a potential sponsor, mentor or coach, remember that it should be mutually beneficial. They're going to give you the benefit of their wisdom and insights, but every time I go out coaching or mentoring, I always learn something. I think, 'I didn't know that. That's really interesting.'

That's where the mutual benefits come in, but it starts with the person who's on the receiving end of the sponsorship. What is it that you know that you think somebody else might find interesting or valuable? Every single individual in business does have a little gem that they have found or discovered that is worth something to somebody else. Take some time to think what that might be.

### Is there a specific example of what you think young women could bring to the table in return for a senior leader's sponsorship?

What's becoming very popular now is reverse mentoring. This is where the millennials are being leveraged to mentor and coach the older business generation. It's because technology is moving so fast.

Reverse mentoring is starting to become critical. More traditional companies in particular are looking out at the digital landscape and saying, "Oh my God, what is this?"

The reverse mentoring opportunity is underplayed. It's something that the younger people coming through should absolutely be taking advantage of, but in a way that doesn't inspire fear in the older generation. For instance, "Hey, I've learned an interesting thing about this particular platform that I think might be interesting to you," and start from there. A lot of the lack of change is because older businesspeople are just a little bit scared.

## What do you think a really effective mentor/mentee relationship looks like?

As a mentor, I'm a one-off kind of girl. The philosophy I've developed as a mentor is that my services are firstly for the people in my team. I have a responsibility to mentor them in the business, particularly the leaders. It's a gift with purchase when you come and work at Pandora.

Outside of that, I am no good as somebody that you make a regular meeting with; I don't have that kind of life. People come to me for a one-off. You come because somebody I value or trust in my network referred you, or if you want the plain speaking truth. I'm going to lay it out for you and you might not be ready to hear it.

*"...there aren't more women at the top or at the table because they can't find them. Well, it's true: they've scurried away into the corners because of lack of confidence, fear, or lack of voice."*

It comes from years of experience and failure. I always say to people, "A step forward might be in the wrong direction, but it's not standing still." Keep moving. Keep moving. Keep moving. Step forward. If you keep doing that and you fail half the time, you're still not where you started. So step and fail. Step and win. Get back up.

## What do we need to do to get more women into executive positions?

I struggle with the gender thing. I'm a big believer in meritocracy: the right person for the right job and hiring for a set of behaviours, not skills. They can exist equally in men or women, depending on the role that I'm looking for, but the evidence is clear: women are not breaking through. They are not getting into senior management. They are not getting on boards.

I think, again, you need to work on both sides of the equation. On the heart side: the coaching, mentoring, sharing, shining a light on the fact that yes, sometimes it's shit, it's hard, and shining a light on some of the very real conversations and compromises that we're making.

It's not easy succeeding; there are trade-offs and challenges all along the way, but nobody is special or unique in the challenges. It's incumbent on a lot of us to talk more about what the challenges are, and practical tips on what we did to get through.

On the evidence side: it's the duty on those of us more senior in the industry to challenge the numbers. Why aren't there more women? What are we doing to fill these roles and to bring great women through? A lot of the pushback is that there aren't more women at the top or at the table because they can't find them. Well, it's true: they've scurried away into the corners because of lack of confidence, fear, or lack of voice.

**Women at all levels perceive that they are treated differently to male peers when they're asserting themselves in business. How do you manage the double standards?**

I attended the Women of the Future dinner where political aide Peta Credlin spoke for the first time after the leadership challenge that saw Malcolm Turnbull topple Tony Abbott as prime minister.

She said, "Look, as Chief of Staff, I was labelled bossy boots, pushy, blocking. If it were a man, he would have been called a powerbroker, detail-oriented"

I thought, 'You're absolutely right.' It's these labels that we need to overcome through our action and by shining a light on some of the conversations.

But how much of it is in your head and how much of it is real? Are they really saying that or are you putting a label on yourself? A lot of how we feel we're being perceived is not real. You need come back to the evidence. Did he really say that or did I make it up?

*"I just forgave myself for being a little bit shit at everything. It was liberating. I am happy now with 80%. It's the new 100%."*

To fix something on the outside, you need to start inside. I call it a walk in the hall of mirrors: have a good long look at yourself before you project it out. When it's real, you need a set of skills to draw out what's being said, and to think about whether or not you want to change that aspect of yourself. But most of it is on the inside, and that's within your control to change. That is a mindset change. I choose not to believe that about myself. Addressing perceptions is hard, but it must be done.

**You have kids and a very busy professional life. How do you make that work?**

A couple of years ago, when the kids were a little bit younger, I remember waking up one day and thinking, 'I am sick of feeling bad about everything.'

I'm sick of feeling bad about being a crap mother. I'm sick about being a bad boss. I look in the mirror and think, "God, what happened? I'm an ordinary friend. There are never vegetables." I am sick of feeling guilty about everything.' I decided I was just going to STOP feeling bad. I was going to stop apologising for the things that I'm not very good at. I can almost name the day. It was like this great finger from the sky that said, "Stop feeling bad about yourself." I just forgave myself for being a little bit shit at everything. That was liberating. I am happy now with 80%. It's the new 100%.

### **What would you say to up and comers who look at you and think you have it all?**

I don't want it all ... In my family we were taught about having "an elegant sufficiency" and that's my goal. It was liberating for me to say to my kids, "Mummy's getting on a plane and going to the US next week, and I'm not going to let you make me feel bad or guilty about that. I'll tell you why: you should be so lucky to have a job that you love when you grow up. I love my job and I am not going to feel bad. I love what I do AND I love you. You need to fit in with that." I have decided that this is how I want to show them what a strong role model looks like in our house. I get to have a life as well. We all get a turn. I decided to lean more on my husband, our family and on my leadership team. No one is really getting it right: that was a really liberating realisation for me.

### **Everyone manages the competing interests of work and family differently. Do you think some of the considerations change depending on where you are in your career trajectory?**

I have a very strong view on work and family. I had my first child at 38 and I'd worked hard for a very long time before I met the man that I went on to marry and build a life with. That would not have happened had I not walked the plank in my career. I had my children a little bit later; I think when you do that, you tend to form some pretty strong views on how you want it to unfold.

My husband and I share a parenting philosophy, which is that, right or wrong, when our children are quite small, we can outsource almost everything. You can outsource playing, feeding, drop-offs, play-dates, and cleaning; and we do. When our girls get a bit older, going to high school, our belief is that's when we will be required. It's flipping it on its head a little bit. Our belief is that we need to be there at that stage of their lives. I've still got a few years.

## How do you manage that philosophy from a business perspective?

I started talking about this about 8 years ago with a mentor of mine, when my first child was one. I said, “This is our view. I’m a really bad stay-at-home mum. I hate playing. I’m over mushing everything up. I’m not really enjoying this bit, but I think the later stage is going to be great and I will be able to make a difference.”

He said, “Listen, mate, we need to figure out how to get you that. What you’re articulating to me is that in 7 years’ time, you ... want a portfolio career where you’re able to pick and choose the work you do, be more available to your kids when you want to be and unavailable when you don’t. That’s what you’re asking me for. Let’s figure out how we’re going to get there.”

He helped me develop a view as to what a portfolio career might look like. As a result, seven years ago, I started building the things that I needed to get there. I needed a CEO title. I needed a seat on a not-for-profit board. I needed profit and loss (P&L) responsibility. I needed an academic skill that I could trade on. I needed to start something.

I started collecting the things I was going to need to move forward.

Whatever it is, you need to have a thing out there that you’re working towards. You need to list, then start to collect the skills that you need to get it.

## Finally, looking to the future, how well is the plan working, Jane?

It’s been 7 years since I started on this plan and I’m getting to a point where I’ll be ready. My eldest child is in Year 3, I’ve got a good 3 years to keep going in this direction, but it’s also possible that the person who stays at home could be my husband. If I’m in the job of my life or staring down the barrel of an amazing opportunity, why should it be Mum? It could be Dad. We’re building for him at the same time. The truth be told, I really want it to be me.

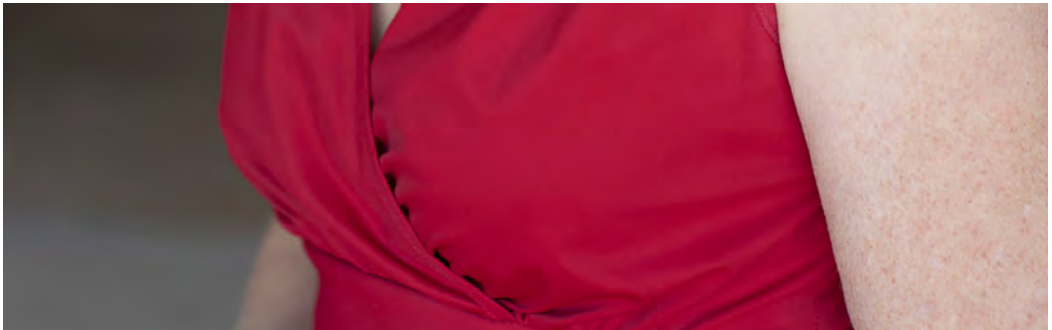
In a few years from now, I would like to be working on some boards, doing some consulting, doing some mentoring and being more available to my children. A few months ago in June, I took my first seat on an ASX listed board, which was the next step. I’m just continuing to work towards what is essentially a philosophical belief about raising our family.



2

**LAUNA INMAN**

Non-Executive Director at  
Commonwealth Bank, Bellamy's, and  
The Alannah and Madeline Foundation





Born and raised in Zimbabwe, Launa Inman has retail in her blood. She has led two of Australia's most recognisable and beloved retail brands: Target and Billabong. Hounded by the media during Billabong's darkest days, Launa helped steer the company to financial recovery and remains one of only a handful of women to have led an S&P/ASX 200 Company.

A chance meeting and some sound advice started Launa's CEO streak. Launa's example shows why women should always be game to ask, whether it's for the pay-rise, the promotion or any other aspect of their development. Now directing her expertise into full-time board work, Launa brings decades of retail experience, strategic acumen and customer focus to a variety of industries, including banking and fashion.

*The Commonwealth Bank is Australia's largest bank; Bellamy's Organics produces organic infant formula and baby food; The Alannah and Madeline Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation established for the care of children who have experienced or witnessed serious violence.*



[au.linkedin.com/in/launainman](https://au.linkedin.com/in/launainman)

### **Launa, what attracted you to retail?**

What I love about retail is that you buy something, you sell it for a little bit more, and you make a profit.

I've worked right across the board, from department stores to specialty stores to big box operations, bottom end, mid-tier. It's really been diverse and I've loved every minute.

### **Moving into executive leadership includes inheriting problems you didn't create, but what can women moving into leadership learn from the situation you walked into at Target?**

When I joined Target, within 3 months they posted a \$32-million-dollar loss. I had only been in the country 3 years. We had just moved to Melbourne for my role and I was horrified because the family had wanted to stay in Sydney. It was a shock.

Target had brought in a very competent CEO who was very marketing focused, whereas I was more focused on the product, the customer and going back to what Target had been famous for in the past: quality and value.

We repositioned the business and within 18 months we had a \$54-million profit. I eventually ended up running the business.

### **What's the enduring lesson in Target's remarkable turnaround?**

Target was a business that had moved away from its core competency, but the thing that I found relatively easy was everyone was passionate about the brand.

People within the business knew what they needed to do. They were very concerned that the business wasn't doing well. They recognised Target had moved away from everything that it stood for. They were really keen to be led back to making it famous again. It was an interesting dynamic.

It was very challenging. There was a lot of external press saying, "Target should be closed down." But we managed to do the turnaround with most of the same people.

### **What can women learn from your approach to communicating your message and vision?**

I really made the effort to talk to people and listen to what they thought the business should be doing to rectify its situation. There was a very clear

message: they felt that the company had deviated from what it was famous for. We'd moved away from children's wear, which was its core competency. Staff spoke passionately about believing this business was fixable if we went back to what we had done in the past.

I think I got a lot of respect by listening. We also did market research to support what staff had said. It came out very clearly that consumers thought the same thing: we were like a wayward child that had lost its way, but if we came back to what we were famous for, they would return.

### **How did gathering those insights from staff and customers influence the outcome?**

We were able to clearly formulate a strategy after those conversations. We made sure we went out to the stores, communicated it and got everyone involved. It became a communication strategy aimed not just at the consumer but all store staff as well.

We came up with the '100% Happy' campaign, which was key. It really worked, because everything we did within the business had to be 100% customer-focused or 100% the right product. Whatever division you were in, it had to be about 100%. We knew that if we could get every part right, in time the customers would come back, which they did.

### **You eventually went to Billabong, another hugely troubled brand at the time you took the reins. Did you anticipate it would so tough when you accepted the role?**

I didn't anticipate Billabong would be so tough. I knew the business was in difficulty, but I underestimated the issues. The decline had been going for some time and was undoubtedly aggravated when private equity came in.

I'd been there 6 weeks when we had to go out to market with a profit downgrade and an equity raising. That wasn't well received and within days, private equity put in another bid. They put one in prior to my arrival, but now they came back with a lower bid.

### **For a newly appointed CEO, what was the hardest part of dealing with private equity so early in your job?**

I was trying to deal with this whole situation: private equity wanting to undertake due diligence while we were simultaneously coming up with a strategy to lead Billabong out of its troubles. It was a really challenging time managing all our stakeholders.

Dealing with private equity prevents you from focusing on the business, but it is your job as CEO because you have a duty to shareholders. If it was in the shareholders' best interests for private equity to buy it and get the best price, you have to do that.

### **What was the turning point?**

Private equity decided not to proceed and left. We then presented our strategy to the fund managers, who realised that there was a lot of merit in what we were saying.

We needed to simplify. A number of styles that were not making any profit but taking up a lot of cost and we closed 163 stores. All these things – which were the right steps to take – had to be done. Then 6 weeks prior to Christmas, two more private equity offers reappeared.

In our critical trading period, we were back to square one, dealing with private equity doing due diligence. They assured us it would be over in 8 weeks; it dragged on for 8 months. At times, I hardly slept. I thought, “We have got to get this business refinanced.” We eventually got a deal across the line. We got it refinanced. It all worked out, but it was a hard journey. It was a torrid time, but the learning was phenomenal.

### **Aside from successfully refinancing, were there any other decisive factors?**

We had a very, very good chairman come in during this transaction period. He was very measured, very focused on making sure we did what was right for the shareholders. You have to keep that in mind all the time. Private equity's job is to get the lowest possible price – that's their day job.

Our option was trying to get the best possible price, so you've got to try and meet somewhere in the middle. You always have to think in terms of what's right for the shareholder, but you also have to run a business.

### **Billabong is an iconic Australian surfing brand; what do you think young female leaders can learn from your commitment to saving it?**

At the time, it was probably my greatest moment: keeping Billabong on the stock market, 5,000 people employed, and giving the shareholders an opportunity to help get back some of their investment. It was a very emotional time, but we did it.

### **There were negative media reports at the time – how can emerging female leaders better manage persistent public scrutiny, particularly when it's gender led?**

I did find the scrutiny challenging. There was this fascination in the media that a woman was running a surfing brand from the very beginning. There was also a belief that it was impossible for someone who didn't surf to run the organisation, which was nonsense.

I said to one reporter, "You're not asking the gentlemen running various department stores whether they wear dresses or perfume, and yet most of their customers are women."

### **And yet you and the company ultimately prevailed, so do you have any thoughts on how other women might approach the media in a similar situation?**

You really have to manage your stakeholders. If you don't speak to the media, they will write what they have to. They have papers to fill. They have columns to fill. If you're not going to talk to them, someone else will. Even if you do talk to them, there's no guarantee that they're going to put forward your views, but at least you're in with a chance.

I'd try to be more open if I had my time again. It's a difficult game with the media. It's very, very hard. You have to be very conscious of your obligations of continuous disclosure and you tread a very fine line.

I had to keep saying to myself. "They have a job to do. They've got to fill a newspaper. They've got to fill a column. I've got a job to do and that's get the business right."

### **How do you maintain focus?**

Initially it did affect me when I picked up the newspaper, but I was so embroiled in trying to get through each day. Everyday things were changing and there was another challenge to deal with – that in the end I got through it. When you're in it, you just keep going; there's no alternative.

If anything my family found it more stressful. My husband would pick up the newspaper every day and see some comment or innuendo. My children were seeing it, and they were getting kind of outraged for me.

### **What would you say to younger women currently working their way up the ladder who have smaller children at home?**

You can have it all, but there's always trade-offs. I've always been a working

mum. I didn't always get to every school function, but fortunately if I didn't, my husband did.

Was I always the perfect mother? No, I wasn't, but my children had the benefits of my working that they would not have had otherwise. It's a trade-off. You've just got to work it out as you go along. Some years it's better than others, don't beat yourself up with guilt.

### **What qualities do you think will help take emerging female leaders to the next level?**

A good leader today has to have a number of attributes. One is that they need to have a manageable ego. I really believe that. The good leaders today are relatively humble and measured. They're not the big personalities that they used to be.

I think the world has changed.

They have to have that common touch – and that's related to ego as well. If you're in a retail operation, those leaders are happy to walk the floors and see what the people are dealing with, and what customers are going through.

Leaders really do have to be smart, and able to clearly articulate a vision of what they want from this organisation – and delegate, because you can't do it all. You have to get people to follow you by constantly repeating that vision. It's got to be 2 or 3 messages and you have to keep going over them again.

I think if you have those 3 qualities to start with, you can learn to be a good leader.

*“There was also a belief that it was impossible for someone who didn't surf to run the organisation, which was nonsense. I said to one reporter, ‘You're not asking the gentlemen running various department stores whether they wear dresses or perfume, and yet most of their customers are women.’”*

### **If you had to isolate the top 3 things you're better at than most people, what would they be?**

I really love the retail industry: I love going into stores and looking at products. I've been passionate about the industry I've been in.

I was always really focused on the customer. Going into the stores was never a hardship because I would see what the consumers were buying and

I would buy a lot of the products myself. When I was at Target, I would buy the white towels, the white crockery and everything. If for any reason it chipped or the towels didn't stand up to severe washing, my whole philosophy was, "If it's not good enough for me, why is it good enough for our customers?" I remember buying a teapot that dripped. I went ballistic. I ended up taking it back and getting 3 in turn, before saying, "They are all dripping. We need to do a recall. It's not good enough." Nothing is more irritating than a dripping teapot.

I believed in the product and I used the product. I have this real fascination with the customer, their shopping habits and what they're looking for. I walk in their footsteps and that's what's made me good.

### **How important is it for executive women to consciously market themselves?**

If I had my time again, I would market myself. I feel that's something I didn't do that well. I am quite reserved and I find it difficult to pick up a telephone and have a conversation with people that I don't know.

I've made speeches, which has helped me with my marketing, but that was as a consequence of my being the MD of Target or Billabong or having won Business Woman of the Year, so I was getting these calls to speak. But did I consciously market myself? No, I didn't.

### **What can younger women learn from those areas in which your networking activities were under- developed?**

When I moved into full-time board roles, I recognised that my network was in some ways limited. I had been so caught up working all the time that I tended to turn down a lot of events where I would meet other co-directors or chairmen. I would go to business functions where I would meet my retail contemporaries, but I wasn't broadening my horizons enough.

Start thinking of the future while you're in your present job. Get out there, go to these functions, meet people and make an effort, because one day you won't be in that role. Most people would have taken a phone call from the MD of Target or Billabong, but I never thought of it like that.

I went on to not-for-profit boards and I'm really glad I did that. Most companies today are very obliging; they allow you to do something philanthropic. I really recommend that. Just choose one cause you're passionate about. It's good for you to grow as an individual and see another side of life, but also to meet different people who are not in your industry.

### **What advice would you give to emerging female leaders who don't yet have that MD title?**

The lesson is you can use your working title and position to benefit the company, but also benefit yourself by meeting other people. You've got to be careful however, that you're not seen to be out there only trying to promote yourself, because that can be annoying to your bosses and co-workers.

Nothing is more disconcerting than someone who's all about their own well-being and what's in it for them, as opposed to what's in it for the organisation. You do have to manage it carefully.

You have to decide what's relevant to you. But you need to go out there, consciously try and work the room and talk to people. Then you need to follow up with them. It might be a very short e-mail or sending an article that might be pertinent to them. If they've been promoted, you could send a text congratulating them.

### **So to what extent do you believe senior female mentors should be an invaluable part of any young woman's career journey?**

A bit like my networking, my mentors were not consciously sought out, but I've had mentors in my life. Initially they were predominantly men, because the retail industry is very male dominated. Most of my bosses were men.

It changed when I came to Australia. Australia has got exceptionally smart women. I ended up joining Chief Executive Women. I started meeting enormously talented women who are doing incredible things, not necessarily in large corporations, but in their own businesses and so on.

Many of them just became my friends – but I have benefited from their guidance, their wisdom, and we're friendly enough that I can seek out their advice at times. Advocates are important too, so having someone who is going to speak out for you. In my time, I did not realise there was a difference. My first job as Managing Director/CEO was Officeworks.

Undoubtedly I had an advocate who was talking to the Group CEO at that time. Only in hindsight I realised that she was the one who was saying, "Have you considered Launa?"

### **The story behind your eventual appointment at Officeworks is one for women to pass down through the ages. Could you tell us what happened?**

I had all the credentials and yet there was strong talk that it would go to one



of 3 men who had all put their hands up. I hadn't because I thought that they would come and ask me. How naive could I have been?

I was on a plane sitting next to a lady I knew who worked in HR elsewhere. She asked if I was applying.

I said, "I think I could do the job. I've been very instrumental in helping Target turn around and I've won Australian Businesswoman of the Year. I really feel I'm ready for it, but no one has tapped me on the shoulder."

*"You have to decide what's relevant to you. But you need to go out there, consciously try and work the room and talk to people. Then you need to follow up with them."*

She said, "Of course they're not going to tap you on the shoulder. It would

be very inconvenient for them to move you out of your role, because you do a great job; you make a lot of money for the organisation. It would be much better if you didn't move. But if you don't tell them you want the job, they're not going to offer it to you."

I said to her, "Well, what do I need to do?"

She said, "When you land, you're going to phone the Group CEO and tell him that you'd like to see him."

I made the call, went in the next morning and eventually he said, "Okay, Launa, what can I do for you?"

I said, "Regarding the Managing Director/CEO role for Officeworks, I would like to be considered." He said, "I wondered when you were going to ask me. The job is yours."

I just couldn't believe it. To this day, I wonder whether they ever would have asked me. Had I not sat next to that lady who encouraged me, I could still be sitting in the merchandise division at Target. That was a turning point in my life and it started with my asking for it.

**Many women will recognise your first response, Launa, waiting for that elusive tap on the shoulder instead of charging in.**

**A lot of women don't ask because it's intimidating, then fume when they're overlooked. How would you advise younger women to get over the terror and just ask?**

What's the worst that could have happened? He could have said, "I'm sorry,

you're not going to get the job."

I've got two daughters. I always say to them, "You need to ask."

The only thing that can happen is the answer could be no, and you don't have it anyway. But they may say yes, and you get what you want. I really believe that.

**Billabong and Wesfarmers both had heavily male-dominated leadership teams when you arrived. You were sometimes the sole female executive – what can you share about how you developed influence and credibility in those circumstances?**

It's been quite lonely at times. You have to learn to adapt and be who you are, and not let it influence you when you feel a little isolated.

Making sure that I delivered the results was really important. It was also about having confidence in myself. And I made sure that I was up to date in sport.

**Was current sports trivia genuinely helpful in dealing with a roomful of men?**

There's always a bit of small talk and often it's sport. I wouldn't necessarily go and watch a game of golf, but I would know enough about the game that if anyone was talking about the US Open, I could contribute.

I made sure that I read the back page of the newspaper, especially regarding the AFL, so I knew how the teams were doing. While you're waiting for a meeting to commence, people would often talk about a rugby game or the tennis or something. I was very conscious of making sure that I knew enough that if I chirped in that they wouldn't look at me as if I had nothing to add.

**That's really smart and simple. Are there any other professional practices you recommend?**

One of the things that emerging leaders don't do enough is read newspapers. I think that everyone should be reading The Economist, The Australian and The Australian Financial Review (AFR). If you read it enough, you build up a history of what's going on and it becomes part of your business knowledge. You need to have a broad perspective of what's happening, not only within Australia but in the world as well.

## **You've extended your board participation to New Zealand – what induced you to stretch yourself even further?**

It's a company called Precinct. They're a commercial property firm on the New Zealand stock market. I like property. I haven't done commercial property, but I've had a lot of experience in property being in retail. Billabong at the time I was there had over 750 stores. Target had over 300. I like and understand property. For me it's very exciting.

## **You have a range of business responsibilities today – what are some of the key benefits of women diversifying their career portfolio?**

I do advisory work with retailers, which I really enjoy, I coach and I'm on 4 boards. It's really enjoyable. I like the different industries that I'm in because when you're running a company, you're in one industry and you're very caught up in one company.

I have this wide perspective, particularly in banking, because that's also a wonderful barometer of what's happening in the country. We get a lot of information as a CBA Board member on spending and mortgages. We receive a lot of interesting economic data, which helps me be a better businessperson and a more able contributor no matter what I do.

*"I always say, 'Ask and if you don't get the answer you want, find out what you need to do so you get the answer that you want long-term.'"*

I also love digital media, I love social media, and one of CBA's real differentiators has been digital technology. For me, that's just fantastic.

## **What do you bring in return as a retailer?**

I'm the voice of the consumer. The CBA Board has got very able bankers, accountants, but we've all got different skills. That's what's fantastic: it's very diverse in gender and skills. We all have a say in everything, but we're very respectful of who has certain skills.

Not that it means that people can't comment on retail, they do, but they will often look to me because that's my passion.

## **How can other women manage that transition from executive management to board roles?**

I had my first board appointment at CBA. They approached me while I

was MD of Target. They wanted a consumer voice, because about 40% of CBA profits come from people who go into branches, get mortgages and so on: Mr. and Mrs. Australia. Having been MD of Target for 7 years, I really understood the customer; they all are very much one and the same. CBA was a great start, a fantastic board position to begin with.

### **Launa, do you have any last thoughts for emerging female leaders?**

The most important thing is working out where you want to be in 5 and 10 years' time. If an article was going to be written about you by a top magazine, how would you want it to sound career-wise, family-wise, philanthropically and so on: how would you want it to read?

Work out where you want to be, then work out the steps that you need to get there and break it up into chunks. Do have a clear vision of what you would like to be. You do need to set yourself small goals.

It might mean moving sideways to get some broader experience. People don't go up vertically. I think it's a bit like a pyramid, but different doors open up when you have different experiences.

Secondly, just ask. I always say, "Ask and if you don't get the answer you want, find out what you need to do so you get the answer that you want long-term."

"Ask": that was my greatest lesson and I've never forgotten that. I'm eternally thankful that I did it.





3

**TRACEY FELLOWS**

CEO of REA Group



Known for disarming honesty and the ability to acknowledge her flaws, Tracey Fellows brings a refreshing vulnerability to senior leadership. Even today, she is unfazed by the idea that she still has plenty of things to learn.

Retaining a slight Canadian twang after 32 years in Australia, Tracey notched up 14 years at IBM after joining the company from university. Bitten by the tech bug, Tracey went on to become Managing Director of Microsoft Australia before heading to Singapore as Vice President for Asia-Pacific. Tracey returned to Australian soil to lead a monumental project for Australia Post: transforming digital and physical mail delivery. Today, Tracey is CEO of REA Group, better known for running the realestate.com.au website.

*realestate.com.au is the number one place for people to come together to explore, research and share their passion for Australian property. Listed on the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX: REA), the Group employs more than 800 people in Australian and international markets.*



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### **Tracey, why do you love working in technology?**

The thing about technology is it's changing so quickly. That becomes what's exciting about the field: you always have to be looking at yourself, reimagining, reinventing. There is a theme of innovation, and that is quite intoxicating.

With Microsoft, competitors that were barely significant when I started became the biggest competitors that the company faced – Google in particular. When I started at Microsoft, Google was a search engine. By the time I left, they were competing with Microsoft on multiple fronts: phone, office, Android versus Windows.

### **You returned from Singapore to become Executive General Manager of Communication Management Services at Australia Post. What was your thinking after building your career at American tech multinationals?**

I joined Australia Post because I was really excited to do something not purely in the technology space. I had the opportunity to work with the Managing Director and Group CEO Ahmed Fahour, whom I really respect. He was a big part of why I joined.

### **Where was the value for you in joining Australia Post precisely at its most challenging time?**

The opportunity was to be part of a company that was going through an enormous transformation – because of the structural decline of letters – that is also such an important part of the fabric of Australian communities.

### **Talented young woman today can expect to be headhunted over the course of their careers; in your experience, are there considerations beyond the salary package?**

It was a big thing when I left IBM and went to Dell Computers for 18 months. I went to the dark side: IBM's biggest competitor. Probably not my best career move, if I'm honest. Having been in one company my whole career, I underestimated the importance of culture. I didn't really gel with the culture at Dell. You learn from good and bad experiences, but I didn't enjoy it.

### **You've built a number of leadership teams. What qualities make a good leader?**

Leadership depends on the point in time for the organisation and the culture of the company. There are people I've worked with in other



organisations who I don't think would be great for REA. It doesn't mean they're not great leaders or great business people, but we have a very distinct culture.

I think it has to be someone who is willing to make an investment in developing people, while being self-aware of their own development needs and opportunities. I think that's very important when you're part of a team; that level of self-awareness, while being committed to developing other people.

### **What do you look for when you're hiring developing talent?**

When I'm hiring I look for people who are accountable. They do what they say they're going to do. Their word is their bond. That's really important: someone who is okay to take accountability, good or bad.

I look for people who have a certain sense of humour, so there has to be some level of personal connection, and I look for someone who wants to be part of a team. I value the power of the team very much.

If someone is absolutely phenomenal at a particular thing, but could never fit into the culture of the organisation or the leadership team, it's not worth it. They have to be part of the team. When you have great teams, it's amazing. Magic happens, everything is easier. When things are going well, it's phenomenal. When things are not going well, the load is shared. Nothing is closer than those teams that survive adversity together with the feeling of, "We did this. We got through this."

### **Beyond cultivating team loyalty, how can female leaders maintain high performance when there is intense pressure?**

As an individual leader, you're under pressure. There is a definitely a point at which I can flip to a leadership style that is not inclusive or not all the things that I aspire to be as a leader. What you need then is two things. You need self-awareness – did you give the people who work with you the type of experience you want? If you didn't, you have to be honest and say, "Okay, now what am I going to do about it?" I've had those moments. Sadly, I've had them plenty of times.

You also need people around who will tell you. You need someone to say, "You know what, Tracey? I didn't like how you showed up. I didn't enjoy the conversation we had. I didn't walk away feeling that I want to give more of myself. I walked away feeling demotivated." You need to have people who are willing to do that. So you need to create an environment of trust where

people can provide honest and open feedback.

That's the receptive environment you have to create. If you say, "You just said that because you haven't delivered on my expectations," forget it. No one is ever opening up to you again.

### **How can women poised for leadership begin thinking about managing combative or confrontational staff?**

I've learnt over my time with difficult people that you have to walk in their shoes, otherwise it's very easy to get judgemental.

The minute my mindset is going to, "I'm right, they're wrong," It's never going to be a good conversation. I know I am not looking after that person. But if I can try and see it from their perspective, 'Why are they doing that? What are they thinking?' Then I can have more empathy for that person.

At my worst, where it really makes me crazy, I imagine they're my son. Because if I look at my son, I love my son, he could do anything, there is nothing but love. So I think, "Okay, if Jake said that to me, how would I respond?" And I try to bring that into the conversation. I know it's not 100% successful, but that's my attempt to bring empathy.

*"At my worst, where it really makes me crazy, I imagine they're my son. Because if I look at my son, I love my son, he could do anything, there is nothing but love. So I think, "Okay, if Jake said that to me, how would I respond?" And I try to bring that into the conversation. I know it's not 100% successful, but that's my attempt to bring empathy."*

In the toughest discussion, you're telling someone they don't have a job here anymore. If you do that from a place of love, they can still walk away with dignity and respect.

### **What can women who don't see themselves as natural leaders learn from your evolution?**

I've worked immensely hard. People who worked for me early in my career would probably laugh to think I had any natural ability as a leader. I've worked on it a lot. It got easier.

### **Is there an attitude you adopted that newly minted female leaders might find helpful?**

It got easier when my Italian mentor said to me, “Tracey, it’s all about love.” They’re words that I still connect with many years later. People don’t want pretty words and pretty pictures; they want to know what’s in your heart. Only then can they follow you.

### **How much do you think it’s about colleagues and subordinates seeing a woman owning her style of leadership and being true to herself?**

Early in my career, I felt I had to wear a corporate face and say things in a very corporate way. That was what I perceived being a manager was about. Now the Tracey you’re talking to is the same Tracey at home sitting on a couch with Ian and Jake, and that’s the same Tracey that I show everyone in the organisation. It got a lot easier. In some ways, I put pressure on myself that wasn’t necessarily there.

### **Many women will recognise that sentiment, Tracey – how did you get beyond that self-inflicted stress?**

I was very fortunate I had a leader who made it very clear: it’s how you bring people together to get the outcomes. Alignment’s the difference, that’s what will make the company great, not your being 10% smarter or your working 20% harder. What that means is you start to understand and see how people perceive you. Are you motivating them, or are you sapping of their energy? Part of that process was quite painful for me, because you see what people say about you in surveys, especially anonymous surveys.

### **What positives can other female leaders take from brutal management assessments – particularly when they have less experience?**

You can’t ignore the results. You have to accept that some of your style isn’t helping bring out the best in people, doesn’t inspire them to come to work, doesn’t excite or energise them. That’s everything you don’t want to be as a leader. You want to be a person who is inspirational when things are going well and when they’re not.

### **Are there any warning signs other women can look for in their own leadership behaviours?**

I’m very driven to jump to the fix, moving very rapidly to getting an outcome, versus letting people feel heard and included, getting different perspectives, then moving to whatever the outcome is.

I'm very outcome motivated, but other people aren't. It's other things that motivate them. You can't engage with them the same way I like to be engaged. We're all different.

**Many successful women speak of champions who are instrumental along the way, particularly when the champion has more faith in their ability than they do. Have you had an experience that boosted your confidence in a lasting way?**

It was correct and amazing that Steve Vamos hired me when I was 3 months' pregnant. Just 4 years later, he was going to Seattle to do a more senior role with Microsoft and said, "Do you want to go for the role of CEO of Australia?" It did give me enough confidence to apply for the role, but confidence is something that I struggle with in my career consistently.

As I've gotten older, I spot the signs. I see sometimes where self-criticism and beating myself up comes from. But I'm not naturally a hugely confident individual in my working life. In my personal life, yes: I think I'm a good wife, a good daughter and a good mother, but in my working life, considerably less so.

**Confidence is something that surfaces a lot in these conversations – what's the importance of surrounding yourself with people believing in your ability?**

Your parents will always tell you you're great. My son and husband think I'm great no matter what I do.

I think everybody has the voices in their head. Women are much more open about it. All the research would say it consistently. My own experience in dealing with other senior women who have worked for me or with me in different roles shows that it's an absolutely constant theme: "One day they're going to find out I'm not as good."

I rarely hear it amongst men. Do I think they don't have moments like that? I'm quite sure they do, but women are more open about it. That Achilles heel has some positive attributes: I am humble, and I think that's appealing for some people.

**You've won some hotly contested roles along the way, Tracey. What do you think ambitious young women can learn from the way you've communicated your value?**

When I've gone for competitive roles, I've tried to be very clear about what it

is I bring to the role, to never stretch and talk about what I don't bring.

The acting CEO at REA prior to me was Peter Tonagh, who is now the CEO of Foxtel. He asked me, "What are the things people would say are good about you? What are the things they would say aren't so good about you?" I told him and he said, "Well, we reference checked. They all say it 100% consistently."

It's very important not to try and 'gild the lily' about the things that aren't so good. I want the employer to know what they're getting. I don't want them to think they're getting something they're not; they have to know what they're buying. Then if they buy it, hopefully that's great because there's no buyer's remorse. So I have always been very honest about my strengths and areas for development.

### **Transparency and integrity are so important, but do you think a young woman can afford to be quite so open about her failings?**

The problem for women is, even in an interview we still feel relatively boastful. You do have to go in over-indexing your strengths, because quite naturally as women we can be hesitant. Leading with things that aren't so strong can be your undoing.

Years ago at Microsoft, I was the only woman working for a leader with quite a big team. I was doing my performance review. It had been a mixed year, not awesome. I thought, 'I really need to make sure I call out the things that did go well.' My boss was highly critical. That's his role. So I made sure I was, very clear on the things that had gone

*"I'm very driven to jump to the fix, moving very rapidly to getting an outcome, versus letting people feel heard and included, getting different perspectives, then moving to whatever the outcome is."*

well in balancing that performance assessment. We finished the session and he said, "Tracey, you are the most self-critical of my direct reports."

That's the most boastful performance review I've ever done in my career. When I told him as much, he looked at me and said, "Really?" In that moment, I thought, 'That's the difference between men and women.' He really called out my self-criticism.

So you don't want to overplay it. The more senior you get people aren't going to bolster you up. You have to have a moment and let the self-critical

voice subside. Without exaggerating, be up front about what's gone well. It's okay to do that.

### **What can other women take from your experience juggling pregnancy with a corporate career?**

When I joined Microsoft, they knew I was 3 months' pregnant. I was in a role for 3 months, had my son and was promoted on maternity leave. I came back to my boss's job after my son was 3 months old and went on to work at Microsoft for 9 years.

### **How do you juggle the demands of business and family life these days?**

On any given week, I hope I'm a good mother, a good wife and a good CEO. I'm not all 3 every day. Some weeks I'm definitely a better CEO than I am a mother, and the reverse is also true.

I try and create boundaries. If I have a heavy workload, I'll get up early. My son doesn't wake up at five, so I can do a chunk before he gets up, versus working late when he wants to see me. On weekends I try very much not to do emails. My son would rarely see me checking the phone. If he does he'll say, "No, Mum, it's my time," and I'll say, "You're right, Jake."

Do you work full-time or part-time when you're a mother, or not at all? That's a very personal decision. I love my job. I love the energy I get from it, so I made that decision. If it means that there are some things at the school that I can't do, there's no point in torturing myself. I made this decision.

### **Now your son is older, what advice do you have for other working mums?**

The other day, I was driving Jake to school, which I don't do very often, and he said, "You have a really tough job, Mum."

I said, "What do you mean, darling?"

"Well, REA want you and they need you. Dad needs you. Nan and Pops (my parents) need you and I need you. That's really tough, Mum."

I thought, "Isn't that a good, wise observation?"

I had a proud mother moment. I said, "It doesn't feel tough most days, Jake, because all those people need me, but I get something from all of those people."

## Are there other people or practices you've found helpful in managing different claims on your time and energy?

Exercise is really important. I know I feel better when I've exercised. It gives me energy. It makes me feel good. It's a good 'turn off' mechanism for me, so I enjoy it. It's a huge part of stress relief. If there's intensity at work and I'm not exercising, that's when I don't sleep well. The intensity at work with exercise won't interrupt my sleep pattern. So I just need a bit of balance, but I've always been that way and I enjoy it.

## Tracey, do you have any other insights for women who are poised for leadership and focused on developing a strong career?

Women who are poised for advancement should be sure they're telling people that leadership's their ambition. Very often women work really hard and they give a lot, but they haven't necessarily told people around them – key decision-makers and in more senior positions – that leadership's what they aspire to.

Men sometimes make decisions about what women's aspirations are, because if you haven't

communicated it, they may reach the conclusion you don't aspire to those senior roles. Giving voice to your aspiration is really important.

The second thing is women supporting each other. If you're an aspiring woman moving into that next leadership position, there is nothing better than helping the women below you and bringing them up, because most of us are operating in workplaces that are still very male dominated. We're the people who are going to change that. So help support other women along the way, whether they are peers or people underneath you.

Madeleine Albright said, "Women who don't help other women, there should be a special place in hell for those people."

I see very little of that, but the more the younger generation helps support each other, the faster we'll see more equality in the workplace.

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4

**JANINE ALLIS**

Founder, Boost Juice Bars





Janine Allis became a household name when she founded Boost Juice in 2000. At the time Janine was a mother of 3 young boys, with no prior business experience. Janine's juice bars transformed Australia's takeaway food retail sector.

Janine's attitude is all can-do: she wants people who soar above the line, change the language and seek solutions. Along with positive energy, Janine believes sacrifice and failure are essential to long-term success. Adding a daughter along the way, today she is Executive Director of Retail Zoo, as well as a 'shark' on TV show Shark Tank Australia, where budding entrepreneurs present ideas and inventions to 5 industry leaders.

*Retail Zoo is the parent company of 3 of Australia's leading food franchises: Boost Juice Bars, Salsa's Fresh Mex and CIBO Espresso.*



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### How important is it for ambitious, would-be entrepreneurs to start early?

I'm an accidental entrepreneur. I wasn't the one that had lemonade stands. All I wanted to do was travel and see the world. It has been a different journey for me than other people, but the challenges have been similar.

### How do you think young women wanting to follow in your footsteps can implement solid strategies for success?

I do see my business life as a journey. You have to plan effectively and you have to make sure you have the right resources. If you're going across the Nullarbor, have you got enough water? You've got to think about those sorts of things on your journey.

### Do you think it's important for young women at the emerging leader level to love what they do?

I have a passion for the business and the journey. Seeing people develop in the business is very exciting. Seeing the consumer's reaction to the product you create is exciting.

### What difficulties can you share with women considering entering your industry?

It's a challenging industry. I'm competitive, I've got ego, I've got all the things that people have, and you want to create something that's special. Now the business is this beast, and you want to make sure that you continue to grow it and you continue to get better every day.

### Do you think women need to put in power hours even at your level to maintain their edge?

No. Now I'm more effective on the oar, steering the ship. I'm making sure I'm showing them what direction to go in. It's time for other people who are far more experienced than me and far better in many ways. It's their turn to come up through the ranks. We've got a fantastic executive team in this business.

### What do you think emerging female leaders can take from your leadership style?

Leadership changes as you evolve through business. I'm respectful, but demanding. If you tell me you're going to deliver something at six o'clock on Tuesday, you should deliver it at six o'clock on Tuesday. I want honesty, transparency and respect. I want people to do what they say they're going to do. I want people to want to be part of a team that wants to be the best team.

## What else do you think they should look for in employees and colleagues?

I look for people who will climb that Everest and do whatever it takes to achieve their goals. Those people make you think, “That’s the one I need to put under my wing,” because that’s the next me.

If you want my role, you’ve got to understand that it takes more than just wanting to get it.

## How much energy should women invest in networking from the outset?

When I started boost I had 3 kids. Starting a business, there wasn’t any time for networking or knowing whether this business was good, bad or indifferent. I had nothing to compare it to because I never spoke to anyone.

## That sounds stressful and isolating – how would you advise the next generation of accidental entrepreneurs to address that if they find themselves operating alone?

When we were about 16 stores, Flight Centre co-founder and BRW Rich 200 member, Geoff Harris came into the business. He was a wealth of experience. My husband has also been a great source to bounce off. But really, that’s been limited. It doesn’t mean that I haven’t picked up the phone and called someone ahead of us in the journey and said, “Look, I’ll buy you a coffee. Can I pick your brains?” They’ve been incredibly open, candid and generous with their information.

*“If you tell me you’re going to deliver something at six o’clock on Tuesday, you should deliver it at six o’clock on Tuesday.”*

## How would you advise emerging female leaders to approach business failures and disappointments along the way?

Many things in the business have not gone to plan and have been challenging. There are times when you rock quietly in the corner, you don’t want to play anymore because it’s all too hard, or because a number of things have gone wrong. I can’t sit down and say, “Here’s the list” – there have been hundreds of disappointments.

Even today, they still happen. Without things going wrong, you can’t be better, because it’s the things that go wrong that are your greatest lessons. It’s with that learning that you make a better business.

### What would you say to women who feel like giving up after one damaging experience?

One of the shames of people starting a business and failing, then never doing it again is that they've got this wealth of knowledge: all the things you shouldn't do. They could take that experience into their next business, but they've given up.

I didn't have a formal education, but I was educated every time I made a bad decision: it always costs money. That was my course. I did a course in hiring the wrong accountant. I did a course in choosing the wrong site. It's those things that go wrong that make a business great.

### We hear the term 'having it all' a lot these days; you've certainly been through it all – do you think women need to prepare themselves for sacrifices along the way?

Sacrifice is the reality. It's no different to someone wanting to be an Olympian. To get there, they have to get up at five o'clock in the morning. They have to eat certain foods. They have to go to bed early. They have to do all these things; they can't go to the pub and party all night. They just can't. If they want to achieve that goal, they have to sacrifice.

It probably doesn't seem like a sacrifice because of their focus and passion on that goal. Business is no different.

You are so limited with time. Every single second of the day is utilised for something to do with the business.

### How do you suggest women go about building alignment within their team?

A really strong communication strategy is critical. It needs to be detailed. I meet with my reports once a week; they meet with theirs once a week. On a bi-monthly basis, a face-to-face event happens, on a bi-yearly basis something else happens, and on a yearly basis something different again happens. It has to be that structured because the diary is king.

People tend to get so busy that the weeks fly by. They're like a hamster on a wheel and they don't achieve or communicate anything, then they get surprised when suddenly it all goes to shit. It's because people haven't been communicating effectively along the journey.

## Many leadership spheres remain male-dominated – why do you think women should be pro- diversity, rather than simply pushing for greater female numbers?

The real power comes from getting men and women together. That's when greatness can happen. It's using both parts of the brain and both emotional traits to create greatness.

There's a lot of private equity businesses and people running superannuation funds that go for businesses with a good balance of men and women. The data says that businesses that have balance are more profitable and it's just good governance. That's a really nice change: the awareness is out there now.

## How can up and coming female leaders help drive the change to more flexible workplaces?

We're the only ones who can give birth. Until that changes, those challenges are still there for us. I don't think that's going to change in the near future.

My husband has an equal part in our family. He does lunches and dinner and I do other things. My sons see that. Now my sons say, "Well, that's the partner I'm going to have, and of course I'm going to support her in the workforce, because that's how it works."

It's really this generation that's smashing it. There are more of us

saying, "You can be whatever you want to be." There are so many exceptional women who are great ambassadors for the young women coming through saying, "Of course I can do that."

*"The real power comes from getting men and women together. That's when greatness can happen. It's using both parts of the brain and both emotional traits to create greatness."*

## As one of those ambassadors, what do you think separates you from people who don't achieve as much?

It wasn't unbelievable confidence in myself; I was naïve. I didn't know how hard it was and the challenges that were coming. The ability to problem solve along the journey helped. I didn't do a business course, but I did a business course called Boost. It has taught me every aspect of the business. I think it was having that curious mind that says: "You know what? I'm going to find a way."

For me, it's about an attitude. I think there are two types of people: I call them VERB (Victim, Entitled, Rescue, Blame) and SOAR (Solutions, Ownership, Accountability, Responsibility).

### Could you please expand on a VERB person?

A VERB is someone who is a victim. We all know them. They say things like: "Poor me," "I can't do anything right". A VERB is an entitled person who says, "I've been in a job 10 years, I deserve a promotion." They are someone who needs to be rescued; they never come to you with solutions. They want you to have the answers. They are the people who play the blame game and aren't honest enough to say, "The problem is me."

### Which leads us to the second type: the SOAR person...

SOAR people communicate and focus on positivity. I call it soaring above the line. These are people who come with solutions, not problems. They take ownership of everything they do. They're accountable and responsible. If you can really SOAR, problems will still be there, but how you deal with them is completely different. Success in life – relationships and everything else – will come to you because you'll attract it.

I think I'm a SOAR person. That's why the journey has unfolded the way it has. Success comes with luck, picking the right partner in life, and a lot of other things, but it's also having that SOAR attitude.

### You'd travelled widely by the time you launched Boost – how did that shape the attitude you have today?

When you're a young, naïve girl travelling the world, you get yourself into all sorts of pickles. I think it's stupidity that gets you into trouble, but emotional intelligence gets you out of it.

You have to be problem solving, because some of those situations can be life threatening. There is sometimes no alternative but to find a way out, be smart, trust your intuition that this is a very dangerous situation and be very clever in the way that you get out.

### How can you apply these life lessons to career building?

Travel was a really good learning curve for me, because business is the same: you get yourself into situations and you do have to find a way out. Failure is not an option.

I spent a couple of years working on David Bowie's boat. You see very rich, famous people: rock stars/movie stars. It was good for a girl from the 'burbs'

of Melbourne to see that they're just people. They are not necessarily better people; it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor.

### How else can those sort of personal experiences and observations be helpful in business?

When I came into business, I was never intimidated dealing with people of any level. People are people. I could either help them with their objective and vice versa or not. I left school at 15.

You find out that everyone's faulty, they make mistakes and you know your business better than they do. You learn as you go.

### What perspective can you offer ambitious young women now you're on the other side of all those years of effort?

I'm 50 this year. As you get older, you do think, "What's important and what's the journey I'm taking?" How can I be a better person? How can my business be better? How can I improve in everything I do?" Your priorities change as you get older.

### Sacrificing time with your children remains a source of anxiety and guilt for many working mums. How did you reconcile those clashing priorities?

It was saying, "Okay, my kids are at school, I'm never going to be the mum that does canteen duty. Never. I'm never going to be the mum that does these things at school and I'm okay with that."

You can try and do everything, but it's bad enough having to do all the things you need to do, let alone putting extra pressure on yourself.

I say to a lot of mums, "Don't feel guilty about that stuff. There are other people who have more bandwidth for that." There's no point I was never guilty about that.

### In practical terms, what strategies helped you run your family alongside a very demanding business schedule? How have you managed?

I've managed poorly! When I started Boost, I had Riley, my third child, who was 7-months old. He was still on the breast. For me, it was setting myself up to succeed. I worked from home for the first two years. My mum has been an enormous help. She couldn't think of anything better than coming to my house every day and looking after my kids, and I couldn't think of anything better than her coming to my house and looking after my kids. I was very, very lucky.

### Can you suggest a sanity check for women who are in the thick of that period right now?

Life is a pendulum. Often, I get it out of whack. Often, I'm travelling all the time; I'm barely seeing the kids and hating myself for it. Other times, I'm spending too much there and the business is suffering.

It's constantly trying to get that balance. I remember one time I was completely out of balance with the kids and I said, "Right, what can I do?"

I read the whole Harry Potter series to them at night. I thought, "Okay, this is going to be my time with them." Hopefully that's embedded in their brains: "You did all this wrong...but at least you did that."

*"Life is a pendulum. Often, I get it out of whack. Often, I'm travelling all the time; I'm barely seeing the kids and hating myself for it. Other times, I'm spending too much there and the business is suffering. It's constantly trying to get that balance."*

I look at my kids now and they're 24, 18 and 17. Then I've got my midlife crisis: she's 7. They are great kids. It's a happy household. Right or wrong, for me it's been a good journey.

### How difficult do you think it is for women to look after themselves while they're split between two fronts?

The early days, between 30 and 40 years old, was a blur. When I turned 40, I thought, "Right, I need to start getting a little bit more balance." That was the era of my fourth child, my daughter, Tahlia. It was the year that I took up yoga, surfing and horse riding. There was no life balance prior – and there's nothing wrong with that. You may not succeed with your business or take it to the heights that it might reach if you don't give everything for it.

### What's the next phase after your personal reboot (or dare we say, re-Boost!)?

I want to be better at whatever I do. The business has a long way to go. It's still on its path, so I'm going to help with that. I'm really excited about some of the businesses that I've invested in with Shark Tank and about growing them, and really excited about having a gorgeous daughter I can actually start to enjoy. She's got me at a different era than the boys. It's just opening up to opportunities and seeing where the path leads.



## What final tips or advice can you offer women still navigating their career at that earlier stage?

Make sure you've got the right husband. If it's not a husband, it's people surrounding you. It's a lot easier if you've got support. Being on the same path is really important. I've seen the support my husband has given me and I couldn't have created or pursued the business otherwise.

Think about your attitude. I spoke about being a VERB or a SOAR. Think about times when you're beaten down, when it's like the moon is in the wrong orbit. Every single phone call is negative and everything that happens is doom and gloom. But you know what? There's another era coming when suddenly everything is okay again. That attitude toward your business and your life will dictate your success.

*"I don't like the word 'try.' If you say, 'I want to try and get there,' that's what you'll get: wanting. But if you say, 'I will achieve this', it is powerful. When you start to change the language, it's interesting how the journey unfolds."*

I don't like the word 'try.' If you say, "I want to try and get there," that's what you'll get: wanting. But if you say, "I will achieve this", it is powerful. When you start to change the language, it's interesting how the journey unfolds.



5

## MARINA GO

General Manager Hearst Bauer Media  
and Chair of Wests Tigers Rugby  
League Club



Marina Go seemingly has no fear. From accepting a senior media appointment at just 23, through to pursuing a board position at a testosterone-fuelled football club, Marina's multi-faceted career is a lesson in stepping up. Chairwoman, general manager, media executive, non-executive director and the mother of two adult sons, she's a sought-after host, panellist and keynote speaker.

*Bauer Media is Australia's leading multi-platform publisher, with a portfolio boasting some of the country's longest selling and most successful brands. As General Manager of the Hearst Bauer brands, Marina has responsibility across iconic titles Harper's Bazaar, ELLE and Cosmopolitan. The West Tigers Club is a member of the National Rugby League.*



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**At just 23-years-old, you became the youngest magazine editor in the country. Running Dolly is a fantasy for many teenage girls, but what was the day-to-day reality?**

When you're thrust into a management position at a very young age with no previous experience it can be a bit daunting. It was a job that I really wanted. When you're a 16-year-old and you think, 'What do I want to be when I grow up?' I wanted to be at Dolly magazine. So to have that opportunity at 23 was just beyond my wildest expectations. But I was there day and night. They couldn't get rid of me. I was there all weekend. I remember leaving the office at 11 o'clock at night, feeling sad I was leaving the office. I'd been there for hours by myself. I just loved it so much.

**What about in the hours prior, how does a very young woman shoulder so much responsibility, command respect and lead?**

I didn't really think too hard about what it meant to be a leader or a manager. I just got on with it. I was used to being in a leadership position to some degree in other aspects of my life. When I was younger I was school captain. When you're used to that you don't stop to think about it. For me, it was just a natural thing and I had a very clear view of what I wanted to do with Dolly because I loved it so much, it was everything to me.

**How do you propose today's hungry young go-getters deal with much more senior and experienced colleagues?**

Well, I learnt from my senior colleagues. I was the most junior editor in the building, and I was very fortunate. When I was a new editor, the caliber of editors in the building was quite extraordinary. I learnt from editors like Nene King, Lisa Wilkinson, Pat Ingram, David Dale and Trevor Kennedy. Richard Walsh was our publisher.

**We hear about 'overnight success' stories, but usually the real story is vastly different. Can anyone really land a job like that without any prior runs on the board?**

I had actually done my cadetship in newspapers before I came to magazines, so I did have training as a journalist. I had experience in a rough and tumble environment because I had been working at the Daily Mirror.

I just got on with learning from the senior editors. I was very fortunate because both Lisa and Pat took me under their wing and in many ways mentored me. Everybody wanted the best from me, which I thought was really fantastic.

### How important is it for women to identify individuals who are positive enablers early in their careers?

Women are criticised for not helping each other, but I was very lucky because I had a group of very senior women who wanted me to do well. Maybe that's why I work like that with my female staff now, because I got that at an early age.

### It sounds like a dream run, Marina – how and why did it end?

I left Dolly because I had my first child. I was pregnant, had a baby, and I made the very difficult decision not to go back to Dolly. When you're the editor of Dolly, you have to enjoy hanging out, going to music festivals and that sort of thing. I just figured I couldn't do that with a baby, realistically, and it would be unfair for the magazine if I were to hold onto that.

### Were there career ramifications that you hadn't anticipated?

In many ways, I put Dolly before myself which was quite naïve. I thought, "I've done such a great job, I'm sure they'll really give me anything I want when I come back." Of course that didn't happen. They put me in a cupboard somewhere.

### Unfortunately, that is a fairly common story among women returning from maternity leave. Many new mothers stay in that cupboard feeling humiliated. What did you do?

I left the organization. Pacific offered me an opportunity to be Editorial Director of their youth division. In many ways, I went to the direct competitor. Girlfriend was at a relatively embryonic stage and I worked with Girlfriend to really increase their circulation and prominence in the market.

### Rejecting your relegation to the cupboard shaped the career you have today. Do you think radical change becomes essential at a certain point?

I was very fortunate. I was offered an opportunity to launch a new magazine, which I was very excited about. That was Australian Good Taste. A food magazine that would only sell through supermarkets was a brand new business model for Australia. I love innovation. I'd never worked in the food category before. I had never launched a magazine and I had never worked with a business model quite like that. Of course I was going to do it.

### What other worthwhile discoveries can young women make when they jump streams, like you did in moving from the teen market to food?

I learnt something about myself when I jumped businesses. I really am

attracted to launching start-ups and innovation. I like to be in on the ground level. I like to re-engineer businesses. Following Australian Good Taste, I've made a career out of that sort of thing. I've always been attracted to roles where something needs to be fixed, changed or created.

When I was asked to be editor of ELLE, it needed to be relaunched and I did that. Going to the digital arena about 8 years ago was the absolute pinnacle at that point in my career, because I'd reached a point where I felt I'd done everything I could possibly want to do in print. I needed to try another channel.

*"I'm not talking about bloody-minded behaviour, we all make mistakes. Understanding when a decision needs to be corrected is also part of leadership."*

When somebody approached me about digital, I immediately thought, 'Here is the thing. I need to do this.' I love it. I love it so much. It's a driver for me.

**Great leadership is complex, but what qualities do you think emerging female leaders should cultivate if they want to be successful in today's climate?**

Great leaders have a very clear vision. If you know what you stand for, you know where the business is heading. Consistency is extremely important in leadership. If you stick to that then I don't think you can go wrong.

I'm not talking about bloody-minded behaviour, we all make mistakes. Understanding when a decision needs to be corrected is also part of leadership. But for most people today, with the uncertainty and the complexity, someone who sets the course is much more important than ever before.

**Can you identify a specific area of communication that's most important?**

A massive factor in leadership is making sure that you take the time to communicate effectively and uniquely with different stakeholder groups. Everybody is different and the blanket approach doesn't work anymore. As long as the messaging is consistent across the group, and everybody feels they're still on the same page regardless of how you've communicated with them, that's still the key.

### What has your role as Chairperson of the Wests Tigers Board brought to your suite of skills?

A lot of people say to me, “How on earth did you end up at Wests Tigers?” But I have a bit of a history with sports governance. I spent six years on the Board of Netball Australia. I really enjoyed that experience; it was a fantastic, collegiate board. It’s one of the best-governed sports in the country.

When I came off the board after my three terms, I was approached about joining another sports board. I had said very clearly to the recruiter, who didn’t tell me the sport, that I was keen on joining another board, but only if it was a male sports board that needed diversity. I couldn’t have hoped for better. I was appointed Chair at the first Board meeting, much to my surprise. I hadn’t expected that, but I take it very seriously.

### How did you approach the role in an environment that’s traditionally been so blokey?

My job at Wests Tigers is a really important position in terms of the Club, but also in terms of my career. It’s the first time I’ve chaired a board, so I did the chairman’s course at the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD).

I also spoke to a number of great chairmen in the sport. I started with Nick Pappas, who is the Chair of South Sydney. He won the premiership in 2014. For me, he is the benchmark of chairmen in the NRL. He’s amazing. He’s offered me great counsel.

### What can other women learn from the strategies you employed to build confidence in that male-dominated arena?

When I became Chair, I did what women do: we make sure that we tick every box and that we feel very, very confident in our ability to do the role. Whereas the guys just get on with it.

I know a lot of male chairmen, and none of them went off and did the chairman’s course or spoke to other chairmen. But it is what women do because I’m determined to do a good job. I take it very seriously. I owe that to the Club and the members: to take it seriously and be the best Chair that I can be for them.

It’s different, but it’s not unlike what I do with Bauer. Our product is our rugby league team. I’ve spent my career dealing with products. I used to be the Editor in Chief of magazines, which is like the captain of the football

team. That's the equation. I'm used to dealing with the equivalent of a football team, day in, day out.

**You've talked about the importance of female leaders having a consistent vision within their organisation – do you think the role at Wests Tigers is consistent with the professional vision you have for yourself?**

One of the attractive parts of the opportunity at Wests Tigers was that the club needed to be rebuilt. The new Board was announced and I came on as Chair at a time when the Club was at one of its lowest points, in terms of its standing in the rugby league world.

My Board is trying to rebuild this club – we established a very strong vision for where we needed to be in 3 years and we're determined to remain on course. Some of the decisions we make will be very difficult for lots of people, but we have to make them, because we're putting the club first. As the Chair, I'm really committed to making sure we stay on course. It's not unlike magazines: from a business point of view, that is my role. I'm not the football manager. I'm not the person who makes the decision as to who's in the team. We are running this business. It's no different to running another business.

**What was the catalyst for your beginning to participate on boards?**

The final year of my MBA was 2002. I joined a group called 'Women with MBAs' and I attended a networking event about two months after I graduated. It happened to be at IAG. I remember it very clearly.

Sam Mostyn was the keynote speaker and she talked about Women on Boards. I was so inspired. She talked about how important it is for women to get on boards, because at the time the representation of women was really low. It was a rallying call.

I immediately took myself off to do the 'Role of the Director' AICD course, which I loved. Realising that I would be part of the group determining the strategic direction of an organisation: that's the bit I really love. You don't know that about yourself until you study it. The thing that I loved about my MBA was that the final year was entirely about strategy.

**Thinking about Sam Mostyn's impact on your choices, do you think our leading women are reaching out to each other enough, particularly when it comes to driving participation in non-traditional spaces?**

I think women are good at reaching out to each other. We're better at it



than a lot of the men I've spoken to. Maybe that's because we've needed to be. People don't bring opportunities to us, so instead we've got to go and find them. But there are a lot of very talented women, whose careers could have progressed further, who haven't reached out to others. Some of that is confidence. It takes a bit of confidence to ring somebody and say, "Look, do you mind having a coffee with me?"

### What can younger women take from your example of having the confidence to make the call?

Confidence is one of the things I've never had an issue with. I've always backed myself – and my instincts – maybe that's why I've been able to do it. The key thing that holds women back is lack of confidence. They really have to put that to one side, back themselves and pick up the phone. People will meet with you. I've never, ever had anyone say to me, "Sorry, I don't have time."

I've met with people like Nick Pappas, who is an extraordinarily accomplished man, and Ann Sherry. She very graciously had lunch with me and we talked about what I would need to do next to progress a board career. I'm very lucky that people have responded to me, but I'm not unique. It's just that I've picked up the phone and made contact.

*"The key thing that holds women back is lack of confidence. They really have to put that to one side, back themselves and pick up the phone. People will meet with you. I've never, ever had anyone say to me, 'Sorry, I don't have time.'"*

### What advice do you have on attitude for women who are just starting down their leadership path?

'Fearless' is a really important word. Somebody asked me recently for a word to describe myself and I said fearless. It also describes how you need to feel in order to call someone up and introduce yourself. Our little fears get into our head as women and we think, "But what if they think this? What if I'm not good enough?" You have to park that, be fearless and front up.

What's going to happen if they brush you off or they say no? You may never see them again. Who cares? Your life goes on. You go onto the next person. Taking rejection is difficult, I understand that; for a lot of people it can be

crippling. If there's anything that women need to work on, it's being fearless. The difference between a really fantastic executive and making the move up to leadership is being fearless.

**Georgina Dent, Associate Editor at popular women's website Mamamia, often refers to the difference you've made to her career – how do you decide which women to support?**

Talent is really important. I needed to find somebody to fill the maternity leave gap for our editor, who was going to have a baby. I am engaged in social media and I was reading things that Georgie was writing; I made a judgement based on her capability. I reached out to her and had that conversation. It still comes down to that: how capable is this person?

I get approached all the time from women who want me to mentor them. I have about 6 women I'm mentoring at any given time. I'm part of the NRL Women Mentoring programme, so I have a formal mentee. The same with Women in Media: I have a formal mentee. Then I have other women who have just said, "Will you help me?" But there are times when my capacity is full.

**What do you think young women eager for mentorship should consider before meeting with a very busy, senior female executive?**

Mentoring only succeeds if the mentee is the person driving the agenda. The mentee needs to come to the meeting and say, "This is what I want out of this." Half the women I mentor don't come prepared for that.

Mentoring is not what I want for them, it's what they want for themselves. I try and get them to tell me what their career aspirations are, then I help them find the steps to get there. I could say, "Just do what I did," but not everybody wants to do what I did. Not everyone wants the career I've had.

I've had someone look at me and say, "I don't want to do that. I don't know how you did all of that." It's not for everybody. I try and work with them on what they want. I think that's the most important thing.

**How do you structure time with your mentee once the relationship gets underway?**

In the first mentoring meeting I say, "I want you to come to the next meeting with your plan: where would you like to be at the end of this year? Where would you like to be in three years? Where would you like to be in five years? I make them come back and define that. Sometimes I have

to help them define it because no one has ever asked them that question before. It can take a few times before we get to where we need to go, then I work with them on, “Okay, these are the steps you need to take.”

For some it isn't about career progression, they need someone to mentor them in helping them deal with strong personalities in the workplace; asking for a pay rise; getting someone to pay for their study. For some it's much more about, “I'm happy where I am right now, but I want to make the most of it.” It depends on what the mentee wants out of it.

### **You've held senior roles while your boys have been growing up. How did you navigate a successful career while raising a young family?**

The most important thing that I have done is prioritise my children. I've never steered away from the fact that I have them. I'd urge women who are mothers to never, ever try and pretend that they're not mothers in the workplace. It just doesn't work and no one is happy. If you work in an environment where you have to do that, then it's clearly not the right place for you. You don't want to make things worse for yourself than they need to be.

### **What decisions can women make to better manage the competing demands of work and home, especially when the kids are younger?**

I've been very honest and open with my managers. I've been very clear about time. It's been important for me to have dinner with my children as often as I can. My youngest is about to finish high school. It's still important we have dinner with him, but not every night. It doesn't matter if I have a lot of events on. My boys are fantastic. One is 21 and the other is 18; they are relatively self-sufficient, so I'm lucky. But I still want to see them. I love spending time with them and they love spending time with me. They know they're the most important thing in my life and that's very important. If they feel secure and happy and they're doing well as people, it enables me to feel less guilty about spending time on my career.

*“I'd urge women who are mothers to never, ever try and pretend that they're not mothers in the workplace. It just doesn't work and no one is happy. If you work in an environment where you have to do that, then it's clearly not the right place for you”*

They're very secure young men and I feel very proud of the people they've become.

**Different organisations still have vastly different cultural responses to pregnancy, maternity leave and ongoing parenting demands. What can today's young working mums – learn from your two vastly different experiences?**

It was harder when I had Jackson; that was my Dolly experience. It wasn't wonderful when I came back having had a baby. I felt like my career was really on the skids. I did feel like I was treated differently, which was why I left the organisation. Again, you've got to have the courage to say, "You know what? This isn't good enough, I'm worth more than this," and that's what I did.

The second time around, which was almost 4 years later, I was Editor-in-Chief of Elle. I was appointed when I was 7-months pregnant. I had to relaunch the magazine and I just couldn't believe they would take me on. They said to me, "You know what, if it's not a problem for you, it's not a problem for us." I had a baby and a toddler and they were just fantastic with me. It was extraordinary. Because of their strong belief in me, I had an even stronger belief in me.

As long as you know what's important in your life – and if you're a mum, your children are important, that's why you've had them – as long as you remain true to that, the career takes care of itself. That's what's happened to me.

**Many emerging leaders struggle to deal with the pressure; When have you been most stressed?**

I was a lot more fiery in my 20s and even into my early 30s. Children have given me perspective. There's stress every single day, I won't pretend there's not: every single day something happens to test me. What I try and do before I respond is take a deep breath, and this little voice inside my head says, "What's the worst thing that can happen?" That puts it into perspective.

That's really how I deal with stress, because I don't have the time to go for a walk around the park or do yoga, which is what other people say. I would love to do a yoga class. I just don't know when I would fit that into my day. That's fine. I think of my children.

**Do you have any little rituals or tricks for relieving stress that other women would be able to adopt?**

If I'm really stressed at the end of the day – and that happens a lot – I go home and I have this beautiful little poodle and I bury my face in his fur. As soon as I do that, everything just stops.

**Wow, you may have hit upon an unusual new business idea there, Marina.**

I just bury my face in his fur and he's so receptive to it. I just give my puppy a hug. But also, when you have children and you walk through the door, they give you a hug. My boys are really wonderfully supportive. If they're at home, they give me a hug, and everything just disappears.

**What do you wish you'd known as a young woman that's become clear to you now you're at the top of the ladder?**

There are different ways of showing strength. Now, at my age, it's okay to show strength by being very Zen. I'm very calm and considered and that's great, but when you're younger, that could be perceived as a sign of weakness rather than strength. It just depends on where you are in your life cycle.

The older you get, the more perspective you have. It's harder when you're in your 20s. I was like a firecracker: nobody would tell me what to do. I was much more confrontational. I think back to some of the conversations I had as a younger woman and I think, "God, how did I get promoted?" I was really quite fiery.

*"If 8 of the 10 decisions you make are right, it's a pretty good outcome. You have to allow yourself to fail."*

**Marina, do you have any other thoughts for an emerging female leader trying to manage her career trajectory?**

The most important advice I was ever given when I was an emerging leader was to back myself. Not only in the decisions that you make. When you back yourself, you have to accept that you might fail along the way. If 8 of the 10 decisions you make are right, it's a pretty good outcome. You have to allow yourself to fail.

Backing yourself also means if a situation doesn't suit you, it's incumbent upon you to go and look for something that does. You owe it to yourself.

I've always backed myself in terms of the next opportunity. Sometimes it's scary. When I first left ACP, the biggest publishing company in the country for magazines, I stepped into a much smaller business. I went from there to a start-up. People said I was completely insane, but I backed myself and I thought, "This is the opportunity that I need in order to do what I want to do with my career and do it more quickly."

### As a career development tool, how can 'backing yourself' help talented young women progress their career?

People have said to me, "Wow, wasn't it lucky that you moved from there to there?" and I say, "No luck involved. I looked at that situation and felt there was a roadblock. It's not going to get me ahead. It won't get me to where I want to be in 5 or 10 years. So I'm going somewhere that will enable that."

If I hadn't gone to Text Media and launched Australian Good Taste, I don't think that I would have had as many leadership career opportunities, because that role resulted in a really successful outcome. People looked at me and thought, "Wow, who is that? That's not just the editor of a teenage magazine." It really catapulted a lot of other things for me.

I still look back at that as the defining moment in my career. Sometimes you need to think outside the square and you've got to be brave enough to work in a smaller business where you might be a bigger fish. That's what I did.

**Chapters 6-12 are not included in this preview**

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