

IT ALL STARTS **AT HOME**



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This is the first time I've really applied my mind to this topic, and it's been an interesting thought journey and more complex than I had anticipated. There are still some very serious areas of equality, such as gender-based violence, which I am in no way qualified to tackle. So instead, I've consolidated my scattered thoughts about my own personal journey and what I've learnt so far.

IT STARTS AT HOME

I can count myself very lucky that from the day that I was born, several sayings were drilled into me (apart from no "whinging, whining or complaining").

1. "There's no such thing as can't, just I don't want to"
2. "You can do anything you set your mind to"
3. "If at first you don't succeed, try, try and try again"

To fundamentally shift society, women, (and anyone for that matter), need to be brought up to believe that they really "can" and importantly, that we are all human - no one is "better" than another. Not all of us are that lucky to have these assurances but we do have the opportunity to afford this to the next generation.

IT CONTINUES WITH YOU

You need to believe in yourself first, before others will. I have been fortunate that in most aspects of my life, I've largely worked with supportive men who see me as equal (and possibly see more potential in myself than I do!). Sure, I acknowledge that there is an unconscious gender bias that rears its head every now and then. We're all guilty of biases as they are based on systems, norms and beliefs that lie deeply engrained in society. It isn't usually deliberate or malicious, just how we have been wired.

Recently in discussion, a colleague referred to someone as a "girl" (she's in her 30's, like myself, and definitely on the wrong side of 12). Once pointed out, a lightbulb clicked. It wasn't meant to be demeaning, it just hadn't been questioned before. Its up to us to point out these nuances, so that we can slowly change these unconscious biases by making them conscious.

LEARNING TO PRIORITISE

One of the most difficult times I had to face was going back to work after my first child. It was a new job, and I struggled to manage my anxiety around how I felt and how I needed to perform at work and at home. I remember once sitting and crying in the parking lot late one afternoon having lost track of time and missing my baby's feed. My hormones were rife and my logic irrational - as truly no one was putting the same level of pressure on me as I was putting on myself.

During this time, our CEO explained to me that in his view, people with children (and particularly woman) are demonstrably able to prioritise better, they are more to the point and focused on delivery because they have so much to juggle. It was the context and reassurance I needed and on reflection, in the 4 years that I have been a mother, have coincided with my biggest career moves yet. Perhaps not a coincidence?



BEING A PART OF THE CLUB

Whilst I support woman-only events or clubs, I also feel that the exclusivity can create just that, exclusion. But isn't that okay? Nonetheless, I'm usually not the first to put my hand up to attend but I do understand the benefits of shared stories and mutual understanding. However, golf is crying out for more female participation... come on, we need more diversity in golf days!

In many industries, there is definitely still an "old boys club". I've come across female senior executives that overcompensate to compete in this 'world', putting on a hard façade to become more "manly" (a stereotype in itself). The reality is that they lose sight of themselves and end up alienating others. I'm not sure they like the person looking back at them in the mirror. We need to stay true to ourselves, no matter how tough that might sometimes be, otherwise we may become part of the problem.

YOU, BE YOU

In closing, I'm a believer in the basics of self-confidence, and pointing out when things don't feel right... making one change in the right direction at a time. As I intimated right in the beginning, this isn't a one-size-fits-all approach, but regardless of circumstances my overwhelming take out is that... it all starts at home.