

Invest in overpriced coffee

When I was at investment bank J.P. Morgan, in 2009, a big piece of research from the UK Human Rights Commission came out looking at gender discrimination in the financial services sector.

It found that women in banking earned 55% less than men, compared to an economy wide gap of 28%. And at managing director level, there were only 11% women and 89% men.

Although at graduate level, the numbers between men and women were about half and half, by the time women reached their early thirties, the attrition rate was huge. Of course, not all women that have kids will want to come back to the work force, but when the majority opt out, and its not the same in other sectors, something is awry.

At face value, the banks response to this appeared sound. Lets up-skill and build the capacity of women. So I was sent on all sorts of elaborate and expensive training courses. Negotiation skills, body language, presentation skills, which I am hopefully using to great effect with you this evening, time management, project management. You name it, we got training on it.

By the end of it my female colleagues and I, kind of looked at each other exhausted.

We had so many skills and yet our situations were still the same!

Then it suddenly dawned on me, that it was no good training women to be even more awesome, if they are still being managed by men who aren't focused on, or committed to, advancing women.

It's a bit like putting icing on top of mud.

And yet there were no plans to train the male managers.

And no plans to introduce policies to ensure the pay discrepancies were addressed and the attrition of women was stymied.

This year, in 2014, the same research was published and found that no improvements had been made.¹

It's a similar story in many other sectors and parts of the world, like Australia. There's a bit of a feeling like lots and therefore enough is being done to make things fairer for women.

And complaining about it makes you sound like a whining nag. And that the real reason you aren't treated as good as the boys is because you aren't as good as them.

¹ <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/our-legal-work/inquiries-and-assessments/inquiry-into-sex-discrimination-in-the-finance-sector>

Have you ever felt that way?

But as women, I believe we should never let sub optimal situations get in our way.

And so I would like to share with you about my own tactical response to this situation, both then and now.

As you heard from the kind intro Rachel gave, I started my career as a mainstream investment banker. I worked in London's banking district for 11 years. Halfway through my time there, I decided to focus my energy on sustainability. I helped setup J.P. Morgan's environmental and social risk management office. I went back to university and did a Masters in Sustainability at Cambridge.

At the start of last year I decided to move back to Perth, where there are no investment banks. And in Australia there wasn't even a superannuation fund that didn't invest in fossil fuels. So I got together with a group of people and decided to set one up. It's called Future Super. We launched 5 weeks ago and have been overwhelmed with the amount of people switching to us.

I'm also doing a PhD looking at solar energy battery storage for apartments, and modular housing. We're installing batteries in people's houses to store excess solar power during the day, and use the battery energy at night. And I'm on the advisory board for a research

institute, Carbon Tracker, which measures how much carbon dioxide is listed on stock exchanges around the world.

And while that may sound like an impressive CV to you, I would suggest you all have the potential to be standing up here and speaking about your various endeavours and wowing a crowd.

I am no different to any of you. We all have potential and the only difference between us is whether you unlock it or not.

In studies of academic performance between boys and girls, where girls were told they weren't as good at science as boys, they weren't. Where the girls weren't told anything, they performed exactly the same.

To realise your potential I believe mentors and advocates are critical. We need at least one bloke and one shiela. Have coffee dates with them, your shout.

For people like Hilary Clinton and Cheryl Sandberg, who's diaries are a bit full at the moment, I watch them on TED.

I speak with my mentors regularly and share with them what I am up to, and they give me guidance on how to navigate through the biased jungle. They believe in me even if I am in doubt.

These mentors have been critical to breaking through barriers and also highlighting opportunities and advocating my success. Peter Newman is my boss and my biggest fan. Maria Atkinson in Sydney is always looking out for opportunities for me. And my lovely mum, who is here this evening, has always been a huge support and helped me so much.

I am really grateful for what my advocates have done for me. And they love being able to contribute. So if you are concerned that no one will be interested in you, think again.

As soon as you start to take yourself seriously, others will too.

Yes, get yourself trained. Always expand your skills. And, start asking your manager what more they can do to advance women. Be brave and hold them to it.

Finally, I would like to leave you with a question and request:

Who could be your advocate and mentor, and when will you call them and invite them for an over priced flat white?

Thank you.