

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2024

*"Imagine a gender equal world. A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that's diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated. Together we can forge women's equality. Collectively we can all **#InspireInclusion**.*

*Celebrate women's achievement. Raise awareness about discrimination. Take action to drive gender parity.*

*IWD belongs to everyone, everywhere. Inclusion means all IWD action is valid."*





## MIN YANG

*Chief Operating Officer, ExpertsDirect  
Sydney*

### **International Women's Day**

celebrates the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women.

The day also marks a call to action for accelerating progress towards gender parity.

This year I would like to harness the opportunity ExpertsDirect has with its International Women's Day publication to offer solidarity, insights, and encouragement to young women in the legal and/or corporate space.

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Our interviews with esteemed women in the Australasian legal industry explore the shared experiences and helpful advice for the young generation of women.

Included are insights providing informed snapshots of some of the main aims and trends of International Women's Day and women's participation in the legal sector today, as well as changes both underway and yet to be realised in achieving gender parity.

In 1984, Australia became the first country to release a Women's Budget Statement — a budgeting analysis focused specifically on the impact of the federal budget on women and girls. Australia has come a long way since, and so have other countries, many of whom followed our lead in releasing a women-focused budget report.

Research this year, however, shows that globally we may yet still be failing to fully achieve gender parity goals. I am honoured to be releasing this publication with the support of tenacious, visionary women who bring us closer to these goals through their successes and generosity.

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# International Women's Day 2024: *Agendas and Aims*



International Women's Day (IWD) is a worldwide celebration of female accomplishment across social, economic, cultural, and political realms, as well as an occasion to acknowledge the action yet to be taken to achieve gender parity.

The day endeavours to raise awareness about and catalyse systemic changes within organisations and social planning at large to address issues such as gender bias and discrimination that perpetuate substantial barriers against women's equal participation socially and economically.

There are two main themes this International Women's Day.

The first is the United Nations' call to action [\*\*Invest in women: Accelerate progress\*\*](#). [The theme highlights the inextricability of gender parity outcomes from the goals of increasing global prosperity and resolving the challenges of climate change.](#)

[The UN this year emphasises a US\\$360 billion annual deficit in gender-equity measures by 2030 and its findings in its own report "Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023"](#) that gender equality is in fact becoming an increasingly distant goal.

As a response, the UN urges increased spending directly focused on improving the human rights of women as a means also of tackling seemingly unrelated global economic and social disasters. It asserts that spending on women's rights will not only achieve the worthy cause of improving the quality of life of women globally but also promote a social shift towards a care society (one focused on global human rights) and environmental sustainability.

The UN subsequently urges for an increase in spending in the following areas:

- Gender Equality, focusing on human rights abuses against women;
- Poverty Elimination, in light of the additional 75 million people now living below the poverty line since 2020 and the 342 million women and girls expected to be living in poverty by 2030;
- Public Spending, which is expected to be cut by 75% of countries as a result of conflict and due to affect women's essential services;
- Green Economy and Care Society Spending; and
- Spending on Feminist Organisations.

The second official theme for International Women's Day 2024 is [\*Inspire Inclusion\*](#), promoted by the group behind the now globally popular [\*\*International Women's Day site\*\*](#).

The group this year upholds the message that truly embracing women's empowerment and inclusion requires a commitment to bolstering the diversity of people in leadership positions and other decision-making capacities. The provision of equitable access to education, employment opportunities, and professional support therefore plays a crucial role in advancing the aims of IWD – knowledge, guidance, and resources are critical to building the courage and know-how that enable every person to thrive to their fullest potential and overcome obstacles.

The group asserts that, as an individual, you can promote diversity in your workplace and other social spaces by recognising, appreciating, and actively promoting the inclusion of women, girls, and people of all genders, backgrounds, and life experiences, particularly those who face marginalisation or underrepresentation.

International Women's Day supports a variety of initiatives and strategies focused around forging inclusive professional cultures, where women's careers thrive and their achievements are celebrated. These include:

- Increasing awareness of issues affecting women's equality;
- Standing up against inequality while striving for positive change;
- Recognising and praising significant advancements of women;
- Commending women's successes and triumphs; and
- Active lobbying for women's equality.





## AMANDA LEES

Partner, King & Wood Mallesons  
Singapore

# WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What aspects of your role bring you the most joy?**

I am a dispute resolution partner based in Singapore. As well as counsel and advisory work for clients, I also sit as arbitrator. There are three aspects of my role that bring me the most joy: working with people; satisfying my curiosity; and the intellectual challenge.

Law is a people business. I enjoy solving problems as part of a team with my colleagues and those who instruct me as our clients.

As arbitrator, I enjoy working with both sides to get a consensus on the procedure for the arbitration. I also enjoy the business development side of my role which is all about establishing and maintaining relationships.

I love that each dispute is different, and this satisfies my curiosity about how the world works. I enjoy learning about new industries and how a client works within that industry. It is important to not make assumptions, ask a lot of questions (even if sometimes you

may think it makes you look stupid) and listen carefully to the responses.

Finally, disputes work is intellectually rigorous. You need to be able to organise the facts, analyse the law, apply the law to the facts and come up with winning strategies. I love reading cases and getting stuck into the legal side of a matter. When acting as arbitrator, there is nothing better than having two excellent counsel teams present their arguments to you and having to think deeply about how to decide the dispute.

### **How do you balance your professional endeavours, personal life, and passions?**

You can't expect to do everything perfectly at the same time, so be kind to yourself when one part of your life is out of balance. Also, what is the right balance between professional endeavours, personal life and passions will change over time and be different for everyone.

It is easy to be consumed by work. I try to keep weekends free as much as possible even if it means working longer hours on a Friday. I found that having a family made me take time out – small children demand attention. When my children were younger and got up early I spent time with them in the morning rather than the evening. Now my three children are teenagers, they need me in different ways, and this allows me to do more activities on the weekend.

Look at how your professional endeavours, personal life and passions intersect. I try to combine activities like exercising with friends. I love travelling so plan holidays with my family to new destinations or try to add on a day of sightseeing (at my cost) to a work trip.

### Reflecting, what advice would you give to your 25-year-old self?

One of my former bosses always said a legal career “is not a sprint but a marathon” and this is very true. You need to have the inner reserves and external support to be able to thrive and sustain a career over many years.

Key to a long career in the law is:

- **Being helpful:** ultimately our job is to help our clients (and sometimes this means telling them not to do things). You will go a long way if you consider how to best help others.
- **Enjoying your job and the people you work with:** you spend many hours at work in a legal career, so you need to enjoy it. If you don't enjoy

your job, reflect on what it is that is not right and change it. This may mean changing who you work for or your role or your practice focus.

- **Knowing when to ask for help:** better to ask someone if you don't understand a task than waste time. Working crazy hours for weeks on end is not healthy so you need to be able to ask for extra help.
- **Taking holidays and time out:** you need to be careful of burn-out. Take advantage of quieter times and go home early. None of us are irreplaceable or indispensable – we can have holidays!
- **Choosing a supportive life partner:** this is essential. I am very lucky to have had a very supportive partner who gave up his own career to move countries and support mine and has listened to me talk about work more than anyone deserves. If you don't have a life partner, get support from other family or friends.
- **Taking opportunities to stand out:** this can be a range of things and should fit your personality, but it is important to distinguish yourself from all the other really good lawyers. Develop a niche expertise, get involved in industry associations, volunteer to speak and organise events or write publications.
- **Taking calculated risks:** have a long-term strategy for your career (which may evolve) and move firms or jurisdictions if the experience you will gain will be valuable and it will help you achieve the goals you have set.

### **What diversity and inclusion efforts at your firm fill you with pride?**

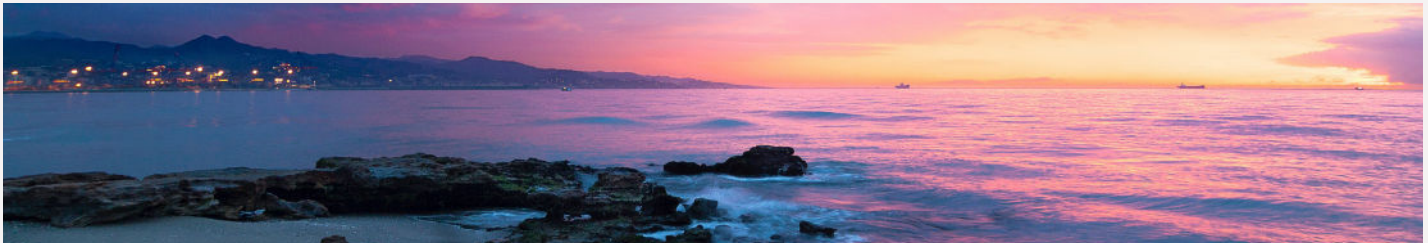
One of the reasons I chose to join King & Wood Mallesons is that their commitment to diversity and inclusion is tangible. There are many impressive women partners in the leadership of King & Wood Mallesons, including our global Chief Executive Sue Kench and our Chief Executive Partner, Australia Renae Lattey, and so many other inspiring women in the partnership. I am a member of the firm's gender working group whose purpose is to increase the number of women in the partnership. We have undertaken multiple initiatives, and I am proud to have been involved in establishing a new leadership program for mid-level women senior associates and senior professional staff which is now in its second year.

King & Wood Mallesons has a real commitment to social change, which can be seen by our Standing Strong & Tall Together strategy by which we work in partnership with community-led organisations, emerging leaders and respected advocates to further strengthen communities through

strategic legal, justice & advisory projects, holistic pathways programs and targeted grants.

One of our programs is Waiwa Mudena which is a flexible, immersive work placement and professional skills development program, co-designed with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander law students. We were proud to host two Waiwa Mudena students in Singapore for two weeks last year. Everyone in the Singapore office got involved in showing them the sights and sounds of Singapore, including the Supreme Court and Maxwell Chambers, and what legal practice is like in Singapore.

At the moment we have two student interns from the Law and Management Program at Temasek Polytechnic spending time with us and our clients in Singapore to learn more about careers in the law as part of a six month long programme called KWM School of Opportunity®.







**ANGELINA GOMEZ**

*Counsel, Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan  
Sydney*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **Share your leadership style and how you “lead” others. Is it different from your male counterparts?**

My preferred style is one of collaboration. It is important to me that everyone participates in coming up with the strategy of how we tackle a particular case – as it encourages open communication and buy-in from team members which in turn creates a positive and dynamic work environment. From what I have seen, this style of leadership is now commonplace both between my male and female counterparts – which I think is because the old dictatorial style is no longer à la mode (and frankly, is an unproductive way to lead a team).

### **How can one be powerful without alienating people or upsetting them?**

Collaboration – and recognising people's work, giving them credit for their ideas especially when they are better than yours. Encouraging

free and frank contribution, including creating a space for the questioning of decisions, is important to ensure that people feel heard and part of the team. It is also important to explain your decisions (especially to people who have a different view) so that you bring your team with you, and they do not feel alienated.

### **What advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

Work hard and take care of the people that come after you. Helping out your colleagues and mentoring lawyers who are junior to you are important when making your way up the ladder to being a leader (and to continue doing when you are a leader). It is also important in my view to be a thought leader in your area of expertise. To achieve this, my suggestion would be to participate in training and educational courses, to run seminars and to prepare contributions to legal publications.



**Angelina Gomez**, Counsel, Quinn Emanuel Urquhart & Sullivan, Sydney

### **How have you built confidence and/or resilience over the course of your career?**

Small wins lead to bigger wins. Do whatever task you are given well (no matter how small) and the confidence you gain from doing a job well will build your confidence for the next task. And if you fall short, that should not bring you down – it is important to ask why and learn from it – everyone makes mistakes, but what you do next, how you learn from it will build resilience and define the type of lawyer you will be.

### **How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

It is absolutely crucial that you have a balance between your career and your personal life. Carve out some time for yourself, for your passions, your hobbies – maybe swim or go to the gym in the morning before work and make a point of spending time with your family in the evenings, and over the weekend, catch up with friends or work on something other than law. Also, it is important to take holidays especially after an intense work project or trial – somewhere you can unwind. It is important to have a life beyond law – and it will make you a much better lawyer.



**CHRISTINE TRAN**

*Partner, Herbert Smith Freehills  
Sydney*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

First and foremost, you have to know yourself well. The whole of it. The good, the bad, the ugly. By knowing yourself well, you can build and grow your confidence from an internal source. Resilience will naturally follow, and that resilience is crucial in dealing with the inevitable challenges that will come. Knowing oneself is not an easy feat. It means continually assessing yourself with objectivity and with accuracy. It means fighting against your ego. It means having to face unpleasant truths. But I genuinely believe that if you want to lead with confidence and with respect, the starting place is you.

### **Have you ever felt imposter syndrome, and if so, how did you navigate your way through it?**

No, I have never felt imposter syndrome. Although there have been times when I have felt less confident or uncomfortable or unsure of myself or my place, these feelings were

more to do with feeling out of place, because I'm an outsider; rather than feeling like an "imposter". I am very grounded in who I am, my strengths and my weaknesses, my virtues and my vices, and because of that I know what I can and what I do bring to the table. My mindset is always "I have fought for, and deserve a seat at the table".

### **How have you built confidence and/or resilience over the course of your career?**

There are three key things. The first is knowing yourself well, which I've addressed above. The second is being passionate in developing your skills and your craft. This means having a learning mindset, and being willing to be stretched and challenged, and also being willing to work hard and put in the hours necessary to become an expert in your field. The third is being in an environment that supports you and your growth. This means being in a place that is willing to invest in you and being surrounded by a team that believes in your potential.



**Christine Tran**, Partner, Herbert Smith Freehills, Sydney

**How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

I balance these things very poorly! I try to find balance by distinguishing between what is important from what is urgent, but that's about it. I don't know if there is such a thing as balance, certainly not over the course of a week or a month. But certainly over the course of a sufficiently long time frame, I hope that I can look back and think that, overall, balance was achieved. I'm a firm believer that you can have it all, just not all at once.

**What advice would you give your 25-year-old self?**

Don't sweat the small stuff. And take care of your mental health. The profession has come a long way in the last 15 years, and certainly the focus on mental health was practically non-existent when I was 25.



**DIANNA SHAO**

*Counsel, Clifford Chance  
Hong Kong*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What is your favourite aspect of your role?**

I enjoy the work I do and the people I work with. I enjoy the challenge of helping clients navigate difficult disputes that have a meaningful impact on their business. I've been lucky to have been able to do this work with a group of bright, creative and supportive people.

### **Have you ever felt imposter syndrome, and if so, how did you navigate your way through it?**

It's normal to have self-doubt. There have been times when I've asked myself, should I do it? Can I do it? Why me? Or have been afraid of failing and what others might think. But then I take a step back and ask myself, why not me? It's OK to feel uncomfortable and challenged. It's also OK to fail. If you get an opportunity, put your mind to it and give it your best shot. Don't be afraid and enjoy the ride!

### **What advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

Be brave and back yourself. Embrace the chances you are given and go for it.

### **How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

I recently became a mother and juggling family life and a career is challenging and exhausting, but also rewarding. "Balance" means different things to different people but it is important to pace yourself. There will be times when you need to focus more on family (or passions) and that's OK. Don't be daunted, consider all your options and look for an environment where you can discuss these types of issues openly. Find mentors who will support and guide you.

### **What advice would you give your 25-year-old self?**

Work hard, be curious, have fun and enjoy the ride!



**JAN SADDLER**

*Managing Director, JGA Saddler  
Brisbane*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What is your favourite aspect of your role?**

There are two aspects of my role that I really love. First, working with younger practitioners and hopefully, supporting them in the growth of their legal careers. Secondly, I love being a class actions lawyer. It allows me to help at lot of people in a way that they could never be able to do so themselves. The law is often complex, deals with a wide range of facts and legal areas, and is very dynamic.

### **Share your leadership style and how you “lead” others. Is it different from your male counterparts?**

My leadership style is collaborative but at the same time recognising that as the managing director of my firm, sometimes a tough decision needs to be made and ultimately that will be made by me. I am also a great believer in leading by example and agree with the adage that the ‘fish rots from its head’. Frankly, I don’t look too much at the leadership style of others. Whilst I might pick up good behaviours or styles from time to time I’m not really a student

of the leadership style of others. I’m a great believer in running your own race.

### **How can one be powerful without alienating people or upsetting them?**

The sense of being powerful in my view really stems from the confidence you feel in the situation you are in – so I think a lot more about being confident in a situation rather than powerful. I am quite a direct person and so I will say very clearly what my position (if the discussion concerns my business) or my client’s position is. When I was younger I would sometimes practise those conversations before having them. If I sense an uneasiness about my directness, I will add to the discussion that for the business relationship to work as best as possible or to maximise the opportunity for resolution in a client situation, that in my experience directness, clarity, and openness leads to the greatest prospect of progress. That usually opens up the discussion but not always. Then I at least know I have done my best to move things forward.

### **What advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

The best leaders I have worked with and what I have tried to always do is to play to my strengths. And for what I am not so good at, I either try to improve my skills in those areas or bring into my team people whose skills complement mine and the skills of other team members. The other piece of advice I would give is to be honest about your strength and weaknesses. I've seen too many people in leadership positions either try to do and be everything or have little or no insight into their skills and abilities, and that is very disengaging and frustrating for their colleagues, clients, and other stakeholders.

### **Have you ever felt imposter syndrome, and if so, how did you navigate your way through it?**

Most definitely. When I was a junior solicitor for about the first 2 or 3 years, anytime the partner I worked for would ask to speak to me, I would think that something had gone wrong with my degree or my admission and they were about to tell me I wasn't a solicitor after all. I can't remember doing anything in particular to get through it; I think what happened was I started to get busier and busier with my work and more confident in my role and over time the fear fell away. It took a lot longer for me to not have the dream that I had failed to sit for an exam.

### **How have you built confidence and/or resilience over the course of your career?**

My career as a litigation lawyer has been a very long 34 years plus a few years as an articled clerk so I've had lots of opportunities to build confidence and resilience and I am still doing it.

I think my resilience has been built on the back of recognising the need for a break to my career at different times. It was challenging to schedule these breaks and there was some fear also around taking these breaks but I do think it has helped enormously in me maintaining my love for my work. I was fortunate to take some time out after about 4 years of practice to study overseas, I took a leave of absence for 6 months when I was around 37 after a challenging time during my career and personal life and I also took a break of a few months between roles in my mid-40s. They were the perfect way for me to re-group and focus on me for a short time. I came away from these breaks happier, stronger and more confident.

# Women in the Law



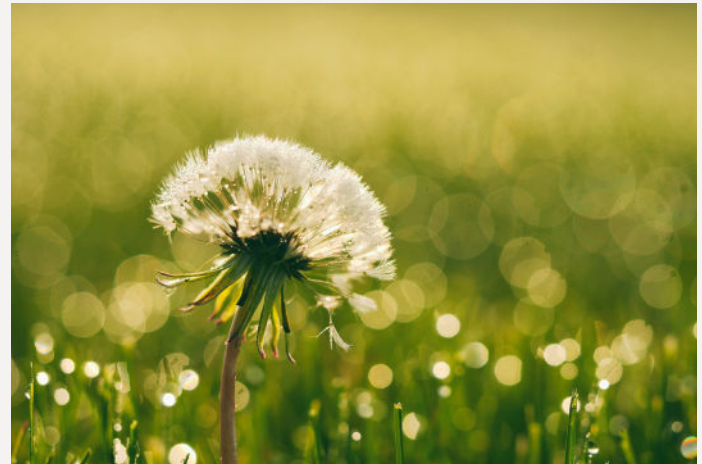
## Positive Changes

Recent female advancement in the legal sphere was reflected in the 2022 National Profile of Solicitors, which foresaw the continuation of women outnumbering men in private legal practice since the first emergence of the trend in 2018, cementing a female majority across all sectors of legal practice excluding the Bar.

The number of female solicitors has surged by 86% since 2011, when the gender split was 46% to 54%. The profession is now comprised of 55% women, an increase from 53% in 2020, which additionally marked the first time women comprised the majority of solicitors in every state and territory. In 2023, female solicitors outnumbered male solicitors for the sixth year in a row.

The number of women in private practice has also increased by 2 percent, rising from 48% to 50%. This marked the first instance of equal representation in the sector, with a clear majority projected for 2024. Now, over a third of partners and principals in private practice are women (35%), even though women are still significantly under-represented in leadership roles in the law on the whole.

The Law Council of Australia's Equitable Briefing Report for 2022-2023 furthermore reports that 31% of briefs reported were received by women barristers while 69% were received by men barristers. The 2022 rate marks an 11% increase in briefing rate to women since the start of the Law Council's Equitable Briefing Policy in 2011.







## What Remains to be Addressed

New research from the University of Sydney Business School and Australian National University reveals that significant gendered inequalities remain in multiple dimensions of the legal profession.

Titled "[Designing Gender Equality into the Future of The Law](#)," the report from university researchers in partnership with the Law Society of NSW and the Women Lawyers Association of NSW reveals that, despite outnumbering men in the legal profession across Australia, women continue to encounter obstacles to attaining leadership positions, contend with biases and harassment within their workplaces, and struggle to access parental leave, education, and flexible work arrangements.

Of the members of the legal profession surveyed for the report, 78% of women and 53% of men indicated that sexual harassment is a recurring issue in the legal profession. The high percentages of both men and women who confirmed the pervasiveness of such behaviour indicate both that legal professionals are more aware of and outspoken about the issue and that considerable action is still required to eliminate sexist work environments in the law.

The continuing underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the law further highlights that there is a clear need for concerted strategies to provide women with equal opportunities for advancement and to ensure that they are promoted based on merit to senior positions within the profession. The retention and promotion of women into senior roles has been facilitated by the widespread adoption of new technologies and the subsequent flexibility in work arrangements and hours provided (both of which have significantly progressed, in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic) – but these new technologies also pose the risk of disadvantaging women by promoting a culture of presenteeism and unsustainable work hours.

Despite the progress in gender equality achieved through such flexibility, a clear gender pay gap in the law remains, most recently highlighted by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) in their [Commonwealth Public Sector Gender Equality Snapshot](#). Compared to men, women are paid an average of 88¢ on the dollar. In the private sector, including private practice law firms, this is lowered to 77¢ - making the gender pay gap currently stand at 22.8%.

# Women in the Law



Significant gender disparities also remain when considering the proportion of women to men in leadership and senior roles in the law. The number of women barristers in Australia remains at 15% of the total number of barristers, and the proportionate value of their brief fees in the 2022-2023 financial year was 26%. Moreover, only over a third of partners and principals in practice are women (35%), while only 33% of judicial officers in Australia are women, with this percentage being even lower in higher courts.

The promotion of gender parity in the law necessitates the identification and elimination of systemic barriers that presently hinder women from advancing in their careers and attaining equal pay compared to their male counterparts. Effort must be made to shift cultural norms and pervasive gender stereotypes to ensure women receive adequate professional support.

Much emphasis has been placed on retaining women in the profession, especially by assisting those who have taken time away from their careers for childcare and other family responsibilities. In practice, this involves implementing family-friendly policies and relevant parental leave programs, as several firms have already done.

Workplaces should recognise the vital support systems and communities that exist for women, and indeed all working professionals, beyond the office and ensure that workplaces are doing what they can to support the health of those systems and communities. Workplaces should resist in other words a trend noted by lead researcher of Designing Gender Equality report Dr Meraiah Foley whereby “the ability to work anywhere at any time has morphed into an expectation that [you] will work everywhere, all the time”.





**JENNY CAMPBELL**

*Partner, Allens  
Sydney*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What is your favourite aspect of your role?**

Being a class actions specialist. I've been lucky to be immersed in class action practice for more than 20 years and to have been involved in many of the cases that have shaped the modern regime. The goalposts are always moving, and I really enjoy applying my skills and experience to come up with practical approaches to address novel issues. What's more, I love being able to do that in a team of fellow experts and super-smart young lawyers who often bring a fresh perspective (and superior technology skills).

### **Have you ever felt imposter syndrome, and if so, how did you navigate your way through it?**

Yes! For many years. The better the feedback, the more concerned I became it was only a matter of time before they worked it out. Over time, I just started to accept that I must

be doing OK and that perhaps I should trust the feedback. I think one thing that can help is to make sure you're getting well-rounded feedback – not just the good things, but also what you should be working on to take things to the next level.

### **How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

Not well, but I do think it's possible and that there are plenty of examples of people who do it very well. I also think it's a critical skill for longevity in our profession. The increasing focus on the importance of physical and mental wellbeing, combined with the greater acceptance of flexible working, in recent years presents new opportunities to get creative. I encourage people to propose whatever they think might work best for them - no matter how unconventional.



**Jenny Campbell**, Partner, Allens, Sydney

### **What advice would you give your 25-year-old self?**

So many things, but I think one of the most important is to speak up. Think carefully, form an opinion and have the confidence to express it – it won't always be right or adopted, but you will learn so much more from having the discussion.

### **Which inclusive initiatives from your firm are you most proud of?**

There are many fantastic initiatives, but what I am most proud of is the respectful, inclusive and collaborative culture we've created at Allens. It really is a privilege to work in such an environment.



**KAITLIN FERRIS**

*Partner, Echo Law  
Melbourne*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **How can one be powerful without alienating people or upsetting them?**

It's interesting to think about how often men would be asked this question – in my experience, men can behave with relative impunity when it comes to being 'powerful' in a work context. Women on the other hand are often subjected to dismissal, or outright condemnation, if they express views with any measure of passion or force.

From my perspective, there is immense power in finding the right moments to express your views – we don't often have the luxury of being able to walk into a room and yell at people without consequence, so sitting back and listening before synthesising the different perspectives in the room and cutting through with a sensible solution is oftentimes the most effective way to achieve an outcome without the alienation factor. Be smart about it, keep it together, and don't let the frustration bubble to the surface because it's inevitably read as being emotional rather than right.

### **How did you navigate power structures early in your career versus later in your career when you had a more formal leadership role?**

In my early career, my experience was that finding your people who have power in the structures you're working in is essential – without being too morose, women are often not going to be in the room where the decisions are made. You need advocates for your views who will be in those rooms, and as you build up a reputation as someone who can add value in this way, your influence becomes greater over time.

Now, I do everything in my power to a) get women in the room when decisions are being made, including (critically) in more informal settings and b) create formal structures which combat the way exclusionary power structures typically manifest – for example, implementing complete pay transparency for all staff. Unwritten rules or information that guide decisions are usually only known by men.

### **How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

There is such a thing as balance, but you can't achieve it without the formal structures necessary to make it happen – you can't occasionally self-care yourself to happiness with a facial every 6 months. You have to hire enough staff to resource your cases; you have to do the right thing by your staff including through remuneration and career progression so you're not constantly hampered by attrition; you have to know when your staff are working late and interrogate it – it should never be expected or go unnoticed.

I personally rarely work outside of 9 to 6 these days – a far cry from my junior days of eating dinner in the office before starting the second shift for the day. There is an inevitability – not a risk – that burnout flows from those kinds of sustained hours. You can work hard and efficiently without being at your desk for more than 8 hours, and if you don't have any time for joy away from the office you're on a one way track to leaving the profession prematurely.

### **How have you built confidence and/or resilience over the course of your career?**

I never really understood the phrase 'pick your battles' until around my 3rd – 4th year of practice – I thought that fighting losing battles was the only way to be true to your values. Now, resilience in my view is a direct outcome of knowing when to commit yourself to getting something done, and when it's tolerable to leave well enough alone. It's uncomfortable, but

building the resilience muscle is less about 'getting stronger' and more about having fewer reasons to feel overwhelmed, disappointed or frustrated – and focusing your attention on a narrower range of achievable outcomes.

### **What's advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

Figure out what you care about – what is it about leadership (in the sense of having a senior role in the profession) that makes you want to put in the work to get there? Zero judgment if it's the money and prestige, but they usually aren't enough to sustain the work required to get to a position of leadership, and to stay there when you do. Is it because you love the work and want to teach other people to do it well? Is it that you care about the values underpinning the work you do and the importance of the outcomes you're achieving? Are you frustrated by decisions being made without your input which result in less than desirable outcomes?

There are plenty of reasons not to aspire to a leadership role in the traditional sense – and the notion that you won't be considered 'successful' unless you've reached the highest title available in your line of work prioritises an outdated approach to our measure of value and worth. A huge part of senior leadership is that the buck is always going to stop with you – think about whether you actually want that, and the aspects of your work that you really enjoy before committing yourself to just one of the many pathways to achieving 'success' in the law.



**LILLIAN RIZIO**

*Partner, Piper Alderman  
Brisbane*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What is your favourite aspect of your role?**

Having the privilege of undertaking large-scale challenging work, while being surrounded by an exceptionally talented close-knit team.

### **What's advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

Back yourself, be the most prepared in the room, and always be open to listening (on how to improve and listening to understand) and evolving.

### **How have you built confidence and/or resilience over the course of your career?**

Throughout the course of my career, I have learnt that hard work, attention to detail, preparation, and experience is the key to confidence. I have built resilience over the years by always having a positive attitude to and encouraging feedback, striving to continuously learn and grow, continually reflecting on how things could have been improved, and being purpose-driven.

### **How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

As a partner of a law firm and mother of three children, balancing career, my personal life, and passions is a constant daily juggle. To assist with the juggle and avoid burn out, I prioritise what is most important, enlist assistance wherever I can (without trying to do it all myself), have learnt to say no without feeling guilty and not get caught up or feel guilty when one aspect of my life is lacking attention. At this stage of my life, achieving balance is a daily work in progress.

### **What advice would you give your 25-year-old self?**

Your career is a marathon, not a sprint. If you genuinely love what you do and the people you are surrounded by, turning up to work every-day will never become a chore.



## MARY WALKER

*Barrister, 9 Wentworth Chambers  
Sydney*

# WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What is your favourite aspect of your role?**

My work in the law involves not only traditional litigation but predominantly other appropriate dispute resolution processes which have been integrated into Court processes. My favourite aspect of my role is the designing of processes and pushing the envelope to provide bespoke, individualised dispute resolution processes which meet the needs of those who come to me for assistance. Knowing the law and processes allows me to engage in creative and innovative approaches to dispute resolution.

### **Share your leadership style and how you “lead” others. Is it different from your male counterparts?**

I think leadership roles have many facets: identifying the issues or problem to deal with, considering options, finding solutions, understanding a conceptual framework to engage your team, a vision, identifying goals,

bringing expertise to the table, and working within corporate governance parameters to move forward. The how is the most important. I often use a consultative approach to begin, unless of course it is a straightforward, simple matter. In the end if you are the leader, the buck stops with you so a decisive approach is necessary to implement decisions which have been achieved collaboratively or individually.

There is a balance to be found and working with the strength, knowledge and wisdom of those around you is essential. Clarity of communication and listening are key skills leaders need to harness. Great leaders are problem solvers, good communicators and inspire others to follow. Unfortunately many women do not have the opportunity to lead. The question as to whether this approach is different to my male counterparts, I will leave the reader to determine.





**Mary Walker**, Barrister, 9 Wentworth Chambers, Sydney

**What's advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

Plan, consider options but remain open to serendipity to bring opportunities and go with it. Learn, learn and continue to learn always. Perseverance and courage when perseverance and courage are required. Perseverance and courage in a quiet way opens doors. I have sometimes forgotten to smile but I do laugh quite a lot. Enjoy the journey.

**How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

Dame Quentin Bryce, AD,CVO, FAAL, FASSA quoting Mae West has said: You can have it all but not all at once! Wise words. My suggestion is to make priorities that work for you and your significant others and create stability. From stability you can pursue adventure. Women are often the centrifugal force that keeps everything in play and on track. Women are not given sufficient acknowledgement, thanks or respect for that gift they provide to others.

**What advice would you give your 25-year-old self?**

It gets better! Every year! Again, enjoy the journey.

# The Importance of Diversity and Visibility — Ways to *Invest in Women and Inspire Inclusion*



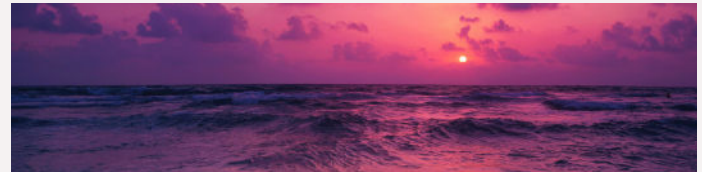
A diverse workforce and leadership team in the legal sector not only reflects the health of cultural norms regarding opportunity and power, but also means that the law and its legal services are better equipped to manage the real and relevant needs and challenges of various contingents of society and client bases who hail from diverse backgrounds and industries.

Whilst the fact that women have comprised more than half of all solicitors in Australia since 2018 reflects significant female advancement within the legal profession, women remain markedly under-represented in senior leadership roles.

In addition, the 2022 National Profile of Solicitors reports that, whilst the mean age in the profession has been consistent for 11 years, the recent influx of female law graduates has seen the average age of a female solicitor lower to 39, seven years younger than the national average age of male solicitors. Women are also disproportionately represented in younger age brackets, with 40% of female solicitors being aged 34 or younger, as opposed to 29% of men. Among those under 24 years old, 71% are women.

These statistics demonstrate not only the prevalence of women's interest in a career in the law but also the legal sector's struggle to retain and empower its workforce of women lawyers from the ages of 35 and onwards. The cause of this drop-off in the number of women lawyers and the lower proportion of women in leadership positions in the law has been attributed to struggle against gender bias in legal workplaces in combination with impractical workplace arrangements and pay structures for new mothers.

Strategies for retaining women lawyers and legal officers in the sector therefore focus on creating mechanisms and cultural habits resistant to gender bias, and providing flexible work and parental leave and payment schemes that support women (and men) through all stages of child-rearing.



# The Importance of Diversity and Visibility — Ways to Invest in Women and Inspire Inclusion



## Inclusion and Mentorship Across Demographics

The ever-increasing number of female partners in law firms, female barristers, and women in senior judicial positions in recent years confirms the impact of visible women role models in positions of authority. The profession can therefore further bolster the retention and promotion of women in the law through concerted efforts to celebrate and normalise a greater range of viewpoints, backgrounds, and personalities, and by establishing forums that highlight the voices and successes of diverse individuals.

Such exposure to diverse success stories takes the form of attending networking events, contributing to publications, and presenting at industry gatherings, rather than placing a narrow focus on billable output. These communal engagements provide invaluable professional training and education to incoming generations of female lawyers since they provide critical opportunities for developing soft skills and broader perspectives that are capable of meeting the challenges of gender and other cultural biases in the workplace.

Law societies also play a crucial role in mitigating gender bias in this regard by facilitating mentorship programs, partnering with the profession to implement relevant training initiatives, and endorsing events tailored for young female professionals. Additionally, ongoing celebration of women's achievements in the workplace can serve as both motivation and inspiration, reaffirming a steadfast commitment to gender equality.

There are now an array of very active and powerful groups and mentorship programs women in the law can join to enact change in the industry and/or seek support and solidarity. Below are just a few and do not include associations and mentorship programs formed within firms:

- [International Bar Association's Women Lawyers' Committee](#)
- [Women Lawyers Association of NSW](#)
- [Diverse Women in Law](#)
- [Australian Women Lawyers](#)
- [The Law Society of Australia Mentoring Program](#)

# The Importance of Diversity and Visibility — Ways to *Invest in Women and Inspire Inclusion*



Moreover, quotas and targets for positions held by women can be effective means to address persistent inequalities and accelerate progress in achieving more diverse and inclusive workplace cultures. In the words of Holding Redlich state managing partner Rachel Drew, quotas and targets ["speed up the progress towards a more diverse and inclusive work environment."](#)

Many prominent law firms have now also adopted fully-paid 26-week to 30-week gender-neutral parental leave schemes, supported by coaching programs enabling women and men to prepare for the transition out of

and then back to work. In combination with flexible work options, the parental leave offers aim to normalise departures from work due to family obligations and establish the feasibility of professional success alongside personal familial fulfillment. Ashurst, Gadens, Clyde & Co, Herbert Smith Freehills, and Holding Redlich are among just some of the firms who have announced gender-neutral and extended parental leave programs in recent years.





**ODETTE MCDONALD**

*Director, Phi Finney McDonald  
Melbourne*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What is your favourite aspect of your role?**

The people. It's a privilege to be able to act for my clients, and I take the responsibility very seriously. The job is intellectually rewarding, but ultimately it is personal for them and that really guides. It's rewarding to see staff members develop professionally – it's wonderful watching someone who joined us as a paralegal develop into a formidable litigator. I love seeing my contemporaries doing so well in their professional and private lives.

### **Share your leadership style and how you "lead" others.**

I'm adaptable, but always respectful. I identify the "big rocks", understand my team and our resources, and then adjust my style so that we can collectively meet our goals while having the best (or, at least, least worst!) experience possible. These inputs impact the leadership style I might adopt in any given situation. There are times when a more delegative or coaching approach to leadership is appropriate because a priority is to get input from team members and

give them space to develop. Some situations may call for a more direct approach, such as where there is an inexperienced team and we need to get to an outcome quickly. If that is necessary, though, I think it's important to have a session with the team afterward to debrief and provide feedback. It's important to communicate clearly and be kind to team members, regardless of which approach is adopted.

### **How can one be powerful without alienating people or upsetting them?**

I think truly powerful people achieve their goals without alienating or upsetting people; instead, acting with compassion and integrity to persuade someone to adopt a particular course or change a behaviour. A person who relies on shouting, fear, or manipulation to achieve their aims is relying on force, not power. That is often the absence of control. They might win a particular battle, but their counterpart will probably not engage with them constructively in future. It's short-sighted and weak, in my view.



**Odette McDonald**, Director, Phi Finney McDonald, Melbourne

**What advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

Be clear about what is important to you (personally and professionally) but also allow yourself the space to check in periodically and reflect on whether your priorities have changed over time.

Have good attention to detail, but don't sweat the small stuff. People can spend a lot of time worrying about things when, if they take a step back and look at the bigger picture, they'll often realise it just doesn't matter. It's hard to achieve big goals if you're afraid of making little mistakes.

**Have you ever felt imposter syndrome, and if so, how did you navigate your way through it?**

I went from an underachieving public school in Melbourne's west to Melbourne Uni Law School. I did have self-doubt around whether I had the background or skills that would enable me to succeed in that brave new world. I haven't felt imposter syndrome because I'm a woman, but I think I have at times been underestimated relative to some male contemporaries.

**How have you built confidence and/or resilience over the course of your career?**

I think experience is important. The things that impacted me greatly as a junior lawyer barely register now. Equally, my hard work as a junior lawyer gave me the skills and experience I needed to be confident and act with confidence now.



**SHARON CHONG**

*Partner, RHTLaw Asia  
Singapore*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What aspects of your role bring you the most joy?**

The privilege of walking alongside clients through a difficult time of their lives/businesses.

### **How do you wield power effectively without alienating others or causing upset?**

Listening actively, and being transparent about my intentions and decisions. Communicating clearly especially in high-stress environments is important as it helps to reduce misunderstandings and build trust.

### **What pearls of wisdom would you pass on to young women dreaming of leadership roles?**

Don't rush – there is no one size fits all timeline or fixed milestones that have to be achieved. Everyone's journey is different, and I always believe that there is no wasted time. Each step along the way prepares us for future opportunity. Of course, when the opportunity comes around, do not be afraid to advocate for yourself and your aspirations.

### **How have you cultivated confidence and resilience throughout your career?**

When we celebrate a success story, we often only see a snapshot of someone who has already made it to the top. Mentorship by successful women who are candid about their struggles and vulnerabilities have helped me to see success in a realistic context, and this in itself is extremely empowering.

### **How do you balance your professional endeavours, personal life, and passions?**

I have come to realise that there is no formula for balance in the sense that it is impossible to carve and apportion fixed pockets of time if you are in private practice handling disputes. Flexibility is something I encourage in my team as the main tool to maintaining balance in the face of shifting priorities and often unexpected challenges.



## SUSANNA TAYLOR

Head of Investments APAC,  
Litigation Capital Management,  
Sydney

# WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What is your favourite aspect of your role?**

I really like that we have a bird's eye view of the litigation process. When a client comes to us seeking finance, we structure that finance in a way that best meets their objectives and also reflects the nature of the dispute asset that we are leveraging against. From day one we are thinking commercially about the completion of the dispute and how the objectives of all of the stakeholders will be achieved. Setting these clear goals on day one and working with a team to ultimately achieve these objectives is a very rewarding process.

### **Share your leadership style and how you "lead" others. Is it different from your male counterparts?**

There are lots of leadership styles and in my experience these are not really gendered. I have been lucky in my career to have been surrounded by some great leaders both male and female. Leadership is really about supporting and guiding people to achieve their full potential. There is no one way to do this

and different people will respond to different strategies, so engaging with people you are leading and understanding what motivates them is really important. Clear and direct communication of the expectations of the person and then helping them to themselves identify the best ways of achieving these expectations is the style which I strive for.

### **How have you built confidence and/or resilience over the course of your career?**

I can remember vividly being a baby lawyer and being scared to call certain senior counsel by telephone, there were a couple who were particularly terrifying! Confidence develops naturally with age and experience but it is important to push yourself to do things that are outside of your comfort zone. If you hate appearing in court or presenting to large groups of people it's important to find opportunities to do those things. Once you do them a few times, they become easier and your confidence will build.





**Susanna Taylor**, Head of Investments APAC, Litigation Capital Management, Sydney

**How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

Striving for balance is a constant challenge. The reality is that a rewarding and challenging career takes up a lot of time so I think the first step is acknowledging that rather than fighting against it. That said, it is really important to carve out time for family and personal life and to make sure this time is quality time where you are not interrupted by work. My husband deliberately books family holidays in remote locations without Wi-Fi or phone reception so that is one way of ensuring work doesn't get in the way!

**What advice would you give your 25-year-old self?**

Take advantage of all opportunities and actively seek out people who are interested in your career. If there is a position or role you are interested in, find out as much as you can about it by talking to people who are in that position or role. Let people know what you are interested in, you never know where an opportunity may come from.



**VICKY ANTZOULATOS**

*Joint Head of Class Actions, Shine Lawyers  
Sydney*

## WOMEN WITH IMPACT

### **What is your favourite aspect of your role?**

I love leading a team that is at the forefront of class actions in Australia and seeing the more junior members of the team develop through the different stages in their careers. Shine has one of the most diverse class action practices and it's an honour to be able to help everyday Australians in such a wide variety of matters and legal issues.

### **Share your leadership style and how you "lead" others. Is it different from your male counterparts?**

I prefer participative leadership where everyone in my team is encouraged to express their opinion and then I will make a decision based on what I consider to be the most sound course after I have considered those views. I don't think leadership style is 'male' or 'female', but is more based on one's personality type.

### **How did you navigate power structures early in your career versus later in your career when you had a more formal leadership role?**

Probably not very well! However as you become more senior, you realise that people look up to you and look to you to take the lead in situations and on issues, and you need to step up and take that lead as far as your position permits it.

### **What advice would you give to young women who want to be future leaders?**

Leadership is really a series of stepping stones, one building on the other. Don't be in a hurry because leadership is also based on experience. Take every experience you can get, as you will get out as much as you put in.



**Vicky Antzoulatos**, Joint Head of Class Actions, Shine Lawyers, Sydney

**How do you balance career, personal life, and passions? Is there such a thing as balance?**

I feel fortunate that after 25 years in practice, I am still passionate about the work I do and every day I learn something new, so I find a way to fit everything in including work, kids and pets. I wouldn't call it 'balancing' but you find ways to make it all work.

**What advice would you give your 25-year-old self?**

Back yourself and have confidence in yourself! You may get it wrong sometimes, but your achievements will always outweigh your mistakes and failures.

**Which inclusive initiatives from your firm are you most proud of?**

I feel proud that Shine has a very large contingent of female leadership. It sets a wonderful example for young women who are in the earlier stages of their careers.

# HOW EXPERTSDIRECT INSPIRE INCLUSION

This International Women's Day, ExpertsDirect would like to urge those in the legal sector to continue to Inspire Inclusion.

In legal practice and expert witness work, pay and promotion biases in favour of men remain stark: although women now outnumber men in the legal profession, women only comprise 35% of principals and partners in private practice in NSW; 91% of expert witnesses are men and, last year, in only 10% cases worldwide requiring a sole expert witness, the parties or court engaged a woman expert witness.

ExpertsDirect believes that governments and businesses play a crucial role in undoing gender bias.

On a global scale, we advocate for fairer opportunities for and attitudes towards women expert witnesses by remaining a signatory of the **Equal Representation for Expert Witnesses Pledge** ('ERE'). As a supporter of the ERE initiatives, we join thousands of other international legal firms and individual legal practitioners across

the globe in ensuring the equal visibility and fair representation of women expert witnesses throughout the expert witness sourcing, candidature, selection, and engagement process.

We are confident that our support of the Pledge will effect a rise in the number of appointed women expert witnesses; the ERA was formed as a sister pledge of the Equal Representation in Arbitration Pledge ('ERA'), which, since 2015, has in fact contributed to a significant rise in the number of women acting as arbitrators.



# HOW EXPERTSDIRECT **INSPIRE INCLUSION**

We urge other legal firms and practitioners to become signatories to the ERE in the hope of bringing the same standards of fairness and parity to the expert witness space as those which resulted from the popularity of the ERA.

Within our own company, we have implemented a resistance to gender bias through fair employee candidature representation and have subsequently seen our business go from strength to strength. In the same year that we will celebrate the 11th anniversary of our company, more than 70% of our staff will be female, with the roles of women covering all levels and departments.

The culture and accomplishments of ExpertsDirect are reflections not only of the professionalism and skills of our women staff, but also of the efficacy of hiring on the basis of merit and demonstrated capabilities.

We look forward to a future in which governments and firms continue to advocate for gender parity and equal opportunity – not only for its just aims but also for the innovations and successes that it will bring in the workplace.

## ExpertsDirect commits to the following initiatives for their employees:



Demonstrate executive leadership commitment to gender equality



Embrace a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion



Value and support flexible working arrangements



Provide formal avenues to address any concerns of bias



Provide external support for women's advancement




ExpertsDirect is an ultra-niche company whose specialised knowledge is sourcing preeminent expert witnesses for litigation.

As the leading provider of highly specialised expert witnesses in Australasia, we are able to source the world's leading experts, no matter how specialised the subject matter.

Our global panel of over 8500 tried and tested experts means that we will have the right expert for you every time.

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