

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

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# Standing by is no longer an option in the gender equality fight

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## As the industry begins a post Weinstein purge, neutrality is not an option

It's darker now as autumn takes a hold. Brexit looms. Most businesses are calculating the impact of change, an unpredictable regulatory framework, the potential brain drain to our [industry](#).

The latest Bellwether [report](#) says that two-thirds of marketing companies have frozen their spend. Campaign's Gideon Spanier [says](#) that the signs are flashing amber.

The traditional Christmas excess may surely be dampened this year by economic fears.

The industry is also beginning a "post Weinstein" purge. Cindy Gallop has [called](#) for

women to name names. There are one or two men out there, at least, surely nervously reconsidering whether they've ever abused the powerful position they have had with respect to the women they lead.

From my perspective as co-author of [The Glass Wall](#): Success Strategies for Women at Work and Businesses that Mean Business, I've been out with Kathryn Jacob talking about inequalities in the workplace for over a year. Pre-publication we spent a year interviewing people for the book. There was more than one account of sexual harrassment. We only wrote about one in detail in the book as we were asked not to share the other stories. In the example given in full we had to change not just names, not just sectors but even the continent where the story was set before the person who confided in us was prepared to let us publish.

People do not find it easy to talk in public about this. However, the more the experiences are shared, the more likely things are to change.

Sexual harrassment is an abuse of power. It isn't flirting, funny or acceptable. Few women escalate their experiences. No-one in our interviews wanted to name names.

It is time for this abuse of power to end.

It was very important to us when writing the book (about which Kathryn is speaking this week at the WeWork Thinking [stage](#)), that we didn't add to or create an "us and them" division between men and women at work. It's a division between on one side the bullies, and on the other side the victims. Not men versus women. If you're not a bully, and you're not a victim, you must pick a side. Standing by isn't neutral, it's picking the side of the bullies.

Lack of gender equality in senior management and the incidence of a poor and abusive culture is very often because of a toxic alpha culture that's bad for all kinds of talented people. Many of them are women. There are also many men who don't thrive in this environment.

We need to fix this problem together. Without hesitation. Anymore delay is inexcusable.

Speaking up for those that get spoken over in meetings – each one of us could do this today – creates a great loop of positivity as each of us passes this on.

Including always calling out verbal or physical sexual harassment instead of being embarrassed and silent witnesses is everyone's responsibility.

In 2015 Michelle Obama gave a graduation address to Oberlin College in Ohio. She encouraged the grads to make a difference, pointed out their privileged position and repeatedly [told](#) them that standing by wasn't an option, and they had to get their hands dirty by getting involved, however messy it might seem. "Graduates, with a degree from this amazing school and all the status that the degree confers, you don't get to have no hands. No, you don't get to be precious or cautious or cynical... You don't get to have no hands".

We're in a privileged position in our industry. We're employed in a business with huge power for positive transformation. No-one should stand by while abuse of senior position goes on. You don't get to have no hands. Speak up, share, support, smash the Glass Wall.

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