

A VIEW FROM SUE UNERMAN

This #IWD2018, pledge to no longer stand by

DIVERSITY INCLUSION TRANSFORMATION

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Speaking up, staging interventions and zero tolerance of excluding behaviour at every level: this is what changes work culture.

For International Women's Day 2018 make a pledge. No more standing by.

Let's talk about bravery. Not mountain climbing. Not parachuting out of a plane. Not bungee jumping, abseiling, marathon running, Tough Mudder or Iron Man training. All of which are admirable.

I'd like to talk about everyday bravery. The bravery never to stand by and just listen while someone in the office shrinks into themselves because the office humour or banter has taken an unpleasant turn.

The bravery always to speak up to make sure that the quiet people are included and heard. That the outliers feel like they belong as much as those who fit the mould.

To speak up, to act, to defend – even if that makes you the unpopular one.

Speaking up, staging interventions and zero tolerance of excluding behaviour at every level: this is what changes work culture. If the current statistics on diversity balance at the leadership levels of our sector and the gender pay gap are evidence, then culture needs to change to be more inclusive and diverse.

Speaking up does require everyday bravery. I know mountain climbing, bungee jumping fanatics who find challenging in the moment too difficult.

It must be done, for the sake of the profits if nothing else. New McKinsey [analysis](#) demonstrates that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity at executive level can deliver 67% better economic profit than those in the bottom quartile.

There's been a lot of discussion of this in the last 18 months. Since I published my [book](#) (with co-author Kathryn Jacob), *The Glass Wall: Success strategies for women at work, and businesses that mean business*, in September 2016, we've seen the issue of gender parity reach everyone's attention – yet little actual change. Yet.

The question every business and every leader should ask themselves is are you doing enough?

One of the case studies in our book concerns a chief marketing officer based in the US whose career takes a downward turn when she finds herself with a new boss from a different country, where the prevailing culture is that women are expected to be much more deferential than in New York. It takes a while before she realises what is going on and takes steps to change the situation. One reader told me that he read the story full of anger towards the woman's colleagues. "Why didn't they speak out?" he said. "They must have been aware of what was going on, but they said nothing. Were they afraid to rock the boat,

thought it wasn't their business or did they simply see this as a way of pushing their own careers forwards?"

Frankly incidents like this are all our business. Or we should make it so.

In our interviews and research for our book and in the questions we've been asked at the 90+ talks we've given, Kathryn and I find the same themes come up.

There was the woman who was asked, the last time she pushed for a pay rise, if her husband's career was in trouble.

There was the rep who was asked if it was her time of the month the last time she challenged her boss.

The lawyer who, when she arrived at a meeting where she was the only woman present and there weren't enough chairs, was asked by the CEO if she'd like to sit on his lap.

Colleagues said nothing.

I expect it was too hard to intervene in the moment.

We must intervene. Every time. We must not stand by. We must be brave. Every day.

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