



## Equality Talks Podcast - Transcript

### Bonus Episode: The Financial Benefit of Women in Leadership with Libby Lyons

Equality Talks. Brought to you by Work 180. Where we discuss how to finally put an end to workplace discrimination. Let's talk about what it really takes to succeed, what people are doing to drive equality and what can still be done.

Samantha Sutherland:

Libby Lyons is the Director of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, overseeing the statutory reporting process that gathers gender equality data for more than 10,000 employers covering more than four million employees. Libby has travelled globally to speak with government and private enterprise on the business case for gender equality. And she presented at the United Nations Commission on the status of women in New York in 2018 and 2019.

Libby was listed in Apolitical's 100 most influential people working in gender policy for both 2018 and 2019 and was featured in 200 Women Who Will Change The Way You See The World. She is a member of Chief Executive Women and is a proud ambassador for, Honour A Woman, a volunteer organization working to achieve gender balance in the Australian Honour System.

Prior to joining agency in 2015, Libby had a distinguished career in corporate affairs and governments relations. She has a strong personal commitment to public service, having started her career as a primary teacher and has sat on a number of non-profit and charity boards. Libby Lyons, I'm so happy to be talking to you today, I'm real excited about this conversation. Thank you so much for joining me.

Libby Lyons:

Samantha, it is an absolute treat to be with you, and I feel very honoured that you've asked me to be part of this today.

Samantha Sutherland:

Well I'm really excited to hear from you. We had a bit of a brief conversation previously, to talk about what we would discuss on the podcast, and so I have a lot prepared to ask you about. And I'm real excited to hear your point of view and all the things you have to share about, about gender diversity and all the topics we're going to cover. So I thought we could jump in with talking about the new research that was released by WGEA in June.

So I don't need to say much about it. If you can jump in and tell us all about the new research and how exciting that is, that will be amazing.

Libby Lyons:

I'd love to, because it is world-leading evidence and research into the business case for gender equality. A report that we work with the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, we work with them and we have

done so now for five years and this is their fifth report. And the report, it really highlights the importance of collecting data because it makes it clear that there is financial benefit from having better gender balance at the top levels of leadership.

Libby Lyons:

It really did break new ground in providing the hard numbers and evidence to support, as I said that well established business case. So what Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre did, was it took our dataset and it analysed the dataset. Particularly the data for the ASX listed companies in Australia. And it has provided tangible proof that better gender balance in leadership, in an organization actually delivers better company performance, greater productivity and importantly for shareholders, greater profitability.

Libby Lyons:

And it's the first time that we have ever seen a strong and convincing causal relationship between increasing the number of women in senior leadership and subsequently improvements in company performance. So, this is as I say world-leading evidence and my message to every leadership team and every board out there in Australia and board member, is if you have not read this report, if you are not across this hard evidence, then you are not meeting your fiduciary duty as a leader and as a director, to your shareholders and your owners.

Libby Lyons:

So, it is an absolute business must, as far as I can see.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, one of the things that I thought was really exciting when I read this research as well, was the fact that there are these hard number benefits to it. So, what the research showed, I mean as you would know is having a female CEO increased company market value by 5%, and that's an average ASX 200 value of \$80 million. And if you have a 10 percentage point increase in women in key leadership positions, it increased the market value by 6.6% or an average \$105 million across the ASX 200.

Samantha Sutherland:

And so as you say, this becomes now a part of their fiduciary duty, to ensure that there is gender balance in senior leadership across the ASX 200.

Libby Lyons:

Absolutely. And there's one other figure too, Sam, or one other number that they came up with, which I think is really, really interesting and that is that if an organization has a female CEO, it leads to an on average 5% increase in the market value of Australian ASX listed companies, or the equivalent of again, \$80 million for that average company. Now, if I was a leader in the private sector in Australia today, I would absolutely be working as hard as I possibly could to achieve better gender balance in my leadership team, better gender balance on my board, because by doing so I have a competitive edge over my rivals. And that makes so much business sense.

Libby Lyons:

So, the evidence is in. Leaders now must be smart and follow what we can take from these hard numbers in this evidence and take action to make sure there is better gender balance in their leadership teams. But not just their leadership teams, the whole way through their organizations.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, that's a thing that I think it needs to continue to be highlighted too is, these numbers look at executive leadership but obviously the pipeline is just as important. And not even just the pipeline to leadership but the organization, even if people aren't planning on being part of the leadership pipeline, that value of diversity is going to be seen across the whole organization.

Libby Lyons:

Look, absolutely. I think in terms of the pipeline, in Australia we're doing pretty well because in our dataset, based on last year's data, roughly 39% of all managers in Australian private sector organizations are women. That's not too bad. And if we look at promotions into management, over 43% of promotions into management last year, went to women. So, the pipeline is strong, the problem is that once we get to that KMP level, that level underneath the CEO and once we get to CEO level, and once we get to board level, there isn't gender balance. Women are a scarcity in many organizations.

Libby Lyons:

So, we have to make sure that we are developing targets and taking real action to ensure that we get these women in these various senior leadership roles, because based on that data I gave you, or the figures I gave you just before around percentage of women in management and the percentage of women that were promoted into management last year. Based on those figures, we know that we should hit gender balance if that trend continues by about 2030 in most levels of management, except at the very top.

Libby Lyons:

So, there are plenty of women there who are capable, who are eager, but who just need to be given the chance and chosen to take on some of these more senior roles.

Samantha Sutherland:

Absolutely. One of the things I thought real exciting about the research as well, is that because WGEA does collect such a comprehensive dataset and to have been collecting it for quite a long time, you can actually do this kind of longitudinal study that shows the causal relationship. And I just wondered from your perspective, why you think the data itself is so important and why the agency is so important?

Libby Lyons:

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the data that we collect is something that all Australians need to be terribly, terribly proud of. We were the first country, as we understand it, in the world to collect such a breadth and depth of data around what is happening in workplaces over any country in the world. In fact, we've searched long and hard to find anyone that collects the depth and breadth of data that we do and we can't find anyone.

Libby Lyons:

And, in collecting the data we now have a very real picture of what is happening in Australian workplaces, but more importantly than that we are able to use this data to assist employers in building strategies and plans, and developing and implementing strategies and plans to enable them to improve their gender equality outcomes, to improve the number of women in leadership roles, to improve the terms and conditions that they offer their employees to ensure that they are meeting the needs of their employees with care and responsibilities.

Libby Lyons:

So the data is vital because it provides us with this very real picture. And in providing us with this very real picture and in encouraging and educating employers to take action to improve gender equality outcomes, what we're also doing as a result of that, is helping drive down the gender pay gap. Because the gender pay gap is a symptom of a broader problem, and that broader problem is the cultural problems that dictates the environments in which most people work.

Libby Lyons:

So, by addressing the issues and the reasons behind the gender pay gap, which we are by collecting the data, we're also slowly driving down that gender pay gap.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes. Interesting. So when we spoke before, as a prelude to this conversation, one of the things you said was, "I'm very concerned that we're going to go backwards as a result of this pandemic." And I had a conversation with Dianne Smith-Gander recently, who's on the board of Wesfarmers amongst other things, who echoed that sentiment, and said that she's really concerned that the pandemic is going to cause us to go backwards.

Samantha Sutherland:

And I wondered if you can talk a bit about that concern, and also what you think might be able to be done to prevent us falling backwards as a result.

Libby Lyons:

Look, one of the reasons for my concern, was that when we released our data at the end of last year, any improvements we saw were actually very modest. We didn't see any great leaps forward in the data for last year. And that to me spoke to the fact that we may have been witnessing the beginning of gender equality fatigue, amongst employers. So I was worried about it then, and I spoke to that issue then and there, at the end of last year.

Libby Lyons:

I think unfortunately this dreadful, dreadful pandemic has made the issues for women and men, but women in particular, far greater and we are now in a situation where globally the world is in recession and we are looking down the barrel of possibly a great depression. And, we know that when organizations are under financial stress that they have to reduce staff numbers, they have to look at other ways of saving money and boosting revenue, say at the cost of boosting revenue.

Libby Lyons:

And often the first way to do that is to look at reducing casual staff and part-timers as a first measure, because they're the low hanging fruit. And of course, we know that there are more women in casual and part-time employment than there are men. In fact in Australia today women work part-time at three times the rate of men. So, in that sense women will suffer in that they may well lose their employment.

Libby Lyons:

And in fact, if we look at the data's that come out since March, more women have lost their jobs than men. So, it is that focus on the finances of an organization and the actions that they decide to take to address their problems that I believe often sees women being discriminated against. So that really bothers me, that a lot of women would lose their part-time and casual jobs, more women than men.

Libby Lyons:

We know from previous downturns that more men have lost their full-time jobs than women, but we also know from previous downturns that as recovery starts the acceleration of men picking up more full-time work is much greater than that of women. So, there are a few pointers here that suggest that this time of economic uncertainty and recession will mean that women are placed in a very precarious financial position.

Libby Lyons:

And of course, these problems are amplified when women are of retirement age, because throughout their lives women on average earn less than men. Women on average have to take more time out of the workforce than men, and as a result of this they have less retirement savings than men. On average at the moment in Australia, women are retiring with over 30% less retirement savings than men. So, the knock-on effect from all of this means that women are retiring with not enough money to live on, many women are having to sell the only asset that they may have and that is their house, this is single women in particular, so they sell their only asset that they have and then many of them are left homeless. In fact women over 55 are the largest growing cohort of homeless people in Australia today.

Libby Lyons:

So, the effects on women, whether they be just joining the workforce, or whether they be at the end of their working lives, the financial impact, and the well-being impact for women is huge. I'm not saying it's not for men, but women seem to share a disproportionate disadvantage in times of economic downturn.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes. I was actually going to say that, the stats about the highest growing homelessness is in women over 55 which I learnt that probably six months ago, learnt that. I was just so horrified that there's structural inequality that the boomer generation women have faced through their whole life, means that they get to this stage and become homeless. And I think everything is structured against women along the way because these women, also a lot of them have spent their life caring, which is why they don't have-

Libby Lyons:

Precisely. And-

Samantha Sutherland:

And repayment is, a lot left behind.

Libby Lyons:

I know, and I mean it would surprise you, many business women that I know who are heading into their 50s or may be in their 50s, who simply do not have enough money to retire on, and these are outwardly very successful women in their careers. But because of all the structural problems, with our Superannuation scheme, and after all Superannuation was designed over 40 years ago and really it was based on a model of men working full-time.

Libby Lyons:

So, many of your listeners would be absolutely surprised by the many successful career women out there, in their late 40s and 50s, who simply do not have enough money on which to retire.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, I actually do find that surprising. As you said, women who are sort of outwardly appear very successful and still because of the interruption to their earning, during their child rearing years.

Libby Lyons:

That's right.

Samantha Sutherland:

It would have a significant effect at this stage.

Libby Lyons:

That's right.

Samantha Sutherland:

I have a funny anecdote about that, which a male friend of mine has just got a new job and he has three children, and a partner. And she has done all the caring to enable him to focus on the eight rounds of interviews to get the new job and all this kind of stuff. And I said to him, "I have this philosophy that when you get a new job, or you get a pay rise, or a bonus, or whatever, that you should make a sacrifice to the pay gods, in thanks for that increased salary that you're going to be earning."

Samantha Sutherland:

And then I said, "But given how much your partner has been supporting you, maybe part of your sacrifice needs to be a gift for her." And she said, "I'd be happy with an additional Super contribution, thanks." So, she's actually very aware of the impact on her Super and her ability to retire later when the children are grown up, because of the fact that she's taking all this time out now.

Libby Lyons:

Precisely and I think it is! And I am so pleased that younger women are wising up to the fact that their Superannuation balances will progressively become less than men's, as they progress through their career. So I think that is absolutely wonderful. And I think too, the structural reform that's required around Superannuation is vast, because again, I am one of these successful women, who at this stage, I do not have enough money to retire on, so I will keep working.

Libby Lyons:

Well, I think the other thing with this is as well, is that at times when women may have the ability to put more money into Superannuation to build up their balance so that it is comparable with that of a man of similar age, et cetera, once you hit a particular amount, or you're over a particular threshold that's designated by the ATO, of course we're penalized by putting more money into Superannuation.

Libby Lyons:

So, these structural issues are hitting us at every turn, and we really need to sit and look at how we can reform the whole Superannuation system to make it fair for all.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. And now, with the structural issues, we know that more women are reducing their hours, or losing their jobs than men at the moment during the current climate and you and I previously talked briefly about the importance of ensuring that women are able to reengage with the workforce in the same capacity as men, when the economy picks back up. So what are your thoughts on that, on where companies can focus, and where individuals can focus to help enable that, as the economy picks back up?

Libby Lyons:

I think the important thing for all employers is to make sure that they have recruitment policies and procedures in place, and promotion policies and procedures in place that address the inherent bias that those who are employing or recruiting have. So, we all know particularly when times are tough, when we're recruiting someone, it's much, much easier to recruit someone who's not going to challenge us or who may make our life easier as a manager.

Libby Lyons:

And generally that person will be someone that look, or sounds like us. And so that's why it's very, very important that very simple steps are taken by employers to ensure that when they are recruiting that they have procedures in place that ensure that they have equal numbers of women and men on their short list. That when they have panels who are doing the interviewing for the roles, that they have women and men equally represented on their recruitment panels.

Libby Lyons:

But also that they bring in... And this is a practice we have had at the agency for some time, is that we always have an independent person come in from outside the agency to sit on that recruitment panel too. Because if you're getting an independent person in, they can often challenge some of the biases that those from within the agency may have when they are interviewing someone for a new job.

Libby Lyons:

So some of those simple things are in place, that when promotions are being looked at in an organization that again they have similar processes in place that people's decisions are challenged where necessary. That they're not just giving a job to one of their mates, to the boys, because that's what it is, or to one of the girls for that matter because they're there and whatever. That are people genuinely being assessed for suitability for a particular promotion or for recruiting?

Libby Lyons:

So I think they're simple things that can be in place but I think the other thing that we need to do, is that as at the moment we're focusing as a nation on nation-building projects, which tend to be infrastructure and construction projects. I think it's really important that we ensure that we have gender on the tender. And by that I mean that when tenders are being let to different organizations or the tender documents are being written, that the terms and conditions of the tender are being written, that we ensure that those that are tendering have gender-balanced teams, that they put forward for the work. That they ensure that the work is completed in a reasonable period of time. And we're not talking six and seven day work weeks here. You see one of the problems particularly with the construction industry, who look like they are really going to be a leader in our recovery, is that construction projects often work to five and six day weeks.

Libby Lyons:

And when employees are expected to work five and six day weeks, it means that their partner, who may be the one caring mostly for the children, really isn't given any opportunity to engage in work themselves because they're constantly having to do the care and all associated work with children or elderly relatives. So, interestingly in response to some of those problems in the construction industry, and may I also add that sadly, the construction industry has the highest male suicide rate of any other industry in Australia.

Libby Lyons:

And, in response to that, there's an organization, a construction company called Roberts Pizzarotti that's headed up by the most wonderful CEO, who happens to be female, Alison Mirams. And Alison, on behalf of Roberts Pizzarotti, were tendering for phase one of the Concord Hospital in New South Wales, and in the tender she put in two project plans. And the first project plan came in on budget and on time, but would have meant that the project worked at least six or seven days a week.

Libby Lyons:

The second project plan, was 1.1% over budget and came in at an additional 10 weeks of work but it was based on no more than a five-day working week. Now some of those days were longer days, but it was based on a five-day working week. In that second project plan, she also pointed out that should government decide to choose that project plan, that they would over the course of the project potentially save two men's lives based on the statistics.

Samantha Sutherland:

Wow.

Libby Lyons:

New South Wales Health, to their credit, went with the second project plan and that project plan is now well underway. It is being studied as a pilot project, and the feedback that Alison and Natalie Galea who's doing the research and the follow-up on this pilot project, the feedback that Natalie and Alison are receiving from employees is extraordinary. Alison caught up with one of the employees who said that, "For the first time in I don't know how many years, I've been able to sit down and have dinner with my family."

Libby Lyons:

Now, it's not that difficult to think a little bit differently about the way we do things. And, this is a wonderful example of some creative thinking, based on evidence and statistics that is actually changing the lives of the Roberts Pizzarotti employees, but more so than that, their families.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, I think that, that's such a fascinating point too. And the fact that you have the data and the stats to back it up, so you can say, "Here are two project plans, and according to statistics we'll probably save two people's lives." Because a lot of the idea of men having to work and missing their families, it's much more anecdotal. I often quote a male friend of mine who changed his job a while ago because he was talking to me and he was like, "Sam, these big companies they pay men to not see their children."

Samantha Sutherland:

And he didn't want to do that, and so he left the company. But to actually have the numbers behind... You can't put a price on a life, and once you put those types of statistics into project plans, then it becomes much harder to say, "No, no. We're just going to push it and do seven-day work weeks."

Libby Lyons:

Yeah, and I think the thing too Sam, is that if we change the working conditions for men, we're changing the conditions and opportunities for women.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yes. Which actually leads me to something else that I wanted to ask you about, which is, how much do you think the increase in domestic load and caring responsibility, and school closures and things like that, have affected the amount that women are leaving the workforce alongside the reduction in casual and part-time work?

Libby Lyons:

Oh, hugely, hugely. We've called it the quadruple burden because not only have the women had to bear the usual burden of doing more of the caring and domestic work, but also working themselves, but they've also had to take on the whole home schooling thing. And in addition to that women worry, women worry more than men. And in fact my husband, my darling George is constantly telling me to close my Worry Book, as he calls it because he thinks I worry about everything.

Libby Lyons:

But women worry particularly about their families. Men may worry about their jobs and ensuring that their jobs are secure, but women really worry about their children, their families, ensuring that they've got food on the table and all of those things. So, during this terrible pandemic, women have had the quadruple burden that they've had to bear. For every hour of unpaid care and domestic work that men do in Australia today or prior to the pandemic, women were doing an hour and 46 minutes.

Libby Lyons:

So-

Samantha Sutherland:

And that would definitely have gone up during the pandemic.

Libby Lyons:

I think it probably has. So, it has meant that because families have had children at home all of the time, some women and men have had to give up their jobs purely to be there to supervise and care and home school. And I think disproportionately that has fallen to women.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, and I think as well that, our pretty strong male breadwinner model, so the fact that many more of the part-time workers are women, means that when a family have to decide where to put their attention in terms of a career, they often financially have to choose the male's career. And so it just continues to embed the same issue that we have, because the more you focus on the man's career and the woman has to step back, well then the more he becomes the breadwinner of the household and so he has to continue to take precedence, when you're making decisions like that, I mean.

Libby Lyons:

That's right. And I think there is always a silver lining, and I think one of the silver linings coming out of the pandemic is that employers now realize that they can trust their employees to work from home, and still achieve business outcomes. So that is a silver lining. And working from home, or working remotely, is one form of flexible work. And so that is a great thing and I hope with all my heart, that as we move through the pandemic and back to whatever our new normal looks like, our new normal includes organizations embracing wholeheartedly flexible work.

Libby Lyons:

Not just working from home, but things like job sharing, things like flexible shifts, things like time off in lieu, all of those different things. That they start embracing flexibility in their workplaces to ensure that all employees get the opportunity to work in a way that makes the business outcomes, but also suits the commitments they have outside of work. And it isn't always about caring either, it's also about physical and mental well-being.

Libby Lyons:

And I think through this pandemic too, we've learnt the hard way the importance of focusing on mental health along with physical health. And flexible work can help employees manage health issues that they may have, or maintain healthy mental and physical health.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, and not always just being reactive, but in fact pro-actively being able to maintain healthy needs, like strong mental health.

Libby Lyons:

Indeed.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. I'd like to change direction in some of my questions now, and you told me about a recent career highlight that you had, and I was hoping that you could talk about that and why it was such a highlight for you?

Libby Lyons:

Oh, was that being on Bloomberg?

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Yeah.

Libby Lyons:

Look, yes it was a career highlight for me. Being asked to go on Bloomberg and be interviewed by Bloomberg was a huge thrill for me. And the reason that it was a huge thrill for me, was that ever since I started as Director of The Workplace Gender Equality Agency, I recognized that the whole issue of gender equality is at its heart, of course at its heart it's a human rights issue, but it's also an economic imperative for our country.

Libby Lyons:

The greater women's workforce participation we have, the greater the revenue for our country, the better it is for our economy, because the more women you have working, the more money there is to spend, the more the whole economy turns over. So, this has always been an economics issue for me, and it's always been about the business case in the way that we have presented the data. The Human Rights Commission address it from a human rights perspective and rightly so.

Libby Lyons:

When you ignore 50% of the population, it is a human rights issue. But, from the agency's perspective it's been an economics issue. So when we released the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, which actually had that for the first time, the causal relationship between increasing the number of women in senior leadership roles and subsequent improvements in company performance and profitability, it was just like I threw my metaphorical hat in the air and whooped with delight, because I was being asked on Bloomberg, which is from my perspective the most business important media outlet that there is in the world.

Libby Lyons:

And I've been even more excited to be asked back on the 28th of August to talk about Equal Pay Day on Bloomberg. So, it's pretty exciting. I was pretty excited and still am and yes, I saw it as a bit of a career highlight. So you can go almost to the end of your career and still get a career highlight, Sam. Hang in there.

Samantha Sutherland:

I love it, it's like the pinnacle of proving that what you've been saying for so long is now just true, and picked up by absolutely mainstream financial propagation.

Libby Lyons:

That's right, it so is.

Samantha Sutherland:

What I wanted to talk to you a little bit about, some of your career history, because you actually started out as a primary teacher, which is obviously heavily female-dominated, and then moved into resources

which is really male-dominated, and so I was wondering if you could talk a bit about your trip through different gender balances, and what you learnt along the way that's led you to now director of the agency?

Libby Lyons:

I was a primary school teacher and it is without a doubt the hardest job I've ever done. And the reason that I say that, is the responsibility I felt in having the education of these... And at the time when I was teaching 40 in my class, 40 young people, the educational achievements of them in my hands, I found that a huge responsibility. And I think it is for any teacher that takes the job seriously.

Libby Lyons:

It is a huge responsibility. But on top of that, the thing that I found extraordinarily... Well, the thing that taught me an amazing skill, was the ability to be able to juggle lots of different stakeholders and manage stakeholder expectations. That's what we call them now, stakeholders. In those days I don't know what they were called, but they were just different groups of people. So, there were the children, there were the children's parents, there were the other teachers, there was the headmaster or headmistress, there was the school council, there was the local community.

Libby Lyons:

So there were all these people and all these different cohorts within your daily life that you had to manage and juggle and keep at bay at some times, and keep informed and all of those sort of things. So, it taught me to be efficient with my time, it taught me to be a very clear communicator and it taught me to listen. So, that was great. But the other thing that it taught me, because I was in a female-dominated workplace, it taught me the importance of listening to the minority view.

Libby Lyons:

And in that sense the minority view was the male view, that when you sit at a staff meeting and you've got 95% of the people around the table are women, and we all know how much women love to talk, then there was a lot of chatter and a lot of the views were similar. But all of a sudden there would be the voice of the minority, the voice of the man that came in, Who threw a completely different perspective over the discussion.

Libby Lyons:

And, I learned very young that it was really important to listen to those who are in the minority. So, I guess I learned the importance of ensuring that you try and have balance in whatever you do, particularly in gender. Then of course, later on in my career I moved into the male-dominated resource industry and at the moment I think, golly, 14% of all employees and resources are women, so it's pretty heavily male-dominated.

Libby Lyons:

And I was the minority voice. And I had to find ways and tactics and strategies for ensuring that my voice was heard. And it wasn't easy because you often go to speak and you're drowned out, or you're shouted down, or you do manage to speak and your view is not taken seriously or you do speak and your view is then passed off as somebody else's.

Libby Lyons:

And I can't tell you how many times, Sam, I was told that I was aggressive. And I wasn't aggressive. I'm not an aggressive person. I was assertive but you could never call me aggressive. And a man was never called aggressive, it was only the women that were called aggressive. So, I learnt the really tough way of how to again, manage stakeholders but in a different way.

Libby Lyons:

And I also discovered that I can't help but challenge things that I think are wrong, and the injustices that I see. And, that came at a cost. It comes with a health warning. People do not like being challenged about the things they think are right. And people don't like being challenged when they know that they're wrong either, or that what they're doing is a bit dodgy. So, it was a really interesting career. But having said that, I love working with men, I love working with women but most of all I love working in an environment where there's some balance, where there's men and women. Where there are men and women from different ethnic backgrounds, men and women with different views, where there are men and women with disabilities. I like working in an environment that represents the communities in which we live.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah. Where different opinions and ideas and suggestions are all heard.

Libby Lyons:

Precisely.

Samantha Sutherland:

And the result is so often better, isn't it?

Libby Lyons:

It's always better. Always better. More creative. Always better.

Samantha Sutherland:

And so you said that when you were working in resources you had to find some strategies to get your voice heard. What were some of those strategies?

Libby Lyons:

Humour. So, I think it was important for me to bring humour into the way... Because I think sometimes that if you... Don't underestimate how... I think men feel uncomfortable too if there's a table full of them and only one woman. They don't feel comfortable. The same for me walking into this room of men, it's not always comfortable but men find it uncomfortable to have one woman there too.

Libby Lyons:

So, oftentimes if you can make people feel at ease by having a bit of a laugh, then that just takes the tension out of the room and lets them see that you are actually human. That you've got a sense of humour, and then they often listen. So, that was the first thing that I would do. I also used to, if I had a new idea, or something that I wanted to bring up, I would discuss it with... And this is a very political tactic I suppose, I come from a long line of politicians.

Libby Lyons:

But, I would go and make sure that I had discussed the idea with those that were of like-mind, so that I would have a bit of support at the table. And if at the end of the day somebody else took the credit for it, well that was bad luck for me. But if it meant that it was for the betterment of the business and the shareholders, then that's what I was being paid to do, so that's okay. But, finding your friends within that group and those that are like-minded that you can share ideas with and garner support from, that's really important. And I learnt to do that very early on.

Libby Lyons:

And I think also that I would start out slowly, usually I wouldn't jump in feet first, because I can be a big personality, I wouldn't do that to begin with. I would start quietly and work my way up to my true personality. I think that's it, because I think I used to scare them at first if I went in... So just things like that. And I think some of that comes with maturity, some of it comes with confidence and a lot of it comes from just learning from your mistakes, your previous mistakes, and thinking through strategies on how best to deal with particular issues at a time. So, few little tips there.

Samantha Sutherland:

Yeah, I love them. And now the question that I always like to finish the podcast with is, if you could go back in time, say 25 years and talk to younger Libby, what would you say to yourself about what's to come, or the things you learnt along the way, or the challenges you were going to face, what would you say to your younger self?

Libby Lyons:

That's a really, really interesting but difficult question, Sam. I don't think I would change anything in my life but I think what I would do is tell my younger self to try and not be so judgemental. And I think we're all judgemental to a certain degree, but I think that as a younger woman I made judgment too quickly, and I can still be accused of doing that even today. But I think that what I do now is I stop and think and I try and engage the reflective part of my brain before I make judgment on people, things, on decisions, arguments, discussions, all of those sort of things. I would counsel my younger self to stop and try and access that reflective part of my brain, to not be so judgemental.

Samantha Sutherland:

Libby Lyons, it has been an absolute pleasure and a privilege, and thank you so much for taking the time to share your knowledge with me and to all listeners of the Equality Talks, thank you so much.

Libby Lyons:

Well thank you, Sam.

Samantha Sutherland:

I really hope you enjoyed today's chat. If you can help us spread the word by giving us a review on iTunes, that helps even more people find Equality Talks. To find out more about our mission, check out current opportunities with WORK180's endorsed employers, and to read and listen to more inspiring stories, please head over to [WORK180.co](http://WORK180.co), that's [WORK180.co](http://WORK180.co). See you next time.