

CAROL ANDREWS: Gender
balance at work **P2**

CAREERS FOR MUMS Tapping
into a highly-skilled talent pool **P4**

ONLINE The diversity of roles
for women in STEM

Women in Business

**Sharon McCooey,
Head of LinkedIn
Ireland**

“We need to work together
to solve gender imbalance”

PHOTO: NAOISE CULHANE

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The journey to gender balance

The 30% Club launched in the UK in 2010 with a goal of achieving at least 30 per cent women on FTSE-100 boards and a vision for gender balance at all levels of organisations.

My colleagues and I launched the Club in Ireland in early 2015 after attending an inspirational 30% Club event in London in 2014.

Gender bias disadvantages females and negatively affects males. We wanted to take action on the fact that gender stereotyping limits careers, so progress towards a gender-balanced workforce is vital. A study of nearly 22,000 companies in 91 countries found a clear correlation between the number of women in executive positions and a company's profitability.

Furthermore, gender balance improves decision-making, innovation and performance. So, attracting, retaining and

developing talent of each gender is essential. This is a challenge for many businesses and even those who have improved female representation at senior levels can find it difficult to sustain momentum.

In recent years, improving gender balance has become a focus in Ireland, driven by the evidence that a diverse workplace is better for business.

In 2010, the UK Davies Review showed that women held just 12.5 per cent of FTSE board positions and set a target of increasing this to 25 per cent by 2015. This now stands at about 28 per cent. The pace of change was driven by business leaders working collaboratively from schoolrooms to boardrooms.

We're less advanced in our journey in Ireland, with only 17

**Carol Andrews**

Country Lead,
The 30% Club Ireland

"Gender balance improves decision-making, innovation and performance"

per cent of board positions on ISEQ listed companies held by women. For the last two years, we have partnered with Dublin City University supported by BNY Mellon to publish, 'Women in Management'. Our research shows under-representation of women at managerial level and steeply declining representation at more senior levels. However in companies headed by a female CEO there were more women in senior leadership perhaps due in part to the 'role modelling effect'.

Achieving change depends on visible leadership in business as well as initiatives such as the National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017-2020.

My own profession of financial services was traditionally seen as a 'man's career'. This is now changing and we need to strengthen the

flow of female talent to leadership positions in our industry.

The 30% Club now has over 180 CEO/Chair supporters, with organisations sharing experience and supporting progressive initiatives for diversity and inclusion. Working together we can build momentum and accelerate progress recognising the strong link between greater gender balance and improved performance.

I want to live in a world where we can each perform the work best suited to our abilities; where an individual can achieve the same levels of success, respect and pay regardless of where they start in life and where everyone's talents can flourish and contribute fully to benefit all. ■



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Together – Thinking & Acting Differently to be more Successful

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The future of retail and digitalization

By Alex Van Den Broek

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BROWN THOMAS

The retail sector may not be synonymous with digital technology and innovation, but renewed value in the customer experience may just bring the three together.

Sam Bain, Multichannel Channel Director at Brown Thomas and Arnotts, is one of the leading women in tech and retailing in Ireland today.

Her rise to prominence and success in her current leadership position, reflects her varied experience and expertise. Having previously worked with some of the world's leading multinationals she is no stranger to the retail industry since she started out in 1999. Bain's Creative Arts Degree and Post Graduate in Management adds another dynamic edge to her role in the ever-evolving retail sphere.

The digital era is revolutionising the landscape for businesses and customers. These changes are reflected in the new scope of activity that provide the platform for successful retailing. "In the last five to ten years the demand and advancement of creative, technical, merchant and analytical digital roles that are required for retailing online has skyrocketed," says Bain.

Customer experience in retail

Reports have indicated that, by 2020, customer experience will overtake price as the key brand differentiator. However, customer experience is already at the forefront of Bain's consideration. "In

today's world, customers expect a retail experience that exists both online as well as in physical stores and they expect to move between each easily," says Bain.

"We really do see digitization as a core pillar to maintain great customer experience," says Bain. Smartphones and mobile technology is at the heart of this revolution and is creating new moments for our business to engage with customers. 86 per cent of adults in Ireland own a smartphone and a huge percentage of them shop online."

"Our multichannel vision is about recognising the customer, their lifestyle and purchasing journey and providing a personalized, creative and useful solution in both channels (online and in store)."

The speed at which consumer demands and technological advances are evolving has been reflected in the team of which Bain is at the forefront. The digital team at Brown Thomas and Arnotts has expanded dramatically in just over four years to a diverse team and now comprises of over 50 experts, from seven nations with a 60:40 female to male split. Bain is leading the charge with a creative approach and digitization at its heart.

Developing creative solutions

Utilizing digital solutions to improve customer experience involves creativity and constant innovation, which Bain finds in-house amongst the diverse and talented team. "We are always driving innovation and in many ways trying to leapfrog onto the next thing. The introduction of our internal Innovation Team which represents customer segments across all demographics, is an ideal group to test prototypes. With over 3,000 employees, a large percentage are millennials and digital natives" says Bain.



Sam Bain

Multichannel Channel Director,
Brown Thomas and Arnotts

Bain is leading the charge with a creative approach and digitalization at its heart

The trust in the millennial influence has already begun to have a positive impact on customer experience with the development of a multichannel digital magazine issued quarterly.

"This is a deliberate move away from print into digital editorial to bring the brand to life in a new and dynamic experience for our customers. Created entirely in-house, the digital magazine showcases luxury retail in a new format that represents our customer's lifestyles and media consumption habits. Featuring interviews, interactive video, fashion and beauty shoots it is available online, through social media platforms and email and really gives our customers a full view of the brand and what we are doing. It also allows customers to shop the products online."

In-store digitization

"Our stores are renowned for leading

the way with best brands and delivering the newest trends to our customers across all categories. We carry this expectation and ethos across our group, including our online business as well as in our stores. We continue to strive to anticipate the next big ideas and new ways to use tech which will benefit all of our customers," Bain added.

For some retailers, the traditional in-store environment has long been absent of true innovation and change in terms of the customer experience – a plateau in creativity – which Bain believes can be enhanced through incorporation digital technology.

The use of in-store digital technology can extend way beyond stock management into creating a premium customer experience. Bain believes, "It is all about leveraging digital capability to create physical experiences in our stores and creating a truly exciting and exceptional experience."

"With personal or private shopping appointments, we can use our digital capabilities to build personalised shopping choices, where customers pre-select products and then they are waiting for them in the fitting room. In terms of convenience, customers who shop online can avail of click and collect services at their nearest store. Our Beauty Halls are also integrating digital capabilities and last year Estee Lauder had a selfie station pop-up allowing customers to shade match lipsticks without having to physically apply the shade."

Further development of an 'integrated loyalty app' has allowed for "more personalised and individual messaging," and even in-store recognition, where the app recognises your individual purchasing history upon entry to the store and notifies you of relevant promotional offers.

"If you have been interested in purchasing an espresso machine and

there is a promotion in-store, you will be notified of the deal upon entry," says Bain. The app will become transactional in 2018 and offer customers even more convenience.

The future retail experience

The future of the customer experience and retail sector is sure to surprise and intrigue with technological developments a main thread, according to Bain.

"Artificial intelligence and big data are most commonly anticipated. I anticipate things like 'chat-bots' (digital personal shopping assistants) but also really simple things such as digital mirrors in changing rooms," says Bain.

This progression toward a digitized customer experience involves a need for a diverse range of skills from people with different backgrounds to be truly successful.

"There are a huge number of skill-sets that are involved in delivering a successful retail brand, especially today. The word 'multichannel' encompasses it. A digitized space requires a whole number of different skill sets – including multi-tasking, flexibility, creativity, technical expertise and of course customer service... I believe this provides a lot of opportunity for women," says Bain.

Whatever the future holds for the retail experience – from personalised shopping assistants to apps that remind you of your interest in an espresso machine – the future of retail offers so much more than what is available on the shop floor. With multichannel teams as creative and ambitious as Brown Thomas' – the future of retail space looks limitless. ■



Read more on
brownthomas.com



Jim Warren

Managing Director, Careers for Mums

Full-time mothers finding flexi-time work

As the government's Affordable Childcare Scheme begins to have an effect on a projected 70,000 children, more needs to be done to support mums returning to the workplace.

Both my wife and I had benefited hugely from the flexi-time afforded to her after the birth of our first-child. The impact a considerate employer can have on your life is massive. A two day reduction in her working week and the option to work one day from home enabled her to establish a work/life balance that continues to work really well for us today.

While enjoying the benefits of flexi-work, we noticed many friends and colleagues did not receive the same flexibility from their employers after parenthood. Not only this, but they didn't know where to look to identify the many companies and roles that are brilliant when it comes to finding those all-important flexible working arrangements. The responsibilities of parenthood and working life do not have to be so conflicting.

So, we saw an opportunity. A few years later, after some hard graft and some (thankfully) generous donations, the company was born. The principle idea of careersformums.ie is an online platform to showcase flexible roles that would be appealing to mums either looking for a transition back into work or those looking to find a more suitable role with greater flexibility. The roles range from senior executives downward. From part-time to flexi-time roles, fixed term contracts to project work, job share, maternity cover and working from home. There are also some full-time positions but the majority of roles come under the 'flexible banner'.

Our aim is to access the untapped market of highly skilled, experienced mums looking for the right opportunity and to create a platform to present the many roles with companies who value the employment opportunity of mums in one easy-to-use site.

The site plays host to a range of other features including advice on how to best prepare for a return to work, tailored advice for CV and recruitment processes and case studies on mums who are currently working with their desired work/life balance. Working alongside alison.com who provide free online education for those looking to reskill or upskill, returning mums can work at their own pace to achieve their own goals.

Despite the opportunity to tap into a skilled and experienced workforce, there is still a slight cultural resistance from indigenous Irish companies as opposed to those with international operations. Potentially, this is a result of a more traditional view of employment from Irish companies but there are ever encouraging signs of increased perceptions of value for flexible working, especially for mums.

It doesn't stop here; we are looking ahead to the addition of an agency arm to the business in January 2018 as a response to an inundation of requests from users to personally help find employment – something we are extremely excited to be part of. With increased flexibility to both employer and potential employee we continue to strive to help mums back into ideal employment. A continuation of these efforts and the forward thinking we've seen from companies so far will allow Ireland's un-tapped pool of talented mums to be comfortable, confident and to excel in the workplace. ■

Sharing challenges and celebrating success

By Diane Priestley

Nuala Murphy is the CEO of Moment Health, a new technology company dedicated to maternal mental health, offering early intervention to antenatal and post-natal depression and associated anxieties for new and expectant mums and families.

This high achiever shares the secret to her success: her Lean In circle.

In 2013, Nuala Murphy was at an all-time low. Juggling a baby, pregnancy and starting a new job, she desperately needed support in her career and life, when she read Sheryl Sandberg's ground-breaking book, *Lean In*.

"I was astounded to discover that the struggles I was going through were, in fact, global issues for women everywhere. I was not alone," says Nuala.

She decided to reach out to colleagues for support and started a Lean In circle with just four members, sharing their dreams and challenges. By the end of the year, membership had grown to 100.

And now, in 2017, just four years later, Nuala is the proud founder of thriving Lean In chapters in Belfast and Dublin with circles spreading like wildfire across Ireland with 1,200 enthusiastic members.

At 37, with two young sons, aged four and two and half, she is powering ahead as CEO of her own tech company, rolling out the innovative new app Moment Health, which provides maternal mental health support worldwide. And she has been recognised with prestigious business awards.

"I could not have achieved this without my Lean In circle. I developed leadership skills I didn't know I had through surrounding myself with supportive people. I'm not unique. We all need the right kind of support to achieve our ambitions," she says.



Nuala Murphy

CEO, Moment Health and Founder, Lean In Ireland

Nuala wants to encourage women to join Lean In circles where they live and work.

Confidence and speaking up are core themes

"The core themes we explore are confidence through knowing your values and finding your voice through the power of peer support.

She says: "Research tells us that a woman might contribute to a meeting and be ignored, then a man says exactly the same point and the idea is attributed to him. Having a colleague in the room to amplify what she's said helps to recognise a woman's contribution and raise her profile."

Nuala explains that Lean In circles promote mentorship, workplace allies, positive peers and role models for girls.

The vibrant, monthly meetings provide an opportunity for members to share openly, listen deeply and learn together with panels of expert speakers fielding questions.

Men attend the events too

Circles are diverse with women of all cultures and ages and stages of their careers warmly encouraging each other. And men also attend events.

She believes in the motto: 'If you want to go far, you go together'. You have to share success; there's no

point in having it on your own. Success looks different to everybody, it's about defining your success. Once you work it out, surround yourself with the right people who will help you get there and celebrate your successes.

"Lean In circles are very open and inclusive and real. We're not pretending to be Wonder Women! Joining a circle is a real way to build your confidence and build a team around you to achieve your goals.

"Everyone in the workplace suffers from bias. The more we're aware of it, the easier it is to adjust our behaviour.

"Having access to networks can be difficult for women. But creating our own network allows us to gain access to other networks.

Our recent Be Brave event encouraged women to: go for that job, connect with those people, speaking up for what you want, surround yourself with the right people to help you achieve your goals.

Sharing is the key

"Nobody has all the answers. We need to stop giving ourselves a hard time for not having all the answers and realise it's really special when you open up and share your fears and challenges and successes with others. When you give something of yourself and support and encourage somebody else, the rewards come back tenfold.

Nuala wants to see women becoming leaders. She says: "If we have more females across the infrastructure of society we might have better healthcare and better education because these life-enhancing services are what women value the most." ■

PHOTO: DUBLIN PORT



Pat Ward: “Overall, 17 per cent of our total workforce is made up of women. This has seen a significant increase in recent years, and 30 per cent of our management team are female. We are very proud of our commitment to gender balance in the workplace, and we hope to increase those numbers in the near future.”

How to tackle gender imbalance at work

By Shauna McCrudden

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Today, there are still many workplaces which are considered to be male-dominated. Pat Ward from the Dublin Port Company says they are taking steps to ensure women get equal opportunities.

For Pat Ward, Head of Corporate Services for the Dublin Port Company, gender diversity is vital for companies. Men and women approach problems differently, which can lead to a fresh way of solving complex and challenging issues.

“We are dedicated to creating a gender balance,” says Ward. “Within our different functions, 71 per cent of our finance staff and 100 per cent of our environmental health and safety staff are female. Our project management and corporate services functions are 55 per cent and 66 per cent female respectively.

“Overall, 17 per cent of our total workforce is made up of women. This has seen a significant increase in recent years, and 30 per cent of

our management team are female. We are very proud of our commitment to gender balance in the workplace, and we hope to increase those numbers in the near future.”

Getting women involved

Dublin Port Company is the largest port in Ireland. In 2016, it handled around 35 million tonnes of goods and had over two million tourists travelling through it. Employment at the docklands and harbours has historically been male-dominated and intergenerational, with sons and grandsons working in the same areas their fathers and grandfathers worked in.

How does Ward hope to combat the idea of a historically male workplace, and create a gender balance within the staff?

Ward says: “We advertise our positions and we shortlist the CVs who meet the criteria required. We do this in such a way as to have a gender balance of candidates. We try to have an equal number of male and female candidates where it is possible. But, the best person for the job will always get the job no matter what.”

Ward also says they try to foster a culture of encouraging female participation with initiatives that are equally beneficial to both men and women.

“We are currently testing a pilot



Pat Ward

Head of Corporate Services,
Dublin Port Company

project where some employees can work from home, which has never been done before at the company. This creates an attractive workplace for those with different needs, such as childcare. Creating a family-friendly culture within the workplace is necessary to retain our top performers.

“We have also looked at job-sharing and flexible working hours. If our policies can lead to a more sustainable home and work life for our employees, then there is no reason we shouldn’t do this.”

Future roles

The organisation has a very low employee turnover as those working there tend to have a job for life. However, the company is planning

on expanding their workforce in the future in order to bring in new blood and fresh ideas.

Currently, the areas demanding more physical work such as maintenance, harbour workers and operatives, have a small number of female employees. But, Ward says they are recruiting new operational employees in the year to come, and they are enthusiastic to welcome any woman who wishes to join the company.

“We are an equal opportunity employer. Next year, we will be recruiting marine operatives and marine pilots. The operative is charged with the responsibility of operating our pilot boats which bring pilots onto the ship, and the marine pilots navigate the ships through the waters. These are both very physical and highly trained roles, and we would be delighted to have any qualified woman apply for the positions.”

Over the last few years, Ward says they have reactivated their apprenticeship programme. The first wave of the programme reached out to young men and women who had been made redundant in their apprenticeships during the recession. The apprentices would be training as electricians or in mechanical-based roles.

“Surprisingly, we have never received any applications from

women for the programme, and I really hope that can change.

“We usually reach out to the local community to provide them with employment opportunities and we’ll be doing that again. We hope there are some women out there who see the opportunity in our apprenticeship programme, as it can provide incredible career opportunities.”

Making an impact

Female participation in the workplace is highly valued, as bringing more women into the company provides fresh thinking and a different perspective. Ward feels the future looks bright for women in previously male-driven roles.

“My mother’s generation followed the tradition of women staying at home and the man going to work. That has thankfully changed with the times. Women have so much to contribute to the workplace, and men have a lot to contribute to home life and bringing up children.

“I think people now see the benefits a gender balance brings, not only to work but to society. I believe there are many great opportunities for women in the future, both at Dublin Port Company and elsewhere.” ■



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dublinport.ie

INSPIRATION



COLUMN



Moira Horgan

Head of Marketing, Business in the Community Ireland

Diversity benefits everyone

Gender diversity in the workforce attracts investors and benefits employers and employees.

Moira Horgan, Head of Marketing for Business in the Community Ireland (BITCI), the network for sustainable business says: "Gender diversity is a huge issue for investors in companies and many investors are now asking about diversity at the board level as well as throughout the organisation."

Many studies show that diverse teams perform better with better decision-making and better productivity through having a variety of opinions."

BITCI has worked with hundreds of companies across Ireland on the issue of diversity – including gender – for the past 20 years.

Expanding the talent pool

Horgan says gender diversity benefits everyone: "Employees want to work for companies that are ethical and socially-inclusive. And, diversity expands the talent pool for employers. Large companies are screaming out for talent."

BITCI recently hosted a round table event on 'Returners', a category that includes women who are returning to work from maternity leave and men and women returning after a career break. BITCI members, Standard Life and Vodafone both presented on their programmes for returners.

The discussion explored how companies can embrace flexibility and get people back into the workforce.

Moira's three top tips

- 1 Measure what you're doing.** If you don't measure diversity you can't manage it. Look at gender gaps at all levels
- 2 Set explicit targets** and 'nail your colours to the mast' by setting ambitious but realistic targets such as 'We will have 40 per cent of women in management by 2020'
- 3 Every company has a gender policy** gathering dust. You need take it off the shelf and bring it to life and explain how you are going to meet those objectives.

BITCI offer the only independently-audited standard in Ireland for sustainability, called the Businesses Working Responsibly Mark, which is based on ISO 26000 and audited by the NSAI.

"The Mark asks about a company's diversity policies, practices and performance, says Horgan. And the Mark is available to all businesses throughout Ireland. Fundamentally, diversity is a business issue and senior management need to future-proof their business by setting ambitious targets and taking meaningful action". ■

Encourage diversity and close the gender gap

By Alex Van Den Broek

With current estimates it will take over 100 years to achieve full equality in the boardroom. Leaders like Sharon McCooley are pushing the clock forward and closing the gender gap.

Only six per cent of companies in Ireland have a woman on their board, despite the World Economic Forum's 2016 Global Gender Gap study ranking Ireland as sixth best in the world when it comes to workplace gender equality, behind the Nordic countries. However, McCooley looks to take leaps and bounds ahead of the rest with gender equality, diversity programmes and ambitious female management.

A recent report from Accenture says women are vastly underrepresented in science and technology-based careers that will drive the industries of tomorrow and shape all our futures. Reasons range from poor re-integration for working parents to intangible recruitment bias. In the face of such a gender disparity, Sharon McCooley, Head of LinkedIn Ireland believes in – and successfully implements – a truly proactive approach to these issues.

"It's a societal problem... there is no one answer, but if we work together as individuals, as organisations and certain membership organisations, we can come together to solve it."

Sharon's story

After graduating in Business from University College Dublin and working across a number of different industries in high-level multinationals, Sharon McCooley discovered her true passion in the tech sector in 1993.

"The constant innovation, being at the cutting edge of technology and being able to work with such an amazing and diverse group is what brought me to tech."

McCooley has worked in four different organisations where she established the Irish branch of operations among other multinational project-based work in Europe and Asia before dealing with the trials, tribulations (and, of course, romance) of motherhood.

Having taken three years out to look after her two young children before finding her current role, McCooley had "personal experience



Sharon McCooley

Head of LinkedIn Ireland

with what it is like to come back after an extended period... It's not always easy."

This personal experience and passion to address issues of inclusion, diversity and the gender imbalance has led to McCooley being a leader in ethical practice and recruitment.

Diversify your workplace

There is a strong financial argument for diversity in the workplace with studies indicating that companies with a diverse workforce are 35 per cent more productive and, for every 10 per cent extra of gender balance achieved in a company, the profitability will rise by 3.5 per cent.

With a 50:50 gender split across 1,200 employees (and over 64 nationalities) the benefits are clear to see at the €85 million EMEA high-spec office in Dublin.

"When compared with other companies around the world, our 'Employee Voice Survey' score is extremely high," says McCooley. "You will feel that energy and general wellbeing if you walk into our building, which you are more than welcome to do any day of the week."

High retention of talent and high employee satisfaction scores indicate the potential impact of a diverse workforce. "Those two things will tell you we have a happy workforce who stay with us. Our employees feel successful and our business is successful as a result of that," says McCooley.

'Programme your network'

Creating a balanced workforce is difficult for STEM organisations with issues on the supply side that start in the education system. "Each stage of the way we drop off potential applicants to such an extent that, by the time applicants come

out of college, there is generally a bias already in the system."

McCooley attempts to ensure balance and equal opportunity through education, training and diversity in the recruitment process. "We do lots of bias training and ensure a diverse range of people from different backgrounds are involved in the interview process," says McCooley. "This is a really enlightening experience for everyone, having the terminology to help call out biases has really helped us. It's supremely important".

Positive initiatives

McCooley has further ambitions to provide support services that extend beyond the walls of her own Dublin office with the new 'ReturnIn' initiative to offer training and employment for those returning to work from extensive leave, rolling out for 10 employees in 2018.

"If it works here, we can see this being implemented globally. There is a social need and untapped potential within this pool of talent," says McCooley.

Creating role models

Citing an ever-increasing pool of positive female role models in tech, McCooley believes the future is bright for women in tech. This is thanks to the positive work and aspirational successes of women in the industry, such as LinkedIn's CMO, "Shannon 'Stubo' Brayton and, more locally, Paypal's Vice President of Global Operations, EMEA, Louise Phelan. It's so important to have positive role models for women in the industry."

Spearhead diversity

The ambition of McCooley and her team to spearhead innovative and inclusive programmes for their employees and the wider community is a 'continuous journey' of positive business practice for both women and men.

"Gender imbalance and a lack of diversity in the workplace is a large problem and we need to work together to solve it" say McCooley. If more leaders and organisations take a proactive approach, the gender gap in tech may well close sooner than the turn of the century. ■

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Women thrive in STEM industries

By Diane Priestley

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Anne Moore never thought she would end up as the Environmental Manager for Gas Networks Ireland.

After eight years with the innovative company, she enthuses about her exciting job: “I love my role. Every day provides new challenges!”

Blessed with encouragement and support from her parents and teachers to study science and maths, she believes this provided the foundation for her fascinating career.

“I was lucky to come from a home that placed huge emphasis

on maths in school. My father had a love of maths and helped me and my siblings all the way through school.

“I also had female chemistry and biology teachers who were passionate about their subjects, who influenced me to pursue a university degree in Science.

“I was lucky to be in a school with a strong emphasis on the STEM subjects – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

“I would love it if all girls had the same access to STEM subjects in school. I think this is key to women entering the STEM path. I advise girls considering a STEM career to ‘Go for it!’ It’s a wonderful career, both challenging and enjoyable.”

Anne believes there is an interesting variety of jobs in the field for women. She says: “There is a perception that when you pick a college course, you will be stuck in that area for life. But in reality, you can choose



Anne Moore

Environmental Manager,
Gas Networks Ireland

your own career path. There are endless opportunities in the STEM area.”

After graduating from University College Dublin with an Honours Chemistry Degree in 1998, Anne worked for the pharmaceutical industry, then as a Health, Safety and Environment consultant across

everything from the food industry to steel works. She then joined Gas Networks Ireland, starting as a safety engineer.

“Fortunately, I haven’t faced obstacles to advancement because my employer is supportive both personally and professionally; very open to new ideas and supporting innovation.”

A huge responsibility

Anne explains that Ireland is under pressure from the EU to meet environmental targets. Failure to meet targets could lead to significant fines and harm Ireland’s reputation.

She adds: “Homeowners and businesses have become more conscious of the need to reduce energy use and ensure energy comes from cleaner sources. Our organisation is looking to deliver Renewable Gas as a solution.”

The pollinator plan

Gas Networks Ireland has also signed up as a business supporter of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020.

“Irish Pollinators (bees, hoverflies etc.) are in serious decline requiring immediate attention to ensure the sustainability of our food production, avoid additional economic impact on the agricultural sector and protect the health of the environment,” explains Anne.

“The Pollinator Plan provides food and shelter across the country so that pollinators can survive and thrive. We met recently with Biodiversity Ireland to discuss how our company can support this important initiative.” ■

Read more on
gasnetworks.ie

PHOTO: FITBIT



From left to right: Caroline Roche, Senior Financial Controller, Nicola Maxwell, Director of EMEA Retail Marketing and Caroline Chauvire, Head of Brand and Communications, EMEA

Finding your work/life balance

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We are all searching for balance, but what does that really mean? It means having the freedom and flexibility to build a career that fits seamlessly around your daily life, family commitments and personal goals, whatever they may be.

At Fitbit, there is a commitment to helping people to lead healthier lives; be that through feeling motivated and challenged, becoming more active, or from learning more about their own health and wellbeing. For women building a career here, this customer promise is brought to life for employees by offering a working environment that allows people to embrace an active and health-focused mindset in their day-to-day professional and personal lives.

“With a busy work and home life it can be really hard to find the right balance. Having the flexibility to do the school drop off, attend

the doctor’s appointment, fit in your walk – or even attend one of the fitness classes – is a real help. Such flexibility may not be the key reason for joining a company, but is an important one for retention” Caroline Roche, Senior Financial Controller, EMEA.

Another company belief is that you’re more likely to reach your goals if you’re encouraged to have fun, challenge yourself and feel empowered along the way – and that’s exactly how they approach each day.

Caroline Chauvire – Head of Brand and Communications, EMEA says: “Leading a number of marketing and communications teams across the

EMEA region means that my job is incredibly diverse – every day is different. It’s an exciting and dynamic role but it also requires flexibility. My working culture needs to reflect this and I know that making time to fit in a run or bring the kids swimming can be just as important as fitting in a conference call.”

One size does not fit all – in career, life or health and fitness. Fitbit has something to offer everyone and this is reflected in the inclusiveness of the work culture.

“The tech space is evolving so rapidly that now it’s possible to work anywhere and be even more productive whether you are in the office or

out and about. Employers must embrace the attitude that we need to ‘blend’ work into our lives. This attitude should be truly a part of the organisational culture, where everyone’s career and personal goals are facilitated. Here, we are passionate and dedicated to health and wellbeing, and building products that help transform the lives of people across the globe.” Nicola Maxwell – Director of EMEA Retail Marketing. ■

Read more on
fitbit.com

INSPIRATION



TIPS

**Emily Lane**Co-Founder,
Lane and Simon Consulting**Maureen Simon**Co-Founder,
Lane and Simon Consulting

7 Keys for optimum empowerment

Change is coming, and it's coming fast. Globally, women's self-perception is shifting.

Here in Ireland, we are happy to report that women in business are right at the forefront of this cultural change. Irish women are waking up at lightning speed to realise their strengths, what is important to them and to how they want to live and work today.

Remarkably, companies led by women at CEO level have been shown to deliver 14 per cent more ROI. Perhaps it is not surprising to then learn that women have specific skills, talents and gifts that are hard-wired for success. These unique feminine distinctions are both psychological and biological and are evident in the way women operate in business. Our work with our clients has shown us that women are particularly designed to be natural networkers, collaborators, communicators and leaders.

It is now time for Irish women in business to step forward into natural leadership roles, claim powerful feminine attributes they naturally hold and consciously, confidently live their lives in a way that includes their values and strengths.

Our top seven keys for beginning this journey are:

- 1 Creating your best self** is an inside-job, one that requires inner reflection and a commitment to change. Look within to begin.
- 2 As a woman, you are designed** naturally for collaboration, relationship building, communications and leadership. Which of these areas is your strongest? Begin to consciously engage this power and lead with it now.
- 3 Recognise that you are unique** and have a personal contribution that cannot be replaced. You are here for a reason. Reflect and notice your uniqueness today!
- 4 Learn about and claim** the natural and powerful feminine attributes that you already have.
- 5 The art of self-leadership begins** with self-care. Consciously make time to nourish yourself and look after you personal needs. If you were to choose one need for today, what would it be?
- 6 Never fear change.** It is your friend. Look for opportunities to stretch yourself and fully show up in the New Year.
- 7 Women need community.** Learn the value of communicating authentically to create trust and more powerfully influence relationships.



Learn more online at www.laneandsimon.com

PHOTO: THINKSTOCK



A focus on gender diversity can have a transformative impact on an organisation

Chartered Accountants are leading the way in attracting more women to the profession and supporting those returning to the workplace.

Earlier this year, I was elected as President of Chartered Accountants Ireland, Ireland's largest professional body for Accountants. I am only the second female to hold this position; the first female President took office in 1983 – quite a considerable time ago.

Transformative impact

Gender diversity is one area that I have been keen to bring a greater focus to. It is important, not just because it does more to represent the full spread of our membership, and, not because it can be more reflective of business's customer base; it is important because focus on gender diversity can have a transformative impact on an organisation.

Studies show that having gender diversity can be powerful. The Financial Reporting Council, for example, has stated that diversity in board composition is an important driver of effectiveness, creating a breadth of perspective and breaking down a tendency towards 'group think'.

Others have demonstrated the links between diversity and

**Shauna Greely**President, Chartered
Accountants
Ireland

resilience; some have even asked if more women in boardrooms might have helped to prevent the financial crisis.

Building confidence

At Chartered Accountants Ireland, we're fully committed to leading the way in increasing the pace of change. We have a Diversity Committee, composed of members, with specific targets to represent women and develop female talent.

Since 2013 we've been running various activities; boot camps and one day workshops designed for female Chartered Accountants who want to get back to work following a career break. These have been attended by women formerly working at a high level who had taken time out for their family and who are now keen to return to work.

They want to use their qualification, demonstrate their skills and add value.

Not only do these events cover the practical steps that women need to consider when returning to work after a break – areas like rebuilding networks and technology updates, but they are also vital in terms of building women's confidence and allowing them to meet and support others taking on the same challenge.

Rapid change

Our membership base today is at a 60:40 male to female split, with one third of our governing council being female. And things are changing quickly. Our student body is 50 per cent female and our student body chairpersons in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, are both female. I can be sure that it won't be nearly 35 years before my next female successor as President.

Of course, there is more to do, both in our particular organisations and in society as a whole, but it is time for us all to make a start. Let's inspire, encourage and develop the talent that's out there. Let's bring through female talent that can make our businesses more diverse, more resilient and more successful. ■



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businessnews.ie

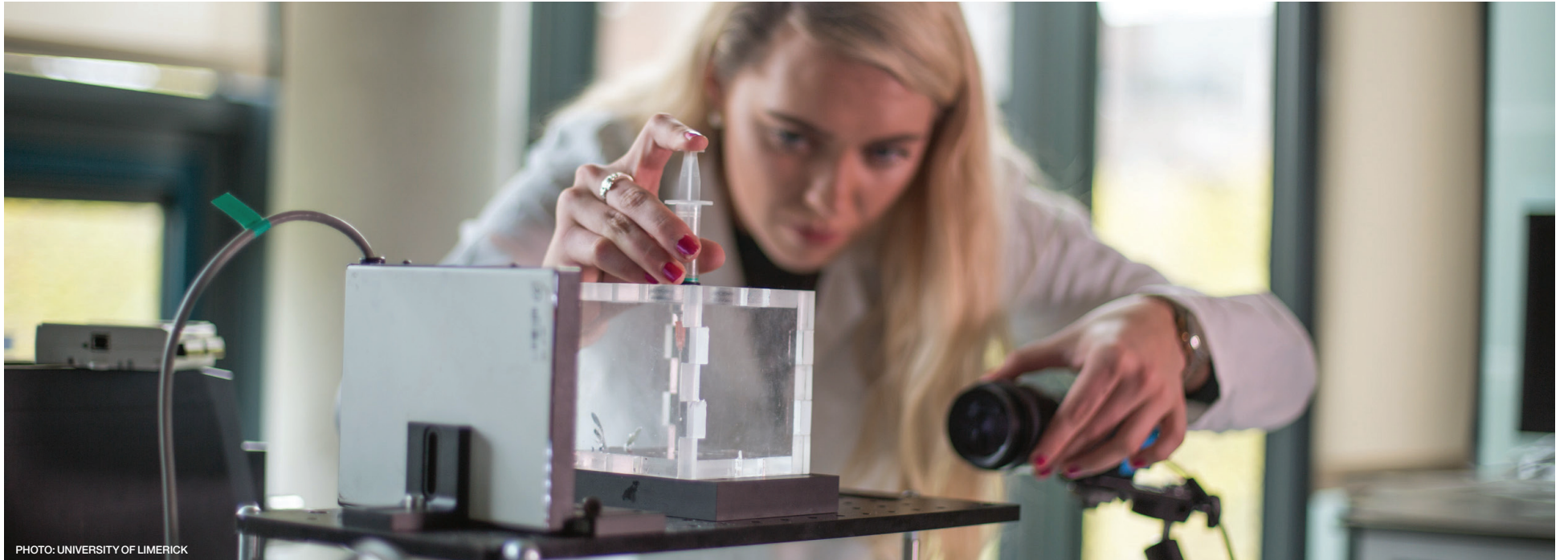


PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

Committed to advancing gender equality

The underrepresentation of women in higher education STEM courses is an intractable problem nationally and internationally. Here's how the University of Limerick (UL) are actively seeking to foster gender equality.

By Clodagh Dooley



Prof Edmond Magner

Dean of the Faculty of Science and Engineering

Gender imbalance in STEM-related courses is a long-term problem. It is not an issue that can be fixed quickly; it requires a long term commitment. We have been very proactive for a number of years, with research programmes that try to understand and address the barriers for women entering the industry, as well as developing gender equality policies and procedures. Currently, 3,972 students are doing STEM-related studies here – 53 per cent of the STEM student population – and we have the highest percentage of female professors in Ireland. We make sure that we have fair recruitment processes for staff – that are unbiased – and we also ensure that staff – in particular women who take leave, whether for maternity or careers leave – are actively supported and funded to get back into work and research. We strive to attract the best talent into STEM courses, both male and female. To encourage more young people to study STEM, we send past graduates to schools to showcase the opportunities that can be available to them. We also engage with companies to give our students scholarship opportunities. Not only does this give students the chance to work in industry, we also use this as an opportunity to ask these students to return to their old schools and share their experience to inspire younger students. ■



Sarah Mitchell

Head of Department and Senior Lecturer in Applied Mathematics

What use is maths after school? A lot of use actually. Problem solving, logical thinking and data handling are all mathematical skills which are applicable to the real world. Creating the virtual world of video games involves maths. Maths is used throughout medical research to model the spread of diseases and check the effectiveness of new medicines. Most of today's music uses synthesisers to add effects to the sound, and these are created by software engineers using maths techniques. There are many exciting careers which involve maths and young students need to be aware of the opportunities a maths education can bring. But we need to change how we think about maths. Recently, I did an outreach programme in a school in County Limerick, where nine and 10 year old girls had already decided maths was a boy's subject – we want to change this view. As one of the first Irish institutions to achieve the Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) Bronze award, we are committed to advancing gender equality in STEM. I'm very proud to have been promoted to Senior Lecturer and Head of Department recently, and I think that all women should be motivated to pursue senior or leadership roles. It's a busy, challenging career but it's exciting. If you have a real love for the subject, there are many careers that open up from having a maths background. ■



Niamh Nash

BEng in Aeronautical Engineering and PhD in composite materials

When I graduated from Aeronautical Engineering back in 2012, I graduated top of my class alongside another woman. When the course was finished, many of my classmates got careers directly after graduation in aircraft design and in aircraft leasing. I decided to continue my studies at UL, and complete a PhD in composite materials (combining materials to make a stronger material). This interest was the result of an internship I completed as an undergraduate as part of a 'Women in Engineering' scholarship that I won. After this, I began my current job as an Aerospace Mechanical Engineer, where I put my creative and problem-solving skills to the test – designing and assessing aviation and space flight technology. There are so many opportunities with an engineering degree – engineers are highly sought after. Engineering is a discipline for anyone, man or woman, with an interest in technical subjects and who wants to contribute to the development of essentially everything you use on a daily basis. Designing new technology, be it in everyday items, such as phones or computers, aircraft or space craft, or even designing equipment to help develop cures for diseases – it's such a diverse subject and career. It's the type of job where every day is different and exciting. I love going into work in the mornings as I never know what each day will bring. ■

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INSPIRATION

PHOTO: THINKSTOCK



Ireland is failing to reap the returns on a pool of highly educated and skilled women

Do you ever wonder what happened to that really talented woman you used to work with, who left her job after her second child and seemed to fall off the radar?

If you spend any time at the school gates in Dublin, Cork or towns around Ireland, you will meet many women like her. You'll find highly educated engineers, project managers and software developers standing alongside lawyers, accountants and consultants, all now at home looking after their children.

Women have been told they can have it all. They outperform at school and at college, set themselves ambitious goals, and then find themselves set adrift when it comes to having families and working. The data shows that up to the age of about 30, women keep pace with men in the workforce. After that, however, a hefty gap opens up, with just 64 per cent of women working compared with more than 70 per cent of men.

A World Economic Forum (WEF) gender gap report from last year placed Ireland top of the table for educational attainment. However, when it came to economic participation and opportunity, Ireland slumped to 49th, due to lower female participation rates and lower average earnings for women.

The WEF report notes, a large number of countries – Ireland included – “have failed to reap the returns on a pool of highly educated and skilled women”.

Return to work challenges

Whether it's to take some time out to be at home with your family, look after elderly parents, or start your own business, there are plenty of reasons that professionals step off the career path. But, when it's time to get back on, it can feel very daunting.

“The majority of people who step out of organisations don't do it with the intention of leaving permanently,” said Elaine Russell, who has set up the Irish branch of Women Returners, an organisation that has helped hundreds of professional women to get back into the workforce. Studies have found that 75 per cent of women on career breaks intend to return to the workforce when the time is right.

Russell said a number of factors – external and internal – keep women from going back. “Some of the reasons can be personal to the individual who may doubt their own skills and be asking themselves, “Am I still relevant? Has the workplace moved on too much? Am I too old? Will any employer be interested in me after such a long break?” These are typical questions that people ask themselves when they are considering returning.” Others relate to the job market, where applicants without recent experience rarely make it through traditional recruitment routes.

Steps to get back to work

From our experience at Women Returners, one of the most common ‘returner’ mistakes is to launch straight into an unfocussed

Returnships: higher-level paid internships tailored to create a supported route back to mid-to-senior-level roles for returning professionals

Elaine Russell

Head of Women Returners, Ireland

job search. This approach is more likely to dent fragile self-confidence than get someone back to a satisfying job. We suggest the following steps to a successful route back to work:

1. Start by getting clear about the type of role and organisation you want to target. What energises and motivates you? Do you prefer managerial or technical roles, operational or strategic work? Use this thinking to identify the types of activity and environment which suit you best.
2. Make sure you know how to sell yourself. Start by writing down all your strengths and skills. Ask friends and family for feedback on great things you have done and use those stories to pick out other skills. Then craft your ‘career story’. Outline your pre-break work experience and qualifications. Give a brief

explanation of your break – don't apologise or justify – and do mention any relevant study, projects or volunteering. Finish with a short description of the type of work you are now targeting.

3. Get up-to-date with your sector news and trends. Start reading articles. It's also a great idea to meet ex-colleagues and discuss what is going on for them and the current challenges and opportunities facing your sector.
4. Many mid to senior roles in Ireland are filled through the hiring manager's network so your contacts are important. So, get networking! Tell friends, family and acquaintances what you are looking for as you never know who might have just the right contact for you.

Each of these steps support rebuilding your professional network.

How returner programmes work

In the UK, we have succeeded in starting to change the conversation around returners. Employers are recognising that this high-calibre and motivated group can help to increase gender and age diversity, and fill talent gaps.

Central to this change of employer mindset has been the introduction of ‘returnships’: higher-level paid internships tailored to create a supported route back to mid-to-senior-level roles for returning professionals. Returnships range from three to six months, with a strong possibility of an ongoing role at the end. While

the majority of participants are women, programmes are open to anyone, male or female, who has taken a long career break.

Employers get access to an untapped, high-calibre candidate pool, with the opportunity of a built-in trial period to reduce the perceived risk. Returners take on professionally paid work using their existing skills and experience, and receive support from the employer in terms of training, mentoring and often coaching to enable them to rapidly rebuild their professional confidence and skills.

What's next for Ireland?

We're now taking our learnings from the UK market to introduce returnships and other returner programmes into Ireland in a way that works for both business and the returners.

If your organisation is concerned about skills gaps or diversity at mid to senior levels, encourage them to consider returners and the returnship model as a mutually beneficial way to target a valuable new group of talented employees. ■



Elaine Russell is Head of Women Returners, Ireland. Women Returners is a consulting, coaching and networking organisation that works with individuals and organisations to create supported routes back to work for experienced professionals after a long career break.



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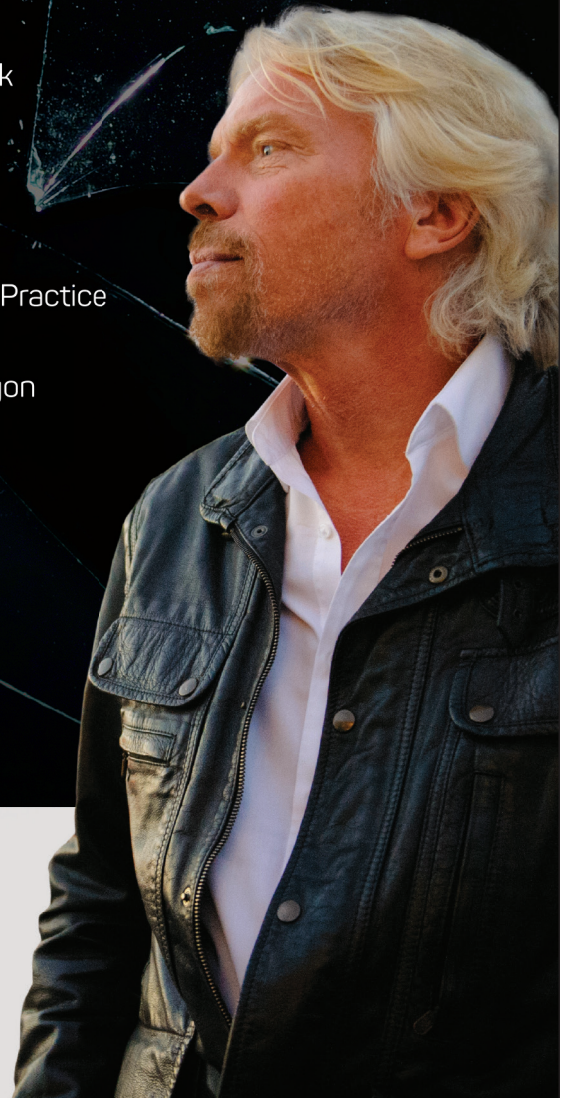
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The real issues facing women in the workplace

By Tony Greenway

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Sheila Gallagher
Commercial Director



Geraldine Casey
People and IT Director



Sarah Gallagher
Legal Director



Christine Heffernan
Corporate Affairs Director

With over 13,500 colleagues, Tesco is one of the largest private sector employers in Ireland and is proud that more than half of all colleagues and 50 per cent of the Irish leadership team are female. We caught up with four Directors from Tesco Ireland to talk about some of the biggest issues affecting women in business today – from better work/life balance to improving female empowerment in the workplace.

What are the challenges for women in a male-dominated workplace?

Getting people to see the real them. It's important for everyone to see past traditional female stereotypes – such as 'women are better communicators', or 'men are more assertive' – and reveal their true skillsets. We need to forget preconceived ideas about what women are 'like', and concentrate on getting the best from individuals.

How can businesses challenge preconceptions of male-dominated roles?

It can be done in lots of ways, big and small: from the development of people through coaching and courses, to simply allowing everyone – whatever their gender – to speak in a meeting. The important thing is to encourage women to find their voice, build their confidence and demonstrate their own skills and talents.

How important are female role models in business?

Really important! If you can identify successful women who are further up the corporate ladder, then that's highly empowering and encouraging. I've benefited from different role models – and mentors who have encouraged me – at different stages of my life.

What is the most pressing challenge that women face in business today?

Returning to work after having children is one of – and it is only one of! – the challenges that women face. But work/life balance affects men with children or anyone caring for elderly relatives or a partner. It's something that all businesses need to focus on, and not simply characterise as 'a female issue'.

There are fewer women at the top of global businesses. Why?

It could be women's lack of confidence in their own skills and abilities, or it could be 'impostor syndrome' – the idea that they shouldn't really be there – I think that affects women more than men. Women need the confidence to stick their necks out.

What can be done so that women are able to climb the career ladder more easily?

Changing ways of working, such as introducing greater flexibility. It's also vital to have the right support systems in place, such as coaching and mentoring. Businesses need to nurture women to give them the confidence to sit at the top table. At Tesco, we're a fully nationwide company, and we promote mentoring, networking and coaching to ensure that all colleagues – not just women – are supported and progress through the variety of roles available.

Do women have to work harder to prove themselves in business? If so, what can be done about it?

Yes. I think it's really important that women support and promote each other. We have a big role to play in society, so the workplace should be more inclusive and representative of us, too.

How important is networking to career advancement?

Extremely important, both inside and outside your organisation. I'm part of a women's executive network group, which I've found particularly inspiring. Networking can be daunting, but it's also a great opportunity to find your voice and meet people who are experiencing similar challenges to you. It encourages different ways of thinking, and it's a good way to grow confidence.

What is the most pressing challenge that women face in business today?

One of the biggest is self-belief. I tell every female I mentor 'believe you can do it – because you can.' I'm not suggesting for one minute that women are not courageous, because they are. But they have to push on towards their goals and not let any barriers get in their way.

How can companies help women achieve a proper work/life balance?

It's about good communication, and understanding that not everything can and should be about work. When women return to work after taking a break they must feel that no-one's view of them has changed. Businesses shouldn't just pay lip service to this. They have to really understand the challenge each individual has when it comes to achieving a good work/life balance.

Are some businesses wary of employing women because they think they require a better work/life balance than men?

I don't hear that as a complaint anymore – although when I started my career 18 years ago, I think it was probably different. For the most part, companies have good policies and maternity benefits in place these days.

How have you managed to achieve a work/life balance?

Support from home helps, and good organisation is key. You have to take one day at a time, because priorities may change during 24 hours! It helps to be agile, and don't try to do everything yourself. Take support where you need it.

Why is it important for a business to be gender diverse?

It leads to better engagement, innovative thinking, creativity, greater insight and better decision-making: all the things that lead to stronger performance. It's also important for recruitment and retention because businesses have to utilise 100 per cent of the talent available to them and win the race for millennial talent. Plus, successful businesses have to be representative of their customers.

What particular strengths can women add to a team?

People see women as being more collaborative, more empathetic and good communicators. But it's important not to overplay stereotypes in the workplace. Instead, it's vital to have a happy marriage of skills and life experiences within a team – and gender diversity is central to that.

Are diversity quotas a good thing for business?

Whether you're female or male, if you're good enough to get the job, you should get the job. Businesses have a responsibility – actually an imperative – to identify and remove any barriers that might prevent greater gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

How important are female mentors in business?

Very important. Mentoring and role modeling is important if we expect to grow and nurture not only existing female leaders but new ones too. Mentors can advocate for you and help you progress along your career path. It's important that female mentors help both men and women to ensure the workplace is more diverse, leading to more innovation and creativity. ■