

LIGHTBULB MOMENTS

Ian Narev, Commonwealth Bank CEO

In finance, like in any industry, the key is get the best people and make them as successful as they possibly can be and statistically half of them are going to be women so the answer is not only that it can be done, it has to be done, and I don't accept the answer that a successful career for any portion of the population is not possible.

My lightbulb moment at a personal level was in one sense always there because I grew up in an environment where my parents had been war refugees from Nazi Germany. One had been in a concentration camp; one had been hidden so I grew up from the earliest years knowing the effects of negative discrimination and so there was a lightbulb right through my life that discrimination was a bad thing and everybody should just be judged on his/her merit.

In the business sense my lightbulb moment was having my own children, having them a bit older and as a senior executive and that led me to engage in a lot of discussions with women about their families because I was going through raising young children and that gave me a real understanding at a personal level about the difficulty in juxtaposing bringing up the family with working, particularly for women, and seeing that through those eyes was a real lightbulb.

Unconscious bias for me is important because it helps people reconcile the fact that they feel like they're good people doing the right thing but somehow the outcomes aren't there because as they are judging people, interviewing etc, actually although their brain is telling them "I'm judging them on merit, irrespective of gender, colour, religion, sexual preference etc" actually unconsciously they're being informed by a range of experiences which are causing them to not recognise that candidate's quality and so the fact that people have recognised that increasingly and are aware of it and can test themselves on it, build processes around it, is a very positive advance in my mind.

The main criticism these days is now actually that we give the attention to this issue, we're going to put people in jobs who don't deserve it and that's rubbish but that is a common criticism now as the debate is increasingly

frequent relating to quotas, targets etc., that's a common criticism that you have. I think it's rubbish. Good organisations are not doing that. There are plenty of talented women, that you can actually find good women to put into good roles without having to put the wrong people in the wrong roles. Undoubtedly there are still overt and unconscious biases about what happens with maternity leave. Is the person going to come back committed and all those sorts of things? They are still out there. I think our approach and our language is improving that but those biases undoubtedly still exist so that when male leaders are dealing with a woman in their team who is pregnant, on maternity leave, recently back from maternity leave, or even with young children, they are somehow judging that person differently from men in the team, sometimes in terms of their commitment. It's not supported by fact but that problem is still out there.

I think you can embrace anti-discrimination without having had personal experience of discrimination and I've seen people do that. I talk about this a lot with people and I've seen people grow up in environments where they've had a very balanced upbringing, right socioeconomic group, not suffering from discrimination but through various things they've read, people they've spoken to etc., they've reached a view that this is an important fact for them in their lives, notwithstanding they haven't had the experience. It's a matter of openness, good morality, good business judgment and empathy which can be borne of experience but doesn't need to have been.

When I was a teenager I spent eight months working on a kibbutz in Israel and every day I went into the chicken coop and picked eggs that starts at five o'clock in the morning. It was just eight hours of grabbing eggs, putting them in a tray, being attacked by roosters etc and I worked with people from all sorts of different

backgrounds, skill sets, different languages etc, and what it taught me is just how enjoyable it is to be working in a diverse group of people with different skills, different interests. When you're an executive life sometimes you get used to being in an environment where you're spending a lot of time with people of a particular skill set, executives etc., and what you've always got to make sure is that you realise that it's enjoyable to spend time with and learn from and just enjoy the company of people from all sorts of diverse backgrounds.