



Marsden Collective

HER BRILLIANT CAREER

Hannah Doody explores what it means to be a woman in the workforce in 2016.

YOU ENDURED ALL those years of school; you survived the energy drink-fuelled late nights at university; you graduated and landed your first job. Finally, all your hard work has paid off... and then you realise your male colleague is earning twice as much as you.

This is the reality for many women in Australia and around the world. Data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency shows the full-time gender pay gap is currently sitting at 17.2 per cent. That statistic means women are earning, on average, nearly \$15,000 less than their male counterparts per year.

Melissa Marsden was one of these women. A motivated young girl from Oakey, Melissa had a job at the local bakery, and she saved all her money so she could afford a computer. Moving to Brisbane at 17, she studied a Bachelor of Design at Griffith's Queensland College of Art and began working in interior design.

"In a previous role, I was paid almost half that of my male colleagues despite the fact that I had many hats to wear, whereas they had a specific focus in the business. And I was matching or exceeding them in generating new business for the organisation," says Melissa.



Melissa Marsden, Chief Creative and Director at Marsden Collective



Libby Davies, CEO of White Ribbon Australia

“I was told that I was young and that my time would come to earn the equivalent amount,” says Melissa. “But this is a classic example of ambitious young women being undervalued despite their significant contribution.”

These experiences drove Melissa to work harder to prove herself in the workplace. Today, Melissa is the director of Marsden Collective, an all-female creative design firm based in Fortitude Valley. Melissa has also recently been named as a finalist in the Entrepreneur category of the 2016 Telstra Business Women’s Awards.

While Melissa says there is still a lot of work to do, she is certain that society is taking steps in the right direction.

“The discussion is happening for men to be given the same paternal leave that is extended to women,” says Melissa. This change will enable more mothers to return to work and share the parenting and financial workload with their partner.

Jackie Woods, Strategy and Engagement Executive Manager at the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, is supportive of this discussion.

“Australian organisations are increasingly recognising that gender equality is good for business,” Jackie says. “We are seeing growth in: flexible work arrangements for women and men with caring or other commitments; training and mentoring programs to support women into senior roles; and payroll analyses to identify and address gender pay gaps.”

“The [number of] women’s networking groups has grown exponentially,” says Melissa. “And within these groups I have seen a shift from competing with one another to supporting each other and embracing the tall poppy syndrome, lifting one another up.”

This female support network is essential, but that doesn’t mean that men should be excluded from the conversation. White Ribbon Australia is an organisation that works to engage men and encourage them to drive social change, especially when it comes to any violence against women in the workplace.

“It’s about men standing up and saying, ‘We want to walk alongside women to drive this change,’” says Libby Davies, CEO of White Ribbon Australia.

The White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation Program recognises workplaces that are taking active steps to prevent and respond to violence against women and make conditions in a working environment more respectful.

“It gives workplaces the skills and expertise to change or build a culture where women feel safe, respected and supported,” says Libby.

The Workplace Accreditation Program is based on research by the Australian Government Department of Social Services; 15 criteria must be met in order to achieve certification.

Libby says it doesn’t stop there: certified workplaces have KPIs to meet, ensuring that they also “walk the walk” and are held accountable for whether they put their values into action. There are currently 65 White Ribbon accredited workplaces, ranging from smaller companies to larger organisations such as National Rugby League and Telstra.

There are currently 120 workplaces undergoing the accreditation process and, of these, 23 are applying to be reaccredited – meaning they have been certified for more than three years.

It seems like such a small thing – equal pay for equal work, and ensuring that everyone feels comfortable in the work place.

Hopefully some day soon we’ll be able to take such luxuries for granted. With more and more companies putting themselves in the spotlight and taking steps to address gender inequality, the future looks bright.

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