Women find their champions at Henley Forum

28 September 2015

The London offices of global law firm Allen & Overy played host to the latest event in the Henley Women in Leadership calendar, with the latest research from Henley providing the prologue for a panel discussion on the subject of championing.

Opening the event, Henley Business School’s Deputy Dean, Professor Ginny Gibson, began by marking Henley’s 70th anniversary, before welcoming the audience of over 100 men and women. Professor Gibson went on to highlight the benefits of diverse leadership, including better decision-making, and then introduced the speaker for the event, Dr Shaheena Janjuha-Jivraj, Associate Professor at the Henley Centre for Entrepreneurship.

Women in leadership across the Commonwealth

Dr Janjuha-Jivraj presented the results of her recent survey into women in leadership, which had been undertaken across 53 Commonwealth nations between August 2014 and January 2015. The report presented a baseline study of women in leadership roles across the Commonwealth for the public and political sectors along with insights gained in case studies and fifty interviews with women in leadership roles from diverse backgrounds.

The findings highlighted that in so many countries, relevant, accurate data still isn’t available; in fact, only 18 countries were able to produce comprehensive information, and even some of the most developed countries failed (or were reluctant) to provide meaningful information.*

But as Dr Janjuha-Jivraj was at pains to point out: ‘It’s absolutely essential that we create some baseline data so that we can provide a basis for future comparison and establish the rate of progress.’ Adopting a multi-layered approach the report identified the three constituents that need to work collaboratively to support greater gender diversity in leadership; governments with a clear target for gender representation in leadership, businesses and advocacy groups.

The research looked into the ratio of women at C-level compared to the number who were at board level, and it became clear that while imposing quotas had been doing more harm than good, having clear, measurable targets was working far better. Dr Janjuha-Jivraj commented that: ‘This is not gender for gender’s sake, but recognising the value of diversity.’

According to Dr Janjuha-Jivraj, the respondents cited a number of factors in them gaining traction and confidence to perform in executive positions, including:

- having stretch role opportunities at an early stage
- having role models – both in the family and in business
- a culture in which an increased willingness to take risks, or make a stand, wasn’t seen as a barrier
- organisations in which there was a clear strategic vision – a sense of bigger purpose – plus a greater embracing of change and a pioneering spirit
The emergence of championing as an opportunity to develop talent

Dr Janjuha-Jivraj spoke about the differential features of mentoring, sponsoring and championing, and of how the latter was providing a more appealing and practical alternative in many cases.

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<th>Mentoring</th>
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<tr>
<td>• person with relevant experience and knowledge</td>
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<td>• offers advice, guidance, a safe space</td>
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<td>• informal relationship – no direct reciprocity</td>
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<td>MOTIVATION: ‘paying back’, knowledge sharing</td>
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<th>Sponsorship</th>
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<td>• proactively helps you achieve promotion</td>
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<td>• offers stretch opportunities</td>
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<td>• expects a return on investment</td>
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<td>MOTIVATION: succession planning, harnessing talent to achieve performance goals</td>
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<th>Championing</th>
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<td>• proactively supports growth of talent</td>
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<td>• investment in a longer-term relationship</td>
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<td>• altruistic</td>
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<td>MOTIVATION: developing talented individuals and seeing them thrive</td>
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When Dr Janjuha-Jivraj looked at what helped women succeed, the impact of mentoring was evidently a strong driver, and sponsorship also featured prominently, with the caveat that a return on investment was expected.

In practice sponsorship benefits men more than women, ‘men have generally been over-sponsored and under-mentored, while for women, the opposite was shown to be the case.’ (CTI, 2013).

Dr Janjuha-Jivraj proposed that championing could be the way forward for women considered to be the ‘ones to watch’ (OTW), with the champions investing in talent and in the well-being of that talent. Championing is based on the CHAMP model as a framework that describes the journey for women in leadership;

Chisholm & Janjuha-Jivraj (2015) **‘Championing women leaders’ Palgrave MacMillan
*The Commonwealth report, Shifting Gears in Women’s Leadership will be presented at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Malta in November 2015, a full copy of the report will be available after 26th November, for more information please contact: Nikki Cooper

** Dr Janjuha-Jivraj’s book on Championing women leaders, co-authored with Kitty Chisholm, includes 20 case studies of women across the world sharing their championing experiences. The book published by Palgrave MacMillan is available for preorder.

To reinforce this, she shared three quotes on the impact of championing:

For the majority of my leadership life, I had to hunt down people if I wanted their support... It’s not a natural thing for women to do, even though we overachieve, we are reluctant or unable to articulate our impact, not in an arrogant space but in an assured space. We must change this, for women in leadership roles can be a game-changing value proposition.

Rt Hon Dame Jenny Shipley, former Prime Minister of New Zealand

In the early part of my career I never really identified them as champions, but in hindsight I can see even from my very early days they believed in me and gave me the opportunity. They didn’t know if it was going to work or not.

Anne Abraham, LeadWomen, Malaysia; Non-executive Director, Media Prima Bhd; former Managing Director, Cisco Malaysia

Following Dr Janjuha-Jivraj’s presentation, some of the issues raised were explored in more depth in a question and answer session with the audience.

**Q. Are champions mainly men?**

A number of women in the audience said they had been championed by men, and Dr Janjuha-Jivraj suggested that this might simply be a ‘numbers game’ at this stage.

One audience member described how she had championed another woman but was challenged by a male board member, who accused her of recruiting in her own image. While unconscious bias undoubtedly still exists, it was noted that ‘the only way to combat bias is to have greater diversity’.

Another delegate commented that: ‘When you glimpse yourself through the eyes of a champion, you begin to realise what you can achieve.’

**Q. How can we improve championing?**

In response, Dr Janjuha-Jivraj asserted that: ‘It will move forward so long as it’s perceived as credible, sensible and practical,’ and she used an energising ‘click, clap, stamp’ exercise to illustrate the importance of focusing on co-operating with one’s partner!

Other comments from the floor suggested that ‘mentoring works best cross-discipline’, and that mentors themselves can become very effective champions. But Champions – need to be senior leaders in order to influence and create opportunities for moving OTW through the pipeline.

**Q. What competencies are required for effective champions?**

A range of suggestions included ‘clarity of purpose’, ‘good communications skills’, ‘being a good listener’, ‘clear motivation’ and ‘matching actions to words’.
Dr Janjuha-Jivraj added that she believed that many women suffered from the ‘Cinderella syndrome’, believing that if they work hard, a fairy godmother (or handsome prince!) would take them to the ball. But most of these women have discovered, to their cost that it is not enough simply to be good at what you do; you have to find the confidence to push yourself forward and find others who will be prepared to back you.

She made it clear that for every good mentor, there are still plenty of bad ones, and that as a champion, there are three key things you can give to your OTWs:

- credibility
- connectivity
- influence

The delegates were then paired up to discuss whether they considered themselves to be potential champions or potential OTWs, and to ask themselves what they do well and how they can make themselves even more effective.

A selection of the feedback from this lively session included questions such as:

- Is being the OTW age-capped?!
- How can we teach women to take up more space?
  - Is coaching missing from the list of approaches, or is coaching implicit in all roles?
- How do we overcome the fear and risk of championing someone?

Dr Janjuha-Jivraj strongly recommended the TED talk by Amy Cuddy (www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are), which shows how body language can affect levels of testosterone and cortisol.

Highlighting the need for further research, including a review of the gender pay gap, Dr Janjuha-Jivraj concluded her presentation with a quote from the former top-ranked tennis player, Billie Jean King: ‘We are not measured by the number of champions we create but by the number of opportunities we create for others to be champions in life.’

Panel discussion: sharing examples from leadership journeys

Following Dr Janjuha-Jivraj’s presentation, Professor Gibson was then joined on stage by a panel of five business leaders, all of whom had followed diverse routes to their current role:

- Bella Vuillermoz, Director of Women in Leadership, Sky
- Cathy Bell-Walker, Partner, Allen & Overy
- Jeanette Pope, Professional Development Manager, BAE Systems
- Shelley Frost, International Director and Head of Consulting, JLL
- Steven Greenbank, Director of Aircraft Programmes, BAE Systems

Each of the panellists described their background and leadership style, and the ensuing session gave them an opportunity to share their own experiences, insights and ideas in response to a series of questions from Professor Gibson and the delegates in the audience.

Q. Who were your influences?

Steve Greenbank replied that all his influencers had been men, adding that he fully recognised and supported the need to change this, stating that: ‘We need to take more risks.’
Shelley Frost revealed that all her mentors had been men too, and explained that women often ‘focus too much on the negatives and not enough on our strengths’.

Cathy Bell-Walker had been mentored by a man and a woman. ‘The man was a big character, who taught me to take risks’, she told the audience, ‘while the woman was much more gentle and collaborative. So I have tried to take elements of both.’

And Jeanette Pope recalled that her mentor was highly career focused to the point that ‘he couldn’t understand why I wanted to leave accountancy!’

**Q. How can we encourage breakthrough moments?**

Bella Vuillermoz explained that ‘we need to actively ask for champions and mentors, and find a “safe place” where we feel comfortable sharing our feelings and concerns.’

Steve Greenbank suggested that we should be more willing to give – or ask to be given – special projects which will provide an opportunity for OTWs and high-potential personnel to demonstrate their capability.

Shelley Frost said she was a firm believer in having a clear plan.

**Q. Have any of the panel benefitted from external coaching?**

Jeanette Pope said that she had benefitted from coaching, especially in developing her speaking and presentation skills; while Shelley recounted that she had had a coach, but believed it was the wrong person or the wrong time, and that she had preferred having a trusted mentor.

Cathy Bell-Walker explained that she had attended a Women in Leadership course and had developed a small group of trusted contemporaries who provided her with support and guidance.

Steve Greenbank stated his belief in the power of transactional analysis, noting that the way we interact with our children is a good lesson for how we should interact with our teams!

**Q. Does the panel believe consensus decisions are more powerful than strong independent leaders?**

Bella Vuillermoz replied by citing the example of Sky, which has grown quickly. ‘We have had to look at a long-term vision, and have introduced the idea of emotional intelligence into people’s awareness. In my experience, men tend to be more confident, but women are more collaborative. But it is also affected by the culture of the industry.’

And Steve Greenbank reflected that: ‘no-one wants a collaborative fireman! There is still an unconscious bias towards the traditional type of leader, but all sorts of biases exist. There are still lots of people who don’t value diversity, and we have to address that.’

**Q. Aside from Bella, how many other Directors of Women in Leadership are there, and should every organisation have one?**

Bella Vuillermoz suggested that diversity can be ghettoised in HR. At Sky, a working group set up to address the issue created a full-time role for her. ‘It’s very powerful, and a short cut that says we take it seriously and believe in the business case. It’s very odd that my job is to make my role obsolete as soon as possible!’
And Cathy Bell-Walker shared her experience: ‘We asked the business what we could do to address the diversity issue, and this created ideas and momentum. Four ideas went to the board, and all were approved.’

Jeanette Pope added her belief that unconscious bias training is vitally important, as is the engagement of senior managers on this topic. Shelley explained that JLL has a dedicated resource, with targets and data, adding that: ‘Networks and peer support are important, plus traction from external campaigns too.’

Q. As role models in their respective organisations, what are the panellists doing?

Cathy Bell-Walker responded that ‘...as a bread winner, I reach out to the girls in the team and always try to be honest about what is achievable, and try to optimise their potential.’

Jeanette Pope said that they had invited a number of internal and external role models to present to the staff teams. The first event attracted an audience of just 40 people, but word got out, and the second presentation drew over 120 people. ‘Role models must be able to be identified with, so we included part-timers’, she said. ‘A range of personal stories came out. I, myself, try to make sure I’m seen to be going to spend time with my daughters, setting an example by doing so.’

Shelley Frost stated that: ‘I’m a role model for some but not for all. I was a career woman, but I now have a partner and child – finally! It’s for other people to choose whether I’m a role model for them.’

Bella Vuillermoz extolled the influence of external events, especially those featuring women with diverse personal and career backgrounds. ‘Leaders are starting to adopt behaviours that set an example,’ she added.

And Steve Greenbank said that he felt that role models needed to be for life, not just work. ‘On one’s death bed, no-one will regret not working more’, he reminded the audience. ‘People will copy what they see, not what they hear. Nevertheless there is generally a low level of trust in leadership, and that’s something we must overcome. To overcome the cynicism of my team, I was challenged to do video blogs after attending events – including one with my cat, and one at a friend’s funeral – and it has made me more visible.’

Q. How did the panellists connect with a sponsor?

Shelley Frost showed her tough side in response to this question: ‘I hunt them down’ she explained; ‘I’m a ruthless networker!’

On the other hand, Jeanette Pope, who recalled that the formal process hadn’t worked for her, told the audience that her previous mentor was matched to her by a colleague.

Cathy Bell-Walker had taken the bull by the horns, and rang a senior partner and asked him if he could have a coffee. She urged others to take a deep breath and do the same! Bella felt that this approach would be very flatteringly for a potential sponsor, mentor or champion, and Ginny added that she felt that the coffee approach was ‘low risk’.

Shelley Frost said that she likes to change mentors every few years, to ‘recalibrate her progress’.

Q. When trying to engineer a mentoring relationship, what has worked for you?

For Cathy Bell-Walker, the challenge was about finding the right relationship and maintaining it, while Bella Vuillermoz suggested that sponsorship and development programmes are useful starting points, adding that ‘...you need to make sure that both parties understand what their roles are, and you can’t sustain the relationships if there’s no spark.’
Professor Gibson added that in her experience, the sponsor often gains as much as the sponsee.

And in response to a comment from the floor that ‘it’s easy to talk about it, but organisations need to do it’, Bella concluded the session with a resounding call to call to action, reminding the audience that ‘it’s not rocket science!’

**Post-event feedback**

The event generated much praise from delegates, with comments including:

‘Another really interesting event; Henley does this so well.’

‘I particularly liked the fact that the people on the panel had reached their positions by such a variety of routes. It meant that anyone – everyone – could identify with their challenges.’

‘I felt privileged that Shaheena was sharing her research findings with us before they were made public. It gives me the sense that this group adds real value.’

‘I’m feeling totally inspired now – and I loved the “click, clap, stamp” exercise – I’m going to use that tomorrow with my team!’

‘The biggest take-out for me was that women need to be confident and push themselves more. And that putting role models in front of them can help to instil that sense of self-belief.’