



Jenny Daisley and Liz Willis, the creators of the Springboard program. For more information please see: www.springboardconsultancy.com from: John Ruskin for the Springboard Consultancy.

Rebalancing gender in the workplace

John Ruskin discusses a program that is designed to inspire women to take a confident direction with their careers.

Gender inequality remains one of the unresolved issues in the Australian employment market, just as it does in most of the developed world.

Despite political support for change and countless well-intentioned initiatives among employers, it remains the case that women are chronically under-represented in the boardroom. The paradox that around 50% of the population remains under-represented in strategic decision-making in the country's corridors of power goes largely unremarked.

To rub salt into the wound, across the employment spectrum women often receive less in their pay packets than male counterparts doing the same work. Small wonder then that many women feel they have good reason to feel unfulfilled in the workplace.

The good news for those who want to achieve a more equitable jobs market and the benefits that can flow from it is that women's motivation to progress their own development is typically much stronger than most men's.

A training consultancy that is working in this area is Springboard. It specialises in personal development programs that are mainly for women. Designed by UK training experts Jenny Daisley and Liz Willis, the Springboard program is run by women for women, and enables individual participants to break down the barriers to fulfilment and equality of opportunity.

The program has spread from the UK to Australia, and over 30,000 Australian women have participated in it. The program asserts that: "It helps you to be the best you can be!"

Training methodology

"The Springboard program is based on adult learning principles," says Jenny. "As personal issues have an impact on work performance, the workshops address topics that are both personal and work-related. Achieving better work-life balance is just one of several key topics we cover. The focus is consistently on enabling women to grow their potential," she added.

As far as possible, experiential methods are implemented so that participants "own" the findings of the course. Small group discussions, listening pairs, brainstorming, case studies, personal and peer assessment, group feedback, simulation and work-based exercises are all deployed.

Expert input is provided as the need arises in the course of discussion, and can take the form of mini-lectures on topics such as communication skills, assertiveness, and managing change. Guest speakers are invited to share their knowledge with participants. Theoretical frameworks and best practice examples are introduced when appropriate.

The Springboard format

Participants undertake four one-day

workshops spread over three months. They are required to complete workbook exercises between workshops, and they are encouraged to network with one another and in their workplaces.

Implementation of the program can be infinitely variable, depending on the circumstances of participants and the organising body. Each individual sets her own agenda.

Regular support from mentors is provided to participants.

The process is designed to work with a large number of participants (up to 32 per trainer).

Learning outcomes – for the workplace and beyond

The program brings together a diverse range of learning material. The course is specifically designed for women outside management grades. The goals are for participants to:

1. identify their strengths and know how to build on them
2. understand their weaknesses and how to deal with them
3. develop support systems for themselves
4. recognise the value of promoting a positive image
5. understand how people get promoted
6. identify possible career opportunities

“ Women’s motivation to progress their own development is typically stronger than men’s.”

7. clarify and set goals and priorities
8. understand the key principles of assertiveness
9. demonstrate effective communication skills
10. identify networking techniques
11. demonstrate an understanding of body language
12. identify stress management techniques
13. recognise emotional intelligence concepts
14. provide constructive feedback to peers.

Organisations experiencing the benefits

More than 300 organisations throughout Australia ranging from the Attorney-General’s Office to the Wesley Mission have introduced the program to their staff. One of the benefits reported most often is that it motivates women to give more to, and get more from, their work, often discovering untapped skills. It also increases women’s confidence, which in turn can lead to more job satisfaction and greater achievement.

The program encourages participants to network, and one of the benefits discovered is that participants gain an improved understanding of overall company aims and how each individual job fits in. For organisations, results can mean competitive advantage over organisations that fail to capitalise on the potential of their full workforce, as well as demonstrating corporate commitment to equal opportunities and cultural diversity through positive action.

Government support for this form of personal development is illustrated by Mary Gillett, MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Women, Victoria, who said:

“With Springboard, each person takes responsibility for their own development and by doing that, they change the world.”

Paul Tosi, General Manager at Campbelltown City Council said:

“We strongly support the role of women in management positions and Springboard assists them to fulfil career objectives while maintaining a balance between work and personal life.”

Worldwide, some 170,000 women in 21 countries on five continents have completed the Springboard personal

development program, delivered by 700 trainers. It was launched at the BBC in London and has been gathering momentum ever since – nowhere more so than in Australia. ■



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