

EIP

Reflections on International Women's Day

As we mark International Women's Day (IWD) I reflect on my own mixed feelings about this day of celebration.

My first engagement with IWD came in the early 2010s when I had the honour of working in a female founded alternative law firm which celebrated flexible working and sought to support and empower female entrepreneurs.

My mixed feelings around IWD are not about denying women being celebrated but more that by labelling issues and simplifying this year's theme #breakthebias to being purely about gender I fear it diminishes the conversations that need to take place to really address how we remove bias.

Early in my career I was lucky enough to work in two law firms which had female Managing Partners which was unusual in the noughties and early 2010s. Both women had very different management styles, but I found them to be decisive, empathetic, and strong leaders.

Working in at EIP, an international patent firm, I am aware of the gender imbalance within STEM subjects. I hope that we can help to improve the visibility of career opportunities which exist for people studying STEM subjects through supporting other awareness days such as National Careers Week and International Day of Women & Girls in Science. At EIP we also recognise that encouraging girls to consider choosing STEM subjects needs to start during secondary and tertiary level education and are looking to partner with several schools to offer work experience and internships.

I went to an all-girls convent school where I grew up surrounded by females (including

some quite scary nuns!) where I learned the power and value of strong females and was empowered to believe that women are equal to men, and gender was no barrier to achieving whatever we want.

In this modern age women often have many 'roles', in my case wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, friend, colleague to name a few, and each label should be equally respected. I don't believe anyone can 'have it all' (irrespective of gender) but acknowledging and allowing time for individuals to fulfil these 'roles' will create some parity. This may be wishful thinking on my part, but I hope to be proved right.

I have been fortunate to never have felt judged for my gender, either positively or negatively discriminated against and feel equal to my (male) peers. EIP is forward-thinking and has long offered flexible working (in terms of hours and location) and shared parental leave. I have always felt valued and supported in my role as Head of Marketing & BD working four days a week. I often feel male working parents have a different attitude to blending their personal and professional lives, e.g. they will work from home to manage childcare but will not feel the need to explain this request. Maybe part of breaking the bias is to take a lesson from this and women accepting and being proud of, rather than apologetic, the different roles they have.

Women have so many positive qualities and should focus on supporting and encouraging each other. As a working parent I have been received some negative comments from other mothers about how I combine my career and parenting. I cannot imagine a situation where my husband (who is very much a co-parent who manages his career alongside parenting) would receive such comments. For me #breakthebias should encompass everything from trying to achieve gender balance (starting from education into careers) to building a society where women are not judged for their personal choices.

I am grateful for the many strong females in my life. The mutual respect, love, and support we have for each other is really important to me and I feel very proud of these bonds, many of which stretch back for over 30 years.

On this IWD I would encourage everyone to think about the topic of gender imbalance and how they personally can positively contribute to #breakthebias.

Written by Charlotte Noon