

# Beverley McGarvey

## Chief Content Officer and Executive Vice President, ViacomCBS Australia and New Zealand

**Emma German** and **Eli Fisher**, Senior Legal Counsel, ViacomCBS Australia and New Zealand, sit down with **Beverley McGarvey**, Chief Content Officer and Executive Vice President, ViacomCBS Australia and New Zealand, to discuss a career in the Australian media industry and International Women's Day. Beverley's role at Network Ten is sometimes described as "co-lead", in the sense that she – with Jarrod Villani – shares the function of Chief Executive at Network Ten and ViacomCBS's other businesses in Australia and New Zealand. Beverley possesses vast experience as an Australian media business and creative leader. She is responsible for all content and creative activities related to the company's networks and digital properties in Australia and New Zealand including 10, 10 Peach, 10 Bold, 10 Shake, 10 Play, 10 Speaks, MTV, Nickelodeon, Comedy Central, Spike and Paramount+.

Since joining Network 10, Beverley has been responsible for the successful launch of many franchise series, including *MasterChef Australia*; *Have You Been Paying Attention?*; *Gogglebox Australia*; *Australian Survivor*; *The Masked Singer Australia*; *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here!*; *The Living Room*; *Ambulance Australia*; *Hughesy*, *We Have a Problem*; *The Project*; *The Bachelor Australia*; *The Bachelorette Australia* and *Bachelor In Paradise*. With a strong and successful catalogue of Australian produced drama, under the direction of Beverley, the network has also launched acclaimed drama series including *Offspring*; *The Wrong Girl*; *Five Bedrooms*; *My Life Is Murder* and, most recently, *The Secrets She Keeps*.

**ELI FISHER:** Beverley, on behalf of our readers, thank you so much for chatting with us about International Women's Day and your observations of the Australian media industry. With over 25 years' experience in television internationally and in Australia, could you explain your current role and how your career led you to this point?

**BEVERLEY MCGARVEY:** I started my career in the creative team at UTV in Belfast before working in programming and production at TV3 Ireland and at ITV's Meridian Television in England. I later joined TV3 New Zealand, where I was Director of Programming for several years. Before I was appointed Chief Content Officer and Executive Vice President, I had been Chief Content Officer at Network 10 since 2016 and Chief Programming Officer since 2012, after joining the company as Head of Programming in 2006.

**EMMA GERMAN:** What trends in the Australian media industry most occupy your thoughts?

**MCGARVEY:** I think the trend that most occupies my thoughts is diversification of platform. I think we have lots of amazing content. The quality of content has improved

dramatically in recent times, and there is so much choice. That in turn forces the content being produced to be even better. So the question becomes: how do you get the audience to watch your content as the platforms expand?

There is a challenge for us to keep the audience within the ViacomCBS ecosystem. We want to support different platforms – of course, our Paramount+ SVOD service is about to launch – and it is vital to maintain a good balance and work out where the tipping point is. This would be a shared challenge among most media companies – being where the audience is.

For us at ViacomCBS, we are striving to maintain our linear strength, and growing our BVOD business. The free side of the business is important, and growth comes from the subscription business – which is Paramount+ as well as our arrangements with Foxtel. So our aim is to make sure we can grow the pay business as we maintain the free business. People can make it as complex as they like, but there are fundamentally two main ways for a content company

to generate revenue – either the audience watches your ads or the audience give you cash. We are in both those verticals.

**FISHER:** Are there legal or regulatory reforms that are sorely needed, or legal challenges that keep you up at night?

**MCGARVEY:** From a regulatory point of view, we had some reforms last year that gave us some flexibility in our business, in terms of making content choices that work for our audiences. When people talk about regulatory in Australia, what they really mean is Australian content. The thing for me is that the marketplace is really demonstrating that Australians want to watch Australian content on free to air services. On the SVOD services, they want to watch the best content in the world. And some of that is Australian, and lots of that is international. It's American, it's from the UK – and increasingly, it's also foreign language, which is something relatively novel for the Australian market. One of the shows that I've been watching, which loads of people are watching at the minute, is a French show called *Call My Agent*. We as part of ViacomCBS have a brilliant Israel production company. There are lots of Israeli shows, like *Fauda*.

That breadth of content is really interesting. But, if you look at the top 100 shows last year, they were Australian. So the market is determining that Australians want to watch Australian content, although

the regulatory reforms last year did help us with flexibility. So I think that's probably the key thing. Other things like making sure that film and television are treated the same in terms of tax benefits and offsets are ongoing things that we've been pushing. That's the broad regulatory perspective.

From the legal point of view, ensuring that we have enough rights to effectively commercialise the content that we pay for is probably the biggest challenge. Content is so valuable, it's really heating up. And everybody wants more rights; but in order for us to really invest in content, and in many cases pay 100% of the underlying production costs, we need really strong rights in order to make that investment back. Production companies, IP owners, format owners – everybody wants a piece of the pie, and the pie is getting more and more complex. It's no longer a matter of a purchaser buying three runs over two years on a one page contract, and everybody goes home. It requires a lot of skill on all sides of the transactions, and it requires more and more time. That's going to be a constant battle in the coming years.

**GERMAN:** What's the best professional advice you've ever received?

**MCGARVEY:** The best professional advice I've ever received is actually so cliched that I'm embarrassed to tell you. But it really is the best advice that I've ever received, so I'm going to tell you: It's to be really good at the job you have now. And this is particularly true for people at the beginning of their career. Be brilliant at the job you have now. Get expert. Get really skilled. Don't try to run before you can walk, because you will get promoted and your career will be better if you are good at your core skills at the beginning. So get good at it, learn from people, then move forward, as opposed to getting promoted after a year before you've really learned anything yet. Being good at the job you're in is a really good stepping stone to the next job. These days, it is not enough. You have to be really good at what you do and 55 other things, but without



being good at what you do now, you can't move forward. Somebody told me that a long time ago, and I think it's really true.

**FISHER:** How did you celebrate International Women's Day as a media exec? What is the triumph that pleases you most?

**MCGARVEY:** I think that's interesting because it's posed as an optimistic question, so therefore I feel like I have to give you an optimistic answer. There's something a little depressing about International Women's Day to the extent that it is annual confrontation that we are still dealing with these same issues. The most interesting thing I did this year on International Women's Day is that I went to the launch of Sandra Sully's book. She puts together this amazing book that celebrates amazing women every year. This year, she focused largely on frontline workers. So, I was lucky enough to go to this lunch that Sandra has, and there was a firefighter in her 80s or 90s. She worked last year as a firefighter in the bushfires. There were also young women who had this great idea of filling an esky, and they got people to donate eskies filled with food, so they could take them up to people in rural areas during the bushfires. There were really interesting guest speakers, including a lady who had been the Deputy Director-General of the ABC in the 80s and had forced

them to hire their first female newsreader. I think for me, more broadly, what I have experienced over the last number of years is that, probably five and definitely 10 years ago, I was quite blasé about IWD. Because being mid-level in my career I didn't experience any gender bias. Being mid-level, there are lots of men and lots of women and, in my experience, you get treated fairly equally and gender issues were less visible to me. As I've become more senior, I have become much more acutely aware of gender bias. And I notice it now more than I did 10 years ago – and I find it depressing.

If you look at people like Sandra Sully, she's incredible in this way. She will speak up. We did this panel together for International Women's Day and Sandra has many stories to tell and has been in the business for a long time. She has always been bold enough to speak up. I think it's incredible that she uses her voice in that way, because it would be easy to not do so, but she always has. There are lots of other people like her who have a powerful voice and they use it. I really respect that. If you have a voice like that, and you're not using it, I think that's a sad waste.

Diversity is a really important issue at ViacomCBS. We talk about diversity a lot, but diversity means a lot of different things across

different markets. In Australia, improving diversity means having greater representation of a range of things including race, socioeconomic background and sexual orientation. But in Australia, it also still means gender in a way that maybe it doesn't in other markets. There are no female CEOs of any of the major production companies in Australia. The situation is quite different, say, in the UK. It's quite different with some of the big tech companies in Australia – Twitter, Google, Apple – and it's probably fair to say that commercial free-to-air broadcasters have been the slowest to advance in this regard.

**GERMAN:** Present company excluded, there are, and have historically been, very few female leaders of major Australian media companies. Why do you think that is? Is change happening at a satisfactory pace? What should be done differently?

**MCGARVEY:** There are some women in senior roles in the industry. For example, Amanda Laing is very senior at Foxtel and has a large portfolio of work there. Amanda is very impressive. When I was in the UK and NZ, I didn't notice it as much, or until relatively recently. But there are fewer female executives at top jobs at production companies and on the free to air side in Australia. It's clearly not changing quickly enough because it would be more balanced if it were changing quickly.

Why is this the case? I honestly don't know. There are so many talented women. I think having a leading role in a broadcaster and a production company requires a mix of commercial and creative skills – which is something that many women are really good at. There are many women who have that ability to multitask and mix the commercial with the creative.

I hope that the underrepresentation is changing. There are certainly many brilliant women coming through in the mid-to-senior levels – will they go the whole way? I don't know. When you look at Board composition and the number of CEOs of ASX-listed companies, the data tell you that the

Board piece is getting better. That's interesting because the director commitment is different from the commitment of being a full-time CEO. The numbers actually aren't getting better for CEOs. What you hear is that some women actually self-select out because you have to push so hard. I don't really have a good answer. It's not good enough. It needs to be better, and we all need to work really hard to bring other women through the system.

**GERMAN:** The 2021 International Women's Day campaign theme is #ChooseToChallenge. What does this mean to you and how would you suggest this is implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

**MCGARVEY:** I think that obviously, we have to tackle the big stuff. Issues like maternity leave and flexibility. These issues have been well progressed and are often spoken about – especially in our business. But #ChooseToChallenge, to me, also means choosing to not accept the small things that accumulate and add up to systemic gender bias.

Choosing to Challenge for me is about being vocal about it. ViacomCBS is part of Champions of Change, Ten is one of the founding media companies of that organisation I find that really interesting, because they talk about everyday sexism. It's the sort of thing that I and most others would typically let go.

There are a couple of examples that come to mind. The first one is including the whole room in a meeting, not just the men. I've been in meetings in the last week where people would address all of the conversation to the male in the room – and I let that stuff go. And I think #ChooseToChallenge means not letting that everyday sexism go, and to be brave enough to say to somebody "Excuse me, I'm here too. Could you look at me when you're talking to me? And, actually, what you're pitching is something that I'm the one who is going to say 'yes' or 'no' to, so actually it would be good to include everybody in this conversation." It's about manners.

The second thing is how we colloquially refer to women in a professional context, things like 'babe' or 'darl'. In the last 12 months, I have had people refer to me in those ways. They don't mean it derogatorily, but they would never talk to a male colleague in that or an equivalent way: "Dude" or "Bro" or something like that.

Over the years, I've tuned that stuff out and chosen not to notice it. #ChooseToChallenge means for me that the big stuff is important but also sweating the small stuff is important too, and not letting that stuff go. I'm bad at that. I default to politeness, and I brush things under the carpet because it's the non-confrontational thing to do. But for the women who are coming up behind us, it's important that we choose to challenge that sort of behaviour.

**FISHER:** Who is one woman in the industry whom you really admire, and why?

**MCGARVEY:** One woman isn't enough. Leonie Lowe, who was the CEO of ITV here when I first started working in Australia, comes immediately to mind. I have great admiration for Sandra Sully and people like her who speak up for what they believe in. She puts a lot of effort and time into her Agenda books. It takes her all year to do that, and they and she are amazing. Obviously, Amanda Laing is doing a great job at Foxtel. There are lots of strong female creatives, and there are lots of strong women coming through. Amelia Fisk is doing a great job as Head of Television at Shine, and Beth Hart is Head of Television Content at ITV. I work with lots of really impressive women. There's also something that I find really impressive and admirable about men and women who manage family life and professional life really well. When you put those two together, it's about 120% of every day, which doesn't leave you much time for other things. So, all women who juggle and get through their day – I find that really admirable.