

**QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE SENIOR WOMEN'S FORUM 2011,
HOLIDAY INN, BRISBANE, 3-5 OCTOBER 2011
PANEL DISCUSSION 10.45 AM – 12.30 PM**

**CONQUERING CHALLENGES, CREATING OPPORTUNITIES
ABILITY, ENGAGEMENT AND ASPIRATION TO RISE AND SUCCEED**

What a pleasure to be part of this forum aimed at encouraging more women with ability to accept the challenge of taking up senior positions in the Queensland Police Service.

I am delighted to see plenty of men present. Achieving a roughly equal proportion of able women throughout all ranks of the QPS will be of benefit, not just to the women involved, but to all members of the QPS, and the wider community, including its men.

Let me begin by discussing some challenges I have faced before turning to strategies for overcoming challenges.

I do not have the statistics, but I apprehend the number of women in higher ranks in the QPS remains disproportionately and disappointingly low, despite the significant achievements in recent years of a few good women. Like some of you, in earlier times I was often the only woman in an office or court room full of men.

As a 22 year old law graduate in 1976, I was the first female paralegal employed in the Public Defender's Office. My work environment was a male-centric office and male-centric courts. In those days, judges, barristers, and most court officers were men. And it was almost unheard of for a young woman to attend the men's prison, as I did, to interview inmates about their cases.

Of course, things gradually changed as the novelty of a woman in a traditionally male arena wore off, and as more women entered the arena. As more women lawyers joined the Public Defender's Office, the girlie posters gradually came off the walls, the swearing moderated, and office celebrations became civilised in-house lunches or morning and afternoon teas rather than drinking sessions at the pub. The boys quite quickly accepted me as their boss, as someone from whom they could get legal advice and as the barrister who would argue their clients' cases in court.

But it was not always easy. When I first appeared as a barrister in the criminal courts in 1977, most judges treated me they would every young barrister, male or female. Some seemed to give me a harder time than my male colleagues. One or two seemed to disapprove of a young woman appearing for unlikeable people charged with sordid offences. One judge refused to allow women lawyers wearing trousers to appear in court. On the other hand, I can recall times when being a woman barrister was helpful. When I was seven months pregnant with twins and making submissions on

behalf of a client who had pleaded guilty, the judge was unusually hasty in giving me everything I requested! He clearly wanted me out of his court as quickly as possible in case he had to deliver twins! The few misogynist judges gradually became accustomed to the changing world; or retired from it!

When I was appointed to the District Court in 1991, the *Judges (Pensions and Long Leave) Act 1957 (Qld)* had to be amended. Until then, judges had always been men and it was necessary only to provide for their widows. Later, when I became pregnant with my fourth child, the list of judges' entitlements had to be hastily reworked to include maternity leave (in those days, totally unpaid).

But my greatest challenge so far was in 1998 when, as a relatively junior District Court judge, I became the first woman President of Queensland's Court of Appeal.

What can I pass on to you from those experiences?

At the most basic level, my advice is to keep breathing, place one foot after the other and come to work day after day. The "keep calm and carry on" philosophy has a lot to recommend it. Being there is half the battle! Keep at it, work hard, be collegiate and pleasant, and maintain high ethical standards. People get used to change with time. It certainly helps if you like your work and are passionate about its worth. I was also used to bouncing back from the good natured taunts of my five older siblings and was no shrinking violet. A moderately thick skin and the capacity to forgive also help. After all, you are right and they are wrong. Ability, application, resilience and courage are qualities which will assist.

I expect that, like me, you have been and will be assisted and mentored by clever, good hearted men, as well as women. And I expect you have and will mentor younger or less experienced women and men. There have been many men in my life who have filled that role at different times. My father encouraged me to think independently, to question the status quo, and indirectly, to study law. Justice Alan Demack, for whom I worked as an associate, was ahead of his time in recognising the importance of women in the justice system. The Public Defender in 1976, Bob Bavinton, and his deputy, barrister Neil Andrews, shared Justice Demack's vision and helped me morph from a raw law graduate into a criminal law barrister. The Chief Judge of the District Court in 1991, John Helman (later Justice Helman), gave me wise counsel when I was a youthful novice District Court judge. And the Court of Appeal judges with whom I have worked, most of them male until recently, have all generously accepted me as President and shared their great legal learning and wisdom. I emphasise that clever good-hearted modern men are on your side.

Women friends are also important. I was fortunate to be mentored by trail blazing woman lawyer and former Governor of Queensland, Leneen Forde AC. I found fellowship and support with the members of the Women Lawyers Association of Queensland. I also received encouragement and support from

women who were not lawyers. In 1978, I joined the Zonta Club of Brisbane. Zonta is an international service organisation committed to improving the status of women worldwide. Inspector Veronica Kane, a trail blazing Queensland woman police officer, was a member of my Club for many years.

Work should not totally dominate your life. You are there for the long run. There will be times when you need to work ridiculous hours under pressure. But when you have completed the urgent task, wind back. A healthy body, mind and spirit is essential to work effectively. But this is often hard to achieve when juggling a stressful job with raising children or caring for sick or elderly parents, or all three at once!

Giving back to society through community work can help achieve a healthy mind and spirit. Doing things for others can help ward off the black dog of depression. Community work not only directly helps others, but it makes you feel good, too. And it widens your outlook on life, otherwise limited to friends, family and work.

After entering a legal profession 34 years ago where women were a rarity, an oddity, an exception, it has been a great joy to now see so many more women lawyers, judges – and, indeed, police officers. When the percentage of women in an institution like the judiciary or the QPS is tiny, those women must operate within the framework and vision of an organisation designed solely from the male perspective. But as the percentage of women in the institution becomes a critical mass, those women become more confident to redefine the framework of and vision for the institution from the woman's perspective. It is then that the community starts to really benefit through the equal involvement of women in public life.

Earlier this year, I attended a conference of senior women judges, initiated by doctors from the Acid Violence Health Care Initiative in Cambodia, Bangladesh and India. The doctors (many of whom were men) recognised that acid violence is a form of gender violence. To combat it, women victims need to have confidence that their complaints will be listened to and addressed by the criminal justice system and perpetrators brought to justice. They saw that the rule of law and gender equality play key roles in building peace, sustaining development and reducing poverty. The recent report "Progress of the World's Women: In Pursuit of Justice" affirms what we all knew: there is an increased reporting of assaults on women in countries with more women police officers. The conference determined that it was important to involve senior male judges and police officers in achieving this goal. Women rights are human rights. The importance of the women's voice in public life, in the democratic process and in the criminal justice system will lead to better governance for the entire community, not just for women.

I urge you to embrace the challenges ahead and turn them into opportunities, not just for you, but for your male colleagues, and for the wider community, in Queensland and internationally.

TOP TIPS

- Patience and persistence: things do not change overnight, but they will change.
- Whilst being persistent, be collegiate and kind, even in the face of unreasonable behaviour.
- Toughen up that thin skin and be resilient.
- Accept mentoring and use support networks and mentor and support others, too.