

Women Leaders Network: Then and Now

by

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Welcome again everyone.

I want to begin by thanking Andrina Lever from Canada for her insights into the Women Leaders Network 'then and now'.

As a co-founder, Andrina is well placed to talk about the history of this important network and her views on its future.

We're here for many reasons, but the most important for me is the reality that women truly bring different perspectives and approaches to the world.

And we do so in many, many ways —as mothers, daughters, friends, professionals, leaders, colleagues, investors, consumers, and, last but not least, as individuals.

I see this meeting as a celebration and a very special event. Here we are, at a time when the Asia Pacific has so many new opportunities opening up and so many fundamental challenges that we are grappling with.

This challenging environment is an opportunity for women to bring their own styles and perspectives to contribute - to build on successes and to find solutions to challenges.

The Reference Group I chaired to guide the development of this year's Women Leaders Network Meeting is a case in point. It is a joy to work with such talented and diverse women, who all bring something special to the table, and who have such energy to make the world a better place.

We're seeing more and more reputable, published work concluding that using women's skills is not only about being fair or just. It's about good business.

In April 2006 *The Economist* reported on a study by the consultancy Catalyst that determined, and I quote:

...American companies with more women in senior management jobs earned a higher return on equity than those with fewer women at the top ...

The article continued:

...men and women are better than single-sex groups at solving problems and spotting external threats. Studies have also suggested that women are often better than men at building teams and communicating ...

There is no doubt that women think differently and act differently than men.

We're overall more collaborative than competitive, which is not to suggest we don't have ambition or the desire and strength to make our mark.

We also have a healthy multi-disciplinary approach to life and are skilled at linking disparate elements to form a holistic perspective. We're not content with a narrow focus.

This is why many mainstream issues today are becoming the domain of women as much as they are the domain of men.

We're slowly but steadily moving away from operating solely in areas like education and health, and are more and more involved in, and influencing, hard-edged economic and technical issues.

That's one critical reason this network continues to exist.

You have a paper in your conference satchels with "One woman can..." printed at the top.

I encourage you to write down your inspirational stories about what women can do and pin them on the noticeboards so we can learn from one another.

We'll collate the responses and disseminate them to you as a reminder of the power of women and to illustrate, with real-life examples, how we make a difference to the world we live in.

And let's remember, as we work through this year's meeting, what Andrina Lever has said in the past:

APEC is the only multi-lateral fora that has a womens' advisory group that has met once a year for over ten years. This makes us a unique entity and one we need to build upon.

As Chair of the 2007 APEC Women Leaders Network, I urge you to be a voice speaking for other women ...women who can't raise issues for themselves or who don't have access to decision makers like we do.

Without this type of network it's a sad reality that these women will be forgotten. And we can't have that.

So absorb and contribute as much as you can during our time together.

And, importantly, remember that one goal of the Women Leaders Network is to take what we learn here in Australia and apply it when back in our respective homes.

Thank you.