



Financial Executive Women Leadership Conference 2018

With a steadfast resolve toward 'Making a Difference', the Financial Executive Women Leadership Conference 2018 showcased some of the financial services industry's most innovative and inspirational leaders.

The Sydney leg of the conference touched on a range of topics including effective leadership, the importance of mental health and self-care, and innovation.

Kicking off the Sydney event, OneVue chief executive Connie McKeage told delegates that preconceived ideas of what a leader should be rarely helps anyone because good leaders don't actually have a leadership style. She added that people don't speak often enough about how difficult it is to lead.

"Leadership challenges are not gender specific. Like Elon Musk says, "Leadership is like staring down a dark abyss and chewing glass." But there's comfort in knowing that it's difficult for us all. How you manage yourself is one of the hardest parts," she said.

McKeage also called out "mature, old-fashioned boards" for hindering the progress and effective leadership of Australian companies.

"They still think very hierarchical, and they led businesses in a time when you had a lot of time to contemplate things but life isn't like that anymore, life happens faster these days," she explained.

Turning to stress management, Workable Wellness chief executive Heidi Dening quantified the impact of stress on workplaces.

"Distraction not only stresses the individual out but also costs the employer, with \$196 per week of a \$40,000 salary lost to distraction because it takes the brain 64 seconds to re-concentrate after a distraction," she said.

The World Health Organisation describes stress as a global health epidemic and in 2016 Australia spent \$200 million on stress-related claims. In Australia's financial services industry, 78% of workers will experience burnout.

Denying recommended turning devices off and finding a spot where "deep work" can be done without distraction. She also suggested regular meditation and breathing exercises to both kickstart and relax the brain.

Later, FEW founder Judith Beck gave tips on recruiting, telling delegates that the first thing she looks at when headhunting is their LinkedIn photo. A bad profile picture shows a lack of judgement and leaders should ensure all their team members' pictures are appropriate, she said.

Other tips for recruiters included doing comprehensive reference-checking, confirming qualifications and achievements, checking the candidate's social media profiles and Google their name to minimise future risk, and always remember that the candidate wants to be impressed too.

Meanwhile, IRESS chief executive Andrew Walsh spoke of the importance of humility in leadership, saying: "Leadership goes to people's heads and you end up with the wrong outcomes and behaviour. It's the people that don't think of themselves as leaders that really are. Humility is a great asset."

"I encourage you to be real and to not get lost in the glory of leadership. It takes grit and grind and realism is what's needed to scale businesses without losing culture."

The 2018 Positive Progression of Women Award was presented to Centuria Capital distribution manager, investment bond division Allison Macfarlane.

Macfarlane was recognised for her efforts in encouraging more women to consider financial advice as a career and has been a staunch supporter of women in the industry since 2002 when she co-founded a women's initiative called PEER; the core values of which have influenced those of FEW.

The body also welcomed 17 male financial services executives to aid the positive progression of women in the sector with FEW launching a new initiative - FEW Good Men.

It will see male executives from major financial services organisations commit to advocacy roles for women in the industry. They will be paired with a female FEW member for two years to provide support and guidance as they prepare to enter general management or managing director level roles.

Beck said as most senior positions are still held by men, the only way to break that cycle is for men to participate as mentors to women on the rise.

"It has always been the belief of FEW that the lack of progression for women in the last 20 years has been more about the lack of support systems needed to get from A to B," Beck said.

Also appearing at the Sydney conference was Financy founder Bianca Hartge-Hazelman, Conscious Presence director Naomi Abbott, BKindred founder Penny Locaso, PwC managing partner Julie Coates.

The event concluded with a panel session hosted by Commonwealth Bank executive general manager, Commonwealth Private Marianne Perkovic and featured Buildcorp principal Josephine Sukkar and Authentic Woman Global co-founder Jo Wagstaff. The panel discussed how they've navigated success and broken down barriers while maintaining effective leadership and work/life balance. **FS**



The quote

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