

# awomansplace

Let's have a constructive conversation

Makheni Zonneveld



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Let's have a constructive conversation



awomansplace: Let's have a constructive conversation

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ISBN 978-87-403-0840-2

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# About the author



Makheni Zonneveld wears many hats. She wears her social activist hat as the coordinator of Project awomansplace and author of this book. She is a diversity guru and the founder of both Real Solutions Training SA and Real Solutions Training Netherlands. (RST)

Finance Directors usually complain that they do not see a Return on Investment (ROI) on Human Resources Development (HRD). That is where RST steps in to ensure organizational growth through individual effectiveness. RST specializes in organizational culture transformation with special emphasis on diversity competency, transformation competency and management training. Makheni uses these communication tools: speaking, conversation facilitation, workshop facilitation, coaching, writing and storytelling.

She is also a Neethling Brain Instruments NBI® practitioner and a Dutch NBI® co-agent with her husband, Koen Zonneveld. Without his unwavering support this book would not have been possible. They live in The Netherlands and she is originally from SA where she has two grown daughters and a grandson. Her area of operation is the English-understanding world.

For more information on all these hats that Makheni wears please visit:

[www.awomansplace.international](http://www.awomansplace.international)

[www.diversity-guru.com](http://www.diversity-guru.com)

[www.makheni.com](http://www.makheni.com)

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[www.breinvoorkeuren.nl](http://www.breinvoorkeuren.nl)

# 1 Introduction

It was Ted's greatest moment. The advertising executive went home to announce his promotion to Joanna, his wife and mother of their five-year-old son. Before he could utter a word, she made her own startling announcement. "I am leaving you and I am not taking Billy with." The workaholic had no choice but to start juggling his 25/8 job with being a single parent. He got fired. The year was 1979; it could have been 2015. The place was New York; it could have been anywhere else. Ted Kramer is a character in the movie *Kramer vs. Kramer*; he could have been a real life Ted or Thembi.

Lodewijk has a high-ranking job. A meeting at his work clashed with an activity at his child's school. He chose to put his child first and excused himself from the meeting. He was chastised in the media and he defended himself. The year was 2013; it could have been 2015. The place was The Hague in The Netherlands; I cannot say it could have been anywhere else. Lodewijk is in the public sector; I cannot say he could have been in any other sector. In the profit-making sector he would probably suffer the same fate as Ted for such a daring stunt.

Lodewijk is not a movie character. He is Mr. Lodewijk Asscher, The Minister of Social Affairs and Employment and also Deputy Prime Minister of The Netherlands and yes, he did miss a meeting to be with his child. If a Laura dared to put her child first she would have faced the same criticism.

In spite of the title, this is not a book on women for women. This is a book on remaking the workplace as part of remaking society. Would you like to survive the corporate jungle we have created with 25/8 careers? This book is for you. Are you the kind of person who now and then pauses to question his or her assumptions? This book is for you. If you are the kind of person who is willing to ponder: "Am I asking the right questions?" or "What is gender equity in the first place?" or "What kind of society am I creating with the kind of career choices that I make?" or "Should women's rights supersede their children's rights?" or "Are we implementing Affirmative Action (AA) effectively?" This book is for you.

If you are the kind of leader who asks: "Would Ted keep his job in my organization?" or "What kind of society are we creating when we make it difficult for Ted or Thembi or Lodewijk or Laura to be a parent first?" This book is for you. The message of this book is: Women are duped into believing that the noises that we have heard on gender equity, especially in the past two years, are in their interest. They are dancing to someone else's tune.

## **Why awomansplace?**

It all started with: "A woman's place is in the kitchen, barefoot and pregnant." Some women think they are the ones who responded, "A woman's place is in the boardroom, at the top of the corporate ladder." They even celebrate the fact that their eggs are going to be frozen so that they can give the best years of their lives to business, then run behind two year olds at 50 and deal with their teenagers in their 60s. When are women going to decide where a woman's place is? *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

## 2 Project awomansplace

This book is part of Project awomansplace. The objective of the project is to encourage a constructive conversation on remaking the workplace as part of remaking our society. That is why you do not have to be a woman to be part of it. The success of the project hinges on your continued engagement. As the convener, all I do is facilitate the process by stimulating the conversation and I do this through:

- This book
- The website [www.awomansplace.international](http://www.awomansplace.international)
- The Facebook page [Makheni Awp](#)
- The video blog (VLOG) – [awomansplace](#)
- The Twitter account – [@aWplace](#)

And you do the rest.

This book is based on real life, real people and not on theories and models. I sincerely hope you will join in the conversation because your contribution to this discourse is crucial. I am only one of 7,142 billion people and my point of view is limited to how I experience the world around me. Since the project is about conversations, while writing the book, I had conversations with real people from all walks of life from different countries. Each conversation was limited to a particular aspect I was writing on at the time so these people do not necessarily endorse everything in the book. I hope, like you, they will exercise their right to join the conversation online.

### 2.1 Why I initiated the project

I have engaged with this subject for decades because although I now live in The Netherlands, I lived most of my life in my home country, sunny South Africa. Gender issues and all equality issues get ongoing attention because of the political history of the country. Over and above that, I deal with these issues on an ongoing basis as a female transformational speaker, female facilitator and female coach. By the way as a black female I can say without fear of contradiction that gender issues have a lot in common with ethnicity issues. That is why it is said that women's rights are human rights.

Raising children is probably the toughest job in the world. For the purpose of this book I use “work” and “job” in the context of working outside the home. Not all women are mothers of small children so some of what the book cover does not apply to them. I believe you do not have to be personally affected by a social issue to be concerned about it. I do not have small children and I am not an employee so I am not personally affected.



The truth is, what inspired me to write this book and start Project awomansplace was not the plight of women per se but the plight of some of the small children who are affected by some of the career choices that parents make. Many mothers have to work and we should not add to their guilt. I know because I was one of them.

Why does a person who has never adorned herself with the fashionable label of “Feminist” and never claimed to be a gender specialist, write a book on the advancement of women? I do not have to claim to be a specialist on women's issues or call myself a feminist to legitimize my writing a book on the advancement of women. The label I have adorned myself with for decades is “social activist” and no one has objected thus far. In fact I looked up the meaning of social activist for the first time today.

Wikipedia defines ‘activism’ in general and not social activism in particular. Under types of activism they include “Some activists try to persuade people to change their behavior directly, rather than to persuade governments to change or not to change laws.” Thank you Wikipedia, I will continue to call myself a social activist of note.

I have always questioned the status quo and I have always thought, “There should be another way.” That does not always make you the most popular person because people prefer to swim downstream instead of challenging the status quo, let alone challenge what respected leaders endorse. It is easier and takes no courage to beat the same drum and say, “In an ideal world 50% of the people at the top will be women.” I am amazed at how many people simply buy into this and accept that attaining this quota is tantamount to women advancement.

This is a free world and anyone has the right to make such statements but I do not think when we make these statements we should pretend that we are talking about women advancement. Once you say “in an ideal world” or “in a perfect world” you are talking about remaking society. Remaking society is going to take far more than replacing the few men at the top with a few women. This is the main point that I make in this book. Although women should have the same opportunities that men have to get to the top of the corporate ladder, I believe reaching the 50–50 quota is a very small part of women advancement and it should not be achieved at all cost.

If you look at the number of books and blogs that are written on this as well as the column inches that the mass media devote to the underrepresentation of women at the top you will realize that it is quite fashionable to demand quotas. I wish we gave as much attention to the real issues that affect the majority of women.

If you have never questioned the wisdom of quotas before, this will definitely hurt your brain. Decades ago, when I was a college lecturer, I started understanding the seriousness of hurting people's brains. Now and then the social activist in me would overtake the lecturer and I would engage the students on social issues such as the erosion of values, why we spend money we do not have on funerals etc. One day one of the students yelled in frustration: "Leave us alone! Stop questioning everything we have always taken for granted!" In spite of his objection, I have continued for more than 3 decades because I believe it is necessary.

Over the years I benefitted from people who hurt my brain because they have forced me to question what I had taken for granted. I have realized that different things hurt different people's brains but I have found three main things that hurt most people's brains. 1. The cognitive dissonance you experience when what you have always believed is challenged. The student mentioned above is a classic example. 2. Being told that you always have a choice. 3. The fact that material possessions do not bring fulfillment. The first one is most applicable to this book.

About a decade ago I received a fax from a delegate a day after conducting a workshop in Johannesburg. It was already in the email era and she said that she sent the fax because she wanted to make sure that none of her colleagues got hold of the email. She had sat quietly throughout the 3 days and it was not easy to get her to participate. The content of her fax shook me.

She wrote: "I am 23 years old. When I was 20 years old an older man who was known to my family raped me. He subsequently disappeared from the area and he was never caught. The rape left me pregnant and confused. I battled with the idea of an abortion and eventually I kept the baby who looks like the rapist. Over and above the trauma of this violation, I battled with the fact that I hated my own baby. Now three years later, I am coping better and I no longer hate the baby so much." I felt so bad as I read each line and I kept thinking that if someone had told me about her plight, I would have refrained from repeatedly stating, "You always have a choice."

With a lump in my throat, I forced myself to read further: "Thank you for starting the workshop by saying we always have a choice and for repeating that fact throughout the workshop. I wish I had met you three years ago – I know I would have dealt with this pain better." What a relief! We subsequently met and she was a different person with an open face. This young woman gave me a reason to go continue saying things that I know will probably make people to feel uncomfortable.

I said another thing that hurts people's brains is the fact that money does not bring fulfillment. Some people who did not grow up with money and people who have never had enough money to cover their real needs imagine that they will get fulfillment the day they have more money. I always ask people who complain that they do not get promoted why it is so important to them and thus far they have always said that they want to earn more money. At least they are honest and they do not come up with some politically correct answer. Fortunately not everyone who did not grow up with money falls into this trap.

I had to come back to this page after watching a Bill Gates interview on Campus Tour on VPRO, a Dutch TV network, in November 2014. If all the people who have a lot of money did what he does with his wealth and all the people who do not have money knew that money does not bring him as much joy as philanthropy, the world would be a much better place. On the other hand I do not believe in the glorification of poverty. In fact I agree with whoever said the best favor you can do for poor people is not to be one of them. Poverty is not a virtue.

I prefer to write or talk to people about what is within their sphere of influence so I will focus on the choices we make at individual level and dwell less on what organizations should do. I know that people like to listen to someone who says what someone else should do. When I conduct workshops it usually takes a while to get the attendees to stop insisting on talking about what goes wrong at the level above them. It hurts their brains but it is worthwhile because at the end of the workshop they usually say that they felt empowered after realizing how much of their power they were giving away all along. I am used to being told "On the first day I thought that you were absolutely crazy."

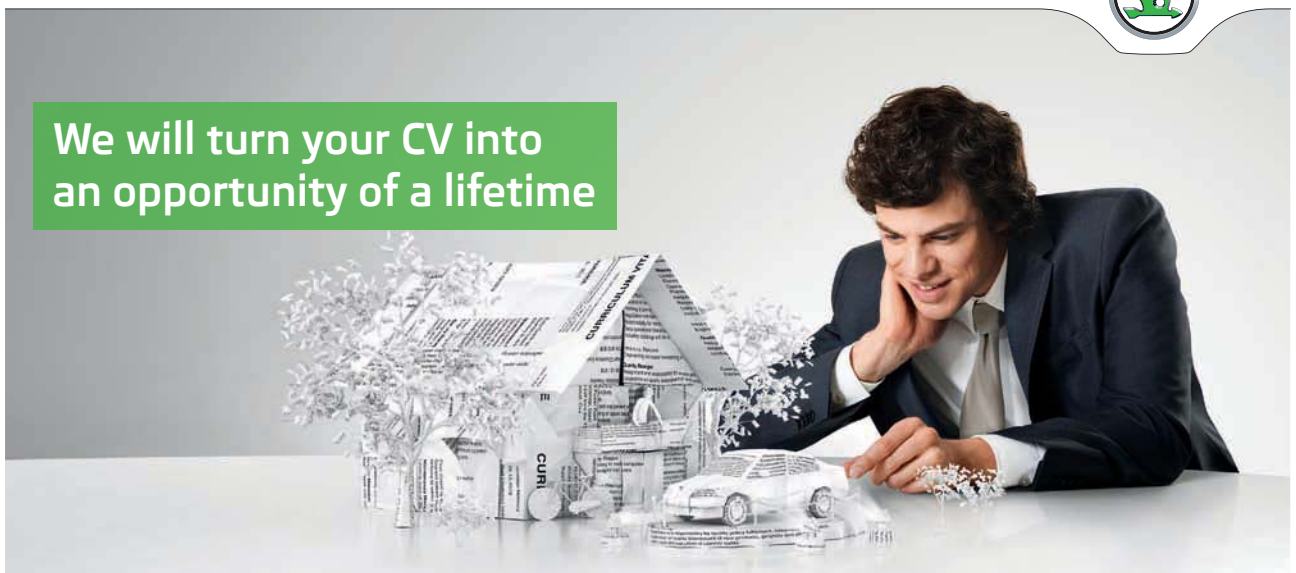
Every year in November we observe the worldwide campaign "16 Days of activism against the abuse of women and children" in SA. I used to address audiences on this and also called talk radio stations 702 and SAfm ad nauseam and repeat the same message like a stuck record. I will repeat it here and will do so at every opportunity:

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“It is all well and good to talk about what the government, employers and men should do. When you talk to employers, tell them what employers can do better. When you talk to men, tell them what men can do better. However, because today I am talking to women, I will talk about what we as women can do better. We hear of the high numbers of women who get physically, emotionally, financially abused and even murdered by intimate partners. We should ask why he is still an intimate partner. We should talk about equipping women with the essential life skill called assertiveness so that they can use the rights they already have. Why should we depend on the benevolence of others?”

The people at the bottom are not the only ones who want to talk about what others should do. If you talk to leaders about transforming their organizations they tell you that the problem is that the people at the bottom resist change. They do not realize that the same applies to them. Many have bought into the idea that there is only one way to do business; which is to dehumanize and commoditize people. This is in spite of the fact that there is all this talk about “The new workplace.” When all the noises on “The new workplace” started, I thought it was about remaking the workplace but it turns out it is euphemism for squeezing the last drop out of every worker.

For obvious reasons, I never disclose the identity of clients unless the example puts them in a positive light. Some years ago one of the big pharmaceutical companies asked me to speak to their people on the important subject of change. I got a brief over the telephone from one of the leaders. Among other things, she said that they were facing serious changes because they were going to retrench staff. I asked her what the main desired outcome of my talk should be and she said that I should help their people to accept change.

The wheels fell off when I asked the last question. I asked her if the audience was made up of those who were leaving, those who were remaining or both. She said, “At the moment all they know is that some will get retrenched but they do not yet know who is going to be affected.” I calmly responded: “Ma’am I am a consultant and not a magician. I cannot help your people to accept change with a 45 or 60-minute talk. Maybe we should talk about how you can treat your people better”

It is about time we humanized the workplace. In 1997 I was most impressed when I joined Liberty in Johannesburg as an OD manager. They had a crèche, a heavily subsidized gym and a heavily subsidized canteen. I thought wow...this is heaven! It did not take me long to realize that although providing such amenities is important, it only takes care of what Frederick Herzberg as far back as 1959 called hygiene factors. Humanizing the workplace is going to take far more than having these facilities and far more than changing the gender of half of the executives. It will take a complete overhaul of the whole system and seeing employees as more than a pair of hands. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

The people I planned to interview had a much bigger role in the original idea of the book. Apart from the fact that there were more of them, more countries were represented. The role of these conversations and the number of people became less and less as the project got a life of its own. Many examples came from informal chats with friends as well as from daily news. On the 26th of September 2014 I felt like the book had scored a hat trick because there was one example after another as the day unfolded.

The morning news reported a story from the daily newspaper, De Telegraaf. The Dutch telecommunications giant, KPN, had ditched their women advancement program. My interest in the story was the fact that I was halfway with the book and I had already made a prediction that over time sense would prevail and Affirmative Action quotas for female executives would be dropped. I did not know that an example would present itself before I completed the book. Unfortunately I did not get an opportunity to talk to KPN. The reason I had predicted that what I call Women Executives Affirmative Action (WEAA) would be dropped sooner or later is that it is not sustainable.

Later on the same day, Harvard Biz Report posted this Tweet “Average workers should earn a lot more, according to ideal CEO-to-worker compensation ratios <https://hbr.org/1slWEIG> pic.twitter.com/kdLLsAlOxS.” Thanks HBR, I had already put an old Oxfam report as well as an old OECD report in the book and bingo! You provided a more current example. They say bad luck comes in threes. I don't know what they call it when three good things happen on the same day. The third thing that happened later that day was as I walked to the shops and I saw a woman with a big shopping bag. I will revisit this later. That is what happens when you write a book based on real life.

Apart from the daily news and daily chats with people, while writing the book I read Jessica Chivers' book, “Women Work! How to Get a Grip on Guilt and make a Smooth Return to Work” She is the UK based Thinking Woman's Coach. She interviewed 200 women for her book and she included excerpts of the interviews in the book. Thank you Jessica, I am going to piggyback on your interviews and quote some of these women. I read the book after having a conversation with Jessica and I did not ask her for permission to use these excerpts because they are in the public domain.

I still go back to SA in August because I get a lot of opportunities to address audiences. In what we call the old SA, the identity documents of black people were different from those of their white counterparts. They were used to enforce influx control laws and black men had to carry these documents on them or face prosecution. When this law was extended to women, women said: “Enough is enough!” On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 1956 women from all walks of life, including non-black women marched in protest to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. They marched chanting “Wathint' abafazi wathint imbokodo! You strike a woman you strike a rock!”

In the past 20 years we have celebrated the 9<sup>th</sup> of August as Women's day and the whole month as Women's month in honor of these brave women. Organizations in all sectors celebrate this month in one form or another and as a speaker I get opportunities to address audiences on all sorts of gender issues. I have noted, with dismay, that changing the gender of 50% of executives has become the focus of women advancement programs in SA workplaces. This quota thing is not just a SA phenomenon. All UN member states have to achieve these targets by 2015. I revisit this in chapter 3.

Apart from facilitating workshops and presenting talks at these functions I also facilitate workshops and conversations. Thus far the conversations have been limited to teams and organizations and I hope to broaden the participation through Project awomansplace. Thanks to social media, we can sit around a global table and have a conversation. I hope this will not only get a global conversation going but it will also stimulate conversations at organizational level, team level, among friends and most importantly get individuals to think twice before making career choices.

As a conversation facilitator I never pretend to be a neutral process facilitator who has no views on the subject. The conversations entail giving everyone an opportunity to state his or her views and they have helped me to see my own views with a fresh pair of eyes. I hope they do the same for you too. Of course other people's views do not shake my values but they definitely shake some of my views as I question my assumptions. Although I am the facilitator we are all equal participants. This is different from delivering a talk or writing a book because only one view gets stated.



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There are so many important people issues and gender issues but this project focuses on women and the workplace because of what is happening around us. Many companies have women advancement programs and as I have said, this project is a reaction to the fact that the focus of these programs is on getting a few women to the top of the corporate ladder. Although my views on many things have evolved over time after other people hurt my brain, my views on “A woman’s place is in the boardroom at the top of the corporate ladder” are not new. Fortunately this is documented. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2005 I presented a Women’s day talk at Nedcor, one of the four major SA banks and they were kind enough to allow me to record the talk.

Even then I did not see a woman’s place as the top of the corporate ladder or any other place that society designates as a woman’s place. The recording of the talk is available as a free download on [www.makheni.com](http://www.makheni.com), Free Resources. A decade later, I still see “A woman’s place is in the boardroom, at the top of the corporate ladder” as the new oppression of women. Why should women be pressurized to have so-called “ambition” just to get the quotas right in the name of women advancement? Why should managerial aspiration be every woman’s priority or a priority for anyone else for that matter?

When it comes to the top of the corporate ladder, what is my bottom line? I am going to quote Jessica because I cannot state it more eloquently even if I tried. When I asked her what her bottom line is she responded: “Irrespective of your color or religion, whether you are from Nigeria or Norway, whether you have a penis or a vagina there should be a possibility for you to deploy your talents and skills in a way that is gratifying to you and of service to others. For some it is at the top of the corporate ladder, for some it is being of service to humanity and for some it is raising children.”

I see the operative word in her statement as ‘possibility’. There is a big difference between saying a woman’s place is in the boardroom at the top of the corporate ladder and saying that if a woman would like to be in the boardroom at the top of the corporate ladder it should be possible. The glass ceiling is still firmly in place in many cases and that should change. In this book I am saying the choice should be possible but every choice comes with consequences and responsibilities so we should not just get carried away. It is possible to eat five hamburgers or drink a bottle of wine a day but those choices come with consequences. *Let’s have a constructive conversation...*

## 3 Why quotas?

The whole issue revolves around quotas. I suppose a good place to start is where these quotas come from. I quote the entire foreword of the 2014 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) report by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon because it sums up the context of this book:

### 3.1 The deadline for MDG targets – 2015

“At the turn of the century, world leaders came together at the United Nations and agreed on a bold vision for the future through the Millennium Declaration. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were a pledge to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity, and free the world from extreme poverty. The MDGs, with eight goals and a set of measurable time bound targets, established a blueprint for tackling the most pressing development challenges of our time.

This report examines the latest progress towards achieving the MDGs. It reaffirms that the MDGs have made a profound difference in people's lives. Global poverty has been halved five years ahead of the 2015 timeframe. Ninety per cent of children in developing regions now enjoy primary education, and disparities between boys and girls in enrolment have narrowed. Remarkable gains have also been made in the fight against malaria and tuberculosis, along with improvements in all health indicators. The likelihood of a child dying before age five has been nearly cut in half over the last two decades. That means that about 17,000 children are saved every day. We also met the target of halving the proportion of people who lack access to improved sources of water.

The concerted efforts of national governments, the international community, civil society and the private sector have helped expand hope and opportunity for people around the world. But more needs to be done to accelerate progress. We need bolder and focused action where significant gaps and disparities exist.

Member States are now fully engaged in discussions to define Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will serve as the core of a universal post-2015 development agenda. Our efforts to achieve the MDGs are a critical building block towards establishing a stable foundation for our development efforts beyond 2015.” Ban Ki-moon.

I am not saying that the UN is the be all and end all but if you have been following the impact of this intervention you will agree that there has been movement in the same direction. I hold no brief for the UN but I would also like to state that the myopic “let's get women to the top to create an ideal world” approach is not their approach. Ban Ki-moon created an important agency, UN women and they focus on crucial issues such as abuse of women and they do good work. This book is not a critical analysis of the work of the UN but it is my view on the negative unintended consequences of one aspect, which is a specific quota: *Equal representation of men and women at the top of the ladder.*



### 3.2 Unintended consequences

When people have good intentions they tend to deny and even defend the unintended consequences thereof instead of simply admitting that those consequences were not intended. The child support grant is one of the social grants that the new government introduced in SA to try and fight poverty. Because of the high rate of teenage pregnancy, many of the beneficiaries of this grant are teenagers. The unintended consequences were an incentivizing teenage pregnancy and the misuse of the funds by the teenagers who spend the money on themselves and not on the babies.

About 14 years ago, I was a guest on the Tim Modise Show (A talk show on radio 702) together with a representative of the National Department of Social Development and the producer from Special Assignment. Special Assignment is a current affairs series on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). They had just conducted an informal survey at schools and the teenagers had admitted that they did not spend the funds on the babies. This was not a desktop survey, they visited schools in Orange Farm and Soweto in Johannesburg. Everyone who called in during the show agreed with what the two of us had to say but the government representative insisted that it was not true.

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He did not say anything about a formal survey that the department was busy with. Within a very short space of time a news report stated that the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) had conducted a study for the department and they found that the teenagers used the money for the benefit of the children. I have studied Research Methodology so I am one of those people you cannot just bamboozle with surveys. I started wondering how they pulled it off in such a short space of time and wondering what kind of questions you ask to get to the bottom of this.

My questions were answered after some years. I found out that the offices of the department are housed at the colorful HSRC building in Pretorius Street in Pretoria. Mystery solved! That is how far people are prepared to go to defend unintended consequences. I expect those who are busy with these targets to defend the unintended consequences.

I offered management training for four years at Anglo American Platinum mines in SA. One morning I arrived at one of the mines with two suitcases on wheels with all the paraphernalia that I used for the course. As I struggled from the parking area with the suitcases, the handbag, the coat and all the things we women carry, I asked a young man for help. He thought I was one of the mine employees. He responded "No way, Beijing 50–50! You said you wanted Women in Mining!" My initial reaction was "He is such a jerk!" Later, when I gave it more thought, I understood where he was coming from because he said Beijing 50–50.

In 1995 The UN held the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing. Over the years I have realized that this quota is all that the average person knows about Beijing '95. Once a person says Beijing 50–50, I realize that like the young man, he or she has never seen the report of this conference despite the fact that it is just a click away:

The Millennium Summit which I have already referred to, set the eight international development goals, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which the world is supposed to achieve by 2015.

1. To halve the number of [undernourished](#) people
2. To achieve [universal primary education](#)
3. **To promote [gender equality and empower women](#)**
4. To reduce [child mortality](#)
5. To improve [maternal health](#)
6. To combat [HIV/AIDS](#), [malaria](#), and other diseases
7. To ensure environmental sustainability
8. To develop a global partnership for development

Whenever I ask people where the 50–50 quota comes from they either say it is from the Beijing conference or from the MDGs or both. It is clear that they have not read the report of the Millennium Summit. The 2014 report is just a click away: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2014%20MDG%20report/MDG%202014%20English%20web.pdf>. It is true that literacy is wasted on the literate.

I do not necessarily agree with everything the UN gets up to but if you have been following the progress or just go through the reports you will agree that good progress has been made and if we put all that into practice we will go a long way toward remaking society. How can we possibly “*promote gender equality and empower women*” by replacing a few men with a few women? UN member states are under pressure to meet these targets by 2015. The unintended consequences of these targets are the impact on the personal lives of the women that have bought into the idea that moving to the top of the ladder is always in their best interest.

I have heard a lot of people who have never been to Sweden citing Sweden as shining example to emulate. Although Sweden is ahead of most countries when it comes to gender issues, it is not the perfect example that most think it is. Among other issues, they still have a gender pay gap even if they have narrowed it in the past 20 years. One of the unintended consequences of reaching the quotas there is that 20 years ago women's issues were a hot topic and now that they ticked the box of meeting quotas, talking about gender issues is frowned upon. Swedish people get surprised when I tell them that we talk freely about gender issues in SA because in Sweden it is easier to talk about ethnicity issues than about gender issues.

The fact that 2015 is the deadline for reporting on the Millennium goals explains the marked increase in the attention that the underrepresentation of women at the top have been getting in the past two years. A lot of airtime and column inches are devoted to this subject in both mass media and online media. The number of books and the number of blogs devoted to this is rising daily. The label “Feminist” has become more fashionable than ever. I wonder what new fad will emerge in 2016. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

## 4 Women and financial independence

No one can argue that financial independence is important for everyone including women. There are a lot of women who put up with physical and emotional abuse because they are financially dependent. Like most people, I used to believe that financial dependence is the main reason women put up with abuse. I come across a worse form of dependency and it cuts across all social classes through my engagement with hundreds of women. I came to the conclusion that women are more emotionally dependent than they are financially dependent.

Even before I started doing this work I dealt with women who are emotionally dependent because I was one of the volunteers at People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) between 1992 and 1993. I was one of the volunteers who manned the telephone 2 evenings a week. We offered counseling to abused women. 100% of the calls that I took were from women who were abused by an intimate partner. Almost all of them were husbands. For me the most interesting statistic was that 100% of these women were not financially dependent on the men who abused them.



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Since then I have encountered many more women who are emotionally dependent. I was interviewed on different media in SA including TV, radio, newspapers and magazines and they always gave out my contact details. The wide range of topics included women abuse, child abuse, management, personal effectiveness, assertiveness, entrepreneurship etc. No matter what the topic was, I would always get calls from abused women. It is a pity that I cannot share the confidential emails I still get from the delegates I meet in management workshops. Men who are financially dependent on them abuse some of these women.

Are there women who are abused because they are financially dependent? Yes. Will they get out of abusive relationships once they become financially independent? Not necessarily. I am not saying women are better off when they are financially dependent. All I am saying is financial independence is not the panacea that many assume it is. We need to equip women with a vital life skill called assertiveness and acquiring this skill starts with understanding your intrinsic self-worth.

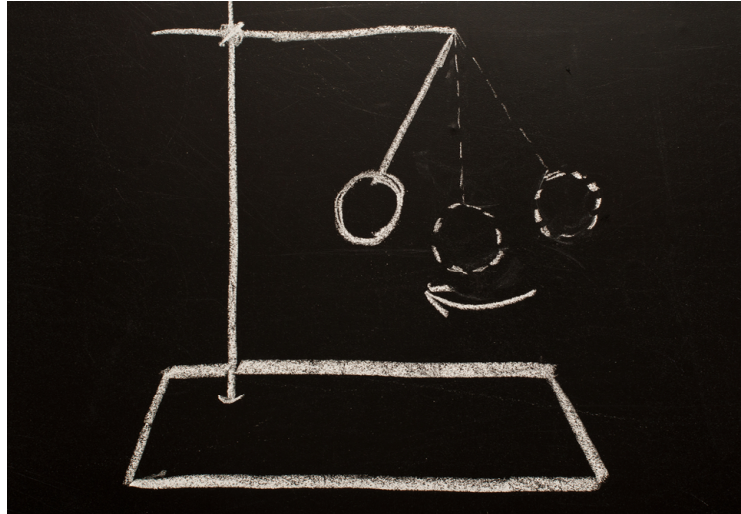
If we really want to help these women we should stop lying to ourselves. I am not sure who first said that the lies we tell ourselves are the most dangerous ones but I endorse this statement. We do that in our personal lives and we do that as a society. Some time back I started using a small plate when eating dinner at home because I wanted to eat less. I recently realized that I have been lying to myself all along because I eat from a small plate but take a second helping. It is about time we faced the truth even if it is unpalatable.

#### 4.1 The pendulum effect

The swinging of the pendulum from one extreme to another is normal human behavior. When we do not like a situation we try to change everything that is associated with it. We introduce change for the sake of change and we usually swing to the other extreme. There are countless examples of the pendulum effect. One of them is the human rights situation in SA. In the old SA black people had no rights. Obviously that had to be addressed in the new SA but unfortunately the pendulum swung to the other extreme and we ended up with a human rights culture that went completely wrong.

Unfortunately change in the wrong direction is usually easier and more rapid because it takes no effort. Trying to get the pendulum to swing back and settle at the equilibrium does not happen overnight. That is why twenty years later the pendulum is still at the other extreme and criminals are enjoying the right to be wrong. I believe this pendulum can eventually settle at equilibrium but that will not just happen without the effort of concerned citizens. Things change when thinking people start asking the right questions and fortunately that discourse has started.





The pendulum effect

Domestic work in Sweden is another example of the pendulum effect. People who make a lot of noise about Sweden never talk holistically about the changes that were introduced by the Social Democrats. They do not talk about the fact that forming an egalitarian society included not allowing domestic workers because a domestic worker is someone of a lower class working in your home. Instead of banning slave wages, they went to the other extreme and banned domestic work. There is no problem in countries where domestic work is allowed but you have to pay good money for it.

In countries like SA you are allowed to get someone to do your housework or your garden and pay them slave wages and unfortunately the government sets ridiculously low minimum wages. I am looking forward to the day we will name and shame these new slave masters. It is sad that women employ most of the domestic workers but domestic have the shocking working conditions. I hope one day the trade union for domestic workers, SADSAWU, will conduct a survey on what female executives pay the people who raise their children. It is sad that there is a need for a trade union for domestic workers. It is as sad as having a court to enforce child maintenance payment by irresponsible fathers.

Another example of the pendulum effect is women and self-esteem. When women are not assertive they tend to be non-assertive. When men are not assertive they tend to be aggressive. When women try to assert themselves the pendulum sometimes swings to the other extreme, which is aggressiveness instead of settling at the equilibrium, assertiveness. The pendulum also tends to swings from the extreme of women not asserting themselves to being obsessed with self-assertion at all cost.

No one can argue that women were denied access to opportunities in the past and that this has to change. Does that mean all women should rush to the top of the corporate ladder at all cost even when that cost is the welfare of their children? Do women have unlimited rights or is their right to stake their claim in previously male territory limited by their responsibility to their children? We will revisit this question and the pendulum effect in chapter 10. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

## 5 Is the top a great destination?

Firstly, is the top of the corporate ladder a great destination? Like most people, I used to hold the view that leadership means the top of the ladder until John C. Maxwell disabused me of that view. In 2005 he wrote “The 360° Leader – Developing Your Influence from Anywhere in the Organization”. Thereafter it became fashionable to talk about leading without a title. In the past 15 years this writer has influenced the way I see leadership in particular and the workplace in general. If you still believe that leadership means the top of the ladder maybe you should consider reading The 360° Leader. I will not speak for John because he does that very well without me. He does not write on women and leadership but on leadership generally.

This title mentality is not limited to leadership. I asked delegates in a management workshop what they would rather be doing with their lives. A young woman said that she was not happy being a mining engineer because she wanted to become a social worker instead. The reason she became a mining engineer was that she was from the area close to the mine and the mine only offered bursaries for studies in fields that are related to mining. She was selected because she got good grades in Math and Science and her passion was not taken into account. She did not like her job because all she wanted to do was to help people.



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I asked her if she engaged with people in her job as a mining engineer and in her personal life. She confirmed that she did engage with a lot of people all the time. I asked her why she did not help them and she said that she did help them and...then the penny dropped. She realized that she did not need the title "Social Worker" to help people. When she came back for the following module of the course she was smiling ear to ear saying that she had realized that she does not need the title to live out her passion. In contrast, I think everyone knows at least one social worker that has never helped anyone in spite of his or her title. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

The reality of the workplaces we have created is that almost all jobs are 25/8 jobs and most jobs go with a lot of stress. Is there more stress as you go up this ladder or is executive stress a myth? Should we go to animal research for answers or look around us? If we look around us we see real people like Marco van Basten, a very famous former Dutch soccer player. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2014 he announced that he was stepping down from Head Coach to Assistant Coach of AZ football club because there was more pressure at the top.

I know very little about sport but I do know that there are more male soccer head coaches than female soccer head coaches. One day, if that has not yet happened, someone is going to demand that 51% of soccer head coaches should be women because women make up 51% of the population. Should one of those females get out of the kitchen because she cannot stand the heat, we will probably jump up and down and say that she was not given support just because she is a woman.

Ingvar Jónsson, the director of Profectus in Iceland does management training and coaching for most of the big corporations in Iceland so he deals with the people at the top of the corporate ladder all the time. I asked him if all things being equal a CEO has more work stress than a cleaner. I included all things equal to exclude stress triggers that are related to personal life. This was Ingvar's response...

"All things equal, I strongly disagree with that statement. The leadership environment has changed dramatically the past decade – it is more complex, volatile, and unpredictable. In the last decade many industries have entered an era of increasingly rapid change. The most recent global recession has created an environment that is fundamentally different from that of 10 years ago.

The leaders I work with often complain about being pulled in many different directions simultaneously. The other challenge many of my clients have in common is the lack of overview and information overload. The skills needed for being comfortable in the leaders shoes have therefore changed. More multifaceted and adaptive thinking abilities are required. The methods being used to develop leaders have not changed at the same pace. In my opinion, leaders are not developing fast enough or in the right ways to match the new environment which is the biggest stress trigger leaders are facing today."



I had an interesting conversation with Gisela Kassoy of Gisela Kassoy Consultoria in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She is a Creativity and Innovation Consultant, Trainer, Speaker and facilitator. When I asked her if she thought a CEO had more work stress than a cleaner she said that she is not a stress expert but she knows that a CEO has far more work-related stress than a cleaner because a CEO has more responsibilities. All the people I talked to about executive stress are not stress experts but they deal with real executives in the real world and they all agree that executive stress is not a myth. In case you are still not convinced just Google pictures of President Barak Obama in 2009 and compare them with his 2014 pictures.

One of the Swedish people I got input from is Liv Cardell, the Owner and Senior organizational consultant at Cardell Consulting AB in Malmö, Sweden. In August 2014 she had an interesting post on her Facebook account. I will only quote part of it: "And then there are those who say that there is no difference!!! It is almost like saying that Hitler did not exist! I think we came to this earth to be complimentary." When I introduced the conversation she said, "I have been thinking of these issues a lot." Liv is one of those passionate people who care about what kind of society we create.

She says 15 years ago, as an organizational consultant, she was part of the team that looked into a tragic situation in her country after they reached gender parity in the number of medical doctors. They investigated why the rate of suicide among female doctors was rising. Since most of the female doctors were married to male doctors, both partners had 25/8 jobs because they work 60 hours a week. Since they have to do their own housework and raise their own kids at the same time, most of the load fell on women. In a perfect world men and women would share the work equally but in the real world women carry a heavier load so having both parents in 25/8 jobs put a lot of strain on women. That is the real world!

The top of the ladder is not a family friendly place. Let alone family friendly, it is not a personal life friendly place. When executive dating services were introduced I wondered why anyone needed this service because you meet people all over in everyday life. Some years ago I heard a radio interview with a woman who runs one of these services. She said that people are too busy to meet partners. I started wondering where these busy people find time to devote to a relationship and should they get married and have children where they would find time to even know their children's names. A job that takes over every waking hour is a high price to pay. This simply means you are making a living and not a life.

Traditionally men paid this high price. There are so many of these true stories and they prove that men never had it all and there is no reason to believe that women can have it all. Some years ago I bought a DVD by Nick Vujicic, No arms No legs No worries. Nick talked to small kids, then to teens and then to adults at one school. If you are still not convinced that men have always paid this high price please get this DVD and watch the part where he speaks to adults. After his talk there was a Q & A session and a middle-aged man made a comment that stayed with me all these years. No amount of money, status or power is worth this high price. I quote this sad man verbatim:

“When I look back on my life I’ve been a workaholic. I’ve worked in earthmoving equipment. I went away and would come back weeks later and months later. I worked out in the Northern territory and I left my wife who I had been married to for 34 years with the children. Now the four children I’ve got, three of the boys want to have nothing to do with me and my wife says well, you never spent time with them when they needed you and I realize now. I rang my son this morning and said John I love you and he said: ‘Look dad, I haven’t got time to talk to you now.’ I realize now that if I had spent more time with my kids and shared with them more they might have spent more time with me now. I hope and pray that one day they will appreciate the fact that I thought I was doing the right thing. I thought I was giving them material goods but what they needed was me.”

While both parents wage the gender war in the boardroom like two elephants, it is the grass that suffers – the children. Fathers have an important role in bringing up their children but whether we like it or not, a woman is more than being the person attached to the source of milk. It is not true that society has created this role for women. This is just propaganda that is supposed to make mothers feel less guilty about working outside the home when they have small children. The guilt is not a creation of society. The creation of society is the pressure on women to get married and have children even if they had rather just focus on their careers.



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This pressure is so strong that women believe that they hear a biological clock ticking away. After talking to someone who could not have children I realized that this biological clock is in fact a societal clock. It is the voice of society that some women internalize. In the early eighties when my daughters were small I had a friend who always talked about her big problem. She was married and she could not have children. I asked her to explain why it was a problem. Everything she said had to do with what her in-laws had to say about the fact that she had no children. I told her that I still did not understand her problem and then she said that she had no one to send to the shops. It was very clear that she had internalized the voice of society.

Women are getting married later in life and having children later in life so when they are in their mid and late thirties they have small children. That is the time they are on the race to the top. We have come up with nonsensical concepts like quality time to justify not giving our children face time. Women are advised to provide some minutes of quality time in their diaries to take care of their guilt. Because of technology, the way we do work and life changes all the time. There are aspects of life that do not change as technology marches forward at the speed of light. We remain human and children remain human with the need for attention that humans will always have.

Am I saying that no one should get to the top of the corporate ladder? No. I am saying that there is a cost and denying the cost does not help anyone. If the top of the corporate ladder is not the greatest destination why is it such a popular destination? Many people dream of the corner office because the higher you go up the pyramid the better the perks – money, power and status. That is the major reason people want to get to the top. Before we judge the people who want to get to the top for money we should consider this reality. It is not only a matter of the people at the bottom being underpaid but it is also a matter of people at the top being overpaid.

Earlier I mentioned the Harvard Business Report of the 26<sup>th</sup> of October, which said that workers should be paid more. According to an Oxfam report, the combined wealth of the 85 richest people in the world is equal to more than the wealth of the bottom 50% of people in the world. This means 85 people have more than the poorest 3.5 billion people in the world. Usually when people talk about poor people they refer to the unemployed poor. In many countries including my home country there are millions of the employed poor. In the past two years the world has seen images of the living conditions of the employed poor of Marikana who risk their lives digging platinum out of the belly of the earth. In case you missed the action, Marikana is the platinum mine in SA where strikers were massacred.

The world also saw the horrific images of the textile-manufacturing factory that collapsed in Bangladesh two years ago. Over a thousand workers, mainly young women who worked slave hours and earned slave wages died in this disaster. We heard about them because of the disaster but we do not hear about the millions of the employed poor all over the world.

Contrary to popular belief, these disparities are only in less developed countries, an OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) report paints a different picture with income inequality being at it's highest in over 50 years. African countries are not members of the OECD so they are not included in the list. The top 10 OECD countries with the worst income inequality as per their gini coefficient include Chile, Mexico, Turkey, USA, Israel, Portugal, UK, Spain and Greece.

The working poor in countries like the USA are not as badly off as the working poor in Marikana but they are still badly off. Some have to hold down two or three jobs just to survive. I know that the calculation of the gini coefficient is based on the difference between a country's richest and poorest and not the salary gap between executives and the lowest workers but it does give an indication of this gap.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 2014 I listened to the Redi Tlhabi's show on talk radio 702 online. She discussed the latest Oxfam report on inequalities. It was interesting to listen to the people at the top defending the indefensible. One of the callers went on about the risk that entrepreneurs take and ignored the indefensible executive pay. Every time the salary gap is discussed someone calls in and says that if we do not overpay these executives they will simply go to another country. Interestingly enough, they also say that in other countries.

I hope one day Redi or any other host will ask exactly which country these people will go to. I would like to know where our politicians would go to if we pay them less and paid teachers and nurses more. We know that our good nurses go to the UK and Saudi Arabia to get paid better but I wonder, which countries need our politicians, our senior government officials and our CEOs in both the public and private sectors? I would like to know which country needs our hospital managers so much that we have to keep them by overpaying them while underpaying nurses, teachers and policemen. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

In 2006 I presented a talk at an engineering company in South Africa. Thereafter I talked to a delightful young lady and we subsequently became friends. She said that she loved working for that company because she loved her work as an engineer and she did not have to be a manager to get paid decently. In that company people became managers for the right reason and as a result they had good managers. They did not have managers who chose higher positions because they were underpaid at the bottom.

In my management eBook, "Storytelling meets Management", I call this the GTLH Syndrome – the Good Teacher Lousy Headmaster Syndrome. If only leaders realized that if you do not pay people well at operational level you may lose a good worker and gain a lousy manager. Underpaying people simply does not make business sense. The money paradox is that money is not a motivator but it demotivates. Money demotivates if you cannot even make ends meet and it is even worse when there are such disparities. I believe if people got paid well and treated well at all levels they would consider their personal circumstances more in making career choices. Please download a free copy of the eBook from [www.makhani.com](http://www.makhani.com) – just click on free resources. *Let's have a conversation...*

When I talked to Jessica she made a poignant point on the importance of raising children. She said that raising children is not an individual issue but a societal issue. It is a very important role and she says that parents should not be penalized for choosing to take time off work and raise their kids for whatever time is needed. For some children this can be months but for some this can be years. She feels very strongly that mothers should not be ruled by the fear of losing out on promotions and opportunities and be put under pressure to rush back to the workplace. She suggests that when mothers return after whatever period they should be supported and helped to get back on track.

I agree wholeheartedly with her. That is why we need to remake the workplace and make it a family-friendly place for both men and women. This means we should have workplaces where Ted will not be fired and Lodewijk does not have to be in the public sector to be a hands-on dad. This is not attainable for as long as we have 25/8 careers. Parents are not the only people who should have a life. Even single people are entitled to a family friendly workplace. We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that it is right to treat single people like slaves and that they should always pick up the slack when working parents take time off to take care of their children.

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I am looking forward to the day this conversation will be redundant. The day the workplace will be a totally different place. The thing is, we make career choices today in this real world and not in that ideal world. Both parents should consider these realities before rushing off to the top. I am not saying fathers should continue sacrificing their relationships with their children but all I am saying is that I am concerned about the fact that mothers of small children have joined them in the rat race at the expense of their children.

The other reason people want to get to the top is that someone else's job always looks easy. One day I conducted a workshop for people at operational level and one of the activities I got them to do was to complete puzzles. I observed what happened at each table and I noticed that one of them just held the lid with the picture instead of leaving it on the table where everyone can see the picture clearly without her holding it. When I asked her why she was not participating she said that she was the manager.

I asked her what the role of a manager was and she said "Nothing." When we discussed the learning points from the activity, I raised this point and they all agreed that managers do nothing but attend meetings. They also believed that the higher your level of management, the more you earned and the less you had to do. One day some of these people are going to get to the next level and they will get a rude shock. Some people want to get to the next level to escape bad management. They do not realize that at next level they are going to get another layer above them and they will be even worse off because they will be the ham in the sandwich. Unfortunately when these people get to the next level they perpetuate the bad management. You would expect them to do better than their predecessors but they don't. For some reason that I do not understand yet, people do unto others what they do not want done unto them. I will not go into the fact that success at every level takes a different skill because I think I covered that adequately in *Storytelling meets Management*. I hope you have already downloaded it from [www.makheni.com](http://www.makheni.com).

Another reason people want to get to the top is that they think they will be happier. When I was in SA in August 2014 I heard one of my favorite radio presenters, Ashraf Garda interviewing someone I have not seen in ages. A wonderful woman called Professor Irene Moutlana. She is the Vice Chancellor of Vaal University of Technology and she holds Masters and Doctor of education degrees from Harvard under a Fulbright scholarship. She achieved this when things were really tough in SA. This is a woman at the top of her ladder.

Like many of Ashraf's profile interviews, it was a great interview and I hope it inspired many listeners to reach their goals against all odds. At the end Ashraf asked her if she had any regrets. She said that she had no regrets but then said something interesting. She said, "My mother has no education but she is so happy." Irene is not unhappy and she sounded like the Irene that I know who loves her life. She has, however, realized a fact that eludes many, the fact that life is not a competitive sport and you do not have to be at the top of anything to be happy. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

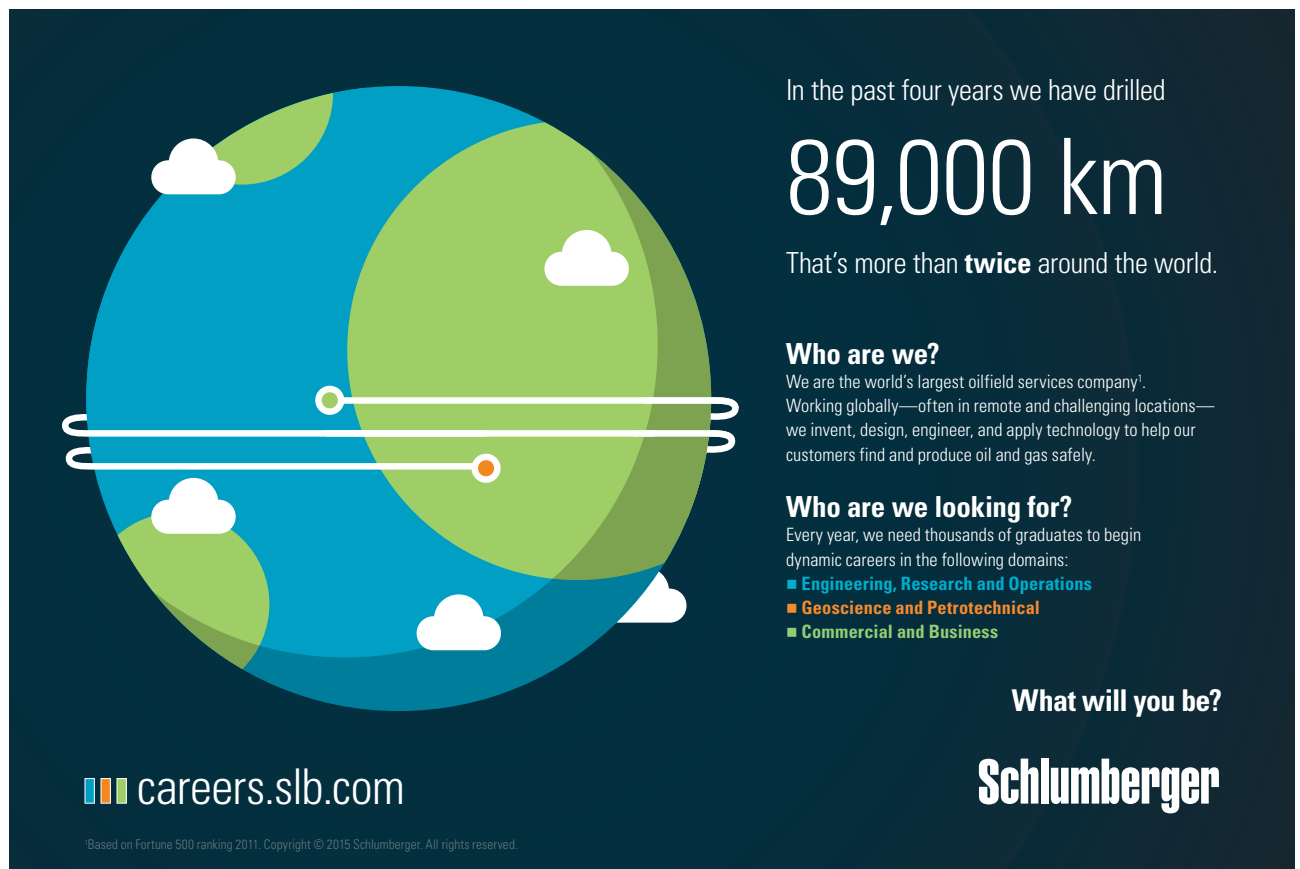
## 5.1 Does everyone want to be in the rat race?

We sometimes assume that everyone wants to be in the rat race. There are a lot of people who do not get into the rat race because they do not want to and a lot of people who get out of it after they realize that they prefer another way of being. Firstly, we assume that everyone who has a job wants to reach the corner office. Secondly, we assume that everyone who has a business wants to have a big business that employs other people. I got that impression when I recently read in a business publication for our region.

Power women, the article that profiles 14 business women, starts with “alle stimuleringsmaatregelen van de overheid ten spijt komen er nauwelijks meer vrouwen op topfuncties bij. Wel zijn er de afgelopen vijf jaar meer vrouwelijke ondernemers bij gekomen. Ook in de Bollenstreek. Dikwijls zijn en blijven dat ZZP'ers, die vanuit huis hun eigen onderneming bestieren, met de kinderen dichtbij. Maar net zo vaak groeien deze bedrijven het woonhuis uit en is het aannemen van personeel een logische volgende stap.”

Translated “In spite of the all the efforts of the government, the number of women that get to the top is still low. In the past five years we have seen an increase in the number of businesswomen. That includes the Bollenstreek (The tulip bulbs region).

They are mainly and remain self-employed entrepreneurs with no staff, who work from home alongside the children. Now and then these businesses outgrow the home and employing staff becomes the next logical step.”



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This article presupposes that outgrowing the home and employing people is more desirable than working from the comfort of your home alongside your children. I am a self-employed entrepreneur who works from home and so is my husband, Koen. I wouldn't trade this blessing for anything, especially for driving to an office and dealing with staff. What can beat living your life on your terms in your own home?

Over the years people have asked me why the company that I started 15 years ago, Real Solutions Training, has not grown. When I ask them what growth is they say by now I should be having offices, employing other facilitators and acquiring huge contracts. I work with independent associates when the need arises but the last thing I want is to employ other people and be responsible for their actions. If I heed these people's advice and acquire huge contracts, which sometimes involve compromising your values, I will make more money but I will be "The coordinator" and no longer "The facilitator." I have grown as a person in the past 15 years and that is what counts.

After all these decades we still have a narrow definition of entrepreneurship. We think of an entrepreneur in terms of traditional business only. I personally know a lot of people who either quit the corporate rat race or quit their traditional business to do business like we are in the new millennium. The world blinked and the meaning of entrepreneurship changed. That is not reflected in mainstream business publications. I must say, mainstream media in the US are catching on but elsewhere we are still to wake up and smell the coffee.

More and more people leave the corporate sector for good either out of necessity or out of choice. They go into services such as coaching or web design or start non-traditional businesses in the exploding MLM sector or other online businesses. In fact the MLM sector is exploding because it has gone online. These entrepreneurs skew the figures. I have no doubt if they were still in the corporate sector, they would probably be somewhere higher on the corporate pyramid because most of them are not just Average-Joe. I know because I am one of them. We look at the quotas as if we are in the previous millennium.



## 6 Is everyone cut out for the top?

When I asked Wayne Morris if he thought everyone is cut out for the top of the corporate ladder he gave an interesting answer, which actually fits into the previous chapter. I asked Wayne because of his extensive experience in Management Training and Coaching in New Zealand. Wayne, a Director at Future Edge Ltd, is one of the trainers that I respect because he offers practical tools that work. He said over the years many people have asked him if it is possible to train anyone to become a leader.

He responds by saying that the question presupposes that leadership is everyone's aspiration and he sets the record straight. "Many people in organizations have the desire to climb the corporate ladder but many more have no desire to move up whatsoever. Even though it is possible to learn the skills needed to become a successful leader, not everyone wants to learn them. *More and more people want a balance in their lives where work isn't necessarily their top priority.* (My emphasis). For many people it is their personal vision of success that drives them but success may not mean rising up the corporate ladder. Success isn't and shouldn't be measured by your title or salary but by your contribution." I agree with Wayne.

"Where was this when I employed the wrong COO?" This was Linda's response after Koen and I explained brain profiling to her in a private conversation. Linda (not her real name) is a CEO of a big international marketing company. She is one of those people who quickly grasp abstract concepts. When you talk to Linda you do not need to draw a picture. The first time she heard what brain profiling is she immediately realized that if she had this knowledge beforehand she would have picked up the fact that the lady in question was not suitable for the role of a COO. Linda only took her skills and past experience into account and ended up with a disastrous placement.

The COO can do the work she is appointed for but her passion does not lie in the detailed structural nature of the activities in this role. Linda used to think that the COO wanted to do her job, which is being the face of the company. Now she understands that the COO role puts this woman behind the scenes and that is not what she enjoys. All along Linda thought that this was an ego problem. On the other hand, Linda reports to a Group MD who is trying to do what does not come naturally to him. He thinks Linda is outshining him as the founder of the company because Linda has the natural charisma that inspires both staff and clients. The Group MD tries to compete with Linda instead of capitalizing on his own strengths.

The company would benefit if the three understood their own and one another's brain preferences. Assuming that everyone should have management ambition presupposes that everyone is cut out for the top of the corporate ladder in the first place. This fallacy is partly responsible for the way we appoint managers. If you are good at operational level you get appointed to a higher position where you are expected to help others to do the same. Apart from the fact that you need a different skill set at every level, we are not all cut out for every possible role because we are all wired up differently. It takes more than learning new skills at the next level. It is also whether the activities at the next level suit you.

This is not only applicable at management level but at all levels. A delegate in one of the management workshops was an accountant. She became an accountant because all she considered was the fact that she was good at the subject. She said that all she wanted was to open a Bed and Breakfast and not just manage it but cook and serve people. It did not take her long to resign and do exactly that. Her husband is an unhappy medical doctor who is studying law. Training these people was a waste of resources and of their time.

In the middle of 2014 I talked to a young lady who works at our local Indonesian restaurant on weekends. When I found out that she is a student, I asked her in what field she studied. She was about to complete a degree in Archeology and she said that at the beginning of the academic year in August, she was going to start a course in Nursing. Her eyes lit up as she talked about looking after people. We all know of such cases and you may be one of them. Although I knew why someone would complete a course in Archeology and then switch to nursing I asked her why she studies Archeology in the first place.

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She said that she found it fascinating and still found it fascinating after all those years of study but she realized that she did not want to spend her life doing the work of an Archeologist. Not many people figure that out before starting to do the actual work. I am one of those who did not figure it out at the start. It took me a whole year to figure out that I was not cut out to be a mainframe computer programmer. When I was an Organizational Development manager at Liberty I heard that the company sponsored employees who qualified to become programmers. The institution that offered the training did their selection based on an aptitude test and their minimum was 70%. The company sponsored employees who got a minimum of 80%.

I got way over 80% and the company and I thought that meant I was cut out to become a programmer. I became a full time student, then a trainee programmer and then a programmer on a full manager's salary. After the company made this huge investment I was bored out of my skull after a year. After three years I left the company and that whole investment went down the drain. That is what happens when only potential and competence are taken into account. What have the people in these examples got in common? Any one of us could have become a medical doctor, an accountant, an archeologist or a programmer because we had the analytical thinking that is required to get good grades in these courses.

Why did the wheels fall off when it came to doing the work? If teachers and parents knew the answer to this question school subject choice would not be a mystery. Career choice would also not be a mystery. If recruitment officers and managers knew the answer then proper placement would not be a mystery. The simple answer is that we are all wired up differently and acquiring a skill does not necessarily mean you will have the passion for doing the work. The same applies to talent. Having talent in a specific field does not necessarily mean you will have the passion to follow a career in that line.

Talking about talent, in 2010 the world was spellbound and amazed by the talent of 80 year old Janet Cutler. This granny made the finals of Britain's got talent. Many would give their right arm to have the talent or get the opportunity and Janet had both. She was, however, not cut out to be an entertainer at that level. Some people with her talent make great entertainers because they are wired up that way, while some as Janet puts it prefer to "Sing in wee pubs and clubs". Some become one-on-one music tutors, some become music teachers, some write lyrics, some produce music, some become very good managers and some become happy accountants. Talking about accountants, one of South Africa's top entertainers, Lira, is a qualified accountant and fortunately she followed her heart.

The most important aspect of career choice is not the title or the perks that come with a job. It is the daily activities. The mining engineer who wants to help people did not know what daily activities make up a career in Social Work. All she wanted to do was to help people. The last thing on her mind was what a Social Worker does for eight hours everyday, which is mainly being a paper pusher. When we think of a career we hardly ever think of it in terms of the activities involved. When we think of the top of the corporate ladder, just like when we think of any other role, we hardly ever think of the daily activities. Financial rewards and status will never make up for having a career where what you do daily is not in sync with your passion.

We all know people who think in big pictures and thinking of future scenarios comes naturally to them. They ask the question *why?* We also know those who are on the other end of the continuum. For them the small picture is the big picture and to them detail is everything and they thrive in working in a structured way. They ask the question *how?* We also know people who are result driven and want to see proof and facts. They ask the question *what?* We also know those who are on the other side of this continuum. They are people oriented and people interaction energizes them. Some of them are energized by doing things for people and some by doing things with people. They ask the question *who / for whom / with whom?*

This has serious implications for careers because the daily activities involved in every career should be linked with this passion and not only to skills. This applies at all levels and management is no exception. The engineer who works for the engineering company which pays engineers well at all levels says that she loves being an engineer but she does not want to spend her day getting other people to do their work. Unlike most of us, she considered the daily activities. Apart from the fact that managers do not get equipped properly for the next level, one of the reasons they keep doing the work at the lower level is they love those activities. After all they were good at those activities before they got promoted to their level of incompetence.

Like most people, I started off not knowing about the role of brain preferences. Having studied Psychology, I was aware of personality and behavior assessment tools and had even applied some of them to a certain extent in management training. Things changed when I learnt about thinking preferences because thinking preferences have a closer relationship to behavior. As I always say, becoming a Neethling Brain Instruments NBI® practitioner put what I have to offer as a consultant and facilitator on steroids. It is not possible to do justice to the world's largest battery of instruments in this book so I am not even going to try. You can get more information on [www.breinvoorkeuren.nl](http://www.breinvoorkeuren.nl) – click on English or on [www.makhenionlinecoach.com](http://www.makhenionlinecoach.com).

## 7 Affirmative Action (AA)

I call replacing a few male executives with female executives Women Executive Affirmative Action (WEAA). I have always wondered why the people who call for these quotas and those who set these quotas do not refer to quotas as Affirmative Action. Is it because AA got bad press in the USA decades ago? Is it because AA includes black men and it actually puts black women ahead of white women? At age 61, I have lived through both AA eras in SA. The first one had nothing to do with women. It was the Afrikaner Affirmative Action (I call it AAA), which favored Afrikaner males since 1948. 1948 was a bit before my time but by the time I happened AAA was in full swing. Parliament was almost 100% Afrikaner male and public service was almost 100% Afrikaner with males at the helm.

I know that some non-Africans do not understand the meaning of Afrikaner. I have realized since I started living in The Netherlands that Dutch people refer to native Africans like me as Afrikaners. Afrikaners are white South Africans who descended from the Dutch people who colonized SA from 1652. They speak a language called Afrikaans. This means not all white South Africans are Afrikaners – some are English, Jewish, Portuguese, Greek etc. AAA excluded them too. Although these non-Afrikaners were first class citizens and they enjoyed the full benefit of apartheid, they were excluded from parliament and from public service.

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Apart from oppressing black people, AAA robbed parliament and public service of the contribution of black people as well as white non-Afrikaners. That is one of the reasons we did not have a great public sector. Productivity was a four-letter word in that sector and it was characterized by sheltered employment and jobs for pals. Does this mean all Afrikaners were not good enough? Definitely no but there are Afrikaners who got those jobs just because they were Afrikaners and that always goes with quotas. Even apartheid does not mean that all Afrikaners are bad.

One of the many repressive apartheid laws was the Job Reservation Act of 1911, which was amended in 1926. Among other things, it prohibited Blacks, Indians and Coloureds from occupying senior positions. In SA Coloured means a person of mixed race who is classified that way officially. You will agree that I come from a very interesting country. Anyone with half a brain cell and half a heart will agree that something had to be done to redress the imbalances that were deliberately created by the apartheid system. As soon as we gained freedom from this oppression we implemented AA. At least we were honest enough to call it AA.

SA set out to get the demographics of people in parliament and in the workplace to reflect the demographics of the country. While we were at it changing the complexion of the people at the top we also included women and differently abled people. This move seemed like a noble cause and I am one of those people who said "Amen" to the policy. There is nothing wrong with the policy per se. In fact the Afrikaans translation states it better – Regstellende Aksie – translated: Corrective Action. As with everything else, the problem is with the implementation.

The assumption was that all would be well once we changed the demographics in all workplaces to reflect the demographics of the country. Twenty years later, as far as I know, South Africa has the highest representation of women in parliament and an overrepresentation of black people in the public sector. In fact we took less than twenty years to get there. You do not have to do a scientific study, be a social science professor, an economist or even a genius to dispel the myth that AA is the answer in cases where people have been deliberately excluded.

South Africa is one of those countries that provide a perfect example. Having succeeded in meeting the AA quotas in government and in the public sector, the million-dollar question is, do we now have a better government and a better public sector? Am I saying we would have a better government and a better public sector without AA? No. I am saying it will take far more than AA to remake any society. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

## 7.1 Dancing to someone else's tune? The crux of the matter

I would like to make two points in this section. 1. Are you sure you are dancing to your own tune or are you dancing to the tune of someone who is dancing to someone else's tune? 2. The way AA is implemented leaves much to be desired. All UN member states have to meet the MDG's by 2015 so they set AA targets whether they call them AA or not. All organizations in those countries then have to set these targets to comply because the pressure includes punitive measures.

CEO's then have to put pressure on HR directors to meet these targets and they in turn filter down the pressure until it reaches people who are responsible for recruitment. The propaganda we read is meant to help prop this up and it even includes awards for the best women at the top. It is just like awards for the best-dressed celebrities, which serve only one purpose – to get people to buy expensive brands that they do not need with money they do not have. The circus just goes on and everyone is duped into believing "I'm dancing to my own tune!" By the way the Afrikaners that implemented AAA were not dancing to anyone's tune; it was their own agenda.

Time reported this on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2014: "From Facebook to Citigroup, more companies are covering the cost of elective egg freezing for women who want to delay child-bearing. Is this the key to real gender equality?" I believe women can choose what they do with their eggs and companies can choose to pay for that but my only problem is that it should not be done under the umbrella of gender equality. We should not pretend it is done to liberate women or advance the course of women. Women are happily going along with this because they are duped into believing that it is for their own good.

I have been on both sides of AA implementation, as an AA appointee and a recruitment officer tried to force me to implement AA incorrectly. He tried to get me to dance to his tune and he was dancing to someone else's tune. I relate both stories in "Storytelling meets Management" to illustrate a different point. In 1995 I was hijacked because I drove around in a fancy company car. It was time to look for a job where I could feel safe in an office. A recruiter who did not do his job properly gave me a wrong brief and I found out at an interview that I was there for a management position and not a marketing position. I was so desperate to get this safe job that I accepted it knowing that it was not what I had in mind.

I was appointed as the Client Service Manager and by the time I left I was a senior manager client service communications and marketing, reporting to the CEO. The company was Transmed, The medical aid of Transnet, which is the transport parastatal. A parastatal is a wholly government owned agency. I was appointed about 3 months before the commencement date so I made an appointment with my prospective boss. I started by asking him why he appointed me because I knew I was not the most suitable candidate. I asked him if he was playing a numbers game. He denied it and both of us knew he was not truthful.

It turned out Mr. prospective boss was not interested in whether I was suitable or not. He was in trouble with the HR department because the numbers were not right. I later heard that they had gone through two or three rounds of interviews and they had not found a suitable person. They had a different view of suitable. The day I went for the interview the assistant manager was off sick and when she reported for duty the following day the boss told her that they had found a suitable person. She was not aware of the boss' version of suitable so she asked questions about this suitable person and she was as shocked by the answer as I was when she told me.

He told her that she would have to do both her work and mine and I would just 'sit en mooi lyk' – sit and look pretty. The justification for wasting money on a person who was going to serve no purpose was the fact that at the interview I looked like a very friendly person and so I did not pose a threat to them. He said 'Sy is nie 'n Peter Mokaba nie' meaning she is not a Peter Mokaba. Peter Mokaba had given a lot of them grey hairs because he used to sing "Kill the boer, kill the farmer." They had real fears. They were scared that a black person would come with anger and revenge. Such fears and mistrust are inevitable when people are kept apart.

This malicious compliance continues whether the AA is for black people or for women. The dynamics are different, the fears are different but malicious compliance is malicious compliance irrespective of what drives it. If appointing women is not seen as a business imperative and the person who appoints a woman does not believe that there are competent women out there then it remains a box ticking exercise and a numbers game.



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Since I was appointed as a manager after some time it was my turn to appoint AA candidates. Because Transnet was a parastatal, The MD, Mr. Saki Macozoma had to report to parliament on the progress on the numbers game and so he put pressure on all the business units to get their act together. There was even more pressure on Transmed because we lagged behind all the other Transnet business units. So Mr. Macozoma put pressure on our CEO who put pressure on the HR Senior manager who put pressure on Tony the HR guy.

As managers we were at the bottom of this food chain so Tony put pressure on us to play the numbers game. He succeeded with other managers and suddenly there were black faces on the floor. We were a medical aid company running a paper-based system so we had a lot of assessors. They were at a level we called clerk. Call center agents were senior clerks so joining my team was a promotion. I needed more call center agents at the same time that new black assessors were appointed and Tony told me that I also had to appoint black women.

What I have not mentioned thus far is that Tony and the managers who were appointing black assessors were white males or as they referred to themselves, pale males. Much to Tony's surprise, the only black female manager said no. I told him that it was good that they were changing the complexion of the people in the other departments but that I believed it was not right to take people from the pavement and put them in the call center. I told him that I would consider the new people he had just employed in six months because by then they would know how the system worked and that I would teach them the call center system and give them the support they needed to be good call center agents.

Tony asked in exasperation, "What kind of black person are you?" I responded "The kind of black person who takes the operational requirements of the business seriously and does not want to entrench stereotypes. You call me a client service manager and that is what I am here to do, to serve clients." Firstly, the operational requirements: Unlike assessing claims, call center work happens live. All our stakeholders; namely suppliers and members called my department when something went wrong. My department was called the Client Service Department but we were actually a complaints department.

When the assessors, the finance department, the IT department, the communication department or any other department did something wrong our job was to clean up the mess. I told him that my job was to mop up after everyone else made a mess and I was going to do a damn good job of it. People called me when they were very upset and I was not going to expose my call center agents to their abuse just because they have no clue what they are talking about because they are new to the organization.

Secondly, when I arrived there, there was one black agent and although he was experienced, he still faced abuse because the clients used to think that it was okay to take out their anger on him and call him a kaffir. Unfortunately he was a non-assertive kind of guy. I defended him and told him that "The customer is always right" does not apply in case of abuse. How could I expose new people who had no clue to that? I wanted to make sure that I only have to defend their right to be treated with respect and not to defend the fact that they were the only people in the call center who did not know what the hell they were doing.

The long and short of it is that by the time I left Transmed I had appointed and trained better quality call center agents of all ethnic groups. Tony shook my hand and said; "Now I see where you were coming from." Without Affirmative Action, those black assessors would not have had an opportunity to get the promotion to the call center because there were far more white people in the system before them. In my opinion, getting them into the system as assessors and fast tracking their move to the call center was an effective way of applying Affirmative Action.

Getting them into the call center just to make up the numbers would have put them at a disadvantage and entrenched stereotypes. Unfortunately that is what happens when a quota is an end in itself and not a means to an end. I made it possible for them to succeed and that is what matters most. Tony's targets were delayed by some months but I was not willing to dance to his tune and compromise on such an important principle. I firmly believed that indiscriminate application of AA does not serve the course but actually harms the course.

How can you apply AA properly when you advertise jobs for AA candidates only? According to the policy if a man and a woman are equally suitable the woman should get the position in the interest of redressing the unfairness of the past. How do you compare them if the man is not even supposed to apply? If we want AA quotas to be taken seriously we need to apply the policy correctly. AA appointees also get labeled because the assumption is that they are not competent. Women complain that they have to work twice as hard to get half the recognition. As a woman, they expect me to powder their bottoms and sympathize with them but I never do.

As a woman all you can do is to work twice as hard instead of complaining that a man is competent until proven incompetent but a woman is incompetent until proven competent. Simply accept that that is how the mop flops and prove you are competent. Whether we like it or not quotas for appointing women amount to AA and since it is necessary to implement AA, whether it is based on ethnicity or gender, we should do it right.

Fear is not the only reason for malicious compliance. Just as there are white people who do not believe that there are competent black people, there are men who do not believe that there are competent women out there. I have been told countless times that I am an exception and by the way that insult to my ethnic group and my gender is always meant as a compliment! There are also men who have not yet figured out that a diverse workplace makes business sense. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

## 7.2 What will we achieve through AA for women?

After the world succeeds to tick all the boxes and says we have achieved the quotas what will change? The short answer is: very little. Ted will not get the promotion and Lodewijk will not be the Deputy prime minister. Thembi and Laura will replace them. Thembi will still be fired for failing to juggle two demanding roles and Laura will still be chastised for making her child's activity a priority. As women we will jump up and down and say Thembi and Laura got a raw deal just because they are women. The reality is, what happened to Ted will happen to any employee even if his or her boss is a woman.

We assume that women will treat other women better when they get to the top. We assume that female politicians will pass laws that will advance the cause of women and that female judges will treat cases that involve women better. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 2014, Judge Thokozile Masipa disproved this. She gave the blade runner, Oscar Pistorius, a 10-month slap on the wrist for the cold-blooded murder of Reeva Steenkamp. Changing the complexion and gender of judges has obviously not lead to the transformation of the judicial system.

A month later a parent threw a chair at a Dutch female judge who had also meted out a sentence that was a slap on the wrist. She sentenced a driver to community service for killing the angry parent's child in an accident. Am I saying that male judges would have meted out sentences that fitted the crimes? Definitely no, I am saying that transformation will take more than WEAA or any form of AA. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*



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### 7.2.1 Do women bring their strengths to leadership positions?

I do not remember reading a book or blog, which appeals to teenagers to rebel against authority. A book that tells people how to procrastinate would not sell because we do it without any encouragement. Why are there so many books, blogs and workshops, which encourage women to bring their strengths to the workplace? They are there because we don't bring our strengths to the workplace. Women supposedly bring empathy, intuition, sensitivity, flexibility and other interpersonal skills. Since many women have these good interpersonal skills why do they behave like men with boobs when they get to the top? Some women even outdo men.

It was a real privilege to have a conversation with the wise Sophie Gobet. Sophie is the organizer of CREA, the annual creativity conference in Italy. She was not interested in entertaining a discussion on women replacing half the men at the top. She just said there are such few positions at the top anyway and started talking about real issues. I asked her what women would bring to the top and she mentioned the usual list. I am happy I had an opportunity to talk to Sophie because when I asked her why women behave like men with boobs instead of bringing these strengths to the workplace she mentioned a reason I had not thought of before.

Before talking to Sophie I had only thought of two reasons. Firstly, women had male leadership role models and since the most common leadership style is the testosterone style, women and men alike, simply emulate what they have been exposed to. The vicious cycle continues until some intervention introduces a virtuous cycle. Secondly, oppressed people tend to oppress others. Being oppressed tends to result in a scarcity mentality. The positions at the top of the pyramid are few so people feel threatened and try to make sure that no one else grabs what they see as the only slice of the pie.

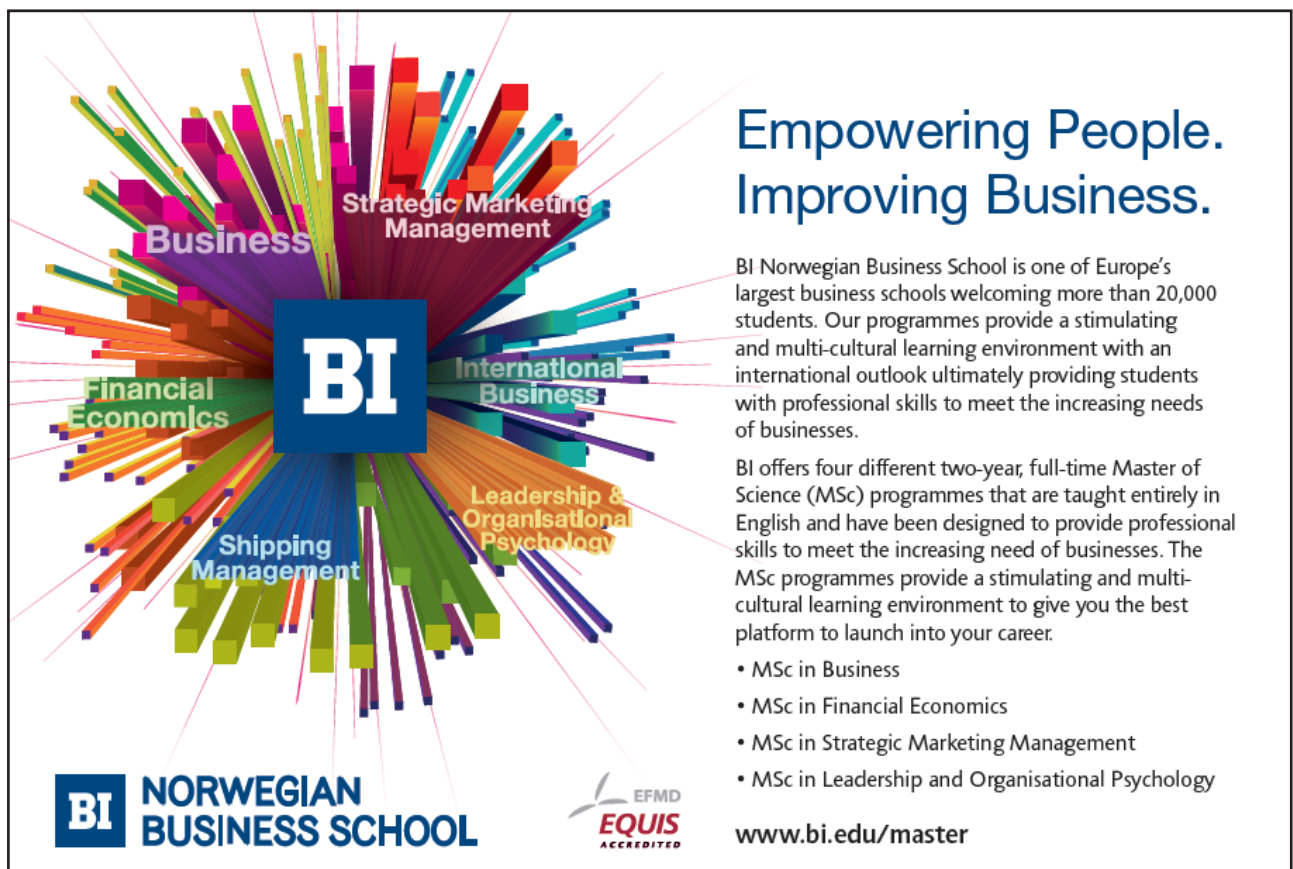
Sophie pointed out something that I had forgotten about in spite of having experienced it first hand. She said that women behave like men with boobs because it's a war up there. I experienced this war in my first management job, which was at Transmed. The other black person who was appointed at the same time was a male senior finance manager. We were not in the same division so we each fought our battles on our own.

My colleagues declared the war that Sophie referred to. I took my work very seriously and I was naïve enough to think we would all be very busy trying to serve our clients. They were on another planet. They were obsessed with proving to themselves that a black woman could not be a boss. One day they made things so difficult for me in our weekly management meeting that I decided I had had enough of their obstructive behavior. After the meeting I took my bag and my briefcase and simply walked out. I decided that's it! I'll find another job. Jobs were much easier to find in 1996.

I had a good relationship with Esna, the assistant manager. She was on the same lift club with one of these males. On the way home that afternoon he proudly told them how they had made my life hell. It was only then that Esna realized what had happened because they had spent the whole afternoon wondering why I had just vanished. Esna asked him what they had against me and he said they could not stand me because I thought I was smarter than them because I always came up with ideas they had never thought of and they had been there longer.

I did not think I was smarter than them. I just had a different work culture. In fact at the interview the senior manager had raised the concern that I may not fit in with the culture because it was very obvious that I had a different mindset. I did not see that as a problem because I am very open to change and I expected everyone to be the same. I always tried to find a better way of doing things and I had not yet figured out that there are people who were more comfortable with more of the same.

You would expect normal people to be happy that someone came up with ideas that would move the organization forward. Esna called me at home that evening and told me about the discussion and asked me to come back the following day. When I arrived in the morning two supervisors could not wait to talk to me. They told me that my colleagues had tried to influence my team against me. They kept asking them what it was like to report to a maid. Not only was I the wrong gender but I was also the wrong color and I did things differently. I worked hard and made a success of my career and they could not deal with the cognitive dissonance. They had to deal with a maid who was shattering their stereotypes and prejudices by the minute!



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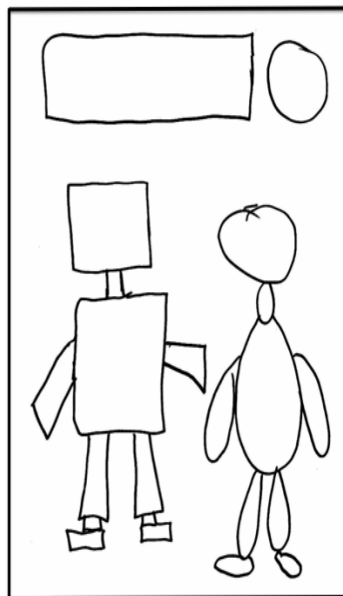
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I recalled this episode when Sophie said it's a war up there. The truth is that there are supportive men who should not be tarred with the same brush. These people did not behave this way because they are males. They felt the need to protect their turf and that has nothing to do with gender but everything to do with the scarcity mentality. It is up to you as a woman to choose whether to go down to their level or simply choose to be competent. The top of the corporate ladder is not for sissies. As a black female I do not only get that complaint from women but also from black people of both genders. My response is the same. Be competent – no one can take that away from you, period.

When I joined Liberty, Alistair, the AGM I reported to asked me what I had done to impress them so much at Transnet because he had never seen such a good reference. I told him that all I did was work twice as hard so when I say be competent because no one can take that away from you I speak from experience. Gisela Kassooy says when she started her business decades ago she was a young single woman and Brazil was still a very traditional society. Like all traditional societies, they treated single women as second-class citizens. She proved she was competent and earned respect. She proved that we advance the cause of women by delivering and not by complaining about the men who feel threatened.

Liv Cardell says in the Facebook post I mentioned earlier. "Only when it becomes balance, there is hope. And I'm not talking about male and female, I talk about man-like and woman-like! Without this balance, we are all losers, men, women and the world. She was kind enough to give me permission to use her illustration, which really depicts the difference. She depicts man-like with a box and woman-like with the more round shape. The workplace is a man's world so the values are based on man-like values.



Man-like and woman-like.  
Used by permission – Cardell Consulting AB, Sweden



Liv quotes Barbro Dalhobom Hall a lot and unfortunately Swedish is not one of the 12 languages that I speak so I cannot translate the work of this phenomenal woman for your benefit. I was just fortunate enough to spend time talking to one of her ardent followers. Barbro says that it is important to get women to the top so that they can influence the man-like values. You will agree that this is one of the things we should aspire to, a transformed workplace, which benefits from the strengths of men and the strengths of women.

Barbro says that women adopt the men-like shape because the approach of men to the workplace is the norm and the approach of women is seen as a deviation to the norm. This means women always have to fight in the workplace. As with all struggles, we know that freedom is never given but it is taken. I believe the reason we do not fight for the woman-like way is that many compromise their woman-like way because it is much easier to conform. *Let's have constructive conversation...*

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## 8 Transformation and Empowerment

Another problem with AA is that we call replacing white people with black people and replacing men with women *transformation* and *empowerment*. About 5 years ago I presented a talk on transformation at a function. The client was the provincial department of agriculture in one of the provinces of SA, Limpopo. There were about 300 black people, many of them women and about 5 white people. Police brutality was in the news at that time.

I started by saying “If I had delivered this talk 20 years ago the room would have been filled with white males. In fact a white male would have delivered the talk. 20 years ago, the Minister of police, the Commissioner of police, the Station commander and the policemen were white and I was brutalized. Now the Minister, the Commissioner, the Station commander and the policemen are all black and I am still brutalized. Can we say we have transformed the way we serve citizens as public servants?”

Transforming organizations will take much more than AA because AA is just a small part of it. In the public sector transformation will include changing the way we see citizens, seeing them as customers and treating them with the respect they deserve. Transformation entails public servants seeing their role as serving and not just having ‘service’ in the name “public service” or “civil service.” Such a transformation starts with the organization seeing employees as their first customers. Such a transformation will include seeing employees as human beings. That is the only way we are going to create workplaces that are family friendly where Lodewijk or Laura can be a parent before an employee.

Mr. Lodewijk Asscher, the Dutch Deputy Prime Minister, has a lot to say about working conditions and work stress. Unfortunately every time I see his interviews they are in Dutch. Giving the links in an English book would not serve any purpose. I have the advantage of understanding the language but like Afrikaans and the rest of the South African languages that I speak, you cross one border and no one understands you. He is very realistic. In one of the interviews he says: “Ik weet dat ik dit kan doen omdat ik de baas ben.” (I know I can do this because I am the boss.) He was referring to dropping off his kids at school every morning and going home at 17h00 to have dinner with his family.

If there is an after dinner meeting that requires him to have dinner with his colleagues, he skips the dinner and returns after being dad. In case you think I am his fan, you are right. I see real transformation of a workplace as an environment he would not have to be “de baas” to put his family first. The world needs more people who see themselves as parents first and the world needs more organizations that make it possible.

In most countries we pay lip service to the importance of the family because it is politically correct to say but that is not reflected in the workplaces we create. It would be nice to have such workplaces but the fact is we don't. While we talk about remaking the workplace and making this a better world, we make career choices in the real world and not in the world we would like to see.

I see transformation in the profit making sector not only as an environment where the first customer (employee) is taken care of first but also as an environment where the juxtaposition of workers rights and profit is compatible. Now this is brain hurting stuff. It will not hurt your brain very much if you know that a maverick called Ricardo Semler makes above average profits by respecting the rights of his factory workers and by using their brains. He shares his "secrets" of success freely because he writes books on how he has achieved this feat. The world goes on as if this is a well-kept secret.

Cirque du Soleil also share their "secret" of getting people to whistle to work in John Bacon's "The spark". Many leaders read these books and all they do is talk about them and quote them to sound relevant. They pay us (consultants and speakers) good money to talk about these principles but they are not willing to change. In fact it suits them that there are people who keep everyone busy with a nice sideshow that does not disturb the status quo. This sideshow keeps the people at the bottom of the pyramid busy talking about achieving quotas.

We can only transform how we deal with our external stakeholders if we transform the way we treat our internal stakeholders. We need leaders who will transcend the old paradigm. We need leaders who will stop seeing employees as a pair of hands. We have embraced the dehumanization and commoditization of people as the only way. If this does not convince you that transformation is far more than AA, I think nothing else will. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

## 8.1 The new oppression of women

We talk about the oppression of women as if it is a thing of the past and women are now liberated. I see the pressure on women to live up to the new expectations as the new oppression. It is not good enough to be at operational level or to be a stay-at-home mum while your children are small. You have to be an executive to make up the quotas. The role models are all the pressurized executives especially those in fields that were previously dominated by men.

I understand Judith Rodin, a woman who has had such an illustrious career and been a role model to many, said this to an audience of younger women: "My generation fought so hard to give all of you choices. But choosing to leave the workplace was not the choice we thought so many of you would make." Is she saying that she fought very hard to give them the choice to do what she wanted to dictate?

How does this differ from what a man who fought hard to end apartheid said to me in April 2014? I told him that I was not happy with the fact that I could not vote in the general elections because I would be in SA on the voting date for expats and be in The Netherlands on the SA local voting date. He accused me of being unpatriotic because I chose to live in Europe. So Judith fought very hard so that women could choose what she had in mind and this man fought hard so that I should be restricted to the choice that he had in mind. If what Judith stands for is not the new oppression of women, then I do not know what oppression means.

I wonder what would have happened if Marco van Basten, the former soccer head coach had been female. It is unlikely that she would have thrown in the towel. She would probably feel the pressure to hang in there because she wouldn't want to let the side down. After all she would have been hailed as a role model for women in a previously male dominated field. One of the points that women make in conversations on women advancement is the fact that women should be at the top not only in departments that matter. What defines a department that matters is the fact that the work was previously done by men.

Women are the ones who look down upon work that was previously done by women. This does not only apply to domestic work but also in the corporate sector. I cringe when I hear someone telling secretaries that they can do something better with their lives instead of remaining secretaries. They are told that they can work themselves up and become managers or even executives. I always tell audiences that we need good workers at all levels and that life is not a competitive game.

An advertisement for SKF. The background is a blue-tinted image of a woman with long dark hair smiling, with a wind turbine behind her. The text 'Brain power' is written in large white letters on the left. On the right, there is a block of text about wind energy and SKF's role. At the bottom left, there is a call to action to visit the SKF website. The SKF logo is in the bottom right corner.

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Striving to be the best you can be has nothing to do with what others achieve. It is far better to be a good nurse than to be a lousy doctor and far better to be a good lecturer than to be a lousy professor. Many of us have been exposed to lousy professors and lousy executives. I always try to inspire people to be the best they can be and not better than anyone else. This is what leads to the lack of contentment that plagues our society. Of course this lack of contentment creates a retailer's paradise.

When a man does work that was traditionally done by women he automatically becomes a great guy. I recently heard Xolani Gwala saying on talk radio 702 that the finance commentator said that he would not get to the studio because he was going to cook for his children. I know that that made him a cool guy. If a female finance commentator said she was going to cook for her kids it would not sound cool at all. It would actually make her husband to sound like a jerk.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1993 a great South Africa, Chris Hani was gunned down in cold blood outside his house. One of the first people on the scene was Tokyo Sexwale. Most South Africans had never heard of Tokyo before and the first time they saw him he was all over the media in tears. That made him the country's number one hunk. Women said that he was in touch with his feminine side. If that is not double standards, I do not know what "double standards" means.

About 5 years ago, a successful South African talk show host got married and changed her surname from Direko to Tlhabi. I listened to a show where women called in and chastised poor Redi Tlhabi for doing what they saw as "letting the side down." She had to justify adopting her husband's surname as if it was any of their business. She was so gracious about it and she allowed them to waste airtime on such nonsense. All that was in the name of liberation, transformation and empowerment but it is in fact oppression and an example of throwing out the baby with the bathwater and the pendulum effect.

In the past mothers had no choice but to stay at home and look after children. I understand that in The Netherlands, in the public sector, as soon as a woman got married she would lose her job because she had to make babies and look after them. It was not up to her and her husband to decide if they wanted to make babies or not. It was not negotiable. That was also the reason men earned more than their female counterparts.

Obviously something had to change. The assumption was that what had to change was that women should not have to look after babies. No one asked "Hang on, do we have to have babies in the first place?" Do we have to have babies at a time that suits the employer, which was immediately after getting married? Do women have to stay out of the workplace forever even after their children are grown up?

Fortunately now women can decide if they want to have babies or not and they can choose if they want to work or not. Unfortunately the legacy of gender pay disparity still remains and those are the issues I believe we need to spend energy on. Unfortunately mothers raising babies is seen as part of this oppression. This is another example of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, just more serious than the surname one.

In fact it has really serious implications because it involves raising human beings. Part of the new oppression of women is that they have to pretend that juggling the 25/8 job of being a mother of small children and a 25/8 job of being an executive is a walk in the park. We keep pretending that it works and spend a fortune on counseling, coaching and all sorts of crutches. Sadly, we women perpetrate the new oppression of women. *Let's have a constructive conversation.*

## 8.2 Throwing out the baby with the bathwater

There isn't a single culture that can boast that they have always treated men and women equally. The difference is only in extent on a continuum ranging from women not being allowed to vote to gross human violations such as genital mutilation which unfortunately still continues. Women always got a raw deal and still do. I come from a society where women are still put under pressure to get married and have children. Choosing to be a single career woman is not yet an acceptable option.

Some years ago I presented a keynote address at a function and a middle-aged woman later said she wished I could address people from her village. She came from a rural village north of Pretoria. She is a schoolteacher and her daughter, who had a good job, had just completed a Masters degree. Instead of being impressed with her achievement, which was rare in that area, the community saw her as a complete failure because at 26 she had never been married and had no children. Fortunately for the young lady, her mother was not part of the problem.

We complain that men oppress us but I think we should first look at how we oppress one another and ourselves. In my language, Setswana, There are two derogatory terms "lefetwa" and "nyopa" which mean spinster and a woman without children. "Lefetwa" means marriage whizzed past like a train while you waited on the platform as if every woman is actually waiting for marriage. I have never heard a man use these two derogatory words. It is women who use these words to make unmarried women and women without children to feel like second-class citizens.

I am not into watching TV but I used to watch the sitcom "Everybody loves Raymond." There are 5 characters, Raymond, his wife Debra, his parents and his brother. In this series only one person insists on making Debra to feel inadequate. It was Marie, the mother in law. In African culture there are a lot of customs that oppress women, like what should happen when you are widowed. Men never enforced any of these customs but older women do so enthusiastically. When a woman gets married her mother and other women from her own side of the family tell her that she should put up with her husband's infidelity. She gets told "Monna ke selepe o lala a adimilwe." "A man is an axe, he gets borrowed overnight."

This nonsensical advice never comes from a father, an uncle or a grandfather but from a mother, an aunt, a grandmother or any other older woman. Women carry out repressive customs such as female genital mutilation. Before we complain about the patriarchal society and the terrible glass ceiling, shouldn't we look at our role as women in society and at the stiletto ceiling in the workplace?



The traditional roles of women have always been to do domestic chores and raise children. When women got sick and tired of being downtrodden they started demanding the rights and respect that they are entitled to and unfortunately threw out the baby with the bathwater. Women rejected traditional roles and the only desirable roles are roles that were typically male roles. Women feel they have not achieved anything if they are excellent secretaries, nurses, homemakers and mothers. This is not restricted to traditional societies and it is not restricted to personal life.

I have already stated that I am not saying that the UN has all the answers and this is where I have a problem with one of the reports. On page 23 of the MDG reports under "Women's political participation continues, but glass ceilings remain" they say "Another positive trend has been that not only traditionally so-called 'soft' portfolios – such as Social Affairs, Education and Women's Affairs – continue to be more commonly held by women ministers, but also that more women are now holding some of the so-called 'hard' ministerial portfolios – such as Defense, Foreign Affairs and the Environment."

The very people who are supposed to be busy with women advancement entrench the view that only roles that were traditionally fulfilled by men are of any value. How can Defense matter more than Social Affairs, Education and Women Affairs? This reflects our upside down priorities. I wonder what Sir Ken Robinson would say about this. I hope he will do a TED talk on this or even join in the conversation.

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A friend of mine, Tessa, is a wonderful full time homemaker and the best wife and mother anyone can ask for. She recently said to me that she did not study further like I did. She said after high school she learnt to cook, bake, sew etc. I asked her why she thought the skills she had were inferior to mine and she said, "The problem is with the Afrikaner community. People always ask what you have studied." After bringing it to her attention that it was not an Afrikaner thing but a global phenomenon I asked her a question even though I already knew the answer. I asked her if the people who looked down upon her role were men or women.

One of the impressive young people I am blessed to have in my life is Brenda van Noort. She is married to Koen's nephew and she has her head screwed on right. She is a full time homemaker and she sees her role as very important in raising her 3 children and supporting her husband who has a 25/8 career. When Brenda writes her CV, she accounts for the years she has been at home as "Manager." Your heart just swells with pride when you hear Brenda talk about her important role of managing the household and offering her husband the support that he needs to succeed in his role.

Brenda says she is blessed because he earns enough to support all of them and she does not have to work. She says because she is a fulltime homemaker people assume she does not have an education, let alone a brain. When I told Brenda about the project, she told me about a friend of hers who had recently invited her to a high tea of professional women. Her friend was planning to quit her job and be a stay at home mom and when she told this to the professional women they all told her that it would be the biggest mistake of her life.

They told her that she would not have intellectual stimulation. Fortunately Brenda's friend did not listen to them and she says that is the best decision she has ever made. Sadly, the women who were totally against her sacrificing her career for her children are mothers. I do not know why women imagine the most important job in the world requires no brains.

A few months ago I met Winnifred Ferro, the new chairperson of the local running club. She asked me what I do and I told her. When I asked her what she does she confidently said "I have a multitasking job, I'm a manager, an educator, a cook, a sewing lady, a guardian, a singer, a storyteller, a taxi driver, a personal assistant, a spouse, a pet caretaker, a mother, etc." I could have done cartwheels out of sheer joy. When I said "So you do not work" she promptly set the record straight. She said "I don't have a paid job outside the home."

Like Brenda, Winnifred has a good education and she could have had a thriving career outside the home. I asked her what her choice to be a stay at home mum was based on and she said that she and her husband looked at what would be in the best interest of their children and they both decided that she should be the home manager. Other women look down upon her role but this does not bother this woman who comes across like she really loves her life!

Am I saying all mothers should be stay-at-home moms? I am the last person to suggest that because I was a working mom when my daughters were small. I was not as blessed as these women are. Although I was married, I was a breadwinner. Don't let anyone fool you – being a working mom is not a walk in the park. It is tough, period. That is why working moms, especially in demanding jobs keep the personal coaching industry so profitable. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

### 8.3 Are women and men the same?

Some years ago the former President of SA, Mr. Thabo Mbeki made a statement that impressed many women in SA and I was one of them. I quoted him when I did the talk at Nedcor in 2005 and the audience responded with much enthusiasm. He said “The best man for the job is a woman” translated – women are better than men. Some years later I started wondering: Are women better than men? Are women the same as men?

When I first moved from Pretoria to Johannesburg at the beginning of 1991 I responded to a job advert and in my opinion I was suitably qualified to do the work. An insurance company wanted a facilitator for product training and when I called, the agent told me that the client would not consider a woman for the position because the facilitator had to train men. I had no recourse then because it was at the time when I had no human rights, let alone women's rights. There is no reason why a woman cannot train male insurance consultants. Does this mean that men and women are the same?

It was more than a privilege to engage Hannie Stuurman on whether men and women are the same. She is the Chairman of FNV Zelfstandigen (a trade union for self-employed people) and a director at Fitvitaalservice, Flynth Adviseurs en Accountants. In her previous life she was a member of parliament in The Netherlands for the PvdA, the Social Democratic party, from 2003 and before that a Union Officer. Hannie is very clear on the question of men and women being the same. Her answer is a definite no and I am in agreement with her because men and women are not the same but they deserve equal rights, respect and opportunities. That means the opportunity to be a facilitator at the insurance company should be available to all irrespective of gender. As she aptly puts it, we should not strive for equality but for equivalence.

Hannie sees women's rights as human rights and not as super rights elevated above human rights so when the issue of women emancipation was added to her portfolio as a member of parliament she did not only focus on women emancipation and equal pay for men and women but on broader issues including the rights of immigrants.

She believes the combination of the strengths of men and the strength of women is essential for teamwork. She relates an interesting event from a meeting at ING. There were young talented people of both genders and they discussed whether women are better or equal to men. She says: "I thought and still think that this is not the issue." She says women are different and they should not try to adjust their behavior, posture and dress to try being like men because that is at the expense of our strength and our originality.

One of the people at the ING meeting was a young woman from Algeria who used the analogy of belly dancing to illustrate the fact that women are different from men because they operate mainly from the belly which can be equated to gut feel and sensitivity. Hannie ended the conversation with "I am proud to be a woman. I feel that I am doing my job my way, I always have. When I think about that and go back to the time I was working for the union, I still experience it this way: That I have established things that a man would not have established. It is the woman intuition or feelings or whatever name we give it."

I couldn't have put it better myself and in fact when it suits us we say women and men are the same and when it suit us we say that women have strengths that men do not have. When it suits is we accept the fact that women and men are not the same because we do not demand that women and men should compete sport where physical strength plays a role. There is no reason why men and women cannot compete in chess but it is not for nothing that Serena Williams does not compete with Roger Federer and no female sprinter competes with Usain Bolt.

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I started understanding the resentment of the young man who refused to help me at the parking lot of the mine when men in the workshops kept raising the issue. They are expected to help their female colleagues underground while they earned the same. One of the electricians said "If I am in a team with 6 guys then each of us does one person's workload but if there are 2 women in the team then the 4 guys have to do part of the work of the 2 women because they cannot carry or pull the heavy cables." No one could argue with that.

#### 8.4 Mothering is not for sissies

Now back to the woman with the big shopping bag that I referred to earlier. She carried her shopping in a big bag and instead of carrying the bag with both handles to have an easier, more balanced load; she let her toddler hold one handle of the bag. The content little toddler was not even aware of the mother's sacrifice and obviously did not thank her. Motherhood is indeed a thankless job and a huge sacrifice.

When mothers say they leave small children to go back to work because motherhood is a thankless job you wonder why they became mothers in the first place. You wonder if they became mothers because society expects them to or because no one told them that being a parent involves a lot of sacrifice and it is indeed a thankless job. Should all women have babies just because they are fitted with the right equipment? When I read what some of the women Jessica interviewed said I felt sorry for them because they sound like they are trapped in a role that was imposed on them by society.

To quote some of them: "One reason I work is to get feedback on my performance. When I was a stay-at-home mum nobody noticed if I'd reached my nappy changing quota or fed high-quality food to my kids." "Parenting in the early years can be a bit of a wilderness: everything that was clean gets dirty, everything that was full gets emptied, spooning it in one end and wiping off the other can leave you feeling like you have made no mark on the world." "Feeling balanced is important to me." "At first I worked because I was frightened of spending whole days with three little people, but when my childcare arrangement broke down I discovered that I quite enjoyed it." So it is all about her enjoyment.

Since I read this book I have recommended it to everyone for two reasons. There are some good practical tips on how to tackle juggling being a mother and working outside the home. I suppose that is one of the reasons she wrote it in the first place but my second reason is to get women to think twice before becoming jugglers or even becoming mothers in the first place. The glossy magazines show a different picture. Women see celebrities with perfect makeup talking about how they are fulfilled by their bundles of joy and they think that is what motherhood is about. I don't know about other countries but in SA it is quite trendy for single women to have a baby as a cool accessory because it is the celebrity thing to do. This book may just help someone to see that mothering is not for sissies.



## 8.5 Mummy and daddy outsourced

One of the great ideas of modern times is outsourcing. I am grateful that all my working life I could afford to outsource cleaning, hanging curtains, ironing and cleaning to someone else and I am grateful that someone invented a washing machine and a dishwashing machine. My grandparents could not even dream of such convenience! I do not know of anyone who on his or her deathbed said, "If only I spent more time washing the car or chopping vegetables". That is because there are no negative consequences for outsourcing these functions. In fact when you outsource these functions you create work for someone else – as long as you do not pay them slave wages.

Outsourcing being mummy or daddy is a totally different story. That is why so many workaholics realize on their deathbeds that they had the wrong end of the stick and say "If only I spent more time with my family." No matter how we try to put a positive spin on outsourcing parenting the fact remains it sucks. We can present all sorts of studies to show that children thrive because of outsourcing but we know that it is not true. I am yet to hear someone saying I am grateful that when I grew up my parent was away making money to buy me all the stuff that filled my life with joy.

Thus far I have heard countless successful people attributing their success to support from their family. Should you hear of someone who knows someone who has heard of someone who is grateful to his or her parents for the amazing gift of absence please contact The Guinness Book of Records. I think they would be interested, that would be a world first.



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We all know of marriages that fail because women complain that their husbands are too busy making money to give them attention and they think they can make up for that with expensive gifts. The very women who do not appreciate snippets of quality time with their partners have come up with the guilt antidote which they call quality time with children. It is about time we faced the truth and stopped glorifying being working mothers of small children. It is not an ideal situation; it is just a necessary evil for some women.

Another great invention of our time is the remote control. Life is so much easier when you can open a garage double door at the press of a button. Couch potatoes are forever grateful to the genius that invented the TV remote. No modern technology will ever replace human presence, touch and comforting. I sometimes spend two or three weeks in SA and have a Skype marriage but it will never be the same as being home. Now I am talking about two adults – how much more does absence affect small children who do not have control over the diary that slots them in for the rare privilege of quality time with mummy? How can a one year old comprehend the meaning of an appointment in a parent's diary?

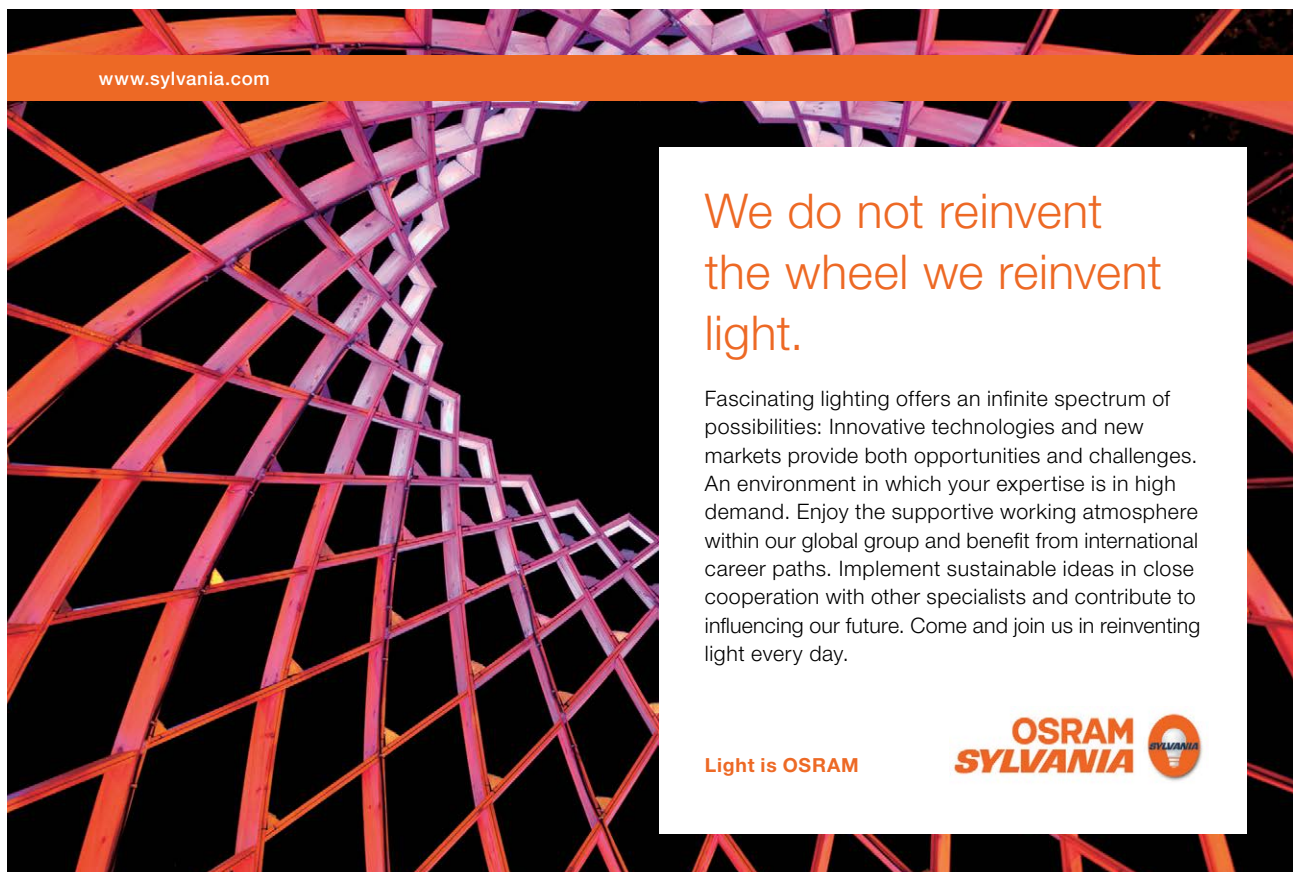
When my daughters started school we were in the process of building a house in an area, which was about 3 kilometers away, and about 10 houses from a primary school. We put them in that primary school and for some months they had to travel that distance daily. A friend also had two daughters in the same school so she introduced me to the man who transported them. One morning the driver told the children that he would be late because he was going to court. After waiting for a few minutes alone at the gate, one of them came up with a bright idea – she suggested that they walk home. This in spite of the fact that the other two lived even further from the school and the older one was 10 years old.

They started walking and got lost. I was away that afternoon and when I got home at 18h00 the woman who used to look after them told me that they had not returned from school and the other mother was already at our house looking for them. Fortunately a Good Samaritan had found them and taken them to the police station. We did not think of the police because then the police were never part of the solution.

Why am I relating this old story? To illustrate the fact that children do not have the same sense of time as adults and they do not understand a context the way adults do. If a driver told me that he would be late because he was going to court I would know that it is possible that he would be in court until 16h00 and then sit in traffic. The children did not get it the way an adult would.

Even when women as adults understand that their partners have a demanding jobs, they still complain that they put their work first and find the crumbs that men see as quality time unacceptable. The same adults expect a child who does not even comprehend the concept of an appointment in mommy's diary to be happy with quality time. One thing we can all learn from Mr. Lodewijk Asscher is that you cannot outsource being daddy. I have never heard that he mows his own lawn or washes his own car. He probably outsources that but he does not outsource being dad. If you still think outsourcing being mummy or daddy is a good idea I suggest you watch Nick Vujicic's video again.

The problem with parenting is that children, like all humans, have free will and they can choose to go astray in spite of the best possible parenting and children from the worst homes sometimes turn out just fine. In spite of that, I believe when it comes to career choice and parenting, every parent should be able to look him- or herself in the eye and say "I did my best." History is going to judge us harshly, very harshly, for sacrificing our children for the greed that we call ambition. We are so self-absorbed in our "me, myself and I" world whose mantra is "I follow my dream and if my dream creates a nightmare for my child or anyone else they can take a chill pill." *Let's have a constructive conversation...*




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## 9 No one-size-fits-all solution

I have discussed this with a friend over the years. His family is blessed enough to have his good income and his wife's ability to homeschool their daughters. Although I believe they have the ideal home, I do not agree with him on one point. He believes all children should be homeschooled. We cannot prescribe a single solution because people's circumstances differ. Some mothers have to work. Some do not have to work but they would do more harm than good homeschooling their children and some are not even literate. The long and short of it is that no one can dictate a one-size-fits-all solution.

### 9.1 Mothers who have to work

I was a latchkey kid because my mother worked all her life. She is one of the strongest women I know but she was stressed out. She worked hard juggling working outside the home, raising children and furthering her studies. I am one of those mothers who had to work while my children were small. I also juggled working outside the home, raising children and furthering my studies and I was also stressed out.

Fortunately for me at that time, for almost a decade I was a college lecturer and the first 4 years we lived at the college. We lived at the college not out of choice but because then I was married to someone who was born in another province and because of the Group Areas Act and influx control we could not get a house in Pretoria. That curse ended up being a bit of a blessing the first 4 years because I did not have to travel far to get to work. Other mothers left home early and came back late because our residential areas were far from the cities where most people worked. One should always be grateful for every silver lining on a dark cloud.

A lecturer's work is never done so although the lessons ended at 13h00, lesson preparation and marking of scripts took a lot of time. In spite of having full time help and getting home at 13h00, fulfilling so many roles was no walk in the park. We should acknowledge that this juggling act is not an ideal situation and we should stop glamorizing it. There are mothers who have to work because the fathers of their children are work shy, or unemployed, or dead, or do not earn enough, or the fathers of their children are so evil that they refuse to pay maintenance. These women should be supported but in spite of what they have to deal with, their career choices are limited by the fact that they are parents before they are workers.

"Fathers who do not earn enough" does not include fathers who do not earn enough to afford the next newer shinier gadget or the latest fast car. This does not include fathers who think their role is to provide the best material possessions for their families. Everyone has rights but there are circumstances that limit rights. We sometimes delude ourselves and believe we have unlimited rights. I believe once you become a parent your rights get limited by your responsibility for your child and one of those rights is the right to make career choices that suit you.

A female manager at an investment bank told me that she has a good worker in her team who has small children. Because she is an open-minded manager, she allows this mother to go home at 15h00 daily to fetch her children from school and spend time with them every afternoon. She applied for a higher position in another department and before she could negotiate her hours at the interview, the prospective new manager asked her if she still worked half a day. She explained that she put in a full day's job but the new manager was not interested. He told her that he expected all her staff to work a full day.

This mother chose to remain in her current job because she put the interest of her children before her own career aspirations. In the long run this is going to cost her and at this rate it is unlikely that she will catch up with men, women who do not have small children and women who put their own interest before the interest of their children. There is always a cost. Either the mother or the children have to pay the price. That is what I mean by women cannot have it all. The manager who understands that putting in a full day's work is not the same as being in the office till the end of the day is an exception.

In spite of the gloomy picture I have painted, there are pockets of excellence that are real exceptions. There are companies that simply get it. I cited the example of Jockey SA in *Storytelling meets Management*. Sonos in Hilversum recently blew me away. They are the wireless speakers people. Let alone their amazing products, I was blown away by the culture they are creating there. After recently talking to Yolanda Castellon who works in their EMEA Human Resources Department, I told her "I want to work here!" If I were a job seeker I would go down on my knees and beg her for a job. If I had a business that employed people, I would "steal" the impressive young people I encountered there. Sonos is just one of those very few companies that are in this millennium!

When I talk about parents making career choices it is not with such progressive companies or with managers like the one who allows a mother to work till 15h00 in mind. We have all experienced the managers who are at the other end of the spectrum. In one of my previous lives I was a programmer. I could log into the system from home when I was on standby and I started wondering why I had to work from the office during normal working hours. I asked my manager why I could not log in during working hours and work from home. She told me that it was because not everyone was as responsible as I was and she could not have different rules for different people.

That happened in 1999 but the technology that allowed working from home was already available. A few progressive companies have caught a wake up but big companies and government departments are still operating as if we are in the Middle Ages. The career choices that parents have to make today are made in the context of the reality that you have to be at the workplace and even take the workplace home. Instead of using technology to make the lives of workers better, we use it to get people to work 25/8. When I was young and when I started working people used to knock off at the end of the working day. There are young people who will never understand this concept because knocking off is not part of their world.

Fifteen years ago after I started Real Solutions Training I contacted people I knew to try to get new clients. I knew the FD of a bank and I asked him whom I should talk to about offering my training services. He asked me to send my details, which he passed on to the training manager. It happened to be at the time when the training manager was looking for a material developer. She called me in and I told her that I was not interested in the job but in the work. She nearly fell out of her chair because she saw the meeting as a job interview. She told me I was wasting her time because she was serious about placing a material developer and I was clowning around. She also said: "I know what you are trying to do, you want to be paid more money for the work as an independent consultant."

I tried to show her that if I took the job I would cost the company more because as an employee they would pay me a salary whether I delivered or not, I would get a pension fund whether I delivered or not, get medical aid whether I delivered or not, a parking space, drink the company's coffee, flush the company's toilet and get a workstation with a computer, a printer, internet access and if she wanted to fire me she would go through an arduous process. I told her that apart from the fact that I would be parking in my own garage and using my resources, if she did not like my work after one task she could just say don't call us we will call you and I would not take her to the Council for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration.



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She still did not get it. For her it was not about the work, it was about the job and structure of the organization. They had done things that way and they were going to go on doing them that way. Unlike the manager who allows the mother to leave at 15h00 daily, this inflexible manager is not an exception. Fifteen years later not much has changed. They still have people sitting in little cubicles doing what you can do from anywhere in the world. This is the reality of the inflexible workplaces, which are definitely not family friendly. Although you may not have control over this as a working parent you have control over your choices.

Not everyone is lucky enough to work for someone like Andre. Let alone what I read about Semco and Cirque du Soleil, I have friends in Randburg, SA who did all the things I advocate and had a successful home business. Andre and Magda Pieterse met when they were both working. When they got married they decided that Magda should be a fulltime homemaker. When their daughters were born she was ready to homeschool them and she made a success of it.

He later started a business that he ran from home and the family was involved. He employed people of both genders in different cities and they all worked from home to give them a chance to be there for their families. He trusted them and treated them like adults and they were all productive. He mentioned all the overheads that I brought to the attention of the training manager at the bank and said if he had to pay for all that his business would not have been so profitable.

Because it was so profitable he sold it to a corporate at a good price. Unfortunately for the employees, the new owners were still stuck in the old way of thinking so they wanted them to work from an office. Most of them resigned. I asked Andre if he had read Ricardo Semler's books and he said that he had never heard of him. He thought that what he did was common sense. We all know that common sense is not common practice.

## 9.2 Mothers who do not have to work

Earlier I referred to the pendulum effect. When I read through what the women in Jessica's book have to say about why they work I saw each of them as an example of the pendulum effect. It was sad to read what these women had to say about their children. One of them said, "Working gives me time to be "me" – the "me" I was before the children – and I think its important (for me at least) to remember that I wasn't always a mum and I had a full life before being a mum." Everyone has a "me" they can go back to. The "me" before a career or before a hobby or before a marriage or before a relationship.

Can you go back to the "me" before having children or does choosing to have children permanently exclude that "me"? If you value that "me" should you have children? Everyone has the right to self-actualization. Should a parent's right to self-actualization supersede a child's right to a parent? Working because you have to as a mother of small children is a necessity but working because you want to feel good about yourself is something else. I could not help wondering if these mothers had children at gunpoint.



Another mother says she works because she finds it demeaning to grovel for money from her husband. I have never been in such a situation so I cannot judge her and I don't think anyone should judge her. I think we should use her plight to warn young women before they have children so that they should think twice before having children with the kind of man who would let his wife grovel for money. We know there are many of them out there. Should a woman decide to have children with that kind of man then she should realize that her choice is between putting her pride in her pocket and groveling while the children are small or working to feel good about herself at the expense of the children.

The mother who works because performance feedback is important to her said, "At my work performance was measurable and noticed by others. I think feedback and appreciation are fundamental human needs, but small kids aren't in a position to give us it!" The last time I checked; food, water and shelter were fundamental needs and feedback and appreciation did not feature in that category. How can the need for feedback and appreciation come before the responsibility to a life you have brought into this world? As I read through what these women had to say I came to the conclusion that they are subjected to the same pressure to have children that we assume applies in traditional societies.

Part time work is an option that gives women an opportunity to work and raise their children at the same time. This is a viable option for women who need to augment the family income or have skills that give them an opportunity to earn a decent living part-time. There are many people of both genders in part-time employment countries like The Netherlands but the thing is at the moment part-time work is not a viable route to the corner office. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

### 9.3 The stay-at-home dad

This is a growing trend and my only concern is what criterion gets used to decide which parent should be the primary caregiver. I do not know of a case where the man became a stay-at-home dad when he earned more than his wife. I said that when Andre met his wife they were both employed but I did not mention the fact that she was a manager and so she earned more than him. In spite of that they decided that she should be the full time homemaker. They did not consider who would bring in more money but they considered what would be the best for their children.

I am the first one to admit that not all women are great mothers. There are some like me, who are better in the office than in the nursery. These are the kind of women who should rather have a career and not have children. If they have children and the father of the children is a better caregiver irrespective of what he earns it's a different story. Thus far all the stay-at-home dads that I have come across are men who earned less than their wives. Is the stay-at-home dad decision based on the interest of children or on which parent earns more? Maybe there are examples of men who gave up careers to raise kids when they earned more than their wives. I hope we will all hear about them in the Project awomansplace conversation.

# 10 Values

One of the first conversations I had was with Ivan Moroke, the CEO of TBWA in Sandton SA, and his family. The whole conversation revolved around values because they are such values driven people. He is the most hands-on executive dad I know but he said that if it were not for his wife, Tracey, the Ivan Moroke that the world sees today would simply not be there. He feels so strongly about the role of women who support their husbands that he says there should be a monetary value attached to it. If only women valued this role to the same extent.

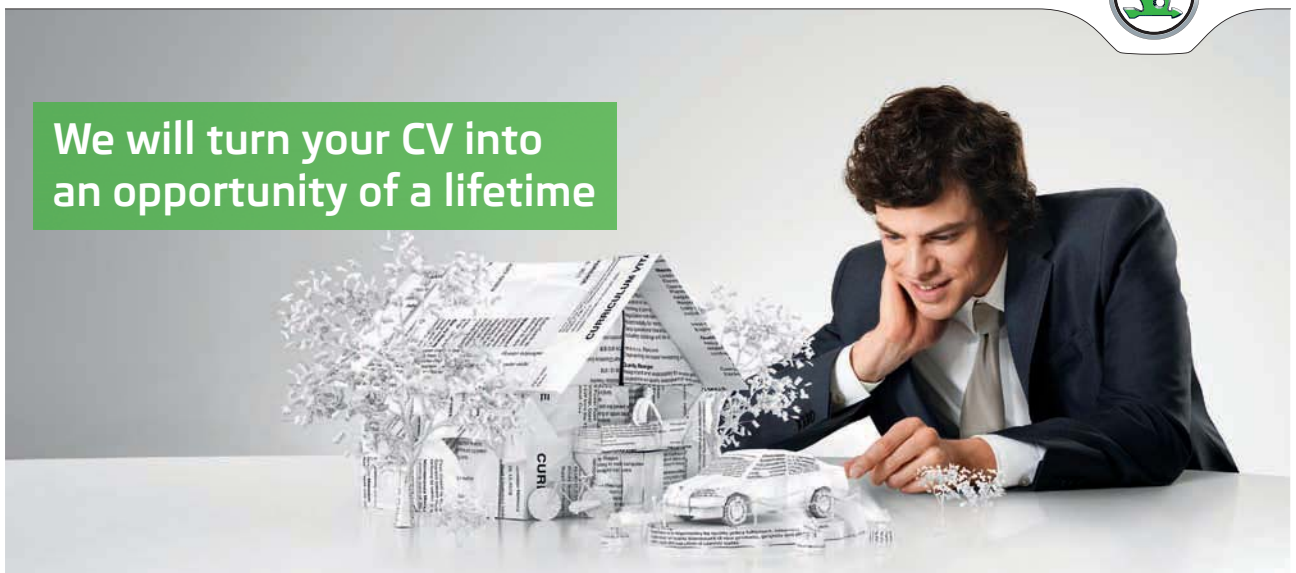
Tracey is not even a full time stay-at-home mum. She has worked most of her married life but she always went for options that put her family first since she stopped practicing as a medical doctor. She is an entrepreneur who is now building a business in the wellness sector. To her it is important that the business will allow her to use her medical background, help people, live out her values and most importantly allow her to still put her family first. When we talked about choices that cause internal conflict she said that she had never had any internal conflict because it was always about her values. I have known her for a long time and I can say with confidence that she is one of those people who are simply untouched by the cancer of materialism that plagues our society today.

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While this long conversation was going on the two daughters were also around the table. Next in line was Thari, the 14-year-old daughter. I will skip her for now and start with Tendo, the sister who was 8 at the time. I asked her if she would have preferred to have a mother who practiced medicine because she would have bought her more cool stuff. Without any hesitation, she said that she wouldn't have it any other way. Her eyes lit up as she talked about how special she felt because she got attention from her parents. She appreciates the face time that she gets and does not take it for granted because she knows that not all kids have that privilege.

I skipped Thari because the conversation with her left me in tears. She is smaller than an average 14 year old and so sweet and innocent that most of the time you forget she is 14. Every time I see her I think the best way to explain the meaning of streetwise is to point at her and say streetwise means *not* being like this! After talking to her parents at length I turned to her and said, "You have been listening to this whole conversation. What do you think?" I expected a short 14-year-old answer but my jaw dropped as soon as she started her long contribution. The opening stunned me. She started like Liv Cardell: "I have been thinking of this for a long time."

She said when she was the sister's age she was stressed because she was concerned about what would happen if her parents divorced. I was surprised because as far as I know they have always been happy. Fortunately I was right. She thought of that because the parents of most of the children at her school were divorced. We never think of how this can affect an 8 year old from a happy home. She then quoted endless examples of children whose mothers are at the top of the corporate ladder. This heart-wrenching stuff had me in tears. It was not even stuff like children being physically or sexually abused. It was just the sadness and longing that these children expressed.

They say things like "My mother is always at work or flying out of the country. She buys me a lot of stuff but all I want is to spend time with her." A daughter of divorced parents says "I don't like going to my dad because he keeps buying expensive gifts for me. All I want is to have a relationship with him but it seems he doesn't know how to have a relationship with me." My only regret is that I did not record the conversation. I wish parents could hear what she had to say and reconsider the meaning of quality time. It was evident from what she said that children of all ages simply crave face time with their parents.

I briefly talked to another values driven person, Dr. Namane Magau, the director of B & D solutions (Business and development Solutions) in Pretoria. This woman's middle name should be values. Just like when I talked to Ivan and Tracey, we spent all the time talking about the fact that it is about values, integrity and serving and we did not even talk about getting to the top of the corporate ladder because it seems in Namane's world that does not even exist. Like Professor Irene Moutlana, she has achieved so much but it is evident that it was never achievement for the sake of power or status.

In the world of public speaking where one of the most rare qualities is authenticity, one of the people that stand out is Itzik Amiel from Amsterdam. What makes Itzik different is not the fact that he talks about authenticity, because anyone can talk about authenticity. It is the fact that he is authentic. When I asked him why he moved from being a successful attorney to speaking and facilitating boot camps on networking, he says it all started at his mother's funeral in Israel. He went back home to bury his mother and was surprised to see a lot of people that the family did not know at the funeral.

Out of curiosity he asked one woman how she knew his mother. She said that she did not know her so well but she came to the funeral because of the many lives that Itzik's mother touched at the hospital where she was admitted before she passed away. Everyone went to her for comfort and encouragement and instead of focusing on her pain she gave of herself. She paid attention to everyone and helped everyone to feel better about his or her circumstances. He realized the importance of touching lives. That explains why the proceeds from his book, "The attention switch" go to kidney research. It is available on [www.itzikamiel.com](http://www.itzikamiel.com).

Talking about mothers, I had the privilege of hearing Mr. Brand Pretorius speak at the 20<sup>th</sup> annual international creativity and innovation conference (ACRE) in SA in October 2014. It is always a privilege to share the platform with people of such stature. He related how he did not treat people right in his first management position. He was stressed because that is not in his nature. He went to Bloemfontein with his wife to visit his mother and on the way back he realized that he was emulating his former boss instead of his mother. As I said earlier, both men and women emulate wrong role models. I have come across many adults who give credit to parents who had good values but I have not come across anyone who gives credits to parents who bought him or her stuff.

The last word on values goes to the late great Dr. Martin Luther King Junior. About 30 years ago someone loved me enough to give me a tape recording of one of his messages. Thanks to YouTube, the message is downloadable. On the 4<sup>th</sup> February 1968, two months before his assassination on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1968, he told his followers what they should and should not say at his funeral. The message is titled "The drum major instinct." I hope you will appreciate Dr. King's message even if you do not share his faith just like many people who do not share his faith are touched by "I have a dream." I hope you will Google "Dr. Martin Luther the drum major instinct" and watch the whole message. *Let's have a constrictive conversation...*

# 11 Conclusion

Women already have to deal with so much and sometimes in an attempt to make things better for them we achieve the opposite. It is not easy being a working woman, especially a working mum. When you are already doing your best, juggling the demands of a career and the demands of being a mum the last thing you need is to be made to feel inadequate for not reaching the top of the corporate ladder and being labeled as not being ambitious enough.

Workplaces are now full of exhausted, guilt-ridden women who are under pressure to pretend that all is well. You dare not let the side down by admitting that you are not coping. Women admit this in private coaching sessions, in private conversations and private emails only to people they trust. I know because they tell me so much in confidence and then put on a brave front. This is a matter of public glory and private tragedy.

Over the years I have come across many women who say let alone feel guilty about not being super mum, they feel guilty about not being super jugglers. They feel that they are failures because other women cope so well. What a burden we are putting on these women! I became a single parent when both my daughters were still under ten and so I raised two teenagers on my own. Many women told me that I was their role model because I managed the two roles so well. I could have just basked in the glory and thanked them for the compliment but I chose to tell the truth.

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They got shocked to learn that I was not coping well at all and that if it were not for boarding school I would have ended up in an asylum. By the way boarding school is not for everyone because there are no one-size-fits all solutions. I wish I learnt this simple fact earlier in life. I spent ten years of my life in a hostel, five years of high school and five years of residential university. I am one of those kids who loved boarding school. My eldest daughter also loved it but my youngest daughter hated every minute of it.

Some of these women who are not coping are executives but many are not. These days most jobs are demanding and you do not even have to get to the top of the ladder to have a 25/8 job. It is even worse when you are at the top. You are supposed to be super-human and of course at that level you dare not say it is not all that rosy. After all you are a poster kid for success because you get showered with awards and get paraded as a shining example to all of us.

Who benefits from this sad state of affairs? Those who make money out of expensive toys and gadgets that are supposed to make up for unavailability, those who make money from antidepressants, therapists and the booming life-enhancement industry. We need to remake our workplaces for everyone's sake. While we have the workplaces that make it difficult for Ted and Lodewijk to be parents before they are workers, parents need to consider taking a leaf out of the book of the woman with the big handbag and sacrifice their career ambitions for the sake of their children.

In 2013 we were privileged to spend two days at the home of Michel and Barbara Neray in Toronto. Michel Neray is the founder of the fabulous MoMondays in Canada. After spending this enriching time with them I was not surprised when I found out that he had designed business cards for his amazing wife, Barbara, and gave her the title "Certified Human Being." Imagine what kind of society we will have if more of us, irrespective of gender, aspired to this title.

The last word goes to Yvonne Cooper, Member of Parliament for Normanton, Pontefract, Castleford and Knottingley in the UK. **"It is not weak to admit children affect our work choices."**

I would like to thank all the people who agreed to have conversations with me in spite of the fact that they could not remain anonymous. You will agree with me, their input added a lot of value to the book. I hope you will do the same by adding value to the Project awomansplace. I am looking forward to hearing your views and receiving topic suggestions from you. You can do as little as help to spread the word by word of mouth and by word of mouse because the more people with different perspectives engage in the conversations the better.



Thank you for staying with me up to the end. I hope I gave you food for thought and at least one thing that will help you to do work and personal life better. I hope you are inspired to join the conversation. You can also contact me on [info@awomansplace.international](mailto:info@awomansplace.international). Please visit [www.makheni.com](http://www.makheni.com) or [www.diversity-guru.com](http://www.diversity-guru.com) to download free resources. When I am not this very serious person you have been listening to, I am a fun person who performs as an entertaining storyteller in different languages including Dutch. Please see [www.makhenithestoryteller.com](http://www.makhenithestoryteller.com). I am looking forward to your participation and your topic suggestions. *Let's have a constructive conversation...*

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