



Hear+Beyond

Accelerating Australian Business

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SEASON 1, TRANSCRIPT

Liz Broderick on prioritising gender diversity in a pandemic

HOST: Rae Johnston, Multi Award-Winning Australian Journalist

GUEST: Elizabeth Broderick AO, Founder of Male Champions of Change

Rae: Hi, and welcome to Hear+Beyond, a podcast brought to you by Accenture. This series is a must-listen if, like me, you're curious about the future of Australian business beyond a pandemic. I'm Rae Johnston, and I'm here to ask the hard questions on the topics that really matter. I'll be joined by prominent business leaders who share their thinking around how Australia can accelerate business from here and beyond.

Voice Over: Hear+Beyond. Accelerating Australian business.

Rae: Kicking things off in the new year on Hear+Beyond, I'm joined by Liz Broderick AO, Australia's former sex discrimination commissioner and founder of Male Champions of Change. As we discuss gender equality, its importance for our collective national success and why it's so much more than just ticking a box. Hi Liz, thanks for joining me on Hear+Beyond.

Liz: Yeah. It's a real pleasure to be here.

Rae: Wonderful. So you work on a broader level as a global ambassador for women's rights, but you also work on a more granular level directly with organisations to help improve and attain equality. How do you balance these two roles?

Liz: It's interesting, isn't it? Because at times I feel it's a bit schizophrenic in one area of my work and my life, which is being a global advocate for women's rights. It's almost like you're trying to pull the patriarchy down if I can put it that way. So more an activist model. Whereas the work that I do with large organisations here, some of them are national institutions like the military, like police, I'm working within power to try and shift it out. I hold those two polarities and I use the skillset a little differently depending on the context. I think, probably what that's taught me is context is really important because when you want to create change or you want to be a catalyst for change, how you present that change really matters. Depending on the context in which you find yourself, that will tell you how best to frame that change.

Rae: So gender equality can sometimes be seen as ticking a box. It's a good thing to do, and people want to be seen ticking that box and be applauded for that. But gender equality is important when it comes to the actual, tangible measures of a nation's economic success as well, isn't it?

Liz: That's so true. Because if you look at it, women make up more than half the population globally, but also I think it's around 50.8% of Australia's population. So the question for us is, are we prepared to put 50% of our talent to one side largely on the basis of gender?

Liz: Because if we think we can do that and still build a strong and prosperous economy, particularly coming off the back of COVID at the minute, that will just not be possible. So gender equality, and that's about having women as well as men workforce participation that builds strong and prosperous nations in a way that we're seeing in many nations now across the world.

Rae: Has the pandemic been a setback to gender equality?

Liz: Absolutely, I think it has. We won't know the full extent probably for another six months or so, but just the action-based research which is happening now shows a number of things. It shows that women engage more in precarious employment. They're more casual labour, so they've lost their jobs at a faster rate than men. It shows that the burden of care is falling disproportionately on women. What we know is prior to the pandemic, women did about three hours more care a day than men or unpaid work actually. What we know is since COVID, that has doubled again. Part of that is because there's so many people in the house, kids are home from school, childcare was closed down for a while. We've got the issues around elderly and more vulnerable people, our parents, our parents-in-law. So that work is still disproportionately being done by women, which is another indicator of a deteriorating set of gender equality numbers.

Then the final thing I'd say is what we do know is that the levels of violence against women, so domestic and family violence. Even though the reports to the police during lockdown were probably pretty similar to how they had been, what we know is that the number of calls to domestic violence resource centres and whatever escalated, I think, the 1800RESPECT number, which is our national hotline, the number of calls to that increased by about 74% over the period of from about March till November. So, we are seeing an increase and it's less safe. If you're locked down with your abuser, your ability to reach out is much more limited.

Rae: How do we help people in that situation?

Liz: Firstly, we need to recognise this as a national issue. I think Australia's made some good progress in relation to that. We've had some fierce advocates, people like Rosie Batty and Christine McKeller and many advocates, and also good men speaking about it. David Morrison spoke a lot about it during his time as Australian of the Year, and others. So, it has to be part of our national consciousness, and then it's all of us working together. I include in that the private sector as well, because prior to probably the last few years, the organisations that were committed to ending domestic and family violence where community organisations, the union movement, government, because of course it's government's responsibility to keep women safe in this nation. But more recently we've really seen the private sector come onboard and that's been a really good development.

Rae: What do we need do post COVID, after the pandemic, to address this inequality that has been highlighted during this time?

Liz: Look, I think we need to, firstly, as we're rebuilding or building back better, it's often called, from COVID, we need to put gender equality front and centre of our rebuilding initiatives. Just to give you a couple of examples for that, I mean, we've seen an unprecedented investment in infrastructure, which has been really positive, but where's the investment in social infrastructure as well? Because we know social infrastructure. So I'm talking there about disability care, aged care, childcare, all the services that actually women rely on, where is the investment in those services? So that would be one thing, including in social housing. It's a really important part of that picture as well. The other thing we need to do is really ensure that women's leadership, so women's ability to lead.

Liz: We have some strong strategies directed at that because I believe to be a leader in the future, having had experience of leading through a time like COVID, will be absolutely key to getting senior national roles in this nation. So we need to ensure that women have exposure to leading through COVID as well. When I look at the data, particularly in the private sector, but also the number of women who are leading sport, it's very, very low. We need some strong and targeted strategies there. I'm talking there about targets and what we call temporary special measures, would be another thing that we should be looking at. Then we have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity really around how we work and care, because one of the really positive is, if there's any positives coming out of COVID. One of the things was that we saw people more able to work from home during the period.

So we started to understand that work is what we do, not where we go. There's infinite number of modalities of work, but work's what we do. But that flexibility and control of an inner sense was delivered back to individuals to work when and where they could. I'm putting to one side, the essential workers, who've been so critical to keeping our country going during COVID. But for others, it's enabled them to balance their caring and their work, I think to a much greater degree. Not only that, from an employer perspective, it's allowed employers to access really great talent that maybe wouldn't be available otherwise because of this heightened degree of flexibility. So I think that's a real positive.

What I don't want to see is we return back to normal, and actually normal was never good for gender equality. So what we need to do is hold onto that experimental mindset and ensure that not just women, but that all people can have a say about where and when they work. I mean, that's really what will encourage gender equality.

Rae: So as a nation, how far have we come in terms of gender equality and how long is the road ahead when it comes to getting to equal, if that can ever happen?

Liz: Sometimes it seems so painstakingly slow or really glacial, but in those moments where I'm starting to lose faith in the possibility of change, take a step back and I just remind myself that even my grandmother, she left work when she got married, the Commonwealth marriage ban. Even my mother wasn't able to have the same life that I have now, and I just see my daughter's so much more empowered than I am. So I think the arc of progress is in the right way. I mean, just to give you some examples of that, we now have a situation where at least 50% of women will have access to parental leave over and above the national paid parental leave scheme. I mean, the fact that we've got a national scheme is fantastic.

We've got a situation where we've had a female prime minister, a female head of state. Hello, we need more, but we've seen some really great role models in that regard as well because you can't really be what you can't see. So I think there's so many firsts that we've had. We've had our first ever female ambassador into the Holy See, which is not for the faint-hearted and so many great examples I could give you about first female AFL officials and rugby referees and whatever. So women have traversed new ground. I think now particularly post COVID, this idea of working and caring, the idea that working and care are not connected, we've smashed that out of a park. The fact is they're inextricably linked and we've been able to see that women can provide immense talent into organisations and be great mothers and carers, and similarly with dads. Dads can as well.

Liz: So, I think we've made progress there. The gender pay gap is currently sitting at 14%. Now it's stubborn to move, but it is trending in the right direction. The one area where we've been really slow is a number of women CEOs in this country. It's about 18.9% of non-government CEOs. If I look at that ASX 200, it's only 5%. In fact, this year, I think out of 25 CEOs, only one was female. I mean, what is that? Can't remember what the study is, but it's something like there are more Peters who are CEOs, than all the women together.

Rae: Yes, I've heard this one.

Liz: So we have made progress on the boards, but the CEOs, not so much.

Rae: What barriers are still in the way? What do we need to tear down?

Liz: Yeah. I think there's three classes of barriers, when I look at. The first thing is the social norms and beliefs that we hold. Now, there's good research out of University of Sydney, which helps us understand that if you were born or educated here in Australia, you likely still believe that good mothers are always with their children. Now, they can be abusing, drinking, doesn't really matter, smoking. If you're with your kids, you're a good mother. We know that's an illogical belief, but it's what's called the good mother belief. So you put that together with another deeply held belief and that is that the ideal worker is someone available 24/7, no visible caring responsibilities, so most likely a man. So when you put those two beliefs together, you've got social norms, which are actually a major barrier to women's progression. So that's the first category.

The second category is with the absence of, what they call, social infrastructure, but they're really talking there about high quality, affordable childcare. I mean, the countries that are doing it well say, and we're looking at Scandinavia and elsewhere, are countries where there's universal access to high quality, affordable care and we're still got quite a way to go to that. Then the third category of barriers, I'd say are cultures which exist within Australian organisations. So most of the institutions and organisations here in Australia, they were invented by men for men, and they're largely run by men. What we've done is we've poured in a few women and stirred, and when they've been involuntarily ejected from these organisations, we still haven't really changed the systems and structures.

So what I always say there is that if you want to really include women totally, we need the active unintentional inclusion because otherwise the system will unintentionally exclude them. That unintentional exclusion, I call a form of gender asbestos. It's built into the walls, the floors, the ceilings of organisations. You can't touch it, you know it's there, but it's intangible, and really the only solution to that is courageous leadership, I think.

Rae: In ripping the asbestos out.

Liz: Give me a big clear-out! And like asbestos it's probably terminal over time as well, unless you rip it out.

Rae: Good analogy. Makes sense. So you touched on this briefly before, but how important is gender diversity for driving innovation and creativity?

Liz: It's just so critical because... It's not just gender diversity, it's all forms of diversity. What we now know is that having diverse talent by itself is not enough to create innovation and creativity, what you also need is psychological safety or what they call inclusion. Because if you just have a whole lot of diverse people, but it's not safe for me to speak my truth or offer up ideas, then it can damage performance as what most recent research has shown.

Liz: So what you need is really to build that inclusion, so that's where I can come to work and be authentic. We can talk about what's messy and sad. There's a high degree of psychological safety and underpinning that is shared vulnerability. So the leaders are vulnerable, I see people being totally human in the environment. I can connect with you on many different levels in those environments.

Firstly, they're a magnet for diverse talent, but also they've got something special. When you get high levels of diversity, and if I go back to gender diversity, if you bring men into highly feminised environments, the group dynamics change and everyone lifts. Similarly, if you bring women into very male dominated environments, it's not that women necessarily bring additive skills.

Although they have had different life experiences, their role in childbearing and everything else, but when you bring them in, the group dynamics change and that's what they call the diversity dividends. So everyone lifts. There's strong research now linking higher levels of diversity and inclusion with much greater levels of innovation and creativity. Let's face it. In this world we're inhabiting now, where not only the solutions of everything is unknown because all the things that we took for granted living through the pandemic; that work would happen in a central location being one of them, they've all been smashed out of a park. So, in a world where the solutions are unknown, having greater levels of creativity and innovation is core to a sustainable organisation.

Rae: Just makes sense. So we've talked about there being a correlation between diversity and success and financial success included in that. But would you go so far as to say there's an actual causation there?

Liz: Yeah. It's interesting, isn't it? Because most of the reports that have been written and there've been thousands, show... If you just take women on boards, so those boards which have higher proportion of women, not all women, this is talking about gender balance, those organisations actually perform better. So similarly, with higher levels of women at the most senior levels, the research would suggest that that's correlated with a higher performance. Now, there is starting to be a couple of reports and research coming through which shows well, it's not just correlated, actually having more women at senior levels is causal. As they said, this is a strong causal link with increased performance, part of that is because the culture changes. So if you have a critical mass of women at senior levels, what you do see is that the culture shifts.

I mean, you can dribble a few women up and hope that the culture shifts, but it'll never be as effective as having a critical mass of senior women. So that's when the culture shifts, it becomes more inclusive. I do think there is a strong causal link, and it isn't just about women like me which... white privileged women who have been educated on whatever, this is about intersectionality as well. That scenario, I really think we need greater focus on here in Australia, because the women's movement in this country has not lifted all women equally. Those women who have what they call intersectional discrimination, so they're women from culturally, linguistically diverse backgrounds, indigenous women, women with disabilities, gay, lesbian, trans-women, the research shows that they experience inequality to a much greater degree than someone like me. So I think that's where our focus has to be as well.

Rae: Tell me about the Male Champions of Change. Why is it important for women to have male leadership highlighted?

Liz: Well, it's interesting. The Male Champions of Change started about 10 years ago with just... It was actually a couple years after I became Australia's sex discrimination commissioner. I started to understand that it wasn't just the collective action of women that was necessary to deliver equality. I mean, that was really critical. Because let's face it, we got the right to vote and the right to drink in the bar and all those things, because some women that cared enough in previous generations stood up and took a stand enough, for that I'll always be forever grateful.

Liz: But I started to understand that actually gender equality is about the redistribution of power, whether it's in families even, organisations or in nations, and if we wanted to redistribute power, we need powerful, decent men stepping up as our allies with us. That we needed to supplement the collective action of women with the collective action of men.

That was the genesis of Male Champions of Change. I rang a number of men and had a conversation with them, just pointing out where the areas of inequality were. I still remember the first man I spoke to. He was a beautiful man who had twins, a boy and a girl. The idea that his daughter would never have the same opportunities as her twin brother was just so abhorrent to him that he said, "Where do I sign up?"

The good thing is I realised once I got a few important men to sign up, other men wanted to step into it. It's really interesting. We've now grown to about 250 champions of change across 17 different groups. One in Pakistan, one in the Philippines, the Global Tech Group, so we're starting on that global expansion. But just last week, we came to a point where having gone out to everyone and most importantly, gone out to the women's movement in this country, feminist organisations, feminist activists, and talk to them about what they liked about the strategy and what they didn't. We've now evolved the name because the fact is it isn't just men who are involved in this strategy. We have almost as many really senior women as men now. It's Champions of Change Coalition, with the tagline men stepping up beside women on gender equality.

Because there is no other space in this nation or indeed in pretty much any nation in the world where men are held equally responsible and accountable for change on gender equality as women are always are. So I wanted to create that space. But I love the fact they report all their data and that they are deeply committed to creating change.

Rae: Is it working?

Liz: I'd love to say it's a linear progress, but it's absolutely not. I mean, some of the things have far exceeded my expectations and other things haven't. For example, we are probably now leading the world in seeing domestic and family violence as a workplace issue, fair and square, and taking strong organisational responses. That's been really positive. Not only that, we've moved into the area of a workplace response to perpetrators of domestic violence and pretty much no other country in the world is doing that. But in terms of a number of women in the C-suite, particularly leading ASX companies, the fact that we still got the gender pay gap, look, there areas where absolutely we need more action. One of the things we've learned from the strategy is that where the CEO personally intervenes, we'll see good progress. So we need more personal intervention by CEO and it'd be great to see as many men as possible speaking out against things like sexual harassment and gender inequality as well. Look, all in all, we've got a strong collective approach and we continue to push forward and I'm excited about that. That's great.

Rae: Are there any simple steps that anyone listening to this podcast can take to overcome unconscious bias they might have so that they can help contribute to that positive gender equality agenda you've got going on there?

Liz: You're right. I mean, there's a lot of conscious bias as well I should say, but yeah. So you could start with that first probably and then-

Rae: They're probably a little more resistant to making changes though, people with the genuine conscious bias though.

Liz: Yeah. They probably are, but the gift of conscious bias is I know I've got it, then I have a choice.

Rae: Yeah.

Liz: But yeah, interesting. Look, I always say start in the family because how we act in the family, and I'm talking about us who have children in our lives or have interaction with children, we're shaping new human beings. So how they see us interact with other adults, our partners in opposite sex relationships or similarly in same-sex relationships, how we are in the family, how we interact with each family member, I think that teaches us a lot about gender equality. Because is dignity and respect sitting at the heart of our interactions? Because the fact is our children will take those learnings into their life. So I always say, that's a starting point. Who's doing the domestic work? Is it shared equally in the house? Are we valuing the aspirations of girls equally with boys and the place we see for them in the world? All those types of things. I think that's a really great starting point.

Liz: Indeed, when I travel across the world with my UN role and I lead a number of country visits to different nations, the place I always look first will be into the personal and family laws to see whether those laws are cast in such a way that they're delivering gender equality in the family. Then I think for those that are listening, who have responsibility in workplaces, maybe managing a team or whatever, it's really interesting to see, "Okay, who speaks in the team meetings? Is there equal share of voice between men and women? Am I elevating women and giving them public profile to the extent of men when I take out to client meetings and those types of things?" We have a strategy that we call audit your public face. That looks at every aspect from your website to your social media channels, to how you run team meetings, to the client visits and everything, to the naming of your rooms in your organisation, all those things, to whose pictures are hanging on the wall.

I love actually what the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade have done because they really up until they had Francis Adams and they really haven't had a female secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs. They've actually done a whole wall of different women who've been ambassadors and really have prosecuted Australia's case around the world as our leading international relations people. So there's a whole lot of strategies that you can do there. Then the other strategy I think, and this costs nothing, but it's really powerful. It's wherever you look, if you're looking to the board or you're looking to the new recruits or who's made it onto the talent development program, always ask the question, "50-50, if not, why not?"

If women make up 50% of this population, why am I not seeing 50% on the talent promotion program or 50% of them in the graduate intake or on the board? Because it's like putting on a new pair of glasses and seeing the world in a very different way, because at the minute we take normal to be what we see around us and that's not normal. So just employing a few strategies like that even for a week, to start to ask the question, "Why aren't I seeing women there?"

Rae: So, you're here on Hear+Beyond, but what does beyond look like to you? Are you optimistic about our collective ability to reach a point where gender equality is just a given, it's the way things are?

Liz: Absolutely. I'm optimistic. You have to be optimistic in my role. I mean, I think to have hope is a revolutionary act at the minute. It's an act of major resistance and I will continue to cultivate hope as a discipline. Because just what I'm seeing around the world in terms of human rights violations against women and girls is unspeakable, some of the things that I witnessed and directly bear witness to. So yes, I will be optimistic. Yes, I will have hope. Do I think that we'll have a gender equal world in my lifetime? Probably not, but I do believe in collective power. Even if you look at work and I was fortunate enough to consult in every region of the world in the year prior to COVID, about what would it look like if we put women's rights front and centre of the world of work? That would be about the redistribution of power and resources in workplaces.



Liz: There was some really positive things. So some real opportunities, but also some real challenges as well. I mean, just to take accelerated digitisation as a major mega trend, which we've seen just on steroids over COVID, that offers some great opportunities. We've talked about them in terms of flexibility and working from anywhere at any time, but also in many nations of the world, there's some significant challenges. One is the digital divide. There are many less technological devices in the hands of women and girls than there are of men and boys. I can't remember how many tens of millions, but we're talking a big divide. Having a smartphone is really critical to being connected these days. But the other thing is what we're seeing is we're in the gig economy, we're seeing is that women can in some nations be relegated back into the home.

So that home, once again, is their place to work. Instead, we've really replaced traditional sweatshops with another form of digital sweatshop where potentially there could be paid in the same way they used to be paid for piece work, and everything else without the ability to collectively organise. So a trend like technology has both opportunities and challenges and I think it's being really aware of those things. I mean, even the sustainability agenda, which is another mega trend, it offers such great opportunities for women in the green economy, new jobs in renewables.

What we know from the data is that there are more women in the renewable sector than there are in traditional fossil fuels and coal, so that's a good story. But unless we continue working to ensure that that continues, we may once again see women missing out on some of those key jobs as we move to a renewable sector and a strong sustainability agenda. So I think we have to be very mindful, firstly, not to replicate the current inequality that we see, particularly into the world of work and to really accelerate our strategies to build greater levels of gender equality in work, so that they won't be amplified in the future.

Rae: Well, thank you so much, Liz, for your time today. It's been lovely speaking with you.

Liz: Thanks very much, Rae. It's been lovely. Really good conversation. Thanks.

Rae: You can find out more about the series and the show notes from this episode at [accenture.com/heardandbeyond](https://www.accenture.com/heardandbeyond).

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Rae: You can listen to Accenture's Hear+Beyond podcast series on Spotify, Apple, Google, or wherever you get your podcasts. Thanks for listening, and don't forget to subscribe. I'll see you next time.

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