

Article on 2016 Queenstown Business Women's Conference - The Art of Leading Change

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The Queenstown Chamber of Commerce put on another sterling conference in Queenstown for professional women. These sell-out conferences have been going now for five years and every year the team at the Chamber bring to Queenstown a group of inspiring women to educate and enthrall Queenstown women.

The Chamber is well supported by a number of sponsors every year with Westpac being the major sponsor and Cavell Leitch solicitors, Jucy and Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand being the gold sponsors. The conference is also supported by other sponsors including the Hilton where it is held every year -and by the way this year hosted the best lunch I have ever had at a conference!



The MC for the event this year was the wonderful Kerre McIvor. Kerre is an interesting, fascinating and funny woman who at the same time manages to be a great MC by bringing out the best in speakers and drawing the audience in so they feel they are one big united group for, at least, the day.

Honourable Paula Bennett



The first speaker for the day was the Honourable Paula Bennett who we will all be familiar with. Paula provided interesting insights into her early life and the sewing of seeds for her enthusiasm and enormous contribution to politics and the National Party in New Zealand.

Unfortunately for readers of this article it is “Chatham House Rules” in relation to what Paula said. This means that the benefit of Paula’s presentation remains with the attendees of the conference and we respect the basis upon which Paula spoke.

What I can say however, is that regardless of the side of the fence you sit on with politics one can’t help but be impressed by Paula getting where she has got and wishing her luck in the future. It’s important for women (and everyone in fact) that we have politicians who have humble beginnings and a few hurdles on the way as well as the politicians who start life from a more privileged position and/or a usual career path pre entering politics.

Joan Withers



Joan Withers is a remarkable woman with a very distinguished executive and governance career including being the chair of TV New Zealand, Mighty River Power and a director of ANZ New Zealand to name but a few roles. She is also a trustee in the Sweet Louise Foundation and the Tindall Foundation. All this after leaving school at 16, getting married at 19 and stopping work for six years when she had her only child. She freely admits that having an only child was her choice because she wanted to get back into the work force (aged 26). She felt she had lost confidence in her years at home. When she went back to work she got a job initially in the advertising agency with flexible hours given that it was commission based. She also said one of the best career decisions, as she saw it, was doing a two year Masters in Business Administration course which she said gave her “her toolkit.”

She moved from advertising into radio and it was during this time that she began to see more and more the importance of team and culture. It was at this stage that she appreciated her mantra/ethos that she would not work for people she did not like, trust or respect. This ethos seemed to be an enduring theme throughout her presentation. For her to be effective and to do her job it was critical that she liked, trusted and respected (and vice versa) the people around her.

In her career she went on to be on many boards as well as being a CEO for a number of years. Her focus in the last six years is balancing her governance roles with her lifestyle. The critical elements of good corporate governance were in her view, and I think they are very important for us all so I list them below:

1. Mutual trust and respect between the board, the CEO and the chair.
2. An appropriately populated board with a complementary skill set and a diversity of board members (ethnicity, gender, experience, qualifications etc.).
3. Board performance – keep asking are the board adding value?
4. Independent board review – keep reviewing and obtaining reviews from independent people of the board's performance.
5. The Board culture revolving around a business being conducted with trust and integrity and the same internal culture within the organisation.
6. The behaviours around the board table – there is no room for arrogance in the board table and there has to be a work ethic and commitment. Directors should lead through the way they behave.
7. Strategic elements need to be up front.
8. The Chair and CEO relationship has critical importance.

If Joan could give some advice to women interested in building up directorships her recommendation was to go to the Crown website for directors. Also if they have problems as a board member then speak to the chair and if you need to then upskill to make sure your skills meet requirements. Generally she saw women as too cautious, they took more time to leap. While this can be a good thing this can also be a bad thing and my words, not hers do not be a ditherer.

Shelley Campbell

Shelley Campbell is currently the Chief Executive Officer of the Sir Peter Blake Trust and a board member of the Halberg Foundation, Te Pou and LeVa.

She has an extensive career in the health sector and seemed to me to be a real loss to the health sector when she moved to the Sir Peter Blake Trust. She said that while she appreciated the “loss” view there was also the view that if you were no longer inspired by it or challenged by your job/role then

you were only offering limited parts of yourself to the organisation and in this regard it wasn't really a loss if you did move on. I have to agree with that analysis given the success she had in the health sector, in managing a workforce and supporting their initiatives seem to come from her enthusiasm and her ability to bring together teams of people. She then took these skills to the Sir Peter Blake Trust which has substantially increased its charitable activities and its public exposure and consequent support since her time at the helm.

With Shelley's presentation what I thought was the most interesting are some of the lessons she had or approaches she took to management. What I'll therefore do is list some of her comments and advice as each on its own is a gem:

- People not organisations create change.
- Do not deflate the confidence of younger women. You have a real opportunity to support younger women.
- Dare to disagree, don't not disagree because you are scared you will lose.
- There are two types of feedback. The one that builds confidence and the one that builds competence. If done with the right intent it is possible to have hard conversations with employees & teams, to build up that person's confidence but at the same time perhaps pointing out the things that they can do that will assist in building their competence. In challenging a person's level of competence it was important to make the person feel like it was possible for them to either change or increase their competence.
- In the position of chaos (like for example a restructuring or change of company focus) a leader needs to be clear about what they can and cannot control. Once that is established the things that you can control can be managed and the best made out of it.
- When you lead staff through tough times such as restructures the help you give them today will not only help them today it will help them in the future. This is because it will enable them to move on. It means that in a similar situation in the future they will have the ability to cope with it and can look back and say what can I control and what I can't control.
- Finally, keep asking yourself where are we and where do we want to be.



Above photo - Shelly Campbell and Sarah Laurie

Sarah Laurie

Sarah Laurie is an author, international speaker and life coach. Sarah provided us with the background on to how she established herself as a life coach from a person with a marketing degree having stopped work to have her two children. In order to become a life coach she did a course obtaining qualifications overseas and then went to the market.

In this time she has developed a reputation as an expert in the field of best performance, wellness and lifestyle. Sarah asked us to think about the question, “Who do I want to be as opposed to what do I want to achieve?” In some regards it was similar to Shelley’s approach who asked us where do we want to be? Combine those and the question for participants to think about after the conference is *“Where and what do I want to be.”*

One of the main parts of Sarah’s presentation in Queenstown was about stress and why notwithstanding that these days we have access to so much information on wellbeing and health our suicide rates are still high. Sarah helpfully went through the physiology of stress. I found this presentation very useful as often we think that we can simply control our stress by saying, “do not get stressed, it’s mind over matter and all under our control.”

Sarah showed us that the stress response in our bodies is a physical response and stress arises when our brain believes we are in danger for our lives. What happens at that point is that certain parts of our brain “switch off” such as memory, information processing, so it’s harder to think of ways to deal with things. I must admit this seems logical as in times of stress it is hard to focus and that’s probably the time when we need to be the most focussed in relation to our work and the way that we may deal with children. So going on from there if we assume that stress is physical, how then can we treat it? Unfortunately and it’s something that I thought was “trite” it is possible to dream to beat it or treat it by thinking positive. This is because if we think positively this triggers a response in the executive function system of our brain.

How do we think positively? Well, interestingly, taking long breaths and breathing in from your diaphragm actually does help. So stop, breath, relax and watch your mind clear. Sarah’s words were: breath, pause, mediate, cultivate optimism, establish routines and be thankful. Perhaps an interesting exercise for us all is in a really stressful situation and when you feel yourself being wound up (be it children, work) just slow down, breath slowly, breath from your diaphragm and see how your mind clears. I’m working on it!

Lizzie Marvally



Lizzie is the niece of the late Sir Howard Morrison. I must admit going into the conference I thought Lizzie's would possibly be the least interesting presentation for me but I was in for a surprise. Lizzie is an inspiration and the sort of woman that we want our daughters and sons to understand and appreciate. Certainly she had a remarkable musical career and is an incredibly talented young woman. All before 25 she had two top ten albums, international singing tours and several appearances as the gorgeous girl singing the New Zealand anthem in rugby test matches amongst other things. However her time was marked with periods of depression which have been debilitating for her which she has worked through and continues to work through.

All this and Lizzie has made an enormous contribution to assisting women and men with challenging the way in which young woman are portrayed in the media and the expectations. Her media website for young women, www.Villainesse.com – is identified in the Google search as “no filter, no bullshit media for young women”. On the website this week is a fascinating editorial by Lizzie which is “Feminism is more than a word”. I like in particular her last line after some particularly relevant comment she says:

“So whatever we want to call it, if we are in favour of gender equality, the word we should use should be the least of our concerns. We should be much more concerned with making that equality a reality – then we can argue over semantics until our equal hearts are content.”

The social media initiative that Lizzie took on which is acknowledged worldwide as “MY BODY, MY TERMS”. If you have not seen this then this is needed because as Lizzie said we have a problem. It was an initiative to counter victim blaming in relation to revenge porn and other sexual assaults. The MY BODY, MY TERMS campaign is to challenge perceptions about victim blaming, revenge porn, consent and sexual violence (see: www.mybodymyterms.com). The YouTube video has 96,000 views and the Huffington Post called it a new campaign that hopes to spark some honest and open conversations about sex, consent and victim blaming.



Lizzie at the conference said that she was about to have her first holiday for some time. In terms of her future she wants to refresh, recharge and move to the next stage. I am sure whatever she does is going to benefit all of us and she is a young woman to watch.

Lisa O'Neill



The last presenter of the day was the marvellous Lisa O'Neill. Lisa has been a speaker at all the Queenstown conferences and freely admits that whether they like it or not she's coming back!

Lisa is the sort of presenter that makes you laugh with delight at some of the outrageous stories she tells and her observations on life. You feel better just listening to her and it is hard to imagine how anyone could be negative around her because just standing beside her makes me feel fantastic. Despite all this Lisa has some lessons on lifestyle, eating and work/life balance which are helpful and make you realise that being fabulous like Lisa requires not only personality, enthusiasm and bubblieness it requires a good night's sleep, a healthy diet and time to recover and recuperate whether or not through a good book, movie, retreat (with or without exercise) and commitment and support from and to one's family.

Carry on Lisa.

Thank you to the Chamber for presenting these amazing women to us, keep up the good work and I'll definitely be seeing you next year.