

Influential Women: An interview with Monica Fogarty, Director of Warwickshire County Council.

What does equality mean to you?

Equality has changed over the years, when I was younger I used to perceive equality as this idea of fairness, and I was under a notion that equality was about treating people fairly. However, I soon came to realise that equality is not about fairness, it is not about treating everyone the same, as some people are more disadvantaged than others. Instead everyone should be given the same opportunity through a different means of engagement.

My understanding of equality has developed into a sophisticated understanding of what equality stands for.

Equality is a social responsibility, as we all play our part to encourage those who have specific barriers to seek support, advice and help. We, as a society should go out of our way to make people aware of their opportunities. This is where EQUiP comes in, a system that endorses an advocacy, in which leaders and community leaders act and go into different communities to create an awareness about equality.

If we do not reach different communities or support one another, then as a result everyone will be ploughing their own furrow, breadth or depth, which will lead to a narrow and restrictive awareness and understanding.

Each person's lifepath and choices are unique stories, but it is our responsibility to make sure everyone is aware and has the maximum awareness of opportunities, so that they can achieve their full potential for either themselves, friends or family.



What do you think women can bring to the workplace?

I do not particularly view people in terms of their gender, race or cultural background. I prefer to see people for who they are, as a connected workforce.

I have always been fortunate enough to work in the public sector, which has allowed for maximum equality, in comparison to other sectors. There is a social responsibility when working in the public sector and it is built into the frame of work. This has allowed me and other women to succeed and receive promotions based on the individual skill-sets rather than gender. I believe in meritocracy, which can open opportunities to those based on achievement rather than socio-economic background.

Nevertheless, one could argue that women operate differently; women generally have a more sophisticated toolkit in terms of communication, and in terms of second position, through empathising and putting one's self into another person's shoes. On the other hand, this maybe a result of a social construct, in which they have been sensitised.

An effective workforce is when you can recognise traits of an individual or albeit someone's gender and create a well-balanced work environment. The so-called male characteristics in the workforce are also just as valuable, they typically consist of directness and candid conversation, which is more efficient and effective. I welcome mixed gender; different cultural backgrounds and different skill-sets.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

I would say to my younger self 'if you want a high flying career, you are going to need family support' and in my case that is my husband. I can recognise that without external support whether you are male or female it would be difficult.

My husband and I play to each others strengths rather than gender. I have always been a confident person and I would tell anyone - do not be surprised when you do well. A high earned job is something you have already earned and aspired to. The key is to always perform at the next level. In fact, I can gleefully say I have always been a bit cheeky; some would argue that in men it is confidence, so I encourage younger females to speak your mind, but be mindful to do so skill-fully. In the workplace partnership is highly valued and I continue to welcome that.

Who would you say inspired you?

Women who display a strength of character and work ethic inspire me, for instance female leaders from across different political spectrums and internationally. However, most recently I have been more inspired by communities and one community in particular that has shown strength, togetherness and resilience is the Grenfell Rally. It was a tragic event and communities came together to show support and by doing so this has transcended into all different social, ethnic and gender groups coming together.

It is fantastic to see people pull together. I want that community togetherness to become the norm in British society. In some cultures, such as the Sikh, Muslim and Irish community have displayed a strong sense of community, by looking after one another from cradle to grave, if every community did that it would be a different place.

What barriers do you think women face today? and what can be done to overcome these barriers?

The biggest barrier many experience is overcoming self doubt and insecurities. There are still gender stereotypical roles, despite the progression made over the last 50 years, and that change continues to progress, as we see more female engineers. However, we must continue to challenge stereotyping people into gender specific job roles.

The public sector is working hard to encourage more females to apply for job roles, such as firefighters, engineers, architects, eventually this should become the norm.

We need to promote inclusivity and steer away from gender stereotyping in the workplace, females need to be open to those opportunities and to step into a non traditional role.

Society has obligation to call out behaviours which are discriminatory because they are not always intended, so we have to think carefully about the use of language and the impact that can have on an individual. Emotional intelligence is critical in the way you converse and with more awareness we can create a fairer society for all.