

IS THERE STILL A GLASS CEILING FOR AUSTRALIAN WOMEN?

We've come a long way but have we come far enough? We asked a variety of high profile women (and even a man!) for their opinions.



ROBBEE MINICOLA
CEO of Hybrid TV

"If it's harder for you, so what? It means when you get to the top the success is so much more valuable."

"For a woman to really soar as an executive in Australia, she must be different; different to other men *and* women and in terms of possessing a level of tenacity, vision and leadership that makes people turn their heads, listen and believe. There will always be glass ceilings—for men and women—and the ones that succeed are usually those who don't mind a few cuts on their knuckles!

If you're 'one of the boys' then stay that way. If you're not, then don't adapt. I attribute my success to *not* conforming instead of the other way around. No matter what you act like, your *performance* is how you get where you are. So focus on results and even if you have three heads and four legs, you will get to the top!

As a single mother with two children I am in a constant state of guilt. When I'm with my kids I worry about the business and vice versa. When you love what you do and what you're creating at work, it simply doesn't feel like work, it becomes part of your DNA. Just as I bring work into my home life, I also bring the kids into my work life. My daughter works inside the business part-time and my son reviews our services on TiVo. It is much easier to balance work and home when you work in the entertainment business. Imagine if I was a dentist!

My advice for other women wanting to get to the top is to persevere and never blame someone else for your lack of success. If it's harder for you, so what? All it means is that when you get there the prize is so much for valuable."

STORY JEN BISHOP



JOE KREMER
Vice president and MD of Dell Australia and New Zealand

Joe was recognised as one of Australia's Leading CEOs for the advancement of women by the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) this year.

"The IT industry is unquestionably challenged in terms of gender balance, and like other sectors, it is most significant at an executive level.

According to ABS, less than 15 percent of ICT workers are female and, of that 15 percent, less than six percent are managers. My belief is an organisation that under represents women, particularly at a senior level, is at a disadvantage.

In addition to employee benefits and flexibility, the creation of an environment where it is safe to take risks is important. Years of experience has taught me that some women—sometimes the most capable and talented performers—will not push for advancement as aggressively their male counterparts. I personally delight in seeing talented women build confidence and belief in their leadership capabilities

The mentoring of executive women to foster the development of leadership skills is equally important. Dell founded the *Women in IT Executive Mentoring Program*, in December 2005. We now have more than 80 mentor/mentee pairs across the Australian private and public sectors. We're delighted the program is really impacting the careers of an increasing number of senior female executives within the IT profession."



REBECCA CASSELLS, 33
Senior Research Fellow, University of Canberra

"It is unlikely that Gen Y girls today, as talented as they are and as far as they have come, will ever break through the glass ceiling."

"As lead author for a recent Income and Wealth Report *She Works Hard For The Money*, I gained an insight into the social and economic status of Australian women.

One of the key findings was the differing gender wage gaps that exist for each generation. For Gen Y, almost no wage gap exists, but moving to women in their 30s and early 40s—Gen X—the wage gap increases to around 3.5 percent. With Baby Boomer women, the wage gap jumps to around 13.5 percent.

These figures strongly suggest the presence of a glass ceiling, with the Baby Boomer women likely to be nearing the end of their careers and approaching retirement, yet never having gained the top position of CEO or director. Statistics support these findings, with, for example, only 8.3 percent of all ASX200 Board Directors being women in 2008.

With wage gaps constantly being pushed aside as being due to 'legitimate' differences between men and women, the big question now will be if Gen Y—where the girls are outdoing the boys in educational and occupation attainment—will experience the same glass ceilings as their mothers.

The majority of Australian studies show that wage gaps have hardly anything to do with differences in education, experience, children, being married, but rather are driven by being female, or what some would phrase as discrimination.

And so, it is unlikely that Gen Y girls today, as talented as they are and as far as they have come, will ever break through this glass ceiling. However, it is likely that they will keep chipping away at it."



DEB LOVERIDGE
CEO (Asia Pacific) of recruitment and HR services specialist, Randstad

"Things will only change dramatically if business leaders in Australia change their mindset when making decisions about future executive appointments."

"Based on the number of board positions filled by women, as well as the percentage of female CEOs and senior executives in corporate Australia, I would have to say yes, there is unfortunately, still a glass ceiling. While Australia is falling behind globally, we have come a long way.

Importantly, women now seem to have a higher profile when they are in senior executive positions and businesses are increasing their focus on mentoring, coaching and grooming more women for leadership positions. Additionally, when you look at the number of inspirational women who are becoming highly successful entrepreneurs within SMEs, the future looks very bright.

Things will only change dramatically if business leaders in Australia change their mindset when making decisions about future executive appointments. The more businesses which realise success under the direction of female leaders, and who are open to sharing their stories, will result in more Australian businesses questioning their recruitment, promotion and leadership development strategies. The ceiling may indeed collapse in the not too distant future."



SHARON WILLIAMS
CEO of Taurus Marketing

"It is unethical, unfair and emotionally draining, but isn't it up to us to take responsibility to do something about it?"

"I've not directly experienced the so-called glass ceiling that often because I run my own business and to some extent avoid the problem. But I have come across it in boardroom situations and it is shocking to experience. I've treated it the same way as any business issue: deal with facts, take advice, remove the emotion, be fair, leave people intact and deal with it. Don't ignore it unless you choose strategically to do so.

I feel strongly that it is up to us to re-write the rules; if we acknowledge the glass ceiling exists then it's surely there to smash, challenge and burst through? Not much will change if we don't take responsibility to change the balance of power and alter the status quo ourselves.

It is unethical, unfair and emotionally draining, but isn't it up to us to take responsibility to do something about it? And if we don't take the bull by the horns, our children and our grandchildren will still be experiencing it." **DB**

©SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/Tomasz Trojanowski