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KATE RAMSAY AND THE **AND** COACHES WELCOME YOU TO OUR STAYING IN TOUCH NEWSLETTER.

In **Learning Moments** in this edition we share an article about what the authors call 'ebullient leadership'. In **Did you know?** we focus on the worrying trend that some leaders are pulling back from sponsoring their Diversity, Equality and Inclusion initiatives. And in a new section headed **ICYMI** (in case you missed it) we reference the findings of former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins about progress made in the past 4 years since the release of her 2020 Respect @ Work Report. **And to close** we quote Nelson Mandela on leadership.

Learning Moments

Kate writes:

An article in the December 3, 2024 edition of *The Conversation* caught my eye. It was headed "Ebullient leadership" can lift your workers out of the doldrums and increase productivity'. The piece was written by Saima Ahmad and Nilupama Wijewardena, both lecturers at RMIT University. I read on and learnt that the authors' research has revealed that what they're calling 'ebullient leaders' are 'adept at fostering curiosity and knowledge-sharing', both of which they argue are important components for innovation and engagement at work.

The catalyst for their research was a recent report that found 'stagnant employee engagement and declining wellbeing were issues facing modern workplaces'. This began during Covid and has lingered since with an estimated annual loss of A\$13.4 trillion to global GDP.

The authors describe ebullient leadership as not just about leaders being authentic, but also about them 'actively creating a positive work environment that is engaging, fun and playful'. Further, ebullient leaders 'create an atmosphere where employees feel excited to come to work. Their leadership style can transform a routine workday into a stimulating experience.'

Ahmad and Wijewardena then explain what ebullient leaders actually do:

Ebullient leaders organise light-hearted activities, such as quick games, humorous exchanges, trivia breaks, social lunches and even dress-up days.

They argue that there is now a vast body of research showing that 'change-of-pace activities' such as these improve job satisfaction and morale and reduce absenteeism and burnout. The authors provide some tips about how to adopt an ebullient leadership style:

Build enjoyable moments into the workday: *be creative in organising social events, competitions or themed parties at work.*

Demonstrate emotional intelligence: *show optimism and enthusiasm even in challenging times.*

Balance work and play: *choose activities that help employees engage and support their work goals.*

Be mindful of employees' preferences and organise fun accordingly.

Lead by example: *demonstrate and champion playfulness, curiosity and liveliness.*

The authors conclude:

Ebullient leadership is more than a feel-good concept. Given the current challenges of high burnout and disengagement rates, it can help organisations lift overall performance and improved knowledge sharing.

Did you know?

One of the first things Trump did when he moved into the Oval Office in late January was to order the cancellation of all Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in the US public sector. And Walmart, Boeing, Coca-Cola, Accenture and Disney are among

the private sector giants who are also ‘jumping on the anti-diversity bandwagon’.

I first read about this in an article by Angela Priestly in the February 26 edition of *Women’s AGENDA* – a daily online feed that I highly recommend.

As I write this newsletter on my MacBook Air, I’m happy to report that Priestly tells her readers that Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, has publicly declared that his company is still committed to ‘creating a culture of belonging’. She reported that, over the next 5 years, Apple will be investing US\$500 billion to create 20,000 more jobs. Priestly:

Cook, along with Apple Shareholders, are likely well aware that effectively and efficiently hiring thousands of employees requires tapping into the full potential of the talent pool. And programs that put a focus on inclusion and belonging can be powerful in making that happen.

I read more on DEI from Karen Barlow, political editor of *The Saturday Paper*, in her lead article in its March 1 edition. Headed ‘How Trump’s war on diversity is spilling over to Australia’, I was shocked to read that, to continue to secure US government contracts, employers in the US must now certify that they no longer have DEI programs. And, as Barlow writes, these programs are already being scaled back at companies with a significant Australian presence including Amazon, PepsiCo, McDonald’s, Meta and Google.

Barlow explains that while consulting firms PwC, EY and KPMG, all of whom are active in Australia, have reaffirmed their commitments to diversity targets, Accenture has cancelled its global DEI goals.

Accenture has 6,500 staff in Australia, and it plans to start ‘sunsetting’ their diversity goals here, along with career development programs for ‘people of specific demographic groups’. Accenture will of course have to continue to comply with Australian law that includes reporting annually to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency on the status of women at Accenture.

Barlow’s piece in *The Saturday Paper* closes with a quote from Greens Senator Barbara Pocock:

We can’t go back to pale, male and stale public sector or consulting firms. We’ve had decades of it. It doesn’t work.

It’s not effective, it’s not efficient and we need to stick with the good inclusive diversity programs that we are world leaders on.

And finally on this topic, another article from *The Conversation* on March 3. Headed ‘Diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace are under attack. Here’s why they matter more than ever’, it was written by Gemma Hamilton, Bess Schnioffsky and Nicola Henry who are all from RMIT University as well. In a paragraph headed ‘Defending diversity’ they write:

Given the assault on DEI measures, it is worth restating why they are so important to a truly inclusive modern workplace. DEI initiatives work to address obstacles and correct disadvantages so everyone has a fair chance of being hired, promoted and paid, regardless of their personal characteristics. They ensure every person has a genuinely equal chance of access to social goods. They can be seen as ‘catch up’ mechanisms, recognising that we don’t all start our working lives on an equal footing.

I have devoted a large portion of this newsletter to the topic of DEI because, as my regular readers know, I recently published my second book *A hell of a lot of glass – achieving gender equality in the workplaces of Australia*. I am enraged about what Trump has done and the flow on effects in Australia; I was hoping my book was almost past its used by date, but it seems not!

ICYMI

Former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins, author of the 2022 *Respect @ Work* report, has done a review of progress 4 years on and she finds the results are ‘encouraging’. However, given that: ‘trusted and engaged leaders are the most important factor in preventing inappropriate conduct ... [yet only] 14 per cent of CEOs were found to have set clear expectations for line managers to communicate on respectful behaviour within the workplace.’ So her message to leaders is: there’s still work to do.

And to close

Nelson Mandela on leadership:

Leaders will have to give clear and decisive leadership towards a world of tolerance and respect for difference, and an uncompromising commitment to peaceful solutions to conflicts and disputes.