

# Equality and Equity

## #BeBoldForChange



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**F**or this International Women's Day, it is topical to talk about women's rights. Indeed, you do not have to look far to see how the subject is "trending". However, the problem is that, by their very nature, trends will pass as soon as the next subject hits the headlines.

You can talk all you like but, to make an enduring difference, the subject must become more than a trend; it must be engrained in our thinking. We need to go back to basics and re-evaluate our fundamental beliefs about the roles of women and, indeed, of men. We need to be bold for change, lasting change.

Looking back at history, we can see that women have had to fight for their rights and, in many countries, they are still fighting just to achieve a moderate degree of freedom and autonomy. How long will women have to fight to earn the same rights that men enjoy on an international level? Cultures around the world pay lip service to equality, but the reality is often far removed from the ideal.

So from where and how did the idea that women are subservient to men, originate? In many cultures, women still play "second fiddle" to men because that is the way it has always been and these cultures are often influenced by religion. However, people tend to confuse culture and religion and they cite religious reasons to create the strict distinction between male and female roles. Women are described as the fairer sex, the weaker sex. "Women should dress with greater modesty". "Women should not be seen to dress or behave like men or do jobs that are perceived as men's work, such as engineering".

However, are we trying to protect women because we consider heavy/physical jobs as a predominantly male domain, or are these ideas underpinned by an insidious subconscious belief that women are less capable because they have a womb?

How often have we heard the expression that "the man is the head but the woman is the neck that turns it"? But is this just an excuse to keep up the pretence that women have the real power? Women don't want power through the 'back door'; they need to be perceived and esteemed for what they are... every bit as strong, independent and capable as men, if not more.

Women do not want to be the neck that manipulates the head as a means to an end. They deserve equal opportunities and, to achieve that, they need to be treated with equity. But how do we give women equality and equity, and what do we mean by these terms anyway?

Equality means that everyone should have the same opportunity. If an individual does not make as much of a

success of his/her life as another individual, it should be as the result of the choices he/she makes rather than because of gender.

Equity means that everybody should be treated equally, with fairness and impartiality, without bias or prejudice, so that the outcome will be the same for all.

What does it mean for the "outcome" to be the same for all? It means men and women should be capable of achieving the same end result, whether in the employment market, politics or even in the home. Equity is about creating an environment where men and women can achieve the same results, regardless of their gender.

However, because traditionally, the sexes have not been treated the same, there still exists an imbalance between the genders, resulting in it being much harder for women to achieve the same "end result" as men. This imbalance needs to be redressed. To achieve equity and the same end result, women may have to be presented with a slightly different set of circumstances until the imbalance is resolved.

What is the best way to explain this? Perhaps we can take education as an example. We want all our children to be intelligent and to achieve a certain degree of success in school. This is relatively easy for children from fortunate backgrounds where parents understand the value of education and who will motivate their children. But for children from less fortunate backgrounds and whose parents do not realise the benefits of education, they may need more "input" from the school to address the pre-existing imbalance in educational standard and ability. These children may need extra-curricular activities or training in motivation and values. It may be that the school has to spend a little more time and effort on these children to enable them to achieve the same standard as the others, but will this be fair to the others? Surely not! We do not want to discriminate positively in favour of the less able children; we just want all children to achieve the same level of education so that they can all have the same opportunities and choices in life.

Of course, where gender is concerned, we are not concerned with ability as women are every bit as capable as men and have been said to be able to multi-task much better than men! However, in most societies, there is still



a 'pre-existing imbalance' in the opportunities that exist between men and women. You only have to look at the number of women in top positions in government or large, international corporations around the world to see this.

Perhaps Europe is slightly more advanced than many other countries in this respect, but how many women have won the Nobel Prize as compared to men? In celebration of International Women's Day this year, The Nobel Prize published a list of women who had won the prize since 1903, all forty-eight of them, without realising the irony that it had been awarded to men 863 times. Is this really something to celebrate?

How can we empower women and give them the equality and equity that they deserve? We must do more than pay lip-service. Society needs to change its ideas about gender, generally. Not only must we learn to accept the idea of women in what have previously been regarded as "men's roles" but we may also need to reanalyse our attitudes towards men adopting roles that are traditionally perceived as women's?

Take childcare as an example. When a woman has a child, we think about arrangements to be made for the woman in relation to the child. Does the company provide childcare? Will the woman be given time off? What will it cost the company in respect of the mother's employment?

But what about the male partner? What if the couple decides that the woman should work and the man should take care of the child? Many cultures have quite strong views about this and they regard it as shameful for a woman to support the man. But why not?

As long as society holds on to this attitude, it will be as hard for the man who wishes to remain at home as the primary caregiver as it will be for the woman who wishes to pursue her career. Perhaps we should be equally open-minded about both sets of circumstances and treat each case even-handedly?

We often need look no further than our own homes to see the imbalance between men and women. How many families do you know where both partners work but, when the man gets home, he relaxes after a "hard day at work" while the woman cooks, cleans and deals with the children? Where is the fairness in this situation? How is that providing equality and equity for women? Empowering women means treating them as equals, not just at work, but in every area where men and women co-exist.

Let us go back to the working environment and to empowering women at work. Our goal for International Women's Day this year is to think about how we can realistically improve women's chances of realising their ambitions without being held back by their gender. There are two courses of action essential to achieving this goal.

Firstly, we need to put in place structures which support women. These include child care support, perhaps more flexible working hours or working conditions as well as equal pay and status. This is not about positive discrimination, but about creating a set of circumstances where women are allowed to flourish and thrive within their working



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environment so that they can achieve the same status and level of accomplishment as men.

Secondly, and more importantly, we need to examine and change our core values about women and their roles in order to give women real choice over their future. Having an equal opportunities policy written into your company handbook is not enough if the culture within the organisation surreptitiously prevents women from ever achieving their full potential.

However, it is not only men's attitudes that need changing. Every time a woman accepts less than is her due because of her gender, she is perpetuating the lie that women are second class citizens.

On this subject, William Golding, Nobel Winner, British novelist, playwright and poet (1911-1993) wrote: "I think women are foolish to pretend that they are equal to men. They are far superior and always have been. Whatever you

give to a woman, she will make greater. If you give her sperm, she will give you a baby. If you give her a house, she will give you a home. If you give her groceries, she will give you a meal. If you give her a smile, she will give you her heart. She multiplies and enlarges what is given to her. So, if you give her crap, be ready to receive a ton of shit!"

So let us take advantage of this International Women's Day to re-evaluate our beliefs about the roles of men and women and make a promise to ourselves to empower women with true equality and equity. ■

## Author's Biodata

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## ERRATA

Error on Cover Story – **58th IEM ANNUAL DINNER & AWARDS NIGHT** published on page 6 to page 11 in **JURUTERA** May 2017 issue. We wish to attach the corrected List of Awards Recipients at the **58th IEM ANNUAL DINNER & AWARDS NIGHT**.

### MOST SUPPORTIVE AWARD

TYPE OF AWARD	ORGANISATION	PERSON WHO RECEIVED AWARD
Graduate Membership for Individual Category		Ir. Assoc. Prof. Dr Khoo Hooi Ling @ Lai Hooi Ling
Graduate Membership for Organisation Category	Petroleum Nasional Berhad	Y.M. Raja Iskandar Arifin bin Raja Azman
Corporate Membership for Individual Category		Ir. Dr Ahmad Anuar bin Othman
Corporate Membership for Organisation Category	Tenaga Nasional Berhad	Ir. Fathullah Razzaq Ghazali
Most Active Organisation	Tenaga Nasional Berhad	Ir. Shah Nawaz Asan Gany

### IEM CONTRIBUTION TO ENGINEERING INDUSTRY AWARD 2016

ORGANISATION	PERSON WHO RECEIVED AWARD	AWARD FOR
Eco World Development Group Berhad	Y.Bhg. Dato' Sundarajoo Somu, Chief Operating Officer	Property Development
Ekovest Berhad	Y.Bhg. Datuk Seri Lim Keng Cheng, Managing Director	Construction
IJM - JAKS	Mr. Wong Kim Kong, Chief Operating Officer	Water
Malaysia LNG Sdn. Bhd.	Ir. Pau Kiew Huai, Chief Executive Officer	Energy
Rapid Rail Sdn. Bhd.	Y.Bhg. Dato' Ir. Zohari Sulaiman, Chief Executive Officer	Transportation

### IEM OUTSTANDING ENGINEERING ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR THE YEAR 2017

ORGANISATION	PERSON WHO RECEIVED AWARD	PRIZES
Shell Projects and Technology, Malaysia	Mr. Momas Modon, Project Manager	Plaque Certificate

The error is much regretted.

THE INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS, MALAYSIA

## ERRATA

Incomplete list published in **FEATURE – CAFEO 34 at an Island Paradise** published on page 15 to page 21 in **JURUTERA** May 2017 issue. We wish to attach the corrected List of Recipients of the AFEO Honorary Awards for Malaysia at CAFEO 34, Philippines.

### AFEO Distinguished Hon. Fellow

Yang Berhormat Datuk Seri Ir. Dr Wee Ka Siong, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Malaysia

### AFEO Hon. Fellow

1. Dato Ir. Lim Chow Hock, AFEO Immediate Past Chairman & IEM Immediate Past President
2. Ir. Lee Weng Onn, IEM Country Registrar 2015 and past IEM Vice President (Upgrade from Hon. Member)
3. Ir. Lee Boon Chong, IEM Vice President (Upgrade from Hon. Member)
4. Ir. Prof. Dr Ruslan bin Hassan, IEM Vice President (Upgrade from Hon. Member)
5. Ir. Lai Sze Ching, IEM Vice President

### AFEO Hon. Member

1. Ir. Ong Sang Woh, ex-Excomm member
2. Ir. Kim Kek Seong, ex-Excomm member
3. Ir. Assoc. Prof. Dr Norlida binti Buniyamin, Vice President
4. Ir. Assoc. Prof. Dr Hayati binti Abdullah, past Southern Branch Chairperson and ex-Excomm member
5. Ir. Farn Yew Hin, past METD Chairman
6. Ir. Dr. Tan Chee Fai, Melaka Branch Chairman and Excomm member
7. Ir. Elias bin Saidin, IEM Vice President and AER Head Commissioner
8. Dr Wang Hong Kok, IEM Honorary Treasurer
9. Ir. Siew Yaw Jen, Past Chairman, Highway and Transportation Engineering Technical Division
10. Ir. Chin Kar Keong, Past Chairman, Highway and Transportation Engineering Technical Division

The error is much regretted.