

every  
woman  
WORKBOOK

# CHOOSE TO CHALLENGE



# About this workbook

At everywoman, we deliver a range of innovative products and resources that unlock the potential and talent of women in business globally. Whether you're just starting out, looking to progress your career, or even to build and develop your own enterprise, the everywomanNetwork provides a wealth of personal development resources, advice and inspiration to address the challenges you face at key stages in business. We produce workbooks on topics that matter most to our members and we're constantly listening to your views to give you the tools you need to propel you through your life's work, at a time and place that suits you.

*Welcome to our workbook, Choose to Challenge.*

There are times in our professional lives when we need a good challenge — something to jolt us out of our comfort zone. When we seize this challenge, we discover what we are really capable of. The satisfaction we glean as a result can be hugely motivating, setting into play a truly virtuous circle that sees us continuing to embrace challenge and grow as individuals and leaders.

There are various workbooks in the everywoman library that are designed to help you set and achieve goals. In this one, we're inviting you to take part in a very specific challenge — one that will challenge not just yourself and your leadership credentials, but the status quo where women in the workplace are concerned. This might seem like a tall order — can one person really make a difference towards a more inclusive world? The answer is that yes, they can! Small actions, taken regularly by the masses is what amounts to great change.

In this workbook, you'll discover the role you can play in bringing about this change, in shaping a better tomorrow for yourself, your colleagues, and society as a whole.

We'd love to know how you get on – email us at [karenmax@everywoman.com](mailto:karenmax@everywoman.com) or tweet us [@everywomanuk](https://twitter.com/everywomanuk).

Max & Karen  
and the everywoman team

“A challenged world is an alert world. Individually, we’re all responsible for our own thoughts and actions - all day, every day. We can choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequity. We can choose to seek out and celebrate women’s achievements. Collectively, we can all help create an inclusive world. From challenge comes change, so let’s all #ChooseToChallenge.”

International Women’s Day

# Challenge yourself to call it out

In this section you will learn: What you can do about gender bias and inequality, why it matters that you speak out about it, how best to do that, and why we need male allies to play their part as well.

## “WHEN THE WORLD IS SILENT, EVEN ONE VOICE BECOMES POWERFUL.” MALALA YOUSAFZAI

Part of the International Women’s Day call to action is ‘We can choose to challenge and call out gender bias and inequity’ and this raises an uncomfortable truth. Many of us are conscious of and often frustrated by both gender bias and inequality every day of our lives, and that goes for men as well as women.

It ranges from seemingly small things such as the exhortation to ‘man up’, inappropriate comment or humour, or women being criticised as emotional or aggressive if they show their passion about something, to the gender pay gap or inequality of opportunity. It’s not the world we want for our children and it would be great if it changed in our lifetime too.

The bias is often unconscious but that doesn’t make it acceptable. So the challenge is to move on from our inner dialogue. We think ‘how dare they say that?’, ‘I can’t believe they did that!’, ‘that is totally unacceptable’, before we walk away and let it go. The challenge is to call it out.

Think of a time when you were part of a group and an offensive comment was made about another group or a female colleague. It may have been intended as a joke and perhaps others laughed, but in your heart, you felt uncomfortable.

Or perhaps you witnessed a pattern emerging of men being selected for projects or promotion despite the fact that there were equally capable and qualified women available.

It’s hard to move from feeling uncomfortable to calling it out. It requires courage as well as some thought about the best way to tackle the issue - but think about it. If we want it to change, we have to make the issue visible and there are good reasons to do so. Firstly it’s important that we are each true to our values because if we are not, it will eat away at us, eventually leading to unhappiness and dissatisfaction. And if we don’t address the issue, it makes us complicit. Ultimately it is harmful to the business we work in. A company culture where such behaviour goes uncorrected will become toxic; unacceptable to the best people who will leave and the company will develop a poor reputation which makes it harder to recruit great talent and achieve its mission.

As Amber Lee Williams of Walmart says,

**“THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT OBJECTING TO SUCH SITUATIONS IS DIFFICULT. THE PERSON WHO DECIDES TO RAISE THE ISSUE COULD DAMAGE THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE PERSON MAKING THE COMMENTS OR ASSIGNING THE WORK, WHICH COULD ADVERSELY IMPACT THE OBJECTOR’S CAREER OPPORTUNITIES. THIS IS ESPECIALLY TRUE WHEN THE COMMENTS OR BEHAVIOUR AREN’T TECHNICALLY ILLEGAL. IT TAKES COURAGE TO BE THE ONE, PERHAPS THE ONLY ONE, WHO CALLS OUT THE BEHAVIOUR AS UNHELPFUL TO A PRODUCTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT.”**

You can be sure that you were not the only person in that situation who felt the way you did, so how can you be brave enough to be the one to challenge it?

- It may be that you can simply put another point of view forward there and then, for example if a role is being discussed, you could suggest a suitable alternative candidate. If a joke is made in poor taste you could initially bat it away with a light touch, pull a face and say something like “Ew, that’s not really appropriate” and that may be enough to make the other person stop and think. But if it is the culture of the team or the organisation, you need to challenge double standards and language that fosters stereotypes or puts people down.
- Stay calm. When you are offended or upset, your initial reaction will be emotional and that’s not the best foundation from which to make a valid point. Take the time you need to process what has happened and how it makes you – and possibly others – feel.
- Plan the message you want to communicate, so that the point will be clearly understood and not undermined by the way it’s put across. Think through what you want the other person to realise. It often helps to write it down in the first instance, so that you can choose your words carefully. The key is to be respectful of the other person, objective but candid. Consider what the reaction is likely to be and that will help you decide whether you can tackle this personally or whether you need the support of others.

- If it feels appropriate, tackle the situation then and there with the person concerned, or see them alone immediately afterwards. Voice your concern but approach it from a learning perspective rather than any intent to shame them. Use the feedback technique of:
  - **SITUATION** - outline the situation you are referring to, so that it is clear and in context.
  - **BEHAVIOUR** – describe precisely the behaviour you want to see change.
  - **IMPACT** – explain the impact the behaviour had on you or how you perceive it to have affected someone else, the team and, if appropriate, the company.

For example, “In the meeting just now (**SITUATION**) you made a joke about women’s heads being so full of babies and shopping that they can’t focus on an important project. (**BEHAVIOUR**) I don’t know whether you realise how that sort of comment makes the women in the room feel? We find it offensive and belittling and we think less of you as a result. It makes us all clam up so there’s no useful discussion afterwards (**IMPACT**).”

Then just stop and listen. You may be surprised to find that the person had no real understanding of the impact of the words. Opening up a dialogue about what happened can sometimes be enough to spark change.

- That technique may be suitable for tackling a peer or a subordinate, or someone you know well but what if the person who behaves or speaks inappropriately is a senior colleague? That is (and feels like) a riskier situation. In that case, seek help and support. Speak confidentially to a trusted colleague who was there and check if their reaction is similar to yours. Knowing that will boost your resolve. Discuss it with your mentor if you have one, or someone else you trust. They will also give you a ‘reality check’ on your reaction and provide moral or practical support. They may help you to identify the appropriate person to speak to about the problem or they may be able to raise the issue themselves.
- The ultimate sanction may be to raise a grievance and your organisation will have a process for that but it is not a step to be taken without a lot of thought about the consequences.

If the moment passes without your having done or said anything, don’t beat yourself up. This is a complex issue. Make time to think about it and what the result will be if the behaviour continues. That will give you the courage to call it out another time.



## EXERCISE

**Think of a situation where someone's words or actions made you feel uncomfortable.**

**What did you do or say at that time?**

**Thinking about it now, what could you have done or said to achieve the goal of stopping that behaviour?**

**Is there a circumstance where this happens quite regularly?**

**What will you do or say now?**

If the nature of what you object to is sexist, don't make the mistake of assuming only women will be offended. Many men will also object to that sort of language or behaviour, keenly aware of its impact on their female colleagues, sisters, daughters and all of the women in their lives. These are the male allies we need to recruit to the cause.

# Recruiting male allies

**“THE IDEA THAT WOMEN’S RIGHTS ARE GAINED AT THE EXPENSE OF MEN’S IS ACTUALLY THE OPPOSITE OF THE TRUTH: THERE’S NOW A STACK OF EVIDENCE THAT MEN BENEFIT FROM LIVING IN MORE GENDER-EQUAL SOCIETIES AND THAT POLICIES PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF EVERYONE, NOT JUST FOR WOMEN.” ANNE KARPf, GUARDIAN**

There cannot be gender equality without involving men – this is a fact borne out by research. An Ipsos Mori survey (1), carried out online among adults under 65 across 27 countries reveals that two-thirds (65%) believe that women will not achieve equality in their country unless men take actions to support women’s rights too.

Promundo US/Kantar conducted a survey (2) which found that most men support women’s leadership in political and professional domains and understand that barriers exist to achieving this. They also express interest in being active allies and partners for gender equality, with 60% of the men surveyed believing there should be more women in leadership roles in their workplace. Furthermore, two-thirds of men agreed that women continue to face ‘major barriers’ in their chosen professions. While 77% of men reported ‘doing everything they can’ to support gender equality in the workplace, only 41% of women agree..

88% of men affirm that they are doing everything they can with regard to the domestic tasks to support their female partner’s career. However, many heterosexual women feel that their male partner does not fully appreciate the physical and mental labour and everything that ‘goes on in the background’ to keep the home running smoothly, especially when there are children involved. And, during the global pandemic, statistics covering redundancies and furlough requests, the use of annual leave or work lost to deal with childcare and home-schooling have emphasised the disproportionate impact on the female workforce.

So clearly, something needs to be done. In the same way as some organisations need educating to realise that gender equality is a business and economic issue, not just a feminist cause, the goodwill of supportive men needs to be harnessed in support of practical change.

But today, too many organizations still miss the mark on gender equality efforts by focusing gender initiatives solely on changing women — from the way they network to the way they lead.’



According to W. Brad Johnson and David Smith, writing for the Harvard Business Review:

**“THE EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT WHEN MEN ARE DELIBERATELY ENGAGED IN GENDER INCLUSION PROGRAMS, 96% OF ORGANIZATIONS SEE PROGRESS — COMPARED TO ONLY 30% OF ORGANIZATIONS WHERE MEN ARE NOT ENGAGED. BUT TODAY, TOO MANY ORGANIZATIONS STILL MISS THE MARK ON GENDER EQUALITY EFFORTS BY FOCUSING GENDER INITIATIVES SOLELY ON CHANGING WOMEN — FROM THE WAY THEY NETWORK TO THE WAY THEY LEAD.”**

So how can we harness the good intentions of the men in our lives and recruit them as allies in the battle for gender equality? Some organisations have invited men to participate in their women's group meetings and conferences and to be full and equal members of their women's networks. They join the leadership of these groups and help to set the agenda, bringing their own perspective to the issue and the actions that can be taken for a more inclusive workplace. As an individual, you can also get involved, by opening the discussion with the men you work with and asking them to think about the issue and support and promote the solutions.

Here are some of the ways men can get involved:

- Become better informed. Sometimes this is as simple as listening to become more aware but it is also about tuning in to the issue. Once aware, they will be alert to inequalities and potential barriers and on the way to developing an inclusive mindset.
- Let other men know when they say something inappropriate. This can be a tough one but this is where mind-set kicks in. Would they want that said about in the context of one of the females in their own life? Male allies openly defend women when discriminatory behaviour or language happens. See above for ways to call it out.
- Point out when credit for an idea or project is due to a female colleague. Women famously pass credit to others or even the entire team. A supportive colleague can make sure credit also goes to the team leader or the person who had the idea in the first place. Similar thinking goes for meetings – create an environment where everyone has a chance to speak up, draw in anyone who holds back and deter those who habitually interrupt women (who are statistically interrupted more often than men).
- Challenge unfair practices in the organisation. Watch out for gender bias in hiring or evaluating performance – two areas where discrimination often creeps in. Advocate for women in leadership roles and for equal pay at all levels but also watch out for unintended bias like women taking on more of the 'office housework'.
- Share opportunities where possible. Involve female colleagues who have potential in stretch assignments, or cross team projects or simply where their expertise will make a difference. Actively look out for such opportunities.

- Mentor a woman further down the hierarchy. Whether or not the organisation has a formal scheme, let it be known that they are willing to share their experience, contacts and insights. If there is a particular person they feel they can help, be proactive and invite them to be mentored.
- Sponsor a woman in the workplace, if in a position to guide and influence their progress. Men have benefited from the sponsorship of other men throughout business history. Increasingly women are benefitting from sponsorship too.

There are many instances of senior men who, inspired by the call to action, have stepped up to set the example in their organisations, as reported by Management Today:

**“THE WOMEN’S BUSINESS COUNCIL TEAMED UP WITH MANAGEMENT TODAY AND SKY TO SPOTLIGHT BRITAIN’S ‘AGENTS OF CHANGE’ – AN ARMY OF MALE LEADERS WHO ARE TACKLING INEQUALITY AT WORK BY CHANGING COMPANY CULTURES, SHATTERING GLASS CEILINGS AND CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO.”**

Danny Pallett, a senior creative at sports marketing agency Dark Horses, features in Agents of Change power list 2019. Fed up with seeing women only celebrated on International Women’s Day, he co-founded a platform called Badass.Gal to showcase a different young female creative every single day – and try and change the dismal facts that only 12% of creative directors are women, and that many young women drop out of creative careers before even signing their first contract.

Rod Flavell, who started FTSE 250 firm FDM Group in his attic in 1991, says you have to “measure, monitor and tackle any gender imbalances at every level of your business”. The company, which has reported a 0% median gender pay gap for the past two years, works with schools and universities to encourage more women into the sector and runs a Getting Back to Business Programme for those who have been on a career break. Flavell is also calling on recruitment agencies to broaden shortlists for non-exec positions. “We need to get more women – from a wider range of backgrounds and sectors – into the boardroom,” he says.

These Agents of Change recognise that promoting diversity isn’t just the right thing to do, it also makes business sense.

Will you accept the challenge to recruit a male ally in your organisation?

**Who can you recruit as a male ally?.....**

**How can you persuade them?.....**

**When will you do it?.....**

Collectively, we can help create an inclusive world.

# Challenge yourself to pay it forward

In this section you will learn: What it means to pay it forward, why it is your responsibility to do so, and what you can commit to doing.

**“GENDER EQUALITY IS MORE THAN A GOAL IN ITSELF. IT IS A PRECONDITION FOR MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF REDUCING POVERTY, PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING GOOD GOVERNANCE.” KOFI ANNAN**

To ‘pay it forward’ in the context of leadership is to respond to the help and support you have had on your career path by doing the same for women and men coming up the ladder behind you.

We’ve all heard the term but may not have thought much about it, let alone considered it to be part of the job, which it most definitely is, if you’re a leader.

Taking an interest in others and wanting to do something to help, even when there is no obvious personal reward, is actually part of human nature. The roots of this behaviour may be based in our survival instincts: people who support and help one another are more likely to develop stronger social bonds and thrive as a community or a team.

Paying it forward helps us to set ego aside – in doing so we focus on the community in which we live or work and have a sense of sharing the moment. This kind of activity leads to a deep sense of positivity and if it’s done on a regular basis, to a sense of contentment. Who doesn’t want that?

Companies which encourage the principle of paying it forward also benefit in many ways. People develop better and faster, quality connections are forged between colleagues, mutual respect grows. As does a sense of community and co-operation. That in turn, leads to a greater health and wellbeing and individual resilience. Everyone wins.

## So what will you commit to do?

- Mentor someone – perhaps your company has a formal scheme, in which case, find out how it works, put yourself forward for any training that's available, and get to work. There's information on how to maximise the mentoring opportunity, either as a mentor or a mentee, on the everywomanNetwork.
- If there is no formal scheme, share your skills and expertise informally. In any case, if you see a less experienced colleague overwhelmed or struggling, offer your help. Make a point of getting to know the more junior people on the team, their hopes, ambitions and even concerns, and see what you can do to support them.
- Remember, however junior or senior you are in the organisation, you are a role model, so it's important that you talk the talk and walk the walk.
- Choose to seek out and celebrate women's achievements. We all crave praise and thanks when they are deserved. It doesn't have to come from the boss. Acknowledgment from anyone on the team means a lot – and you can point it out to the boss too. If you are the boss, send a thank you note or email – don't just say it.
- Be kind. Check in on colleagues. Have a coffee with someone who is new, make time to listen to someone who is anxious.
- Volunteer. If your work environment doesn't offer the opportunities you are looking for to pay it forward (or even if it does) consider what you might be able to do to support women in your local community. If you have languages, you may be able to help translate; you may be able to give a frazzled mother time for herself by babysitting; you may be able to share your tech skills. You never know what is needed until you start to look around you.

What will you challenge yourself to do?

**I will...**

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# And finally...

Can you be a challenge influencer? If you're excited about some of the ideas in this workbook and are going to put them into practice yourself, what else can you do to promote the gender equality agenda?

Can you join your company's women's network or take a male colleague along to recruit him as an ally? Can you blog about it on your company internal comms network, offer to speak at events, use your social media channels to drive employee awareness and engagement?

The opportunities are endless once you accept the challenge!

## Personal action plan

Consider your resolutions here:

1. I will speak out next time I encounter gender bias.
2. I will identify and recruit male allies.
3. Remembering that I am a role model, I will identify ways to pay it forward such as:

.....

4. Any others?

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# Choose to challenge

## Further reading

Harvard Business Review: How to React to Biased Comments at Work by Judith Honesty, David Maxfield and Joseph Grenny

Good Guys: How Men Can Be Better Allies for Women in the Workplace  
by W. Brad Johnson and David G. Smith

## everywomanNetwork Resources

Challenge yourself

How to pay it forward

Moving beyond unconscious bias: challenging perceptions, changing our own outlook

The healthy masculine: Growing a new generation of male allies

Becoming a mentor

## References

(1) Ipsos Mori study: <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/international-womens-day-2019>

(2) Promundo Kantar study: <https://promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Male-Allyship-Study-Web.pdf>

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Any topics you'd like to see on the everywomanNetwork?

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