

FOREWORD — KUPU WHAKATAKI

This year New Zealand has celebrated a gender equality milestone: it is 125 years since New Zealand women won the right to vote.

From this vantage point it is clear that some significant gains have been made towards gender equality. We have our third woman prime minister; the number of women practising law outnumbers men; and we have a majority of women sitting on the Supreme Court. We are proud of these achievements.

Despite these outward signs of progress, it has also been a year in which misogyny in the legal profession has been in the spotlight; a year in which sexual misconduct, bullying and harassment has been exposed as commonplace.

Culture is the hardest thing to change. The feminist revolution has achieved much, but “revolution is not a one-time event”.¹

Sexism is like an iceberg. Overt sexual or sexist misconduct is the visible, exposed tip: easy to recognise but harder to challenge — maybe impossible if you are the one who suffers it. Lurking beneath are problems that are harder to identify: unconscious bias, double-standards, cultural ideas about what it means to be feminine or masculine; you can no doubt think of more.

The system we have inherited gives the greatest rewards to the lawyers who sacrifice their home and family life to long hours at the office; who may even behave badly towards colleagues but so long as they deliver the results, this is overlooked.

Wouldn't it be transformational to rebuild the system so that it respects all individuals equally and values collective effort and collaboration, while allowing space for lawyers to have equally rewarding professional and home lives?

To achieve this we need to examine how we educate, train and promote lawyers, and how we measure success in our profession.

We need to revisit how we define “fit and proper person”, and the regulatory systems that promote and protect the high standards of professionalism we expect.

1 Audre Lorde *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Crossing Press, New York, 1984).

Meaningful change will require buy-in from all parts of the profession: educators, regulators, judges, partners in firms, chief executives in agencies, practising lawyers.

Leadership must come from the top but leaders also need to be open to advice from a diverse range of viewpoints, not least from the new generation of lawyers.

The insights and the challenges offered in this second volume of *Te Aho Kawe Kaupapa Ture a ngā Wāhine* will help guide us towards change. Whether through embracing concepts of *tuakana/teina* (Bernadette Arapere and Kate Tarawhiti, at 22), promoting gender-neutral language to advance gender equality (Ruby King and Jasper Fawcett, at 107) or understanding the history of women lawyers in order to transform women's experiences in the future (Dr Anna Hood, at 249).

I look forward to the challenges ahead, to standing strong alongside the women and men of the profession who are committed to this mahi, and making our profession a safer place where everyone can thrive and reach their full potential.

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29 October 2018