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In the lead-up to International Women's Day, I've been thinking about how things have changed since I started my working life. This year's theme is "Choose to Challenge," encouraging individuals to challenge gender bias and inequality in all aspects of their lives. That includes women's contributions to our families, communities, and societies.

When I was a young girl, people asked me if I wanted to be a teacher like my mother. No one ever asked me if I wanted to be an electrical engineer like my father. What I wanted was to be a fighter pilot like my father. Women weren't allowed in the air force then, so that wasn't an option for me, much to my disappointment.

In high school, girls learned cooking and sewing; boys took woodworking and metalwork. I knew how to cook and sew, so I wanted to try woodworking and metalwork. I negotiated with the teacher. I could if I found a boy who would swap with me. No problem. What's not to like about a class full of girls for a teenage boy?

During the first few years of my first career, I got turned down for promotion several times for not having the "right" experience, and then I had to train the man who did get the job. I then trained as a lawyer, only to have a managing partner tell me that women couldn't be litigators and have a family. Never mind that I didn't want to do litigation and already had my family! I politely wrote back and told the firm I wasn't interested in working for a law firm that felt that way. In those days, women weren't even allowed to wear trousers in the courtroom. How times have changed in some respects.

I was a working mother from the earliest days of my working life, juggling children and law school, working as a lawyer and then in banking. Multi-tasking wasn't an option – it was the only way to keep everything on track and on time. Thankfully my husband was pretty hands-on

with the children, especially once they got interested in sports.

I watched my male colleagues with frustration as their wives managed their family life and they got on with work. Then I realized that my children enriched my working life, and they could see first-hand that women could do any job they wanted. Although, when people asked my children if they wanted to be a lawyer like their mother, they both said, "no, that's way too much work!"

Having felt the inequality first-hand, I resolved to be very aware of my female colleagues and friends to see how I could proactively support them. I suggested they apply for jobs I thought they would be suitable for (even when they said, "I'm not sure I have the right skills"). I helped them craft their CVs and do interview practice. I also hired women for my teams, even if they would need extra training to do the job, because I knew it would be great for their longer-term careers. I especially looked for mothers as I knew exactly what they had to do to get to work in the morning and juggle work and home life. What better experience than that for being able to manage complicated jobs at work?

For most of the past 15 years, I've run my own businesses. That meant I could make decisions that worked for me and allowed me to work against discrimination and open new opportunities for women. There is nothing more soul destroying than not getting recognition or a promotion for your work and contribution, and I've tried hard to counter that with whatever support I could.

I have a challenge for you as we celebrate International Women's Day. Think about how you can make a difference in recognizing women's contributions or encourage others to do so. Start with one person at a time. You may never know how much that means to that person.



