

Male Champions of Change
Launch of *Harnessing our Innovation Potential* Report
Tuesday 27 August 2019, Sydney
Dr Alan Finkel
Australia's Chief Scientist
Sydney
28 August 2019

In preparation for this event, and in listening to the speakers today, I've been reflecting on what it means to be a Male Champion of Change.

Let's start with the word "champion".

Ask most young people and they will tell you its meaning is that of a winner, someone on top of the pile.

But the word itself has a French derivation, from about the 13th Century, and it originally meant one who fights on behalf of others, undertaking to defend a cause.

And this is the definition that has meaning to me in the context of being a Male Champion of Change.

We need champions to defend the cause of gender equality.

Now, one can be very pragmatic, and point to the evidence that shows that gender equality and broader diversity in the workforce improve innovation outcomes, ultimately leading to increased prosperity.

But to me, the most important reason of all to be a champion for change is that I want to live in a society in which fairness is an overarching principle. Valuing diversity, and providing equal opportunities and rewards, is the foundation of fairness in society.

Continuing on, I find myself considering the next key word in the title Male Champions of Change. What is *change*?

Specifically, what do we know about social change?

Well, one thing we know for sure is that social change is not achieved without effort. Think of the work of Charles Dickens and his stories of poverty in Victorian England. What *he* did, and this is what the *Harnessing our Innovation Potential* report does, is shine a light on the areas that need our effort.

In my capacity as Australia's Chief Scientist, I can shine a light on the need to ensure that everyone who wants to work in science, irrespective of gender or background, is supported to do so. It's perplexing to me that people are not paid equally for the work they do; it's concerning to me that this report has data that says the best people are not always being promoted.

Now, I acknowledge that there has been significant progress over the decades, but we are not yet where we need to be. I know this not only from the report we've been discussing today, but also from the work that has been done in my office to produce the second edition of the STEM Workforce report.

This report – not yet released– highlights some areas where we've made improvements, such as the female university-STEM-qualified labour force growing faster than the male.

However, the report also shows areas where more change is needed. One particular concern relates to women who are also part of a minority – for example women with caring responsibilities or women born overseas. The unemployment rate for university-STEM-qualified women born in Australia is about 3.3%. For women born overseas with similar qualifications but only recently arrived in Australia, it is a worrisome 14%.

What does this tell me? When we consider how we can achieve our goals, we need to make sure they are for all women – for example: women with primary caring responsibility, for recent immigrants, and for Indigenous women.

The best way to achieve a goal is to have high aspirations and work towards them. Male Champions of Change for STEM encourages that.

High aspirations are possible when others believe in you, and then that belief is assimilated and becomes part of your *own* world view.

I saw the value of high aspirations recently when I participated in the Graeme Clark Oration Women in STEM luncheon.

There were three other speeches from three eminent women scientists who had started successful businesses. They were Dr Michelle Perugini, Professor Mimi Tang, and Dr Tanya Brown. They talked about their own businesses: getting started, raising money, scaling up. It was clear that they made a *perfect pitch* when they presented their ideas and their personal capabilities to their investors.

The point of commonality was their perception of themselves. They all had high aspirations. They believed they could do it, so they did it.

For women to believe it, women need to see it, and this was a key insight from the report we're launching today.

We're starting to see it in sport – soccer, cricket, football, tennis. We are also seeing the growth of aspirations and achievement of women in STEM. But there is a considerable way to go and we need to accelerate this change.

We've heard a lot about the *Harnessing our Innovation Potential* report already but let me close with some additional observations.

Whether you should ignore or respond to a survey should not be determined by whether you agree or disagree with the majority opinion. It should depend on the robustness of the methodology. This report has the decency to publish its own methodology and it is clear that it is robust.

Key to its strength is that it has a large number of respondents, with a good spread across organisational sectors and a high level of male respondents.

This report plays a critical role in the change environment: it provides data – an evidence base.

Why do we need data? Data transforms unconscious bias into the stark reality of conscious bias, which then means we can be *consciously un-biased*.

There is a saying that “the standard you walk by is the standard you accept.”

The standard we accept will be unshakeable if it is informed by data.

We can take action to interrupt the intergenerational cycle, across all sectors of industry.

We can support the work of Lisa Harvey-Smith in her important task as Australia’s Women in STEM Ambassador.

And we must continue to listen to the experiences of women, and people from diverse backgrounds, and hear and act on what they tell us, so that we can ensure through *our* future actions that they remain involved and engaged in science.

I encourage my co-champions to continue to query those man-panel invites, and respond by suggesting diverse speakers for events, to continue to make changes within your own workplaces, and be a champion in that historical sense of the word: fight the good fight on behalf of others, to achieve change.

And from the inside, as a Male Champion of Change in STEM, I would like to acknowledge the change efforts that my colleagues are leading in their companies. Many are here today.

At the Male Champion of Change Board meetings and in between I get to see the incredible leadership of Ann Sherry and the excellence of the work performed by Somali Cerise. And in head office, the CEO Annika Freyer.

Finally, to Bob Easton, Katie Brown, Luke Higgins, Pamela Naidoo-Ameglio and Tony Worby, the insights provided by you today will give the proverbial can another kick along the road to a better future.

May the Force be with you,

Thank you all.