

# Why your chromosomes mean you shouldn't get the job

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**Don't get me wrong - I wholeheartedly consider myself a feminist. But I also believe that gender targets and quotas in the workplace can do more to undermine our advancement than facilitate it.**

As us chicks fight more and more for gender equality, Government and big business are responding by setting quotas for women in specific industries and roles. But the idea that, as a female, I am offered a job over my male counterpart who may be better suited to the role doesn't sit well with me.

I've argued before about the corporate model in practice and how it rewards not only a '24/7' mentality but also supposes a linear path with no room for career breaks. Undoubtedly our choice to raise a family is having a significant influence on female participation rates, however I don't believe that setting quotas to determine the ratio of men to women in specific roles is the answer. If anything, it will only set us up for failure.

Women have an extraordinary amount of talent to bring to the table, but that talent will almost certainly be undermined if our colleagues believe

we are in senior positions purely to make up the numbers.

Over the last few years, large government and commercial organisations have placed a significant emphasis on the recruitment of women and their promotion into senior positions. Westpac and NSW Fire & Rescue are two such organisations.

Westpac responded to stock exchange guidelines around gender diversity targets by promising to increase the proportion of women in its upper echelons by 40% between 2010 and 2014. The Commonwealth Bank adopted a similar gender target, which begs the question – are we rewarding and promoting staff based on their performance, or their chromosomal makeup? And even if it is performance-based, is that going to be the general perception? Or will these women be subject to whisperings behind the water-cooler about the 'real' reasons behind their promotion?

NSW Fire & Rescue have placed a similar focus on encouraging females into the profession, with a strong recruitment campaign over the last 18 months. However this campaign has been marred with controversy – if there are physical



requirements in place that are directly linked to job performance, and the majority of women aren't physically able to meet those requirements, then should they still be pushed through the process?

I'd suggest not.

It has been argued that managers should be judged on targets and quotas for women in the way they would be assessed on sales targets or other performance indicators, with the idea of financial incentives being suggested. How on earth is this furthering the perception of women as capable, knowledgeable experts in their field?

I'll be the first to argue for equality – the current gender pay gap is currently at 17.1% (equating, on average, to a difference of \$262 per week), which is abhorrent. But equal pay for equal work is different to placing women in a position where we 'make up the numbers' rather than hiring and promotion based on our commitment, cultural fit, education, experience and expertise.

I'd like to think that change can start with awareness at an organisational level - as opposed to quotas, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can

indicate where the gaps are in terms of:

- attrition rates
- pay equity, and
- the male/female proportion of new recruits, as well as staff at each level of management and in the various business lines of an organisation, and can serve as a tool for defining action.

These indicators can help translate what are good intentions into positive actions without undermining the position of women. The creation of flexible work opportunities, job sharing and transparent pay equity will hopefully lead to outcomes that don't unintentionally sabotage our progress.

Yes, present female workforce statistics reflect a market failure. And yes, the lack of women in senior positions indicates a hugely inefficient use of our female talent. But the answer to real change lies at a structural and cultural level. We need organisations to recognise and redefine their entrepreneurial framework – not recruit us under an obligation to make their numbers add up.