

The importance of showing up

 By [Aileen Sauerman](#)

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As is the norm during Women's Month, we've seen a great deal of focus placed on the role of women in society, gender representation in the workplace and, specifically in our world, women in advertising.



Image credit: ErikaWittlieb from Pxabay.

It bears noting that, whilst first and foremost we might be female, gender is just one small aspect of the many roles we as women carry with us and represent in the workplace.



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Everywoman

Any woman also represents a particular age group, a race group, a sexual orientation or a certain level in the workplace. And these are roles that we need to be comfortable owning and exemplifying without fear of judgment.

A woman might also be a wife and mother, or a single parent, or a senior executive who is not in a relationship nor has children – all these roles carry with them responsibility and a resultant impact on our work experience and the perception of these roles at large.

No one ever refers to a male in the workplace as a “working dad” – there is little to zero emphasis placed on whether or not he’s a father and it certainly doesn’t affect the way he is perceived.

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No need to preface everything you do with "I'm sorry." You are allowed to exist in this world with hopes, dreams, successes and failures. Own your place and take up space in this world. You are worthy. #heronetribe #womensupportingwomen

💎💎💎💎 @crazyheadcomics

A post shared by [Angela Hosking](#) (@heronetribe) on Aug 19, 2019 at 5:01am PDT

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The same cannot always be said for women, despite still being able to do the same job to the same standard. Working mothers, for example, juggle the demands of work and children and will still get the job done – albeit at midnight with a teething toddler by their side.

A 2018 workplace study conducted by McKinsey showed that 58% of working mothers find being a working parent makes it harder to get ahead in their career, whilst only 19% of fathers feel the same.

When we consider women at the executive level, we don't need research to show us that female representation decreases the higher up the work ranks you go. But research does show this scarcity is not about women leaving companies or the workforce –men and women leave at equal rates.

And even when women do work their way up the ranks, studies show that women in the workforce are nearly twice as likely as men to be mistaken for a junior employee.

They are also more likely to have to provide substantially more evidence of competence than their male counterparts and have their judgment and area of expertise questioned.

Pro-female does not equal anti-male

By no means do I subscribe to a culture of bashing men – pro-female does not equal anti-male. Feminism is not about rising above men, it's about creating an environment of non-discrimination based on gender.

I'm a firm believer more men understand subtle discrimination against women than don't, and very often women are just as guilty of discriminating against each other as men.



Gender equality makes good business sense

20 Aug 2019



I do, however, think we need to acknowledge that when women sit around the boardroom table, we represent so much more than just our gender. We must show up and represent all the additional roles and labels that society has promulgated on women.

But just how do we show up? When men go off for a round of golf with clients, is anyone – male or female – even aware of subtle female exclusion? As a golfer myself, I have never considered raising my hand to join a four-ball. Reflecting on it now, I've been guilty of considering how uncomfortable I would feel and how uncomfortable it would feel for the men.



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Would my swing be judged and commented on? Will they have to change what they talk about and how they behave because of me? But by not joining in, am I not condoning the discrimination myself? How do we feel comfortable enough in our various roles as women to not concern ourselves with other's opinions and perceived "discomfort"?

The best possible way I can think for women to fully represent those powerful roles that we all encompass is to keep representing –

“ don't step out of the game, don't give up and don't stop talking about the issues ”

Find a space and a work environment in which you feel accepted, where you can do great work without worrying about judgment for how you got there and how you got it done.

And that brings me to the most important point – we show up in all our roles in the best possible way when we do great work. Always do an amazing job, regardless of what else is going on and how you have to get the job done.

If you're super-hot at your job, no one is questioning anything about you – you, like all the men around you, are there for the work. The women in our industry who do incredible work speak for their gender, their age group, their race and every other role they represent.

Surely there is no more remarkable and indisputable way to give credence to ourselves and our gender.

ABOUT AILEEN SAUERMAN

Aileen began her career in Economic Journalism in the early 2000s, before joining the Advertising Industry 12 years ago. She has since worked across some of South Africa's most exciting agencies and brands, both in Johannesburg and Cape Town. Aileen joined the DUKE team in July 2018.

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