

Integration, Leadership & Commitment

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Some years ago I attended a Women in Management Dinner where a friend of mine received an achievement award in the field of management. The dinner speaker at those awards, was then Commander, now Captain Caroline Brand of the Royal Australian Navy. On the evening of that dinner, Caroline enthralled us with the exploits of Russian Women Bomber Pilots during the second world war and it is my intention, for a little while, to share some of that history with you.

The stories of these young women are inspirational, as much for their commitment to die for what they believed in as for their uncompromising attitude to the worth of their womanhood. The stories of these young women are documented in the book "A Dance With Death" by Anne Noggle.

Anne writes, "Soviet Airwomen are credited with being the first of their sex to serve in combat. When Russia was fighting for survival, a famous avaiatrix, Marina Raskova, proposed to the government that female air regiments be formed with volunteer women pilots and other women volunteers to act as mechanics, staff personnel, gunners and navigators. Her proposal was approved and three womens units were formed, one of these being the 46th Guards Bomber Regiment which became the most highly decorated of the three womens regiments and produced twenty three Heroes of the Soviet Union, that countrys Highest Honour.

This Regiment was awarded High Honours for skill and bravery, being deployed to assault bridges, enemy strongholds, fuel and ammunition dumps, and enemy troop concentrations. The planes they flew carried a crew of two and approximately 1000 kilograms of bombs. Made predominantly of wood and fabric, the aircraft were fire hazards and many accounts given by crews of the night bomber squadrons related to their fear of catching fire and burning to death. Parachutes were expensive and not available until 1944.

Between May 1942 and May 1945, the 46th Guards Bomber Regiment flew an estimated twenty four thousand combat sorties, through every kind of weather and conditions. The women - pilots and ground crews alike - lived on the verge of physical collapse.

Senior Lieutenant Nina Raspopova of the 46th Guards Regiment relates a combat experience; "The anti-aircraft guns fired at us fiercely from all directions, and suddenly I felt our aircraft hit. My foot slipped down into an empty space below me; the bottom of the cockpit had been shot away. I felt something hot streaming down my left arm and leg - I was wounded. Blinded by the searchlights, I could discern nothing in the cockpit. I could feel moisture spraying inside the cockpit; the fuel tank had been hit. I was completely disoriented; the sky and earth were indistinguishable to my vision. But far in the distance I could see the sparkle of our regimental runway floodlight, and it helped my orientation. An air wave lifted us and I managed to glide back over the river to the neutral zone, where I landed the aircraft in darkness."

Deputy Commander Irina Rakabolskaya tells how the first slogan of the regiment was, "You are a woman and you should be proud of that." She goes on to relate how her good friend Yevgeniya Rudneva, who was awarded the Gold Star (Hero of the Soviet Union) posthumously, was an astronomer and a poet and was also fond of fairy tales. "When we were not on missions, she would gather us all together at the airfield and recite fairy tales by Zhukovsky. When she was burning, in the air over Kerch, I was standing at the aerodrome watching it. I was losing my friend, she was burning away over my head, and I could do nothing to save her."

In addition to the physical strain of combat, these women were coping with little food or sleep and lack of warmth. Most of them were arrested and sent to the guardhouse at some time for exchanging items with the local peasants for food, or chopping up any unused items to make fires for warmth.

Lieutenant Polina Gelman was a navigator with the 46th Guards Bomber Regiment. She relates, " I could go on talking about it because we had been fighting for one thousand nights - one thousand nights in combat. Every day the girls became more courageous. To fly a combat mission is not a trip under the moon..... Every attack, every bombing is a dance with death. In spite of this, every girl knew the danger and none ever refused to fly her mission or used a pretext to avoid participating in a bombing. Our feelings were that we were doing a simple job, just a job to save our country, to liberate it from the enemy."

At the height of the bombing of Berlin the allied air casualties became so great that allied bombers stopped their bombing raids. All except one squadron of Russian Bombers who continued despite the danger. They all perished. They were all women.

Lieutenant Galina Brok Beltsova was a navigator with the 125th Regiment. She relates how most of the women pilots were aged about twenty. If they survived to twenty-three, they were considered 'veterans' and were then termed the 'old ladies'.

After the war, Galina completed a Doctorate in History and became Head of the History Department at the Moscow Engineering Institute before retiring. She maintains that nothing can be valued as highly as person to person relationships and understanding.

FILM EXCERPT HERE.....

The history of women has so often been unrecorded, because it's his-story, not her-story. So often we believe that as women we can't go there or do that because there is no evidence that women have before.

It's only ninety seven years since Australian white women got the vote (the 1960's for our Aboriginal sisters) and we forget that many women gave their lives in protest for that right.

It is less than a hundred years since Women were equal guardians over their children. Women who 'bolted' lost custody of their children automatically - hence divorce was not a popular option for women. The male lobby groups protesting the 'tradition' of women automatically getting custody of their children - should look a little further at what is a relatively new phenomenon.

As we seek integration and representation in all avenues of life, it comes at a cost. The things that we take for granted cost other women a great deal, just as things women of future generations will take for granted, will have been hard won through pain and suffering in our own generation.

Because a policy is in place, it doesn't mean that the policy works. Barriers can be unseen and unexpected until we come up against them.

I have been an operational Police Officer in New South Wales for fifteen years. I have been a wife and am a mother now raising a family on my own. Over the years I've come up against more than my share of difficulties as I have sought to serve my community and raise my family.

In the workplace the discrimination has ranged from basic sexist attitudes from colleagues and members of the public to sexual harassment, indecent assault and being placed in physical danger in

the workplace. I tolerated certain things in the early part of my career because the processes that were in place were inadequate and unworkable. Later, I didn't tolerate such garbage and sought to change workplace culture and attitudes by making formal complaints when necessary and 'sorting out' colleagues with a friendly chat when it was needed. The concept of being in physical danger seems a little incongruous when you consider our line of work, but the danger escalates when colleagues won't back you up.

I have found that the further you get from the Sydney CBD, or within isolated work cells, such as squads, the more entrenched the sexist attitudes and fear of change are amongst male colleagues.

In 1996 I had been working in the Hunter Valley of NSW for about ten years, when my personal circumstances changed. That change gave me the opportunity to do something I had always wanted to do - become a single unit sector commander in the bush or what used to be politically incorrectly termed as running a 'one manner'. It took a while to find someone to give me the opportunity to try it but finally a location was found.

Other NSW Women Police had been at 'one manners' for a few years, but they were either married to policemen or had male partners. I was the first 'single woman' to be appointed.

At my farewell party the Local Member of Parliament, whose daughter was also a police officer, told me to be sure and support the local footy club. He didn't say why and he knew I loathed football, but he was a very wise fellow, as I was to find out.

I took a fortnights leave when I first arrived, to settle my children in to school and set the residence right. I went out each afternoon on one of the six school buses to see the country and meet all the mums and toddlers at the outlying farms. Often crime in the bush is hidden by rural isolation, and it was a good way of networking with women who were isolated. I also used the trips to compile safety reports on the condition of the roads, for the local councils (three of them) but even though they were submitted, three years later they still hadn't been acted on. Safe National Party Seats.....

The Lions Club held the annual goat races soon after I arrived and I was invited to compete in the celebrity race - being beaten by the local tow truck driver but I ousted the vicar for second place. The population was about four hundred but over half the population had nick names, so I actually had to learn about six hundred names and I knew I was a part of the community when I got my own nickname.....after a famous piglet.

I also learned that country men do an awful lot of what I call 'ing' things.....Shear-ing, crutch-ing, drink-ing, spray-ing, golf-ing, fish-ing, fence-ing, sow-ing, bale-ing, pig-chase-ing, shoot-ing etc... When I organised a woolshed dance, I realised dance-ing, was not one of the favoured 'ings'.....

I have a degree in Social Science and some skills in community development. I quickly realised that there were few social outings for the mothers in the area unless it was party plan

outings. Attending party plan gatherings is a really good way of networking with women, but you can only cram so much Tupperware into the pantry. The fellows had Lions Club, and the Fishing Club etc.. and there was CWA and the school mothers club during the day, but nothing of an evening for the ladies. So, I started the 'Revolting Mothers Club' (Mothers in Revolt) which was a mothers dinner group. We had our first meeting at the pub and took over the front bar for our pre

dinner drinks. Quelle horreur!

The reality was, that most of the mums had to do the feed and bath routine before they came, but it was a rare night out and an affordable evening plus a way for me to get to know the local women. We finished the evenings off with a comedy video in the school library and by indulging in chocolate and goodies which didn't have to be shared with our children.....

There was a niche market for fundraising by providing family entertainment where babysitting wasn't required, and over the next few years I had great fun in organising social functions to raise money for different community organisations.

The community accepted me very well. Early on I had one physical confrontation with a local drunk. I was trying to wrestle him into the back of the Police truck and he was doing the cat thing....you know where they've got all fours pinioned at the back of the truck and you can't shove them in and you can't reef them off? I'd already strained my wrist and then one of the local footballers came jogging up and gave him an almighty shove - then jogged off. That's what you get for buying lots of raffle tickets off the football club. I have since worked out a sneaky technique using a baton as leverage to prise unwilling prisoners through my truck door. That particular fellow was subjected to such censure that he left town for four months.

On another occasion I was called out at 3am to a sexual assault where the fellow was still there and armed with a knife. I had three local fellows offer to back me up. I didn't need to take up the offer, but it was nice that it was there when colleagues weren't.

As I said, the community accepted me very well - country men seem to understand the balance of life. The male complimenting the female and the need for input from both. Country women are out there doing the fencing and stock work, balancing the books, doing the marketing and making time for home skills and children.

My male colleagues however - were another matter.

I had earned the respect and co-operation of male colleagues at my previous appointment and the culture there was very supportive.

Nothing prepared me for the blatant hostility that I was to be subjected to for the next three years from colleagues in the district, even though I had been warned by a senior officer prior to transfer that the staff where I was going were hostile about my appointment. The additional factor, besides being female, was that by succeeding in this field I would be 'opening the floodgates' for other women to enter one of the last male bastions and a single woman, is a further affront to masculinity because she isn't anyones property and not under male control.

Martin and Jurik, 1996, state 'Men attempt to separate from and isolate women officers through a variety of behaviours that ridicule, ignore or show outright hostility.....A unifying feature of mens' resistance is the sexualisation of women in the workplace!'.....it is, 'an organisation that strongly emphasises heterosexual masculine dominance over heterosexual women.'

Further, Smith and Gray, cited in Cavender and Jurik 1998, state, 'Women threaten the solidarity of all male work groups. As outsiders, women undermine the historical links between good police work and masculine prowess.' Martin 1980, cited in Cavender and Jurik, explains that, 'to the

extent that police work and masculine identity are intertwined, womens success in policing is a challenge to mens sense of self.'

The 1994 Report into Sexual Harassment in the Australian Defence Force p62, also explains, ' The resistance and resentment expressed by men is more often about the presumption that their work is 'devalued' by the presence of women and therefore this impinges on their sense of self worth.'

All of these issues impacted on my inability to integrate into 'their' culture. The Police men at other small stations around me were supportive, because we relied on each other for backup and the female administrative staff at my head station were always cheerful and welcoming , but the majority of staff who were also male, seemed committed to making my life hell on earth.

The Police Minister's office kept in regular touch with me, as did the Region Commander, because they understood these issues, but I never divulged all of what was happening to me because there simply wasn't the support at middle management level to have made any difference to my circumstances and the other option left for management would have been to remove me for Occupational Health and Safety reasons because of the threat to my safety by the attitude of colleagues. I was determined that the experiment wouldn't fail for any reason other than lack of competence on my behalf. My competence was one of the first things to come under attack and for three years I was constantly responding to files relating to complaints which questioned my work, my conduct and anything I did which is what is known as 'boundary maintenance', or the act of subjecting female officers to very close scrutiny.

From my observations one of the main reasons why sexual harassment and discrimination still go vastly unchallenged in our policing organisations is because there simply isn't a commitment at middle management level to support EEO legislation and policies. Minorities know this. They are not fools.

So many of our managers have a foot in both camps - their history is in the past and they secretly share the view of the majority while making an outwards show and appropriate noises of supporting departmental policy.

White Anglo Saxon males have been in a position of supremacy in Australian society for a very long time; they will not give up that position easily. It has to do with distribution of scarce resources - employment and promotions and if the rules are changed so that previous advantage is threatened, men will work against the threat without even really comprehending what they are doing.

From the time I arrived at my new location, I was undermined and ridiculed by colleagues. Everything I did was subject to criticism and everything became an issue.

What can you do when people aren't 'nice' to you? How can you complain about an 'atmosphere'?

You can hardly ring your Commander and tell him that. You're not likely to tell him that supervisors glare at you, won't help you, pretend ignorance if you seek information or ridicule you for asking, lose your briefs of evidence, criticise every document or computerised entry you submit, deliberately misinterpret anything you say, criticise your physical features, the way you wash the Police truck, the way you answer the phone, how you interview people, how you write traffic tickets, how you give evidence in Court, humiliate you in front of colleagues, make nasty anonymous comments over the Police Radio, incite people in the Community to make complaints about you, subject you to slander.....

They tell you they don't like your 'attitude' but can't tell you exactly what the problem is; just 'lose' it. And if you have the temerity to stand up to them or heaven forbid, 'spit the dummy' they make formal complaints about insubordination, unprofessional conduct and harassment!

And when the psychological warfare isn't enough, they leave you to deal with armed offenders alone or ignore your requests for urgent assistance when you're facing a drunken mob, outnumbered in the bush.

It can be dangerous to your physical and psychological health to be a cop on the frontline - and the threat can come from many directions!

The important thing to remember is, as an operational cop, you go to work every day to make a difference. Whether it's in the general population or within your own organisation is irrelevant. If it presents, you deal with it.

Women are having to hold their organisations accountable where they can and MAKE these policies into reality. It is only by speaking about our failures as an organisation that we can refine and improve the situation of the people who will be our future. As Audre Lorde says, quoted from Hilary Astors 1988 paper "The Weight of Silence"we have been socialised to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that silence will choke us.'

Violence against women is characterised by silence. Whether it's the silence of the sanctity of the family home or the conformity of women subject to patriarchal power structures such as Policing Organisations, it is still silence. Most women have personal experience of violence and abuse because of their gender - be they police, doctors, social workers or counsellors . Let alone the women who present as 'victims' for assistance and support. Yet we behave as if it were not the case.

I was victimised by a group of male colleagues because I was a solo, independent female in Policing. An unfortunate biproduct of speaking out about being victimised is the effect of reducing oneself to the stereotype - without taking into account the strength and resilience of women subjected to these situations, yet to ignore victimisation leaves the harm unaddressed and the perpetrators unchallenged. Being victimised doesn't have to make you a 'victim' - suffering can produce a strength of will , a depth of knowledge and comprehension of life which is unparalleled.

I did what I could to challenge the abuses I was subject to , limited by the circumstances in which I found myself.

During all of this period of harrassment by colleagues I was also fighting a personal battle in my private life of harrassment by a vengeful ex husband and his new spouse who were intent on obtaining custody of my children through any means available.

For three years I went back and forth to the Family Court, fought trumped up AVO's which were designed for gains in access and Internal Affairs Complaints aimed at destroying my career.

I don't think you could possibly imagine what it must have been like. I had lobbied for the introduction of AVO's. For five years previously I had been an advocate for women in the area of domestic violence, doing voluntary work at the womens refuge, as the Police Domestic Violence Liaison Officer and Secretary of the

Domestic Violence Committee. Now I was standing as a defendant in the courtroom where I had advocated for years for women, facing looks of sheer disbelief from solicitors and court support workers I had worked with for years. The financial and emotional cost of defending an AVO was crippling at that point, and on the advice of my Barrister and Solicitor I agreed to demands for more child access in exchange for them dropping the AVO, which they did. Every nerve screamed at the injustice and the compromising of my integrity by doing that, but I was in survival mode.

While ever I was an operational Police officer, I was extremely vulnerable to attack from many directions. The final act of treachery from colleagues (one of which was the Police Association Representative) was to give my ex husband confidential Police information which related to internal Police 'payback' complaints made by middle management against me . My ex husband attempted to use these in the Family Court for a custody application.

His application failed, but still I bear the expense of three years of private legal representation by solicitors and barristers and the associated emotional anguish.

At the same time that I was served with papers for custody of the children, I received a file from the NSW Police Service questioning my integrity and suitability for promotion into a position I had been nominated for. For the Police Service to question my integrity, above all else, was the hardest ask.

Through it all I kept faith that if I continued to hold firm to conduct which was morally right and stood my ground by holding both the Police Service and the Family Court accountable for justice, justice would prevail. It did - but it came at enormous personal and financial cost.

Maintaining a sense of humour and perspective is tantamount to surviving. What I find most amusing about the last three years is the confusion I cause my male colleagues, who like to portray me as a rabid left wing feminist. (Not that there's anything wrong with that.)

Just after I arrived at my bush station, the local agricultural show was being held, so having an appreciation of womens arts I entered the baking, tapestry, embroidery, flower arranging and photography sections and got awards in each. My male colleagues were aghast.

To make it even worse, the local paper did an article on me and I related how the NSW Police Service was now a more family friendly organisation, which acknowledged the roles of women as mothers and homemakers and encouraged women to remain in their professions. And how my own supervisor rostered my work so that I could meet the childrens sporting commitments and had Sunday mornings free for teaching Sunday School. It was the end of the world as they knew it!.....Hunt, 1990, cited in Cavender and Jurik 1998, parallels research suggesting, 'she is their worst nightmare; a moral woman who threatens the camaraderie of the police brotherhood.' 'Moreover, as symbolic keepers of moral virtue, women further threaten men who participate in or know of corrupt police practises.'

In the past three years I have had more complaints made against me than in my previous twelve years of Policing, the vast majority by colleagues. This is a tactic recognised by the NSW Royal Commission as being used against change agents. When it came time for me to apply for promotion, all those complaints were on my personnel file and although I had an agonising period of review, I got through and was promoted. The old culture bearers tried their best, and they failed, but even so, it came at enormous cost. I have not, as yet, received any written exoneration. IN Policing, when you have been subjected to an internal inquiry, the best you can hope for is a verdict of 'not sustained'. To have ones integrity questioned, BECAUSE you have refused to condone unethical behaviours, belies comprehension.

As the NSW Police Royal Commission found, CLEAR LEADERSHIP is the single most important factor in changing workplace culture. The majority of Leadership provided by middle management where I was working, was about maintaining the past, not adopting the future. Some relieving managers attempted to ease my situation by adapting some processes and I take heart that recently I have observed some younger supervisors walking the path of change. It is going to be a long and slow walk.

Being a trailblazer has positives and negatives. Poor Leadership aside, there was a great deal of knowledge and experience gained over the last few years. Besides working in my own small sector, I also shared responsibility for an old mining town where there had been an aboriginal mission. The social problems and marginalisation there were deplorable and deeply entrenched. I developed a good working relationship with the locals and the Publican and would turn up at closing time to collect all the patrons and drop them and the bar staff home. By dispersing them it prevented them from gathering together on the riverbank to continue drinking and eventually, fighting. (Unfortunately, preventative Policing doesn't produce statistics.)

In the early hours of the morning when everyone was safely dispersed and it was quiet I would sometimes drive out to the edge of the dam and sit on the front of the Police truck in the darkness at the waters edge and contemplate the night sky. A bush night sky is nothing like the city. The sky is black, not the vapid half light of electrical glow. It's deep and velvety. The stars hang like crystals on invisible threads and the breeze that drifts across the water is perfumed with the scent of bush flowers. You come to better understand the earth, and the blend of the seasons and life itself when you work in the bush.

One minute I would be despairing over the social conditions of some of my clients and the next I'd have a wedge tail eagle soaring above the Police truck which helped to keep it all in perspective. Life is a delicate balance of beauty and hardship -in all facets of living and to quote the much misquoted Malcolm Fraser, 'Life wasn't meant to be easy, but it can be beautiful'.

We still have a long way to go to for women to achieve full integration. As women get further up the promotion ladder, they are more visible and therefore they are more likely to be targets of attack by men who are well skilled in working as teams to achieve a goal. One of the by products of large organisations is elitism, which once entrenched, is difficult to negotiate by persons who don't 'fit' . Also, individuals, as they progress upwards, tend to forget their origins and the difficulties of the past, and slowly absorb the characteristics of the elite group.

One of the most important changes must be increasing critical mass - sheer numbers - of women and people from a variety of ethnic and skills backgrounds into Policing and the other must be in developing Managers in Leadership of the right kind. It will be some time before we achieve equitable representation of women and minority groups in management structures and even longer unless we can arrest the high attrition rates of colleagues who are 'different'.

I have had to fight to serve my community as the individual woman that I am. My working life is one of commitment and duty - ideals that I share with those Russian Pilots of long ago, as do so many other women who choose to serve their country in so many different ways. Women in our Defence Forces are fighting for full integration and the right to protect our democratic way of life from without. In Policing we all fight to protect our democratic ideals from within and sometimes even from those who have sworn an oath to uphold them.

Change in our organisations will only come with a cost to the individual, who is often seen as a

troublemaker rather than a committed change agent. Our executive management are sending us out to fight crime knowing our physical and psychological health are at risk. Our executive management are also sending us out to enact change knowing that comes with a cost to those who will take up the challenge. It is up to all of us to support each other as we struggle on towards full integration in all aspects of life - either as service providers or recipients of the skills of others.

Wendy M Austin July 1999.

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