

Good morning to all who have come together to celebrate International Women's Day. I am honored to be here reinforcing this year's theme, "#EachforEqual," and sharing observations from my life's work educating and empowering girls and women toward the vital goal of gender equality.

I imagine that everyone here understands why gender equality matters. One half of the human race is female; but do we share with our male counterparts the same burdens, advantages and opportunities? I dare say no one here would answer yes to that question, and forecasts of when we might achieve such equality run to a dismal 100 plus years from now.

It is certainly true that progress has been made, and there are some who think enough progress has been made, perhaps at the expense of boys and men. Ultimately, our goal is for gender equality, not shifting the balance, and as organizational leaders, what we seek is full inclusion of all on an equal basis. The fact remains, however, that here in the United States and many other places in the world, a baby boy born into the same circumstances as a baby girl enjoys untold life-long advantages attributable to his gender alone.

My earliest interests in gender parity began as a college student in the late Sixties, a time in the US of revolutionary thinking on many fronts. Fortunate to be educated at Mount Holyoke College, the first college for women in the country, I learned that Mary Lyon, the foundress, raised money in the early 1800's by going door to door seeking donors sympathetic to the idea that there ought to be higher education opportunities for women equivalent to those available for men. It went without saying that women could not attend those male institutions, so we had to have our own. Later, after returning from Peace Corps service in the Republic of the Philippines, I attended Simmons, a university with an all-women's undergraduate school complemented by strong co-ed professional graduate education programs. There I learned that its founder, John Simmons, also advocated for the educational preparation of women, and his focus was the more specific goal of enabling women to achieve independent livelihoods so that they could become economically self-

sufficient. These two educational experiences were my first deep insights into the historic disadvantaged status of women.

Then a life changing event put me on a very clear course to advocacy for women and girls. Service in the Peace Corps made me very interested in the United States Information Service, today an office integrated into the US State Department. After I received my Master's degree in Library and Information Science at Simmons, I decided to try for a job at the Information Service so I took the Foreign Service exam three years in a row. My second and third tries resulted in in-person interviews, which I failed each time. I determined that I could keep pursuing my dream of foreign service forever without making it, and for the very first time in my life, I sensed gender discrimination. I decided to give up that dream and use the MBA I was just finishing at Simmons to pursue opportunities in the private sector.

Over a decade later, having been appointed the first woman to serve on the Management Committee of the country's longest continuously operating national bank, BankBoston Corporation, I was called to join a class action suit filed against the United States Information Service for discrimination against female candidates during a period of time that included me. Ultimately, the Service lost every individual case it tried, and the class action suit was settled. It was the largest civil rights settlement by the US government up to that point in time. My conviction about the need for vigilance in fair treatment for all was cemented by that experience. My professional expertise is Human Resources and my industry experience has crossed banking, insurance, healthcare, and now, higher education. In each role I have played, I have been positioned to call out instances of unjust treatment as well as to put in place systems to prevent that. I have learned that leaders who understand the benefits of inclusion of talent which comes in any profile are key to long term organizational sustainability. And I know I share with many of you impatience for anything less than commitment to equality for all!

So, how much progress has been made toward gender equality and how do we get to the finish line sooner than 100 years from now?

Let's take note of the fact that this year we are celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the success of the women's suffrage movement. While this was a pivotal moment for women in the US, the general societal conditions for women at the time were deplorable- difficulty in finding employment outside domestic service, and unequal pay when they did; limited rights under the law, including the right to protect themselves from domestic violence; and prodigious limitation on financial autonomy.

The two world wars gave women the opportunity to show their competency well beyond traditional female roles, and by the early 1960's, the legal protections they sorely needed began to fall into place: the Equal Pay Act in 1963; the Civil Rights Act amendment against sex discrimination in employment in 1964; Executive Order 11375, requiring federal employers practice affirmative action in ensuring equal treatment and opportunities in 1967; the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1972; Title IX, assuring gender equity in education programs, also in 1972; the Equal Credit Opportunity Act in 1974; admission of women to all military academies in 1976; and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in 1978. The list is dizzying!

In spite of these significant improvements in legal protections, in spite of the fact that women now outperform men in educational attainment, and in spite of the fact that women participate equally in the workforce, we have struggled for minimal progress toward power equal to that of men, and glaring pay inequities underscore this fact. The truth is that the world has very far to go to ensure that half the population enjoys the same rights and privileges as the other half - especially in leadership and in organizational life.

Experts everywhere report on why this massive failure to advance continues, and the reasons are widely varied: work-family conflict; competition inside organizations; choices made by women

themselves; psychological conflicts for and between women and men; lack of networks and sponsors; overt discrimination; the oppressive nature of 365/24/7 leadership roles; imbedded institutional mindsets, and many more. I have come to believe that we probably could fix many of these things but we would still see slow progress. I have come to believe that we have been circling around the true problem, an insidious component of our everyday life, and that is the high-level culture all Americans share.

My aha! moment came at about the same time as the #Me,Too movement began. I heard a radio interview with Mary Beard, a feminist and classics professor at Cambridge University in England. She introduced her listeners to the idea that myths have deeply penetrated and profoundly shaped western culture. In Homer's ancient story, "The Iliad," young Telemachus sharply informs his mother, Penelope, that he will speak and act for the household in the absence of his father, and that she, his mother, will not. In so doing, he signals the culturally held principles of today's stubborn gender divide: women should have no voice, and women should have no power. These mythical themes have resonated over the ages, resulting in male power directed at subject females in the form of severe discrimination of every kind, humiliating reputation destruction, and physical violence, up to and including rape and murder.

In our culture we see our young men go off to college, where they sexually assault their female classmates annually at the rate of one in every five, with some of our finest institutions of higher education failing abysmally to support their female students. Then, many of those same young men go eagerly off to professions and callings of all types, in every corner of American life, to Wall Street, to Radio and Television, to the Ivory Tower, to Hollywood, to our Houses of Worship, to the Big Leagues, to Silicon Valley, to Washington, DC, and yes, even to Main Street.

And, they arrive at those destinations less educated than their female counterparts but more likely to receive higher pay for the same work and to be promoted ahead of those women. The ultimate reward for a lifetime of gender based competitive advantage? Men hold steadfastly to

power by ascending in greater numbers than their female peers to the top of organizational life, ensuring that a culture of male domination persists.

As the #Me,Too movement has shown, women's willingness to remain silent and powerless is reaching limits. The legal consequences for men of power are creating new conversations about standards of behavior and raising the national consciousness on sexual misconduct and the abuse of power it represents. And, there are emerging more and more examples of organizations doing the in depth work necessary to improve the progress women make.

Nonetheless, the big work of true culture change stands before us. How can girls and women truly break through to find their voices and their power, when the culture at all levels continues to see them as "less than." How can we actually reverse the tenacious cultural bias against women, so deeply rooted in our history and tradition, especially at a time in our nation's history when even coarse public discourse about women has become acceptable to so many?

I am both a realist and an optimist, so my answer to my own questions is to pursue work we know makes a difference even as we each influence the nature of our culture one person and one day at a time, consistent with today's theme of #EachforEqual."

Our work at Simmons sustains long-standing relationships with girl-serving groups like Girls Scouts and Strong Women Strong Girls as well as decades of work educating women undergraduates and graduates for leadership and their own empowerment. Now we are taking new and bold steps to reach gender equality through our recently announced Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership.

Focusing our efforts on two themes, we are continuing to strengthen women who work so hard for their development and we are collaborating with men as allies in the journey toward gender equality. We do all this work with renewed hope for positive change as we see more and more organizations realizing the contribution women's participation makes toward organizational success. At the same time, our breakthrough learnings about male ally ship underscore the

common-sense conclusion that women cannot do the work of achieving gender equality alone.

Simple, profound, and- what took us so long to figure this out?

Perhaps the 100-year projection for the achievement of gender equality is closer at hand if we are all sharing the burden, and Simmons is committed to working with like-minded people towards that end. Will you join us on that journey?

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International Women's Day Celebration

International Institute of New England

Boston, MA