

# Corporate Australia must do more to create meaningful diversity and inclusion

Building on five years of successful advocacy for women entrepreneurs, Rare Birds expands program to help Australian businesses become diverse and inclusive organisations.

Sydney, 10 March 2020 - Corporate Australia's performance in many areas of diversity and inclusion (D&I) remains mixed, and organisations face new challenges around D&I to attract and retain an increasingly-millennial workforce, deliver strong financial performance, create differentiated innovation, and compete globally.

This is the assessment of Jo Burston, CEO and Founder of Rare Birds.

The company is launching new programs to equip companies and organisations across Australia with structured mentoring around the commercial benefits of diversity and inclusion, and create sustainably-diverse organisational structures.

"In our first five years, we've supported thousands of women entrepreneurs through events and mentoring, provided programs to nine companies and organisations, and taken our message and programs to 16 regions across Australia and Papua New Guinea," she says. Organisations that Rare Birds has worked with include 7West Media, American Express, PwC and WesTrac.

"Yet this barely scratches the surface of what's now required. As just one example, the number of women on Australian listed-company boards fell 30% last year. We're grateful to the women and men who have stood behind female entrepreneurs, but equality and empowerment have evolved into a bigger discussion around every aspect of meaningful diversity and inclusion. With International Women's Day well-established as a benchmark for gender equality, now is the time to broaden our horizons to embrace diversity and inclusion beyond gender.

"The stakes, in financial terms, employment terms and reputational terms, are high. As long ago as 2015, McKinsey estimated that as much as US\$12 trillion could be added to global annual GDP by 2025 by making opportunities for women the equal of those of men.

"And according to the World Economic Forum, in just five years, 75% of the global workforce will be millennials - the first generation expecting full inclusion and diversity across the organisations that employ them. Get this wrong, and your future millennial workforce will leave.

"There are two questions every Australian company and organisation needs to answer: Is your organisation genuinely diverse and inclusive in a meaningful, sustainable way? What's your plan to make this a reality?"

Narrow definitions for diversity and inclusion are no longer meaningful. Diversity and inclusion now also cover age, sexuality, flexible work practices, disability access and inclusion, cultural diversity, and equality of pay.

"Diversity and inclusion start with role models," says Jo Burston, "so we are recruiting new mentors from all backgrounds, across all genders, around Australia with extensive experience in running and advising diverse organisations.

"For those being mentored, this will offer significant and sustainable new experience around the commercial and organisational benefits of diversity and inclusion.

"Running these structured mentor programs will allow organisations to build sustainable new frameworks that can evolve and stay relevant.

"And for the mentors, this will provide new opportunities to share their expertise and experience with the next generation of business leaders."

Rare Birds' focus is moving from solely empowering individuals to creating new D&I structures for entire organisations and companies. An example is WesTrac, an industrial business in which nearly 14% of employees are women. Rare Birds works with WesTrac on building and expanding its mentoring program that drives retention, develops leadership skills, and entrenches and sustains the company's diversity and inclusion strategy.

Twenty-six employees were matched to mentors from industries as varied as software and entertainment. Nearly 77% of those mentored said the program improved their leadership skills. According to WesTrac General Manager of People and Culture, Rob Hooke, "As we look to the future, we're focused on harnessing the best talent and providing them with the support they need to achieve success. Diverse teams are more socially cohesive, emotionally connected, empathetic and supportive of each other in pursuit of a common goal."

Organisations seeking to create meaningful diversity programs, and individuals wishing to become mentors, should visit [inspiringrarebirds.com](http://inspiringrarebirds.com).

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The Rare Birds community builds and provides services and programs that transform businesses by creating diverse and inclusive organisations that are sustainable. These programs support improved financial performance, improve talent retention, and foster and facilitate innovation.

For more information, contact:

Alan Smith, Digivizer, 0404 432 700, [alan.smith@digivizer.com](mailto:alan.smith@digivizer.com)

### **Contacts**

Alan Smith

0404432700

[mailto: alan.smith@digivizer.com](mailto:alan.smith@digivizer.com)