

You, too, can be a wonderwoman

40 years after the Equal Pay Act we still live in a society where for every pound earned by our sons, our daughters will take home less than 85 pence. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has just revealed startling new figures showing how women are losing out to men in the pay stakes. Thames Valley is leading the way with the launch of a new business to help women smash through the glass ceiling.

CARLA DELANEY reports

WOMEN are being shown how and why they don't have to settle for second best at work by Thames Valley people management expert Lynda Cant (pictured below) who rose through the ranks to become a board director of a FTSE 100 paper merchant business.

The conflict resolution and executive coaching specialist, who started as a shorthand typist and ended up being a tough union negotiator, is using her skills and knowledge to run a new Lead At Work personal development programme proving that superheroes are not just in comic books but in offices juggling the needs of family and bosses.

Concerned that many women still aren't being paid their worth and reaching the top of their professions, Lynda is demonstrating to women of all ages how to play to their natural strengths and feminine charms to fast-track careers, get paid their worth and become effective leaders.

"I want to see a balance of both men and women in senior positions at work. A balance of both male and female talents, wisdom and qualities will make a positive difference in the world, influence corporate decisions, results and a better life quality," she says.

Lynda is launching a series of career makeover workshops at Lynda's offices at a Georgian mansion in Basingstoke from October 7, reinforced by a Home Study Guide – How to become a professional wonder woman and keep your sanity.

Website encouragement, newsletters and advice guides will give women a nudge in the upward direction.

A strong supporter is Alistair Baker, the former managing director of Microsoft UK who now runs Cogent Business Solutions in Windsor (see story page 3).

He says: "I am supporting the Lead At Work Programme as I believe that one of the biggest hurdles for the majority of talented women is persuading them to have the confidence in their own ability for progression and to just embrace new opportunities. Whereas a significant proportion of men push themselves forward even if they are only 20 per cent ready, women tend to wait until they are 80 per cent ready and let 20 per cent of doubt rule why they couldn't possibly be ready for the next step!"

Lynda agrees that lack of confidence can be the biggest enemy but urges women to believe in themselves and grab the many opportunities to be had – even in recession.

She reassures women saying: "You can have a well-paid, satisfying career and enjoy a personal life. Despite the challenges, there are thousands of women, who are high earners while achieving

balance in their life."

In August, the Equality and Human Rights Commission revealed that women working full-time currently earn 17.1 per cent less per hour on average than men, with the gap failing to improve in the past three years. The difference in some sectors such as finance, are much wider and the majority of organisations are not even aware of their own gender pay gap.

It is developing ways for employers to measure and report on their gender pay gap and is consulting with the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and employers to develop consistent methods of pay measurement.

Andrea Murray, acting group director of strategy at the Equality and Human Rights Commission, is dismayed by the pay gap and said: "It is a waste of talent, and it is unjust, that 40 years after the Equal Pay Act we still live in a society where for every pound earned by our sons, our daughters will take home less than 85 pence."

The reasons for the pay gap are complex so the commission will be gathering views from employers on what could work best for their organisations in terms of measuring and reporting information.

"In particular, we want to hear from employers who have been monitoring their gender pay gap and have made moves to address it."

While acknowledging that many hard-working women are being overlooked and underpaid there are thousands reaching great career heights and getting paid their worth, especially in the US.

Women running their own businesses are on the increase and networking groups such as the Success Network in the Thames Valley, Athena and Shepic are on the increase.

Helping women achieve executive positions has been Lynda Cant's focus since leaving corporate life to become a business adviser troubleshooting people issues and supporting companies to retain and grow their top talent.

"I am so excited about my leadership programme dedicated for professional women. I have seen amazing results from the women I have supported and I want to help many more. That's why I am focusing on and specialising in women and have pulled together the best of my experience to share."

It is not necessary to act as a man to progress up the workplace ladder. Natural feminine wisdom has merit at work, she says.

"Women should play to their strengths, qualities, and passions, find ways around barriers, see opportunities where others don't. In this way they can achieve beyond what most think is even possible."

Lynda is quick to point out in her first blog that she is not a man-hater – in fact she praises them highly and acknowledges many helped her career progression.

Nevertheless she prefers her workshops to be a male-free zone where women can explore their own strengths and benefit from the natural support common in female networking groups but not in male ones.

Lynda worked in a male-dominated environment in an industry with tight profit margins and propelled her career with the same company over



25 years through times of economic recession, trade union negotiations, downsizing, organisational restructures, redundancies and takeovers.

"I do run workshops for men and women but I believe that by giving women space in an all-female environment with a programme that is uniquely tailored for them, allows them to discover how they can use their unique qualities to enhance their career."

"My personal experience is moving from a shorthand typist to a board director in a large corporation and I want to show other women how they too can reach the top of their profession."

Tracy Balachandran, head of Global Chance Finance, Barclaycard, UK, testifies to the strength of Lynda's coaching. She said: "Through a particular difficult time in my life – coping with a responsible job and having my first baby – Lynda helped me to understand how to make the situation work in my favour. You cannot change the environment in which you find yourself, but you can change your attitude towards it."

"I am now on maternity leave with my second baby and have great plans for combining a career and motherhood."

Subscribers to www.leadatwork.com receive a free guide on How To Handle Difficult Conversations and Keep Your Relationships Working! as well as a morale-boosting newsletter with tips to propel careers.

Details of the workshops can be found at www.leadatwork.com/leadership-workshops

As part of their corporate social responsibility Lead At Work is offering a free place for one of its leadership autumn workshops specifically for women. They are:

- Become a more effective and inspiring leader – October 7
- Solve your Toughest People Issues – October 14
- Get Noticed – Turn Adversity into Opportunity – November 3
- How to handle making someone's job redundant – November 10.