

International Women's Day 2024: Inspiring Inclusion with...Claire Dawson

To celebrate International Women's Day 2024, we sat down with BDBF Partner, [Claire Dawson](#). Claire has over 20 years of experience in employment law and is a recognised leader in her field. She shares her thoughts on what this year's campaign theme means to her and talks about her career journey.

1. How does this year's theme of inspiring inclusion resonate with you?

Diversity and inclusion go together in my mind because the more diverse a workplace is, the more likely it is that more of its people will feel included because there is space for all the differences. The converse is that if a workplace is fairly uniform e.g. a very male-dominated team, a woman joining that team may feel like the "outsider." In my work as an employment lawyer over the years I have certainly seen examples of that. Inclusion is about everyone in the workplace – regardless of their sex, race, ethnic/national background, disability, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and those who hold different viewpoints and beliefs – feeling respected and included.

2. How can employers inspire inclusion in the workplace?

Efforts to promote change in any area in an organisation need to be modelled from the top. All of us who are leaders in organisations ought to think about the example we are setting in the way we interact with colleagues and our networks. That

might mean we need more training for leaders and managers including addressing conscious and unconscious biases and behaviours. The words we speak have power and set the tone for the workplace.

Rather than guessing, consult the workforce about what they'd like to see to make their workplace more inclusive. Review policies on diversity and inclusion. What programmes are in place to support career progression for everyone, especially under-represented groups? Mentorship by senior staff can provide vital support, encouragement and career "nods" for junior employees. Offering flexible working – whether in terms of part-time, remote and hybrid working or job-shares – opens up more opportunities for more people and enables employers to attract the best talent.

Encourage people to bring their full selves to work and share aspects of their life outside work (whether that's family life, culture, religion, voluntary work, hobbies or more) with their colleagues.

3. Have you faced any barriers in your career due to being a woman? If so, how did you overcome them?

I think some of the biggest barriers were ones I imposed on myself – although likely because of how I was socialised as a girl growing up. Imposter Syndrome, not "leaning in", and not always having the self-belief I see in others. Some of the things that helped: getting clear about what I wanted from work and life, accepting professional opportunities that presented themselves to me and having the courage to take on new challenges, pep talks with colleagues and friends, having some coaching. I'm lucky to have a great network of interesting and successful people from all walks of life who have been sounding boards and cheerleaders.

4. If you could have dinner with three inspirational women, dead or alive, who would they be and why?

Very hard to pick just three women!

Michelle Obama must be on the list. She's obviously one of the most famous and stylish women in the world and is a woman of substance too: focused on doing good in the world as well as staying true to her roots.

Sinead O'Connor – first and foremost because she was a phenomenal musical talent in addition to her courage in calling out injustice and speaking openly about her personal struggles. I also think she'd be great craic (fun) and might even sing a few songs by the end of the night.

Last but not least, I'd invite my late mum, Eleanor, who inspired me for many years in the way she lived with serious disability and kept involved in work and community for as long as she could.