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'Leading in the future'

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Introduction

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are meeting this afternoon, and pay my respects to their elders, both past and present.

Firstly, thank you to the Townsville Women's Circle and 3 Brigade for the invitation to the Forum today. I am excited to be speaking alongside leaders like Sandra and Michelle discussing 'leading in the future'. My remarks will consider the topic of future leadership through three lenses:

- That of broader, modern 'developed society';
- As it relates to the Army; and
- How it relates to women.

Arguably, it is now universally accepted that the future of developed societies such as ours is being shaped by technology. In particular, the fields of robotics, automation and

artificial intelligence are now routinely combining to produce outcomes that were the stuff of science fiction a few decades ago. The explanation is that we will see exponential growth in machine substitution for human labor.

A common example we hear of is the advent of driverless cars, trucks and trains. But it isn't just the so-called 'blue collar' jobs being replaced by machines. Skilled knowledge work is also in the machine's sights. Consider the fact that machines can now reliably read x-rays more accurately than Radiographers can. Last year the 'ROSS' platform, operating on IBM's 'Watson', was 'hired' as a Bankruptcy Lawyer by a firm in the United States.

The proliferation of applications and machines mean that there will be many more different ways to achieve the same outcomes. In doing so, the technology is changing the workplace experience for both employees and employers. It is changing the 'lived experience' of what 'work' might mean:

- It allows for increases in both part-time and distributed work. A great example of the latter is the Melbourne firm which now employs code developers....in Mongolia.
- And, we are seeing the development of the 'contingent workforce'.
 - While some see this as a threat, as it is very different to traditional employment models, others are seeing this as opportunity. Such as parents working outside of school hours.

These changes not only affect the nature of future work. They have implications for the nature of future leadership. Some aspects of leadership will remain the same: such as establishing a vision, looking after your people and communicating with your team -

notwithstanding that the number of communications channels to do that are likely to increase! But for the remainder of my remarks I want to concentrate on what will be different in the future. Because I think it is this aspect which will give us some greater insight as to what we may need to do, to continue the development of future leaders.

The first key difference is that the leaders of the future will need to be *technically competent*. Leaders will not necessarily need to be code cutters. But experts tell us they will *have to demonstrate a robust understanding* of the capabilities, impact and possibilities of technology. A key skill will be the ability to identify new ‘teaming’ opportunities between people and machines.

The implications of this for the Australian Army are significant. Army used to have an approach of *equipping the person*. Now we are starting to think more about how the *person will augment the equipment*. Please don’t be alarmed, Army’s most important capability will remain our people, but our people will necessarily be networked into increasingly sophisticated equipment.

To further understand and harness the power of technology, the Australian Army is developing a Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) strategy. The aim is to inform recruitment of people with these increasingly important skills, knowledge and attributes. We want our Army leaders to be technically savvy, technically qualified where appropriate and forward leaning to ensure we remain at the cutting edge of capability. At the moment we are specifically targeting cyber professionals – Please, if you know someone with these skills of interest, be sure to pass on this on!

Supporting this recruitment strategy, we are embedding STEM training throughout our training and education system. Army's leadership is alive to the fact we really need to do better in this regard, in order to keep up. It seems incredible, in the 21st century, and in an increasingly science and technology driven world and Army, that we only now have our first Chief of Army who studied a Science (Honours) degree.

Sisters - within the Army, and within broader society, STEM is an area that we in particular need to ensure we are paying due attention to! The Australian Bureau of Statistics Education and Work report of May 2016 tells us that the STEM statistics for women aren't great:

- Of Australians with post school qualifications:
 - 50.8% of men with post school qualifications have a STEM background.
 - 8.7% of women with post school qualifications have a STEM background.
- The STEM background of total society is even worse:
 - 21.6% of all men.
 - 3.7% of all women.

Given what I previously said about 'tech awareness' being a key attribute of future leadership, these statistics are cause for alarm for anyone who cares about women in leadership.

The second matter I want to address about future leadership goes to how we *influence and build* teams. The disaggregated work places of the future, enabled by technology, will require a different approach. Traditional, industrial age leadership approaches to influence and team building, those which rely on positional authority or versions of

'heroic' physical leadership will likely not be effective. Leadership in the future will increasingly involve patterns of *decentralised leadership*.

A book published in 2006, *The Starfish and the Spider*, uses the example of the starfish to illustrate this.¹ The starfish has a decentralised nervous system, enabling it to be successful in surviving and adapting to many changes in its circumstance. For example, if a starfish loses an arm, it is able grow back a new one - it is a very resilient organism, and given our proximity to the Great Barrier Reef, perhaps an appropriate example! In the same way, decentralised leadership will enable our future organisations to adapt to fast changing local conditions.

Key to this will be future leaders being prepared to 'let go', to trust that the team they have built will, like the starfish, adapt and thrive. Given the physical or temporal dislocation of the future workplace, the ability to *influence* rather than *direct* will be a vital leadership trait. When it comes to influencing, to inspiring, encouraging and enabling, I believe women have some natural strength in these areas. It is past time for us to recognise and embrace that.

Army is also recognising the importance of building teams that can work effectively in technologically enabled ways that the old 'mass armies' of the industrial age could not. In Australia, our Special Forces have long understood the power of well-built teams. United States General Stanley McChrystal's New York Times bestseller, *Team of Teams*, highlighted for a global readership the need for *team*, rather than *command* leadership styles. Our Army Headquarters is evolving to rise to this challenge; we are currently

¹ Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom, *The Starfish And the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, Penguin (October 5, 2006), hardcover, 230 pp.

structured in a 'matrix' style. In effect, this means my team all have multiple bosses, and work in teams which form based on contingent task needs. As 'exciting' as this appears, I can assure you that it is not without cultural challenge.

Once again, I think women have some useful attributes they bring to bear in addressing these challenges. Women are often collaborative leaders and, as such, are well equipped to deal with the reality of the future. I don't know about you, but for some time now I have been comfortable that I am generally not the smartest person in the room, alas and I am more than willing to seek help in problem solving. While that is clearly both a subjective assertion and an individual example, others have made a similar observation. In her book, *How Women Decide: What's True, What's not and what Strategies spark the best choices*, Therese Huston wrote (and I quote):

Several studies suggest that women bring something special to the collaborative decision-making process: the willingness to seek advice. Ask someone if he or she knows a man who won't ask for directions, and you're bound to hear a story about a father, brother, or spouse who drove miles out of his way while a woman in the car kept suggesting he stop and ask for help.²

I think we can all relate!

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, leadership will remain a topic of enduring importance. But the environment and context for 'leading' in the future will be different. Technology –

² Huston, Therese (2016). *How Women Decide: What's True, What's not and what Strategies spark the best choices*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, New York. P. 88.

including innovations way beyond the imagination of even those I have mentioned this afternoon – will necessarily change the manner in which leadership is exercised in high performing organisations. Many of these changes suit the attributes that objective data, and the lived experience to date of senior women leaders, demonstrate women bring to leadership roles.

The opportunity before us is recognise the changes that are coming and position ourselves and our organisations to take advantage of them. This will require us continue the progress we have made to date on developing women as leaders within our society. Importantly, it will also require us to re-evaluate and ‘do more’ to address those areas where women may need ‘up-skilling’. As Therese Huston says:

Don't forget the lessons from the fireman's pole. Parents encourage their sons to practice taking risks in the playground, but they find it hard to let their little girls be anything but safe.

If our nation, our society and our organisations are to succeed at leading in the future we must change this. Safety is of course a relative concept in this respect! Our future in the new world which awaits us will be assured by women stepping up to this challenge.

Thank you.