

You've made it, so what now?

Part 2



Getting to know other committee members

- The attitudes of fellow committee members will become clear fairly quickly. Avoid stereotyping people by their backgrounds. Some people you think might be opposed to your position might turn out to be sympathetic to at least some issues that are important to you.
- Make alliances where you can and lobby particular committee members on particular issues if you think this will be successful.
- If you find a natural group within the committee, join forces.
- Through travel, having coffee, a drink or dinner—the better you know them the better you'll be able to understand them and work with them.

Roles

The committee secretariat or secretary

These are very good people to have on side—and very bad people to get offside! You can get them on side by being a good active committee member rather than a token, so let them know about anything that affects your attendance, and in particular respond quickly to requests or comments on draft papers.

The chairperson

'If you are the chair you just have to be on top of it. You not only have to read all the stuff and be aware of the issues, but you have to be awake and alert the whole time so that you not only chair it properly, but be aware of the dynamics of the group and that's so much harder, particularly if you are getting other people in to make presentations. You have to have so much energy and be so up all the time. It's very stressful.' Clare Petre

'You really have to conduct yourself in the chair position with the utmost of integrity and women are quite good at doing that ... this is a generalisation, but I think on the whole women can get that bigger picture and look at what overall is the right thing to do rather than be captured by a particular perspective which may feed their own ego.' Judy Henderson

Representation

- Be clear on the nature of your appointment, as there can be a subtle but important distinction—that is, are you a representative of a particular group or a representative of the interests of a particular part of the community. The former might imply greater reporting and accountability than the latter.

- If you don't have a natural constituency, try and make links with one. You will be less isolated, you'll be able to bring a wider range of opinion to the committee, and you'll have more credibility as a result.
- As a consumer representative you will have to be prepared to make your mark on the group so that the consumer position is not seen as token.
- Use your networks to 'keep you honest' to ensure that you are not isolated by the committee process.
- If a proposal or situation affects women in a negative way, speak out and continue to argue until you've made your point and change is negotiated.

'Probably my background helps them (the committee) to think that there could be a different perspective, but once you get into it you may or may not be representing those perspectives. I speak beyond the scope of non-English speaking women.' Angeline Oyang

'...as a board member you have to be able to take a balanced approach to things ...'
Judy Henderson

'Where boards and committees are male dominated, frankly the interests of women often get lost, and even if I am not there necessarily as representing the interests of women, I have always seen this as part of my role.'
Clare Petre



Being a woman on a male dominated board or committee

If you experience any kind of sexual or other harassment, intimidation or pressure, talk to the committee chair, secretariat, or a committee colleague with whom you feel comfortable. Don't put up with it or let it drive you away from the committee.

'I have experienced being patronised and marginalised and patted on the head—but that's initially and it doesn't last long, because I think most men have quickly realised that I am there not as a token, and I do have things to say and I am credible and I am prepared to do the work ... and so all that stuff tends to fall away after a while.' Clare Petre

'I felt it took me quite a while to establish my credibility with some of the other male board members. Initially I felt intimidated because some of these people were highly qualified. However, I now feel more than able to "hold my own" and have some valid input into the meetings.' Judy Galloway

Legal and ethical questions

- Always maintain an ethical stance and take actions that are right for the best outcome.
- Ask yourself: 'Is it legal?', 'Is it moral?', 'Is it fair?' and above all, 'What would my feelings be in the light of public and family scrutiny?'

Acknowledgments

Clare Petre, *Consumer representatives on advisory committees*, Informal notes, September 1998.

Helen Lynch, Notes from a *Keynote Address, Treading the Boards: Best Practice for Women on Boards and Committees*, video, Department of Industrial Relations, W.A., 1995.