



Why International Women's Day matters to me

This year's theme for International Women's Day ("IWD") is #BreakTheBias.

Over the past year, there has been a lot of talk in the media of the "Great Resignation" – many people walking away from jobs to either take a complete career break or to do something completely different. Some of those are women who have juggled demanding jobs alongside home-schooling and lockdowns over the past two years leaving them burnt out.

So can tackling gender bias reverse this trend, and how can we do this?

When I first entered the workplace in 2006, women still represented a small proportion of Partners in the big law firms I was exposed to. I also saw women a few years older than me who had children, often Senior Associates, feeling under pressure to perform in the workplace like they didn't have any children and that sitting at their desk 12+ hours a day would have no impact on them personally. Equally, hearing a female Partner (who was amazing and I really admired professionally) consoling her child on the phone because she would be missing their school-play did not exactly inspire me with confidence that I could try to be a Partner and be the mother that I wanted to be if my plans for a family were fulfilled.

And then along came GQ|Littler. I joined GQ|Littler in 2012 for many reasons, but one of them was that it seemed like somewhere I could still stay in private practice but have a better shot of making it work alongside parenthood – I am still here with two terrors...I mean boys aged 7 and 4 at home, so that impression proved right! When people in the team ask me how I find it, I am honest – sometimes balancing being a lawyer and a mum works well and sometimes it is hard – I have certainly used the word "frazzled" to describe myself at certain points in the pandemic and when I have been having yet another childcare crisis! But GQ|Littler provides me with great flexibility – such as going to the school nativity in the middle of the day, starting work later so I can do the school-run, or working from home as much as I like, all of which make it easier for me to be a working parent. I have also found it helps to be open – I am now on my third flexible working arrangement since having kids, so I have certainly felt able to speak up when a working arrangement isn't working! At the same time however, I have learnt that my experience is not a one-size-fits-all for lawyers who are also mothers – there is no typical "working mum" experience, and every individual has different circumstances.

So how does this relate to breaking biases? From my personal experience, being in a workplace which is open and flexible, and also treats people as unique individuals (rather than expecting them to fit into a mould) is key.

