This year for International Women’s Day, we are being asked to #BeBoldForChange. The challenge has been laid down to women and men around the world to pause and consider what bold actions we can all take to narrow the existing gender gap.

The World Economic Forum predicts that the gender gap won’t close entirely until 2186 – and this gap is seemingly increasing, rather than diminishing, year on year.

With its roots in social activism and the peace movement of the early 20th century, International Women’s Day is seen as a catalyst for change, focusing our attention on the successes and the struggles of women both here in Australia and around the world. It is a powerfully symbolic vehicle for change – but it requires the actions of all of us to make a sustainable difference in gender equity.

Thanks to the actions of many brave women (and men), who fought and continue to fight the status quo, significant advances have been made in the last century in regard to women’s autonomy over their reproductive choices, political representation, access to education for girls, affordable health care and economic empowerment. However, there is still much to be done across the globe to make a significant dent in the gender gap between men and women.

Today, more than ever, vigilance is required to maintain the hard-fought rights that women have struggled for and to ensure that our focus on gender equity and a more inclusive world continues – not only for ourselves but for the next generation of leaders, activists and decision makers.

This year we asked a number of people from a variety of industries and backgrounds, to tell us what International Women’s Day means to them and how they will be choosing to mark this special day. Here are their stories:
Margie Hartley – Director, Gram Consulting Group:

“International Women’s Day is an opportunity to focus our attention on the situations of all women around the globe. In Australia, we are continually raising awareness through the many channels we have (my favourite current awareness raiser is the Women’s AFL) yet it is easy to become myopic and potentially forget about the everyday struggles for some women. Whether that is the struggle to catch a bus each day to go to work and not be groped let alone struggle to emerge out of the cycle of poverty.

I hope on International Women’s Day we can further our perspective and truly unite to raise awareness of where we have come from and how far we have yet to go for true inclusion and equality”.

Lyn Kraus – Office Managing Partner, EY:

“Although we continue to see slower progress around the world than we would like to on gender equality, it is still important that we pause and celebrate International Women’s Day. To me this is a day for everyone. No matter who you are, we all have a special woman in our life - be it a mother, a sister, a wife, a daughter, a colleague or yourself. We need to ensure that women have access to the same opportunities as men and that they have a choice as to whether or not they pursue these opportunities.

This year EY will be marking the day globally with our #BeBoldForChange theme where people around the world will share stories of how they are being bold for change. I am looking forward to sharing mine by being inspired and motivated by the stories of others.”

Mary Anne Ireland – Partner, Salvos Legal:

“I’m pledging to #BeBoldForChange this International Women’s Day. Throughout my career in law, I have mentored other women to help them access the opportunities they deserve. The young women I work with are smart, educated and energetic so it’s critical that they have an equal opportunity to shine and use their skills. As the mother of a daughter about to start studying law, I want her to know that all doors are open to her. She can defeat any barriers put in her way if she is bold, confident and positive about her role in the world”.
A/P Rae Cooper – Associate Dean, USyd
Business School:

“For me International Women’s Day is a time to pause and reflect on how far women and girls have come. A standout is education and in my job, that makes me enormously happy and hopeful. It is also a time to reflect on where we need change. There's lot of gender gaps in pay and leadership and a lot of work to do to allow women and girls to live free from violence and harassment”.

Fiona Smith – Journalist and Workplace Writer:

“International Women’s Day is a chance for me to reflect on my good fortune – to be alive at a time when I can take charge of my own destiny, thanks to the struggles of those who fought for the right to control their own fertility, to marry whom they pleased (or not marry at all), to divorce, to inherit, to have an education, to have careers and to vote. It is also a day to think about what I can do to extend those rights to women who do not yet have them and to celebrate all the wonderful women in my life”.

Heather Geary – Diversity & Inclusiveness Leader, EY:

“For me, International Women’s Day is about keeping our foot on the accelerator. It is about remembering not to accept the status quo, but to push for a better future where my son and daughter can live more well-rounded lives choosing from a smorgasbord of career options, not just the ones that match their gender at birth. It’s also about the hope that we will achieve this, and that for them, gender won’t be about struggle, or competition”.

Fiona Walford – Brand Strategist, Google:

"International Women's Day is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the immense achievements of women across the world. The gender equality debate is important for society and global economic welfare. McKinsey research suggests that if women can realise their full economic potential then it will add $12 trillion to global growth. International Women's Day is an opportunity to take stock in our busy lives and really support female empowerment".
Tristan Cutcliffe – Management Consultant:

"I grew up in a country where most people would say women and girls are safe - but the reality is that they’re not. While we have one woman every week being murdered by her current or ex-partner we cannot say that this wonderful country of ours is safe for women and girls.

International Women’s Day is absolutely about the women and girls in my life and my community. It’s about spending time with them and reflecting on what more we can all do to make our own community and country safer for women and girls."

Gregory Whitwell – Dean, University of Sydney Business School:

“For me, as Dean of a Business School at a leading Australian university, International Women’s Day causes me to reflect on two things in particular. First, that currently the fate of female graduates from my School is that they will experience wage inequality from the beginning of their careers and, just as disheartening, wage disparity will only worsen for them the more senior they become. Second, we have a long way to go in terms of achieving some kind of parity in the representation of female academics in the professorial and associate professorial ranks. Universities should be fine examples of gender equality in action, but sadly they are failing at present to be so. International Women’s Day is a call to action to remedy this situation.”

Victoria Shelton – Institutional Business Development Manager, Amundi:

“Having been born in the USSR where International Women’s Day is a big national celebration of all women, it is a day to honour my Mum and grandma. For them, it is a very nostalgic day where they were showered with flowers and chocolates from male colleagues, husbands, brothers and friends. This day has a very long history in Russian culture, with the day declared a national holiday in 1917 and then a non-working day in 1965 to commemorate the contribution of Soviet women during WWII: ‘their heroism and selflessness at the front and in the rear, and also marking the great contribution of women to strengthening friendship between peoples, and the struggle for peace’. “

So: С восьмым марта! [I congratulate you] with March 8th!”
Fay Calderone – Partner, DibbsBarker:

“International Women’s Day presents an opportunity to stop, reflect upon and celebrate the achievements of the wonderful women around us, to inspire young girls, women and future leaders to live boldly and shine brightly and to empower the women and girls around the world who are not as fortunate as we are.

At DibbsBarker we are celebrating our talented and diverse group of professional women including 50% representation on our Executive Leadership (comprising our MP, Practice Group Leaders and Shared Service Managers) and our first female Chair. We are also seeking to empower women by partnering with Dress For Success, a fantastic cause which supports women who are seeking work with corporate clothing, and also career support through coaching, courses and training on many of the things we often take for granted, from computer skills to interview etiquette. We are working with Dress For Success on an initiative called ‘Empower Hour’ whereby our staff are able to donate an hour of their pay to help empower a woman to achieve economic independence”.

Helen Jackson – People Director, Advisian:

“Gender Diversity and an inclusive culture is critical to Advisian achieving our ambitions and International Women’s Day gives us the opportunity to reinforce and celebrate this diversity.

In celebrating International Women’s Day, Advisian is not only recognizing our amazing female talent in all our locations across the globe by way of specific events on 8 March, but we will be running a week long digital campaign that showcases Advisian as an organization that celebrates gender diversity and flexibility and profiles the personal brand of our extraordinary women.”

Malini Raj – Head of Strategy, Multicultural Community Banking, CBA:

“Iinternational Women’s Day is an opportunity to celebrate and be inspired by so many women from different walks of life, those who are high profile and those that I encounter in my everyday life. It’s an opportunity to focus and highlight the positive impact they have and can have on society and in being bold in driving change towards a more gender equal world.

For International Women’s Day, I am hosting and attending several events where I will have the opportunity to support, be motivated by and collaborate with some accomplished women who all have the same aspiration and passion as me - to live in a world where the true benefits of diversity are understood and valued and gender is no barrier and there are no boundaries in being able to achieve your potential and what you dream”.
Katrina North – Asia Pac Diversity & Inclusiveness Leader, EY:

“For me, International Women’s Day is a day to reflect on the progress of women in society. Within western society, granting of equality to women has been woefully slow, especially when you consider Switzerland only granted women the vote in 1971.

I continue to be mildly shocked whenever senior men talk about promoting women in the context of meritocracy, to me I hear an underlying assumption from these men that 50% of the world’s population are somehow less meritorious or somehow less capable, less smart, less able to learn and succeed than the presiding 50% - Really?

I believe in the power of sponsorship for all underrepresented talent, there is no substitute. I encourage all male leaders to sponsor at least one person who is physically different in some way to them. Make a difference and #BeBoldforChange”.

Del Gaudry – Director, Penrith RSL Club:

“Penrith RSL, together with Hon Stuart Ayres and the Penrith CBD Corporation is holding an International Women’s Day Breakfast on 7 March this year. I will be compereing a panel of four female veterans in my role as a Director of Penrith RSL Club. The panel of women are from Air Force and Army and they will talk about their experiences and treatment before, during and after deployments. Traditional RSL Sub Branches do not seem to cater for women veterans and this is why organisations such as Women Veterans Network Australia (WVNA) has been born. The WVNA is committed to connecting past and present women of Defence with resources, support and information to live empowered and fulfilling lives. Proceeds from the breakfast will go to the WVNA”.
Whether you choose to applaud the advances in gender equity already made, or reflect on the challenges yet to overcome. Whether you choose to celebrate the women in your life, or contemplate the roadblocks they may have yet to face. Whether you choose to be involved in the many events occurring on this day, or spend some time with a close group of female friends – we at Optimiss, wish you a bold International Women’s Day !!!!!