International Women’s Day - #BeBoldForChange

International Women’s Day is a day set aside each year to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, but it is also a day that serves to remind us that inequalities exist - throughout the world - and challenges us to take action. Since no one organization is responsible for International Women’s Day, it truly is a call to action at every level of society. Anyone can participate, whether it is individuals, communities, employers, and governments.

Since the very first International Women’s Day in 1908, there have been many different themes addressing issues of inequality, but this year’s theme #BeBoldForChange, calls upon us to help forge a better working world - a more inclusive, gender equal world.

Why has this theme been chosen?

The World Economic Forum (Global Gender Gap Index 2016) estimates that, on a global level, it will take another 170 years – until 2186 – to reach gender parity, (and 158 years for North America). This number - 170 years - is noted consistently on the website for International Women’s Day: [https://www.internationalwomensday.com/](https://www.internationalwomensday.com/) reinforcing this year’s chosen theme.

The top 10 countries, or the ones closest to gender parity in this index, are as follows: 1. Iceland, 2. Finland, 3. Norway, 4. Sweden, 5. Rwanda, 6. Ireland, 7. Philippines, 8. Slovenia, 9. New Zealand, and 10. Nicaragua. Canada is ranked 35th out of 114 countries on this index, and United States is ranked 45th. The index takes into account not only wage disparities, but actually 4 dimensions in total: health, education, economy, and politics (e.g.: representation of women in politics).
According to an article published in the Globe and Mail (March 2016), “a woman working full time in Canada makes 73.5 cents for every dollar a man makes, a persistent wage gap that continues even though women’s educational attainment has surpassed that of men and amid widespread recognition of the issue among Canadians”.

Although it’s unclear why the wage discrepancy exists, the article points out the following factors that may contribute: many women are working in traditional occupations which pay a lower wage, women perform nearly twice as many hours on unpaid household and care work as men increasing their likelihood of requiring part-time or flexible hours, and as well, it is generally believed that men and women do not necessarily receive the same pay for the same work.

A working day for men and women

Source: Global Gender Gap Index 2016, World Economic Forum
On the positive side, advancements in equity and equality are being made around the world. In November 2016, a Saudi prince expressed support for lifting of the ban on women driving. “Stop the debate,” he wrote on twitter, it’s time for women to drive.” In our own country in 2015, the first ever government cabinet consisting of an equal number of men and women was announced. Furthermore, Canada and the U.S. have launched a new task force called the United States Canada Council for the Advancement of Women Business Leaders-Female Entrepreneurs, recognizing female participation as a key to economic growth.

Remembering that International Women’s Day is also a time for celebration, it’s also important to take a moment to remember and reflect on past achievements and advancements. After all, it wasn’t that long ago, that women in Canada were legally given the right to vote (1921 for some, but not until 1960 for all women), as well as to own property, or to hold public office! As well, if you are from the Whitemouth area, you will likely know that Manitoba’s first woman doctor, Dr. Charlotte Ross, who practiced medicine in Montreal as well as Whitemouth, Manitoba, was only recognized as a licensed medical doctor after her death in November 1993, when Liberal MLA Sharon Carstairs introduced a resolution to that effect in the Manitoba Legislature. In fact, as women were not allowed to attend medical school in Canada at that time, she had to leave Canada for several years in order to pursue her education at the Women’s Medical College of Philadelphia, graduating in 1875 - well before the first International Women’s Day was realized in 1908.

Stories such as these serve to remind us that things have come a long way since the days of Charlotte Ross. Women, at least in Canada, are welcome to pursue any field of study or profession. We can look back, and see what has been accomplished, and we can look forward to see what still needs to be done, within our own corner of the world, and beyond.

So what can we do?

Some suggestions:
* Read about it - go to www.internationalwomensday.com
* Consider taking a pledge to support this action
* Follow the discussion on social media
* Check out events that are being held this month, including business conferences, networking events, craft markets, fashion parades, theatrical performances, etc.
* For fun - take time to calculate your time to gender parity - take the gender gap calculator - [http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/#frame/ac8d4](http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/#frame/ac8d4)

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