

The logo for Women Step Forward features the word "WOMEN" in a large, purple, sans-serif font. The letter "O" is stylized as a circle with a yellow and orange arc above it. Below "WOMEN" is the phrase "STEP FORWARD" in a smaller, purple, sans-serif font. At the bottom, the Māori phrase "WĀHINE MĀ RERE KI RUNGA" is written in a light purple, sans-serif font.

WOMEN STEP FORWARD WĀHINE MĀ RERE KI RUNGA

Melanie Beirne, founder of Women Step Forward, asks the question: How are we going on our journey to reach gender equality and inclusive leadership, and why does the advancement of women in the public service matter?

Well, we are going, and the journey continues with some great results. Notably, half of our Public Service Tier 1 Leadership roles are held by women, and we have also reached a government set target of 50% representation of women on public sector boards.

Let's not forget to mention the amazing effort and success of the Government Women's Network. I have experienced many of the initiatives and networks that have flourished under the organisation's leadership, and it is to be applauded.

That said, for me, progress is still not fast enough. It's not fast enough for women, it's not fast enough for tangata whenua or wāhine with a cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and it's not fast enough for my 12- and 8-year-old daughters.

Women are my Why. I founded Women Step Forward (Wāhine Mā Rere Ki Runga) to accelerate the pace of change, and to inspire and empower more women to take a seat at the leadership table. When women are at the table our voices are heard, and this to me is a significant strategy to resolve gender inequality and enable inclusive leadership. The advancement of women in the public service is critical if we are going to push forward and instigate more change.

Every day I have the privilege of working with talented wāhine across the Public Service. It fills me with joy to watch women respond to strengths-based leadership coaching. To grow and develop. To soar to great heights for the benefit of Aotearoa.

So, what is holding us back in our aspirations for equality, and why does the advancement of women in the public service matter?

Working intimately with women across the public service gives me a sneak peek into some of the issues women are confronted with daily, and they scream inequality. The progression of a woman's career continues to be affected by pay inequity, gender stereotypes, discrimination, and bias.

My work also highlights how hard it can be for women to consistently believe in themselves. We may make unhealthy "comparisons" that only become a disservice to our self-worth, we may be "people pleasers" to our detriment, we may be quick to downplay our own success for fear of creating a divide between our peers (hello, tall poppy syndrome), and the dreaded imposter syndrome is rampant.

These things are real, but they do not define us. They do not and will not stop us from showing up because what I also see is when women have other women in their corner, believing in them, empowering them, challenging them, helping to strengthen and develop their leadership, and lifting them up if they are having a bad day; well step aside whānau because these women become unstoppable.

I encourage all women to put your hand up for opportunities and take your seat at the leadership table. Leadership isn't just a title, it's an action. It's influence. It's about creating impact no matter what level you are in an organisation.

To those from the younger generation – hear this – our younger generations will become the dominate players in our workplace. You will not be our only leaders (us awesome Generation X and some awesome Boomers will still be around) but our Millennials and Generation Z are indeed our future so get involved.

What can women do right now to play a greater part in change, and navigate a successful and rewarding career?

Build and Bring your Personal Brand to Life

Your brand is about trust. Not only the trust that others have in you, but the trust that you have in yourself and your abilities. It builds a sense of knowing within you, and confidence to achieve.

To know your personal brand is to know and tap into your values, your strengths, your passion, and purpose so you stand out, and create the impact you dare to make.

- What makes you unique?
- When people mention your name, how do you want them to describe you?
- What do you want them to feel, see, and experience?
- Are there areas you need to work on or skills you need to develop to achieve your goals?

To start you thinking about “you” and building confidence and trust in “you” I have created an editable workbook with ten actions for you to commit to right now (*open in adobe reader*). Take the time to complete this **worksheet** and get super purposeful about how you will start to build your confidence, personal brand and advance your career.

Want more?

- Sign up for Women Step Forward’s monthly newsletter with free cheat sheets on matters topical to women [home - Women Step Forward | Shining the spotlight on our next generation of women leaders](#),
- Stay tuned via my Instagram page for more bite size content and a giggle. [Melanie Beirne \(@womenstepforward\) • Instagram photos and videos](#)

I know we can achieve equality sooner if only we all act with intention and contribute to the cause.

Mā te huruhuru ka rere te manu (with feathers a bird can fly).

Melanie Beirne, founder of [Women Step Forward](#)