

Corporate Express ranked on ‘Blue Ribbon List’ for 2006 EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership

Corporate Express has been ranked on the ‘Blue Ribbon List’ of organisations for the 2006 EOWA Australian Women in Leadership Census released today.

The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency measures the number of women in executive positions and board positions of the ASX200 companies, which represent 78 percent of Australia’s market capitalisation, as at 1 February 2006.

The Blue Ribbon list is for companies with two or more women board directors, and/or women executive managers.

Chris Gillies, an independent non-executive director, has served on a number of boards and currently serves on the board at Corporate Express. She has over 10 years experience as a director and more than 35 years experience in business management and information technology – and has even found time to plant a vineyard.

“I consider myself to have had an incredibly fortunate life in terms of my work. I have never come across any such thing as a glass ceiling,” Gillies said.

“My Chairman at Corporate Express is wonderful and doesn’t even think about gender. CEO Grant Harrod recognises women and would not even think about any sort of gender specific judgement. He just goes for the best and that’s what Corporate Express is about – being the best – about teams and qualities. I joined the board of a company that has all of the values I am so passionate about,” she said.

Gillies finished corporate life a few years ago as Group Executive, Group Services at St George Bank where her role included managing the integration with Advance. Prior to St George, she was Chief Information Officer for the Bank of Melbourne and Victorian Director of the DMR Group, an international IT consulting company.

“My career started at the age of 16 as a clerk in a material warehouse. I had older brothers and my mother thought it was more important to send the boys to university than me. If I had gone to university I would have been a teacher,” Gillies said.

With no qualifications, Gillies rose up the ranks through a range of jobs, got married, had two children, got divorced and never married again.

“The biggest challenge for a woman with children is being there as a mother and being there in the work environment. You get that horrible feeling that you think you should be there for your kids and there for your work at the same time. Nobody’s indispensable, but

when I was part of a team trying to get a report in I had to weigh up a scale and prioritize with some logic around that,” she said.

“My two grown up children now have careers of their own. One is a speech pathologist with an MBA and the other an anaesthetist and researcher at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. The best thing I did in my whole life was to have these two children. They are my friends, my colleagues, my confidants. They are a gift.

“In the early 60s, when girls did girl’s jobs, being a woman may have felt like a disadvantage, but the world of Information Technology had not really started. I got in on the ground floor. There was no computer science degree when I started with bits and bytes and binary and accounting machines. We converted accounting machines to very basic computers.

“Being a woman was a challenge – not a disadvantage, and in some ways it was an advantage. Where you have a male dominated environment – you can actually punch above your weight and demonstrate that you are a good thinker and that you don’t have to try and be a man. I was happy being a woman. I didn’t fight the environment, but learnt how to succeed in it and gain the respect of my male colleagues. The glass ceiling hasn’t been an issue - and that’s borne out of mutual respect.

“I attribute my success to the belief that anything is possible – you just have to figure out a way how. I also believe if I put my best foot forward and do my best I will succeed. I really believe in teams, rather than hierarchical organisation structures. When you know something about something you can lead people and its also knowing enough to know what you don’t know and when to go and ask.

“There are always lessons to learn and ways to do things better. I never assume near enough is good enough. The day I think I’ve stopped learning I stop growing. To me that’s the glass ceiling – that’s what stops us.

“There are some fabulous women role models around – and also some damn good male role models around too.

“I’ve come across some incredible people that have supported me that have advised and helped me and it’s been truly independent of gender - from the boardroom down,” Gilles said.

Grant Harrod, CEO for Corporate Express, said the organisation has benefited enormously from having women on the board and in executive manager positions.

“More than 41 percent of our total workforce is female and our goal is to match this representation throughout all levels of our organisation wherever practical. This has provided both cultural and financial benefits,” Harrod said.

“Over four years ago we implemented our maternity Return to Work program providing flexible working arrangements for our female workforce to enable them to continue their career whilst managing the demands of a family environment. To date more than 50

percent of our female staff who have taken maternity leave have returned because of this program. In the last financial year 10 people took the paid Maternity leave option we offer employees.

“The benefits to Corporate Express have been numerous, including reduced training and development costs by not having to replace a skilled and experienced workforce. We have long term retention of female staff who recognise Corporate Express is a supportive and long term career employer that will accommodate their personal as well as professional plans. Retaining this highly skilled and experienced group of people has further added to the skill depth and calibre providing future leadership talent for the company.

“Corporate Express is seen as an attractive employer given its equal opportunity focus. We aim to achieve an empathetic team-based culture collectively focused on maximising our customer’s experience in dealing with the company. We believe the key to accomplishing this is strong female representation at all levels of our business.

“We are of the opinion a positive gender mix in our executive management team and board promotes a diversity of views, opinions and a more counter-balanced environment versus that which is all male dominated. Our senior management team has women in most functional areas including marketing, general management, customer care, finance, legal and general management.

“Many of our customers are female so understanding and representing the female demographic has, and will, continue to play an important role in our ongoing success,” he said.

Corporate Express seeks to maintain its reputation as a socially-responsible and responsive organisation. They remain a valued business partner to suppliers and customers who are seeking to add to their corporate citizenship goals.

Now in its 11th year in Australia, the company has 49 branches around Australia and New Zealand. For more information about Corporate Express please call 13 26 44 or visit the website at www.ce.com.au

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