



YS UP GOVERNANCE AND BOARDS PODCAST

Episode 22 – Achieve diversity and equality by breaking the gender code with Danielle Dobson

Transcript

Intro:

Welcome to YS Up Governance and Boards podcast brought to you by 3YS Owls Governance Consultants. Covering hot topics in governance, risk, latest regulatory changes and issues keeping directors and executives awake at night. Here are your hosts Ainslie Cunningham and Deb Anderson.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Welcome to another episode of YS Up. Today we're joined by Danielle Dobson. Welcome, Danielle.

Danielle Dobson:

Hi, Ainslie. Hi, Deb. Thanks for having me on the show.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yes, thanks for joining us. So, Danielle is an author, speaker, coach, and advocate. As a CPA with extensive 14-year corporate experience, Danielle has covered everything from private practice to multinationals, and has lived and worked in four countries, identifying the high level of stress and overwhelm experienced personally, and by working mothers. Danielle wanted to make a difference, and seven years ago, pivoted from her corporate career to helping working mothers find more freedom and fulfillment through coaching in wellbeing.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Her experience with her coaching clients told her that the answer wasn't purely in wellbeing. There was something else that is holding professional women back from having the lives they really want. Driven by the mission to find answers to why the daily juggle for balance between work and life is so elusive for women in high pressure roles, she interviewed over 50 women and a few good men in leadership positions across a diverse range of industries. Through this work, Danielle learned what works in helping women use what they already have to get what they actually want. And she shares this in her book, breaking the gender code.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Now Danielle uses this body of work and experience to help women to break free from the gender code that has been holding them back. Working with individuals and organisations, she creates clear pathways for women to unlock their full potential and step into positions of leadership and influence, without excessive self-judgment and parent guilt. What a wasted emotion that is.

Danielle Dobson:

Yeah.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Danielle also helps organisations understand the impact of the gender code in their business, so they can leverage the power of the high performing women they already have, attract the right female leaders into their organisation, develop a competitive advantage over industry rivals, and boost their bottom line performance. Wow, impressive. Welcome, Danielle.

Danielle Dobson:

Great, thanks for having me. Well, that just sounds really great, doesn't it? It's like, who doesn't want that?

Ainslie Cunningham:

Absolutely. So, tell us a bit about the Gender Code.

Danielle Dobson:

The gender code, okay. So, the Gender Code, I discovered through my research. And it was actually unintended. And just to go back a little bit and give you a little bit of a story behind the whole project, it started off as a market research project, because I wanted to understand the women that I was coaching better. So, I wanted to be able to support them better. And I was at a stage where I was feeling stuck myself. I was thinking, "How am I going to juggle these two worlds of being a parent, a single parent, and being in the workforce, and do a really good job of both?" So, I was on this mission to understand, how can we do both? And wanting to find the people who were doing it well. And I wanted to understand more the unique perspective and how it influenced ... being a parent influenced how they were at work as a leader. And how being a leader influenced how they parented.

Danielle Dobson:

So, it set me off on this market research project. So, I called it The Wonders of Women Leaders: A Research Project. And I started interviewing these women, CIOs, COOs, CEOs, partners in accounting firms working for international banks, big accounting firms, in all sorts of industry, male dominated industry, banking and finance. I also interviewed scientists, journalists, politicians. And I wanted to find out what was really working well, as I said before. And what kept coming up were some really common themes around how their leadership style had changed for the better once they became a parent, and that it positively impacted everyone around them.

Danielle Dobson:

And another thing that kept coming up was this feeling of struggling to have it all. So, this being torn and trying to think that we have to be high achieving at work, high achieving in everything that we do. And it was causing this depletion and burnout. But one of the things that really, I guess moved me the most to find out more to try and solve was the stories around gender disparity, around unpaid work, around discrimination in the workplace. And I actually had not seen it before. I guess it was always there, but I hadn't seen it. I'd worked in male dominated industries back when I was in finance. And for me, I didn't see it. It just seemed the way things were.

Danielle Dobson:

But when you start to see it coming out in others and other people talking about it, and you're hearing their stories, that's when you start to really, I guess, get fired up and think, "Where did this all come from?" And so, that is when I delved deeper into this gender code. And I did a lot of study, further deeper study. And for me, I always look at science to explain everything. So, I looked at our evolutionary past, I looked at the way our brain works, I looked at neuroscience. I looked at different cultures. And I worked out that we're actually living according to this gender code. It's that set of default beliefs that we all recognise about the natural differences between men and women.

Danielle Dobson:

And these beliefs create these stereotypes that keep the genders firmly in different boxes, and it specifically keeps women from pursuing our dreams and achieving success in life and work. And we've all been programmed with this code. And it's over millennia. It's been embedded for aeons. And because it's deeply embedded within our culture, it's so much so that it's to the extent that we don't challenge those beliefs, even when they create real difficulties for individuals, men and women, for businesses, and across societies, because according to the gender code, women are pigeonholed into the role of carer, and men in the role of provider.

Danielle Dobson:

And this programming along gender lines is detrimental and it stops each of us really stepping into our unique potential at home, at work, and the way we contribute to society. So, I guess that is what I discovered. And so, what I wanted to do is bring that to the attention of everyone. And I guess, like I always say, I did not set out to write a book. But this stuff that I was learning was just way too good

to keep to myself. And I knew I had to share it more broadly. And so, I had a bunch of research, all these transcripts. I was very fortunate enough to interview people who were okay with me recording.

Danielle Dobson:

And I had all this research, and I said, "Right. I need to do something with this." So, then I wrote the book, with a lot of help from really talented people. And I thought this needs to also get out into organisations and businesses, boards to illuminate this and then provide some solutions. So, I didn't just stop with, "This is a gender code, and this is what it's doing." I also put together kind of a framework for women and businesses to be aware of the code, but then to use what they already have to achieve what they want, rather than another thing to add to the to-do list, but looking at what they already have and leveraging that to get to where they want to. So yeah, I guess that's a really long response, isn't it?

Ainslie Cunningham:

It's fantastic to hear about that. And so, what sort of challenges is this bringing up for boards and leadership teams?

Danielle Dobson:

That's a really good one. I guess, if we start with boards, something that I've been really curious about, because the data that we have right now, the latest report on The Gender Equity Insights 2020, produced by the Bankwest Curtin Centre, using all the data, longitudinal study using data from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, which is data that has to be reported by companies with over 100 employees. And there's about 98% compliance. You don't get fined or anything if you don't comply. But all this data on gender statistics has to be reported to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

Danielle Dobson:

So, using that data, Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre has used that. And they've come up, the latest 2020 Insights Report shows us that there's a direct causal link between having more women in senior leadership roles and key management roles, and the performance of your business. So, in terms of profitability, business performance, and productivity. And I've got the numbers here so that I'm completely accurate. So, if there's an increase of 10 percentage points or more for women in higher level management positions and boards and senior roles, the ASX listed companies, this report shows that there's a 4.9% increase in company market value. And that can equate to 78.5 million Australian dollars.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Wow.

Danielle Dobson:

So, I mean, the numbers are in. And appointing a female CEO, there's a 12.9 percentage increase of outperforming equivalent organisations in the sector by three or more different metrics. And I mean, I could go on. There's lots of other ... But now we can find causal links. So, this is relatively new, and it's ground-breaking and it's a world first report, because for a long time, there's been the sense, and there's been some evidence, but it hasn't been as rigorously ... I don't know, compiled. Rigorously put together and scrutinised. And using, like I mentioned, longitudinal data. So, this information was started to be collected in 2012.

Danielle Dobson:

So, Julia Gillard, when she was the Prime Minister, instigated and created this measure. And so, we have years of research. So, in terms of bottom line, because we like evidence, we like data. We like to have the real numbers to help us understand the real true impact of having gender diversity, so we've got it now. So, it's not just a nice to have or the good thing to do or a fair thing to do to have gender balance at the top or throughout organisations in general. But it actually makes good business sense. It is kind of the only thing to do going forward. Like, now, going forward in COVID and post-COVID.

Danielle Dobson:

So, I guess when we look at challenges, what are the challenges to that? So, what I'm hearing generally, in terms of if we go straight up to the board, okay? We'll start with the board. We do have

an increased number of women in board positions on the ASX, I think 300. We've got 31.3%. We've hit that recently. And I imagine you would both have a lot more depth of understanding of compositions of boards. But what we have right now is a situation where there's amazing, amazing women, who are serving on three or four ... Like, multiple boards. And I think about these women, and I think, "Imagine what they have progressed through and gone through, how hard they've worked and how tenacious they must be to get into the position they're in now." And that's fantastic.

Danielle Dobson:

But what I'm hearing around boards who tend to have more of a conservative approach is they would rather appoint people with a proven track record. So, that's part of the reason why there's the multiple appointments. And I'm not sure if they're thinking that there's not enough of a candidate pool. But it's one of those chicken and the eggs. And it's like when you start out in your career, you need to get experience to be experienced. And so, I think one of the challenges that I've been reliably informed is that it's a matter of, I guess, taking ... It's not even taking a chance or a risk, but it's just looking at the candidate pool a little bit differently. So, maybe not just focusing first on proven track record and reliability and being a valuable candidate, but maybe looking at what a valuable candidate means in a different lens, not just a proven track record, but skills and strength and contribution. Their career to date, how that could be valuable to the board.

Danielle Dobson:

So, I guess my suggestion there is to be looking at the candidate pool differently, through a different lens. And more of an expansive lens, rather than a track record proving their stripes lens, because the pool is there. It is absolutely there. And there are people who are frustrated that they're not being considered because they don't have the experience. And then, it also feeds in to these gender coded pressures that women have in general, based on our life experience, that we need to earn our stripes before we can go for a position or apply ourselves to something that we're not experienced with. So, these things play into each other at the same time. But yeah, my major recommendation would be to have a look at who is in that candidate pool through a different lens.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, absolutely.

Deb Anderson:

Did you find any links between parenting and being a good leader?

Danielle Dobson:

Yes, I'm so glad you asked that, Deb. Yes, that was one of the things that blew me away. I was interviewing women and men, majority women. And every single one, except one, said that after they became a parent, they became a better leader. And I was really curious about this. And I said, "Okay, so what was it about that?" And they said, "Well, you develop the skills of empathy, perspective, patience, prioritisation, critical thinking, flexibility, adaptability, creativity, all of these skills that you need to develop as a parent on the job. There's no training on this stuff. It's on the job training. And they found that they brought that to their leaderships."

Danielle Dobson:

So, in terms of the people that they were leading, they increased their empathy and perspective. So many said, after they came back from maternity leave in a leadership position, like their first child, they understood the people in their team so much more. Like, the world that they were living in. They became higher on empathy and perspective. And they became more people focused, more people centric. And it's really interesting, I was hearing this over and over again. And at the same time, I was looking into the future for the kind of skills and strengths that my children need. I've got three young boys. So, I'm looking ahead to look at where I need to help support them to develop their skills and strengths and what's needed for the workforce in the future. And these skills were top skills required, you know? And collaboration, perspective and empathy, critical thinking, creativity, adaptability.

Danielle Dobson:

And I'm like, actually, if we put all this together, these skills that you build and strengthen from becoming a parent are actually a career and leadership asset. So, becoming a parent isn't a liability that we tend to think of from a societal perspective. It can actually be an asset. So, I tested this a bit more with some leaders. And one leader in particular, he works in a male dominated industry. And

he said, "Absolutely." He said, "A woman who has a baby is the cheapest and most effective time management training you could ever put your people through." He said, "They get stuff done. They're efficient. They're great at prioritisation, work really hard."

And he has this policy where he brings women on maternity leave, I should say parental leave, back for one day a week before they're due to come back full-time to work on the business, rather than in the business. And he said it's an incredible opportunity for the women that he leads and also for him too, because it creates loyalty and trust. And he said every single woman that he has managed and led over his career of probably 30 plus years, I think the numbers last time I spoke to him were about 32 of all ... There were about 32, and they've all progressed to management positions. And some of them have leapfrogged males equivalent, who didn't take any parental leave.

Danielle Dobson:

And he said, "It is a brilliant way to build trust." And speaking to another senior female leader, she had actually had a policy about 10 years ago of hiring women who were parents, because she said, "They really get stuff done." And she said, "And give me a woman, if they're single and got a mortgage. And they are out of this world in terms of productivity." So, I guess this is what I really want to shine a light on, that we may actually take for granted the skills and strengths that we're building in not only being a parent, but caring for others, because I found this similar quality in a handful of women that I interviewed who aren't parents. But they were pointed out to me for their huge success in leadership and caring for others. And they had this same approach about caring for others. And the men that I interviewed had a high value on caring for others.

Danielle Dobson:

So, they were bringing those caring skills. So, empathy and perspective. And really understanding the people they were leading. They brought that to their leadership. And the psychological and safety and trust just was off the Richter in their teams, because I tested their direct reports to really get the low down, to make sure that was everyone's perspective. And what I found really interesting is that organisations invest in training to build empathy and perspective. But honestly, if we look at how we are in relationships with people and we care for others, and in particular parents, we're actually building that. It's empathy 101. So yeah, I would really like to shine the light on that.

Danielle Dobson:

And the really fantastic thing about this is, this is open for males as well, for males in terms of caring for others, but also dads, you know? Parents. And this is why it's really important to not only create pathways for women into leadership, but also to create pathways for men into the home, to be able to share the care. So, that was a really exciting thing that I found about my research. It's not just about progressing women, but it's progressing people with those highly sought-after skills and strengths that we really need right now and into the future.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, that's really great to hear that you've got pathways for men as well back into the home, because a lot of them do miss out on taking a more hands on role and approach with raising children. And a lot of them do actually feel like they've missed out and do really want to take a bit more of a front seat in that regard. And so, having something like that is really great. So, how do, I guess, you envisage that they break the code, for instance, in these organisations? Is it a change in culture? Or a change in mindset? Or a combination of a few things?

Danielle Dobson:

Great question. And it is a combination. And what I would start with is, where is the organisation at right now? So, understanding their unique context, because all organisations are at different places along the path. So, if we talk about an organisation that really wants to make a change, sees that the current policies that they have in place right now are not happening, I would suggest looking at something like, if they haven't already done it, a gender pay gap audit. So, looking across all roles across their whole organisation, is there a gender pay gap? So, looking at that. And this is especially applicable in professional services and IT and organisations where there is ... It's not strictly pay scale related. But do that audit, do that gender pay gap audit.

Danielle Dobson:

And then, with that information, if there's a requirement to be reporting that kind of information to the board, and that someone's got to take accountability for that, then there's a good chance that [YS Up - Governance and Boards Podcast Transcript – Episode 22 – Achieve diversity and equality by breaking the gender Code with Danielle Dobson](#)

that's going to be enacted on. So, it really starts with the senior top level ... Like, the board and the execs. So, that's where the culture is created. And then, obviously all the way through. And your direct manager has the biggest influence on an employee's experience at work. That's data that's come out of the Gallup Organization. So, 70% of the employee person's experience at work is determined by the manager. So, absolutely, it's leadership culture all the way through.

Danielle Dobson:

So, when an organisation is required to report on the gender pay gap or diversity in their organisation and someone's accountable, it's more likely it's going to be acted on. And I guess, expanding out from that as well, policies and procedures. So, looking at your policies and procedures. What do you have in place right now around supporting parents to be able to work effectively, to be able to remove obstacles? And a big one is childcare, obviously. And policies that combine work and family better. One of the biggest and most effective policies when implemented properly is an all roles flex policy. So, that's where everybody's role is flexible. Now, I know that's not always manageable in all organisations. But for organisations who can try and work towards that, so that's not just parents with parental leave. It is people who, for whatever reason, everyone has individual reasons, but to be able to manage work and family better, policies that support that.

Danielle Dobson:

So, the all roles flex. And the real beauty of that is that then we don't have divisions between parents and others, or mothers and others. So, if everyone has access to the all roles flex approach, then there's a greater, I guess probability of a more cohesive and collaborative team. So, they're the top ones that I would recommend.

Deb Anderson:

So, I think like with any research, did you have any outliers as part of your research that didn't fit the model?

Danielle Dobson:

Well, it's interesting you say that, Deb, because I guess I actually didn't really have a model as such, or have an hypothesis. But what I found was a surprise, that there are many, many leaders who are leading lonely. I don't know if that's the kind of ... If you are thinking of that kind ... But that was a real outlier for me. I was really surprised that they placed such a high value on caring for others, that they sometimes felt like people didn't place the equivalent value on their own.

Danielle Dobson:

And I found that really ... Like, kind of a little bit disappointing, I guess thinking of them. And I wanted to do something about that as well. That's another part of the reason why I wrote the book, because I feel like wanting to care for them and for all the other people-centric work that they do, yet they're feeling like they're sort of like holding up a tray. Like, you can imagine a tray with a whole lot of amazing food on it and drinks and whatever. And they're holding up this amazing tray and doing all this work, but not being supported themselves. So, who's holding them up? So, I guess that was the thing that surprised me the most. Maybe other people wouldn't find that surprising, but I really did. Yeah.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, absolutely. And so, in terms of, I guess some of the other things that spring to mind for me are, there's a lot of importance for ASX listed entities with value placed on a board skills matrix for the board, for example. And they determine what the right age is, what the right gender is, what the right mix is to get that diversity of opinion and the right skillset to execute on strategy. But it might be even something as simple as having a skills matrix for every layer of an organisation and every type of role, and to try and get the right people on the bus, as they say, and attract the right people in the roles.

Deb Anderson:

Other than just at a board level.

Danielle Dobson:

That is a brilliant idea, yeah. Absolutely, because unless organisations really put some structure and framework around these kinds of initiatives, they will float around. So, absolutely, I think that's

a brilliant idea. And that fits that same model about culture starting at the top. So, using the same tools that we're using at the very top and filter that all the way down. Yeah, so that's a fantastic idea.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah. And I think too with certain investment mandates and things like that coming in from, whether it's large superannuation funds or other types of attract an investment opportunity, there's certain quotas placed on that at the moment for the top end of the ASX to have gender targets and increase in those gender targets, because the last couple of years, there was a trend backwards in representation of women on boards. So, it was actually a little bit disappointing to see those stats come out. So, to hear that they're going back up again is really good. And then, I guess changes in mandating quotas is an improvement in the right direction as well for that.

Danielle Dobson:

Absolutely. And it's interesting, when we had a little conversation last week, we were talking about quotas. And it's really interesting because I still do have conversations with people around quotas and how they feel that it should be on merit. And I absolutely understand that, because that's exactly where I was in my career, my corporate career. And like I mentioned before, it was engineering services. And before that, it was a question that I was asked when I was in interview for a big four accounting firm. It was about big six back then. And the question was, "Do you believe in quotas?" And at the time, I said no, because the lens that I was looking through as a young 20 something who worked really hard, who knew where I was going, who would give 100%, I was operating on a merit basis myself. I thought that my success was going to be completely determined by the amount of work that I did, how I networked, what I contributed.

Danielle Dobson:

But that's because I was looking through my lens. And speaking to women and men throughout this process and during the research, and seeing what they saw, how it was different to what I did, and then having a look at actually, the people who determine what merit means and the parameters are the people in power. So, if the majority of the people in power are only 50% of the population, then they're determining the framework of merit. So, as much as it's not right, it's not fair, and we know now it doesn't make business sense, we need to build in some equity in the system before we can get equality. And what really got me over the line with quotas, because I researched it in politics and business and everywhere, was a story that a senior woman leader told me in a large multinational company.

Danielle Dobson:

She had been appointed the first senior leader in the company's history. And about five or 10 years earlier, she delivered a policy or a strategy on diversity to her manager, which was just thrown back at her and said, "This is ridiculous. This will never fly." So, I said to her, "Well, how did you go from your policy being thrown in your face, to then being appointed as the first female senior leader in your whole company?" And she said two things. She said, "The law." So, she said, "The Equal Opportunity Law helped to shine the spotlight, to open things up. So, it was needed." And she said, "The second thing was that the company discovered that 70% of the buying decisions for the major products they were selling were determined by women." So, they knew they needed to make a difference.

Danielle Dobson:

So, quotas are a necessary part, but they're not the whole part of the puzzle, but they can get things moving, because there's a whole lot of different elements in play that need to contribute. So, I can't wait until we get past quotas, and that we have a system that defines what merit is based on diversity. But we needed those quotas to get going. We need the laws in place to bring these sorts of things to attention, to put the spotlight on it, and for organisations to then start measuring and looking and analysing, "Where are we right now? Maybe we do need to." But then, moving beyond the tick box and looking at how diversity in all roles brings innovative thinking, different perspectives of thinking, creativity, greater collaboration. So, as much as I was there too, I was really always against quotas. But they're a necessary part of the process.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think too though, sometimes it can be quite confronting for men who have not necessarily been exposed to that sort of empathetic challenge or inquiry from women in [YS Up - Governance and Boards Podcast Transcript – Episode 22 – Achieve diversity and equality by breaking the gender Code with Danielle Dobson](#)

leadership teams or boards, etc., where sometimes women will ask what seems to be the dumb question at the table, because they might not necessarily have that background knowledge or the understanding, or they really just want to understand it for themselves. So, they'll make those positive inquiries and respectful challenge, and kind of end up with a lot more robust discussion that actually strengthens a lot of proposals and outcomes for the company as a whole.

Ainslie Cunningham:

And nine times out of 10, you come out of those sorts of meetings, and mostly, the men will say to you, "I'm so glad you asked that, because I was thinking that. I just didn't want to speak up because I didn't want to seem like I didn't know the answer, because it's assumed, I already know the answer." Whereas I think women actually feel in some ways a little bit more comfortable in their own skin to ask those questions and not actually feel threatened by it.

Danielle Dobson:

Absolutely. And brave choice as well too, if you are one of a few, or not many women in that context where people aren't asking questions. And this is one of the things that I found out through my research is a lot of that is to do with childhood behaviour, you know? Our family dynamics, the environment that we've grown up in and that we've created our own code throughout our lives, you know? In using the gender code, I guess, as an overall umbrella sort of code. If you look at the way women tend to operate, and I'm not saying this is fair and I try to not be gender essentialist with what I talk about.

Danielle Dobson:

But if you look at the games that boys play, and once again, it's not all boys. But there's usually a winner, a loser, it's competitive. There's a pecking order and a hierarchy. Boys know where they are. They pick the person on their team to win. They don't pick them because they've got good social skills. They drop the loss, move to the next win. They lose a lot, they win. But there's an outcome. Pretty much all of their games they play, there's an outcome.

Danielle Dobson:

You take that into the workplace. So, you take that into an organisation, your typical organisation. And it's kind of the same thing. They've been trained for this their whole life to be in this pyramid kind of world. And I say that because if you look at an org chart, and if you were to draw a shape around it, it's pretty much a big, fat pyramid, wide pyramid. And so, if you look at traditional games that girls play, they're usually ... And I'm going to be really gender essentialist. But say, dolls, beads, tea parties, dancing, all sorts of games that girls play, it's process and relational. And competition can sometimes be seen as a potential relationship breakdown. And you might pick someone on your team or in your gang, not because they're going to make you win something, but because you like something about them or there's something that may be a value add, or maybe it could be competition. It's not definitive.

Danielle Dobson:

But you take that way of operating. So, I kind of think of that as more collaborative and like a circle. That's kind of a circle approach. So, that's the context that we're used to as women. And men are used to another context their whole life. And that feeds through the whole school system and into the workplace. So, if you take someone who's used to operating in a circle sort of approach, and then you pop them inside a pyramid, there's no wonder that there's a lot of challenges. And look, I'm talking extremes there. And it's not always the case. So, what I actually advocate for is mixing both together, all the really great parts of the pyramid style and the circle, and bringing them together, because I think that creates incredible value.

Danielle Dobson:

I don't think either is necessarily universally applicable in all situations. It's bringing the two together. And I guess what I would say also is, I found that based on that kind of approach and that conditioning and the programming of the gender code, what happens a lot is that men tend to process internally. And then they need to have the answer, and then they'll speak. Whereas women tend to process externally, talk about it, get input, use our words, and then come up with an answer collaboratively, maybe, or get in enough input. And I'm not saying it's definite or that's the way it always happens. But quite often as a leader, and in particular, men feel that they need to have all the answers. So, they may not speak until they have the answers.

Danielle Dobson:

But what they really need are the good questions. So, the good questions to bring out the answers in the group. And this is the real beauty, like you mentioned, Ainslie, of having more women in the room, because it's helping them to feel safe and that it's acceptable to do this. But it's a lifetime of training they've had in a different context. So, bringing all of that together is incredibly valuable.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah. And another thing I'd seen was an interview that Andrew Denton had done with Julie Bishop. And it was around gender deafness in the government and politics. And saying how she'll say something or come up with an idea. And then a few minutes later, a man would say the same idea, and then they'll go, "Oh, that's brilliant." And it's like, "Well, what happened to my idea?" And when I seen this interview, I was like, "Oh my gosh." I totally resonate with that, because so many times I'm like, "What about this? What about that? We could do this. We could do that." And quite often, people are just like, "Yeah, whatever, whatever, whatever." And then, all of a sudden, the guy beside you goes, "Well, what about this?" And it's exactly what you've said. And it's like, this whole gender deafness element.

Deb Anderson:

Part of it's parenting too, isn't it? I mean, no matter what gender, they don't have to fit into a box. You just go, there's an equality here. You can be whatever you want to be.

Danielle Dobson:

Yes. Absolutely. And it's really interesting. I'll just quickly speak about the gender deafness, which is really great. And actually, there was a cartoon even before that called the Mrs Triggs Question. And it's exactly what you mentioned, Ainslie. And that's in my book, actually, in my research. And I wanted to find out more about that as well. Like, what is going on? Because people were sharing that with me too, the gender deafness in meetings.

Danielle Dobson:

And I came across some work by a woman, amazing professor in the UK, Margaret. And I can't believe I've forgotten her name. But she has this ... Margaret ... I'll find out. But she has this amazing book, very small, tiny little book on women and power. And her research and assumptions on that is that it's not necessarily what we're saying, because 90% of us might think, "Maybe there's too many words in there. Maybe it was what I ... Maybe it needed to be briefer," all of these things. But she takes it right back to the skill and the ... I don't know, past time, but the mission for men around oratory. So, speaking in public. So, that was one of the most powerful, manly things you could do in the ancient times, like the Ancient Greeks and Romans, and probably even before that, all the time.

Danielle Dobson:

So, speaking with a powerful language and speaking to people was the most influential power you could have, way before the internet and everything. So, it was a power. And all throughout Western culture in literature, women have not had a voice. We've had a voice on women's issues and children's, but not really had a voice in the literature around those other important issues. And she says that it's ... And she gives loads of examples. It's an excellent book. It's very small and a quick, easy read, or you can get it on Audible as well. But she says, "If you think about how we speak about voices, even. So, we talk about the strong, powerful, deep voice, indicating masculine authority, or the high-pitched cowardice of an emasculated man. And we don't associate the same level of power, respect, and influence with that voice." So, if you think of women's voices, how they come across, it's exactly the same thing. But then, she says as well, "It's not that it's just the tone. It's that we don't hear power and authority in women's voices because they're coming out of women."

Ainslie Cunningham:

When you do, you're yelling at the kids to get their shoes and the backpack on their way out the door, or the lunchbox. And then you just come off sounding like a psycho.

Danielle Dobson:

Exactly. Like, these shrill fish wife, or whatever. And people don't kind of tend to respond well to that.

Ainslie Cunningham:

No.

Danielle Dobson:

For a number of reasons. So, she asserts that that's what a lot of that gender deafness is about. It's not what we're saying. It's just that as a culture and a society, we haven't learnt to accept and understand and hear the power and authority in women's voices, because it's deeply ingrained. And I found that absolutely fascinating. And then, it's like The Matrix, you know? Like Neo in The Matrix movie, it just all illuminates then. You see it all the time now. You hear it. It becomes a lot more evident. Yeah.

Ainslie Cunningham:

It'd be a bit fun to try that one out in the boardroom. Just start changing your voice to like a man or something like that.

Danielle Dobson:

Well, that would definitely get attention.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, absolutely. It's always one ... The number of times you get asked when you've got a cold or something like that. You end up sounding a bit husky. And everyone's like, "What's wrong with you?" It's like-

Danielle Dobson:

Yeah.

Ainslie Cunningham:

All right. Well, we could talk to you all day, Danielle, about this. But unfortunately, that's about all we have time for today. So, is there any sort of top three tips you want to leave our listeners with and whereabouts they can grab a copy of your book and maybe explore some of this gender code in more detail?

Danielle Dobson:

Absolutely. Okay, so to women who are in leadership and emerging leaders in leadership roles, and want to keep progressing without the guilt, I say buy my book. That will help you relieve the pressure. To senior leaders of organisations in people and culture, HR, talent, I would say, do the gender pay gap audit. Look at who you already have. Really have a look at who you really already have. If you think you don't have people in the pipeline, have a good look. Use who you already have to get what you actually want. And to senior leaders, who are thinking, "We need to do better," speak to your HR people. And boards, look at the talent pool through a different lens. I'd say look at the capabilities, the strengths, and the matrix, and everything you mention without needing to have that proven track record. And I guess overall, I would say, ask more questions, listen more deeply, and try and understand people from their perspective.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Absolutely. And where can they grab the book, Danielle?

Danielle Dobson:

Okay. So, off my website. So, codeconversations.com.au, can purchase it off there. But also in book shops. It's on the other online bookshops, like Amazon, Booktopia, all of the online bookshops. So, please buy a copy, or contact me. I'd love to hear your thoughts and feedback. It's always great to get the fantastic testimonials or feedback from people, which provides me with fuel to keep going with this, because I know it's making a difference. So, I welcome any contact at all.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Absolutely. And we'll include the link on our website as well. So, once the episode goes live, we'll have all that up there as well. So, thanks so much.

Deb Anderson:

Thanks for your time, Danielle. we really appreciate it.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for joining us.

Danielle Dobson:

Thank you.

Deb Anderson:

Thanks.

Outro:

That's all for today. Until next time, happy podcasting. And remember if you're enjoying the show, check out our other episodes and all things governance at www.3ysowls.com.au.