

LIGHTBULB MOMENTS

Stephen Roberts, Citi CEO and Country Officer Australia

I moved overseas in 1980. One of the things that I do recall being expressed to me by both Australians visiting from home as well as by people who had been to Australia was that Australia was a blokey place and that always surprised me; until I came home.

And all of a sudden more and more of the things that I did growing up and whilst I was at university and when I started work now I saw in a different light; Christmas parties, official functions. I remember there was one Christmas function where there were various scantily clad women at a work function, sporting events, dinners, which female attendance was an exception. I think those were the things that really made me look back and think “wow”.

The environment on the trading floor was highlighted to me when a young mother came to see me extremely distressed that after leaving the trading floor at three o'clock one afternoon to pick up her son from school she was criticised as being slack by one of the male traders. And it suddenly dawned on me again that something that should happen, that we should be completely comfortable with and completely support was so overtly criticised and made this lady feel uncomfortable to the extent she had to come and see me. I wonder what was going through the head of that male trader? The values that were instilled in me as a child despite my poor mother living in a house full of males are still very important to me. Generosity of spirit, forgiveness, of understanding, of empathy, of humility are absolutely vital in what I do every day and I have just spoken to all of the new arrivals at Citi this quarter and somebody asked me the question “what do you think is a successful banker?” The ability of a person to step into the shoes of someone that they are negotiating with, hiring, selling something to, is vital and if you don't have empathy and if you don't have humility you cannot do that. So those are the attributes that I was brought up with and they are very important today.

In any business, in any environment, there are men that don't get it. It goes back to one's home environment, school environment, primary, secondary, tertiary. Perhaps I'm a little bit naughty here and talk about some of the incidents I read about on the campus at Sydney University in the last couple of years around initiation ceremonies, at some of the most esteemed colleges in Australia. That didn't originate at college. It just continued at college because the shackles were removed.

It's slowly changing. I hope it's slowly changing and some of those dinosaur-like attitudes are slowly being re-educated but it is going to take a long time. It is generational. If something's not right, put your hand up. If you're concerned about something, make it known. It's very easy for me to say that as a leader but in talking to a group of people, the one thing I will always, always plead — and I can only plead, I can't demand — is a willingness where something is not right to put their hand up and make me aware.