

Celebrating Progress Versus Perfection

Inspiration for driving meaningful and lasting change well beyond Women's History Month.

This year, Women's History Month spotlights the conscious and unconscious biases that influence our personal and professional lives.

Defining and reforming biases, especially unconscious ones, takes effort, intention, and persistence. Think of it as an iceberg – a small percentage of the bias is seen above the water, but below is a critical mass that we must keep chipping away at with perseverance.

When it comes to equality, we aim for meaningful and lasting change. And we should be celebrating all the gains along the way rather than the pursuit of perfection. For inspiration on leading change one step at a time, I turn to my superhero, the legendary Ruth Bader Ginsburg (or “Notorious RBG”), who spent a lifetime championing gender equality.

While she was most known for serving on the U.S. Supreme Court, RBG was a trailblazer who fought tirelessly to break barriers in her personal and professional life. She had true grit and achieved many firsts: Graduated first in her class from Columbia Law School; was the first person on both the Harvard and Columbia law reviews; co-founded the first law journal on women's rights; and became the first tenured female law professor at Columbia.

RBG fought against biases of all sizes, shapes, and forms throughout her career. She faced many setbacks and didn't always win, but she demonstrated that real progress could be made with the right intention and focus, and those changes will stick.

Here are three life lessons from RBG to guide us all in forging a more inclusive world:

“Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.” – RBG

Every time you speak up for yourself or others, you are building a groundswell and momentum for change in a small or big way. You are helping to educate someone and empower them to keep chipping away at the more significant issue. I have been known to correct my colleagues to exchange the word “woman” for “girl” and “ambitious” for “aggressive” as small ways to change the tide one step at a time. I encourage leaders to build a diverse team, one hire at a time. If you don't have any diversity in your network, challenge yourself to make two new connections each month.

“You can disagree without being disagreeable.” – RBG

One of RBG's greatest strengths was her ability to dissent professionally, be persuasive, and be fact-based. She was perhaps the quintessential “velvet hammer.” She accomplished this by keeping an open mind and engaging in conversations to get a deeper perspective of what it feels like to be on the other side of the issue. We can all put this into practice in the business world, and when we do, it makes room for new ideas and perspectives by encouraging everyone to use their voice. If there is a woman in your meeting that hasn't spoken up, ask her for her thoughts with one of my favorite questions: “what are we missing?” This simple question opens the doors to new thinking and inclusivity.

“Fight for the things you care about but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” – RBG

I admire RBG for being an independent thinker who brought the rest of the world along with her. Rather than focus on what she could do for herself, she turned her attention to what she could do for others, significantly the underrepresented. We all need a support network to drive change and look for ways to mentor and coach others. Allies are an accelerator and drive scale when making meaningful changes. If you want to help level the playing field, understand the issues and lend your sponsorship to fight for them.

I grew up the youngest of three women with two incredibly supportive parents. My two sisters remain role models to me, and we all share a passion for paying it forward. As Women’s History Month draws close, please join me in taking inspiration from RBG and other trailblazers, both past and present. Let’s continue the work started this month to continue progress and forge a more inclusive world for people from all genders, races, ethnicities, and religions.

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