

The Women's Group: A supportive group for women to explore their work and relationships

Women working in organisations manage a multiplicity of roles often in conflict with the deeply held assumptions of the organisation and the society of which they are an integral part. In climbing the corporate ladder or just trying to do their job, take leadership, manage others, and demand high levels of performance and output, women's experience can be fraught. They become entangled in authority issues, competition with other women and the endless management of one's reputation as a woman in charge at work. Layered onto this is women's experience of growing up, their family of origin, their relationships with girlfriends, partners and children.

In the corporate world of management education, women are advised on everything from grooming, image and reputation branding, beating the boys at their own game, through to developing managerial competencies and the toughness to crash through the glass ceiling. These programs can be problematic in that they tackle surface issues at best, and collude with the status quo at worst to further increase the stress and mixed messages women receive.

The Women's Group offers an alternative learning and personal development process which allows participants to work through these issues at a deeper level. Meeting fortnightly for two hours, the group is an ongoing reflective space in which women can explore their everyday work and personal lives with the help of an experienced consultant and facilitator. The women come from different walks of life, and are of different ages and cultural backgrounds. Some are in relationships and some single, some have children and some don't but what they all have in common is a desire to know themselves more as women, to explore their lives, their organisational and family roles, their partnerships, their relationship with their colleagues, bosses, women friends, their parents, children and of course men in general.

The group is a working group not a social nor a therapy group. Thus, the women work through some difficult job and personal issues. Sometimes there are tears as well as much laughter and support. In addition, attention is drawn not just to the particular issues of the individual but also to how these same issues might be manifested in the group in the here and now. The group is able to address issues that are often difficult to discuss at work or even with friends and family. The women are helped to work through any conflict this generates, learning that it will be ok, that women can be straight with each other as well as supportive. The work the women do together helps ground them and allows them to access their strength, their authority, and their compassion for themselves. It enhances their personal and professional lives.

The Women's Group meets fortnightly for two hours. The expectation is that participants come regularly. In this way, the continuity of stories and understanding is maintained, and the women demonstrate a commitment to being there for each other. For information on joining

the Women's Group, including the invitation to speak to current or past participants, please contact Naomi Raab.

What the Women say: a couple of testimonials

"The women's group changed my life! Well that is to say, I changed my life with their support. After many years of individual counselling, I found the support and challenge offered by this group of women enabled me to move on.

I am in my early sixties, so am as old as some of the women's mothers. The age differences have afforded us all the opportunity to think about things from other perspectives in a safe environment. We are not always "comfortable and relaxed" but are always discovering and learning and this is exciting. My new partner doesn't quite get what the women's group is about, but that is OK as it is hard to describe. Women's lives are different and we need to care for one another."

Meryl

"The women's group for me is a time and place of challenge, privilege and support. It challenges my own often narrow narrative, to view other ways of thinking, doing and acting...it supports my own story and journeys and it is a privilege to know, celebrate and feel for the other women in the group. Through the other women's stories my own story is given perspective and meaning with Naomi skillfully weaving the threads with colour and humour."

Julie