

There are several themes and initiatives running in conjunction with International Women's Day this year.

On the International Women's Day website, the hashtag for 2017 is #BeBoldForChange.

The Women's March movement, which formed out of growing concern over misogyny following the election of US president Donald J. Trump's election, declared March 8 the day for an International Women's Strike.

At the time of writing, allies of the Women's March in more than 30 countries have pledged solidarity with their sisters in the United States by committing to "A Day Without A Woman". Among other things, this means taking leave from work on the 8th and refraining from all shopping except at small-scale women- or minority-owned businesses.

The irony of the strike is that its impact would be most visible precisely in societies that already enjoy relatively high levels of women's participation in the workforce and access to education and information. Which brings us to a third theme for the day.

This year, the rallying cry of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – better known as UN Women – is "Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50-50 by 2030". It's a call for equal workforce gender representation in every sense – not just in terms of employment but also the quality and level of employment.

UN Women reports that globally, only 50% of working age women are represented in the labour force. (In comparison, the rate of representation for men is 76%.) Also of great concern is that an overwhelming majority of

BEING EACH OTHER'S BETTER HALF

the world's women work in the informal economy. They tend to contribute significantly to domestic work while holding lower-skill jobs that pay less, are less stable, and offer little or no social protection at all.

Although Malaysia has more women than men enrolled in local tertiary education and has raised its female labour participation rate to 55% – higher than the global average – local think tank the Penang Institute noted that many Malaysian women remain in vulnerable, lowly-paid or unpaid employment.

Despite women outnumbering their male peers in university, the Malaysian workforce gender ratio stands at 60:40 in favour of men. Somewhere along the line, our female university graduates drop out of the workforce. Many stop working to care for young families and never to return. It is an internal brain drain for which our nation's talent pool becomes far poorer in the long run.

The Star reported last year that women held 26.3% of top management positions public-listed companies (PLCs) in 2015. The Government aims to raise this figure to 30% by 2020, but what will it take to reach and surpass that number?

In this issue, the Leaderonomics

team and our contributing writers weigh in on the challenges we must tackle to make the workplace more conducive not only for women's participation today but also for their success and long-term career pathing.

Louisa Devadason discusses women's representation in the workforce, why it matters and how every one of us can help through various roles both at work and outside the office.

Evelyn Teh and Vinesh Naidu examine how women and men unknowingly maintain systemic barriers to gender equity and what can be done to start dismantling these hurdles for women in the workplace.

Be sure not to miss out on this week's exclusive bonus online content! Key in our shortlink or scan the QR code on our centerspread to read Vinesh's thoughts on what *Star Wars'* Princess Leia

can teach us about leadership.

So do women make better leaders than men? Sandy Clarke lays out the history and suggests that we would all be so much better off if women had had greater freedoms and opportunities to participate in business, science, art and government. The time to keep pushing for that change is now.

Offering a glimpse into the struggles and second-guessing that working mothers face every day, contributing writer Kwan-Ann Lin and Leaderonomics' Prema Jayabalan write

candidly from their respective personal experiences about juggling the competing demands of motherhood and career.

For women contemplating the challenge of building an enduring personal and professional brand, Adam Gilad draws timeless lessons from pop icon Madonna.

We also revisit our interview with Datuk Mazlan Othman – Malaysia's first astrophysicist, the first Director of the country's National Space Agency Angkasa, and the woman who led the Angkasawan Project that successfully launched the nation's first astronaut, Datuk Dr Sheikh Muszaphar Shukor, into space. The insights she shares are in turns both grounded and practical, as well as out-of-the-box and richly imaginative.

And in this week's Be A Leader column, our CEO Roshan Thiran reminds female and male leaders alike not to get caught up in dualistic thinking. Both passion and planning are necessary to achieve and sustain success, although each in its turn may play a bigger role at key moments in our careers and lives.

To all women and allies in the struggle to grow leaders and communities of love: May the celebrations of this past week be but a further catalyst to galvanise us in supporting one another's efforts to build a more gender equitable future. And let every day be an occasion to encourage and celebrate the contributions and achievements of the women in your life!

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Leaderonomics editorial team



QUOTES

“Being a leader is like being a lady; if you have to remind people you are, you aren't.”
– Margaret Thatcher

