

Overcoming the great gender divide

Could you employ a female plumber or a male beautician?

We've made strides in promoting gender equality and countering bias in recent years, according to the Equal Employment Opportunities Trust (EEO).

Even so, the great gender divide is alive and well in New Zealand with women struggling to break through the glass ceiling in male-dominated industries in particular. It's not just that. In professions that are largely female, men sometimes progress faster. Just look at teaching. How often is the principal a male when most of the staff members are female?

Here are some tips to survive the great gender divide:

- **Do: write a career plan.** People who [plan](#) get ahead. If you write down your plan you're even more likely to succeed.
- **Do: seek help.** Get yourself a mentor from your industry. Learn from that person and follow their leads. It can also be useful to talk to a career counsellor to map out your route to the top.
- **Do: let it be known.** Tell those in charge about your career ambitions and ask for their advice. "Make it clear what support you want for your professional development," says EEO Trust chief executive Bev Cassidy-MacKenzie. Always [look the part](#) at work.
- **Do: join organisations.** Network like mad with successful women - sorry guys but females tend to suffer more than males - and learn from them. Join an organisation such as Women on Boards. It doesn't matter if you're just starting out. The old hands will often take you under their wing.
- **Do: think about the language you use.** Kill those weasel words. You're not "just" a teacher or a receptionist. All of these roles are important in an organisation. Words and phrases such as: "I think" and "I will try" hold you back. Men are more likely to state a fact than say: "I think", says executive coach Anne Fitzpatrick of Lead to Success.
- **Do: identify progressive workplaces.** Employers with a positive commitment to diversity can use the EEO Trust's logo. Look for it and seek out employers who have won diversity awards or have a diversity programme. You can also ask recruitment agents, who may know.

- **Do: think highly of yourself.** Women are more likely to be apologists for themselves than male colleagues. [Have faith in your ability](#) and speak up so that your voice is heard. Sing your own praises and make sure others know of your successes.
- **Do: your homework.** “Build your business case to support your aspirations,” says Cassidy-MacKenzie. If you can quantify your success – even from feedback scores from customers or stakeholders – you have a better chance of getting ahead. Have your [30 second elevator pitch](#) ready.
- **Do: find a champion or a sponsor who will help.** This is not the same as a mentor and doesn’t even have to be of one gender or the other. It may play to a woman’s advantage if it’s a man, says Cassidy-MacKenzie.
- **Do: champion diversity.** “Make the choice to champion diversity and take the pressure off the gender debate – make it about being a woman, your age, your ethnicity, your cultural beliefs etc,” she adds.