

## WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP AUSTRALIA

August 2009

Inspiring women:

**Virginia Haussegger – ABC TV News  
Presenter Canberra, author, columnist  
and media commentator**



**With over 20 years experience in broadcast journalism, Virginia Haussegger has lived her life in the public eye. Her work has taken her to the Middle East, Europe, Washington and New York – and has awarded her the United Nations Association Media Peace Prize for her coverage of Indigenous affairs.**

Perhaps her boldest public appearance, however, came with the publication of her first book in 2005, *Wonder Woman: The myth of 'having it all'*, in which she spoke openly about coming to terms with being childless.

Taking on a profession that necessitates being in front of cameras, Virginia has had a long time to adjust to public exposure and scrutiny.

“My work has been in the public eye from the day I did my very first television report way back in 1986,” she reflects.

“I have worked in television ever since, along with expanding my commentary through print journalism, as an author and columnist. I’m not sure that being in the public has changed my life – in truth, it has simply been my life.”

In the world of television, ascending to great heights can be dizzying, and as many people climb the rungs of success they rarely pause to look back. Virginia, however, has throughout her career seized a unique chance to support other women in the media industry.

“Many younger women have looked to me for career cues,” Virginia reflects. “I informally mentor women all the time. I do it daily in the workplace. I can’t help myself. I consider it my role as a senior woman in my industry. I just wish more women had provided mentorship to me during my early years of fumbling about, looking for career cues.”

She firmly believes that women need to play to their own unique strengths.

“A woman is a powerhouse of intuitive knowledge and emotional intelligence, more so than our male colleagues. It gives us an edge and an advantage. We all need to trust it more.”

More specifically, she remains a champion of informal networks, irrespective of the industry one works in.

“Talking and sharing experiences is a key way we help one another. Women are particularly open to learning from others. Another is by offering practical encouragement and providing introductions.

“I delight in putting women together if I can see synergies and opportunities for creative collaboration.”

Whilst Virginia works hard to support women around her, she acknowledges that it would be unrealistic to ignore the external hurdles that so many Australian women still face.

As the ubiquitous evidence confirms, Virginia notes that women still do the lion’s share of unpaid domestic work.

“While the role of women has expanded, our lives have become multi-layered and complex. Men are still not sharing the burden.”

In the workplace, she acknowledges that the inroads made before her have given her tremendous opportunities. And for her efforts and successes, she believes – without any reluctance – that the best recognition is money.

“Remuneration is the labor market’s best way of recognising achievement,” she says. “We shouldn’t be shy about that.”

### **Life, though, has its trade-offs**

In all its complexities, the simple truth for Virginia was that at some point on her career-charged journey, she reached a point where she realised that she would most likely never have children.

So in 2005, she put pen to paper and drafted *Wonder Woman*, a deeply personal account of how her career trajectory had enmeshed with her personal life until the wake-up call came: the promise for women of ‘having it all’ was a myth.

“In recent years some personal and painful aspects of my life were discussed very publicly, after I wrote about coming to terms with being childless,” she confesses.

“It was an odd thing to hear my life choices being discussed at length, and critically judged, by those who had never met me.”

With the bombardment of criticism hurled at Virginia after the release of her book – from camps as wide as the conservative right to liberal feminists – it would be hard to blame Virginia for describing this chapter as the biggest challenge of her life.

Rather, and more humbly, she directs attention to herself.

“Perhaps my biggest challenge has been learning to really trust my own talents

and intuition.”

She remains, with wisdom, a student of her own choices.

“I think working for a couple of decades in a public career has taught me the art of distance. I give a huge amount of myself to my work, but I always reserve a quiet, private corner of my heart for me alone.”

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