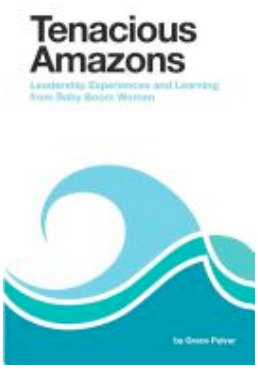
Tenacious Amazons

Leadership Experiences and Learning from Baby Boom Women

by Grace Pulver



At last, a book that recognizes the significant contribution Baby Boom women made to the workplace. Drawing on over 25 years of experience, along with the shared experiences of Boomer women now in senior positions, the author brings their stories to life. From the 1970s onward, Boomer women fought for inclusive leadership and increased diversity, without compromising their values. It took tenacity and courage to drive these changes; it did not come without a price.

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This book describes the leadership experiences of some baby boom women and the author: it is delivered as a record of their experiences. While certain situations describe actual events, the identity of actual individuals is withheld to enable a full understanding of the events for learning purposes. The settings of some of the situations described in the book are also changed to protect identities. This book is not meant to disparage any individual in any way.

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Chapter 1: Honouring Baby Boom Women

It is very early, much too early for such a festive spirit it seems, but that is what I feel in the room. I glance around at this breakfast meeting and see many Baby Boomer and younger women I know; some I have worked with or for, others I know through my network. There are waves and smiles as we enjoy our breakfast celebrating the Top 100 Women in Canada. We have all worn our best gear—decked ourselves out to respect the significance of the occasion—and as women are prone to do, we are checking each other out. I make my decision on the best and worst dressed and turn back to my fruit. Then I notice a woman wearing an orange arrangement as she sweeps herself into the room, and I change my mind. Two other women settle themselves at my table—great jewellery, great gear—this works.

Three Baby Boom women who are among the Top 100 take their place at the front of the room; one is a journalist, one is a senior vice president and one is an academic. The moderator kicks off the meeting and asks each woman to describe her career and the factors that helped them to become successful. I hear stories of courage, of tenacity, about learning from mistakes, about inclusion, and about innovative thinking. I am inspired. I also feel fiercely proud of these women; they are the women from my generation, and I understand their journey. I recognize the hurdles they had to climb over, and I feel a strange sense of gratitude to be in this room at this moment, sharing stories with them. I see I am not alone; other women are soaking in the experience, and I think there is some collective reminiscing in play. We have all stolen this moment from our chaotic schedules to pause, to reflect on our own achievements.

The moderator opens it up for questions from the floor; there is banter and lightness. The three panellists are sharp and witty; yes, I think, they would be. A young woman in her early thirties stands up. I know her – she is like many young women her age who are passionate about protecting the environment. She says:

"It was very interesting to hear about your careers, and that's great. But what I want to know is what you did for the environment?"

The panellists give it a shot and talk about their personal efforts to recycle things in their homes, but they are honest and do not claim great achievements in this area. Their authenticity lands well, but I feel the framing of the question has diminished them in some way, tarnished their legacy unfairly. Something terribly dismissive, terribly misinformed, goes unresolved for me.

The young woman who asked the question seems to lack an understanding of what the work environment was like when the Baby Boom women entered it and how much they transformed it in a relatively short time. I feel combative; someone has slighted my champions, so I go on a mini crusade to defend them. As it turned out,

I did not have to travel too far. There was a break, and the young woman who asked the question came looking for me. She had heard me speak at a previous event, and she knew I was a strong proponent of authentic dialogue.

"Did you hear the question I put to them?" she asks.

She seems proud, almost elated that she has somehow stumped them, caught them out, and I know she is expecting praise from me. I study her face as she talks and as I see the light in her eyes, my anger subsides. In its place now is just sadness for what she has failed to grasp. We talk for a while, and I find myself inwardly sighing as I think, once again, that implicit in authentic dialogue is respect. She looks a little crumpled, even confused by my lack of praise, but I had shielded her from the Celtic warrior woman who lives in my Irish genes, and this is enough.

Later that day, as I traveled back to the office, I thought about the work environment when Baby Boom women first entered it in the 1970s and the challenges they faced. One of them was sexual harassment. A survey conducted by the Working Women Institute in 1975 revealed sexual harassment in the workplace was widespread: over 70 percent of the women responding reported experiencing it at least once. I could not believe the number was so high, and I wondered how the young women in my team would react today to harassment on this scale

The survey also showed that 56 percent of the reported cases involved some form of physical harassment, and that one-third of all reported incidents carried some variety of negative repercussions, such as further harassment or getting fired. I tried to remember one case of sexual harassment I had been involved with as an HR professional in the past five years. There was one; a marked contrast to the incidents of harassment I encountered in the 1980s and 1990s.

"Canada was slow to outlaw sexual harassment in the workplace. In fact, sexual harassment was not recognized as a form of

discrimination when Parliament passed the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1977. It wasn't until six years later in 1983 it was added as a form of sex discrimination, a definition confirmed by the Supreme Court in 1989." (*David Langtry, Acting Chief Commissioner, Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2012*). Many Baby Boomer women were in the workplace ten years or more by 1989.

In 1994, after the Canadian government published a "Study of Harassment in the Workplace," and sexual harassment training became mandatory, the incidents of reported sexual harassment started to climb as more women came forward. However, by 2012, only 9% of complaints accepted by the Canadian Human Rights Commission constituted workplace harassment.

Incidents of sexual harassment continue today, but processes are now in place for women to bring forward a complaint. Companies also take these complaints seriously because they do not want to face losses to their finances, or reputation if a complaint against their business goes through the Human Rights Commission and becomes public. What succeeding generations are starting to understand is while policies and processes have worked, to completely eradicate sexual harassment company cultures must change; perhaps the legacy of Generation X leaders?

Andrea: Vice President, Born 1953

"A senior HR manager personally harassed me, while I was a clerk. He took me for lunch and wound up parking in a low-lit underground parking lot and making an advance. I got out of the car to avoid confrontation, but it was very awkward. I never complained; I was too shy, too young, and too new in the office. I would get looks and feel uncomfortable. I am glad I didn't stay there. His wife used to come in to the office; I felt so badly for her. It was a different time; no harassment policies were in place so you would just keep it all hush and hope nothing came of it.**"**

This was just one challenge the Baby Boom women faced, and it made me realize we had come a long way. The Baby Boom women have a legacy. They evened the playing field for women on a number of fronts and created the space for women today to focus on important issues such as protecting the environment. Boomer women also had to fight a prevailing stereotype that associated leadership with masculine traits, and which put them at a disadvantage. It took tenacity and persistence for women to get a management job in the 1970s and 1980s, and when women were successful in getting into leadership roles, it was often a very turbulent ride.

They altered the leadership model itself, and through the influence of a more feminine style, a much richer type of leadership evolved. But do these younger women and men really understand this gift? As a Baby Boom woman, I try hard to understand the needs and talent of Generation X and Millennium employees even champion them at times. But, do they understand me and their other Baby Boom colleagues or the forces that influenced them?

Chapter 4: Driving Workplace Diversity

Bring it on

It is the 1990s and I am sitting in a somewhat glamorous meeting room, in a plush, hotel, with about one hundred senior business leaders. I scan the room and pick out the number of women in the group, think I have missed some, and count again; the number still comes up small. Then I check the number of leaders who represent visible minorities, and that number is dismal, too. I am not the presenter, and I shouldn't feel nervous, but I am here to support my Workplace Diversity Manager, who is presenting. Even though I know she will do an excellent job, I am anxious.

She is here to present the approach we took, over three years, to design and implement a workplace diversity program with a major

focus on employment equity. This has removed systemic barriers in the workplace for specific groups, such as visible minorities, that prevented them for competing for jobs on an equal footing. The program has been a success and has won an award, so I should feel confident; but, as is often the case when presenting on this subject, I sense we may have a hostile crowd.

They are too senior, and this forum is too public, for them to be blatantly dismissive, or overtly hostile. Against the odds, there has been significant progress in this area, and they know the tide has turned. Raising hostile objections at this stage would only damage the reputation of the companies they represent, so this is not my worry. But I sense they will come at her forcefully and try to draw out flaws in the business case for the program. I know she is prepared, but our experience from working in this area has been that this topic can make some people a little unhinged.

I am right: Within a few minutes she gets her first challenge, and the speaker really does try hard to conceal his hostility, by using a plethora of data in an attempt to discredit her while appearing objective. But his delivery is so agitated that he is not making much sense. His cheeks blow up into two red balloons, and he doesn't do a very good job. I am scratching my head. What in the heck is he on about? But she is ready for him and even helps him to clarify his own inquiry. (Oh, I get it now, or do I?) Then, using the data she has so thoroughly researched, she annihilates him with her own verified facts and a smile.

Others are more cautious now before they take her on, but soon they, too, try to weaken the business case. They do not know the calibre of woman they are talking to; they do not know her tenacity, courage, and commitment, or how hard she had to push to land the program at our company. They also do not know she is a woman with highly astute business acumen, who has always measured the success of any program by its impact on the business. Now I sit back and relax; I even start to feel sorry for them. Bring it on!

One by one, she calmly deals with their questions and counterpoints; they cannot knock her out of her shoes. She goes even further with some of them, turning their questions back on them. Slowly, I sense a grudging admiration building in the room. I am so proud of her I could explode. Not only has she fielded the questions in a masterly way, she has won some converts, and this is an amazing result. At the end of her talk, I am thrilled to see some of them stopping to thank her and compliment her on the presentation. Then my heart stops a beat – are they trying to hire her away from me? She is that good.

Teegan: Vice President, Born 1955

"In 1976 I had been working very hard to prove myself and get a seat on the Management Training Program. The doors closed more often than I expected. My results surpassed my male colleagues, and I trained most of the male trainees when they were given a branch. I kept at it for 4 years, constantly asking them to put me in the program. Finally they agreed and put me in a three-year program. I graduated in 18 months and got my first branch assignment. We had to be so tenacious to get into leadership roles.**"**

Changing the Workplace

From the beginning in the 1970s, when they entered the workforce, many Baby Boomer women fought to be treated the same as men were and to gain a seat at the leadership table. It was not an easy fight, and to achieve it, many Baby Boomer women made sacrifices that were profound. Their efforts changed the workplace forever, I believe, in three dramatic ways.

The first was the leadership role they took in driving and implementing workplace initiatives that created a more even playing field. Some men did lead Employment Equity or its American equivalent Affirmative Action, pay equity, work-life balance, and anti-harassment programs, but my own experience attests that the

program leaders battling it out on the ground were nearly all women, especially at the beginning.

As these programs were advantageous to women, and other designated groups; many companies sought out women to lead them. This was often an attempt to demonstrate their support of women. But also, many men at the time did not want to be associated with these programs − especially in a leadership role. These initiatives removed systemic barriers that prevented women, racial minorities, people with disabilities, and Aboriginal employees from progressing. The workplace became much more culturally diverse and rich at all levels. The Boomer women also drove changes in benefits plans to provide work-life balance options enjoyed by many Generation X and Millennium employees—both male and female—today.

Secondly, the Boomer women brought feminine characteristics to the leadership role, such as collaboration, empathy, and persuasion, at a time when that role was moving away from command and control. They also brought these traits to professional occupations they moved into in greater numbers. In doing so, they influenced the prevailing leadership model, and it evolved to include both female and male traits and to meet the needs of GEN X and Millennium employees. The natural inclination of some Boomer women to be as inclusive coaches enabled their employees to contribute their unique potential and created a stronger bond between the employee and the company.

The third influence that many Baby Boomer women exerted came from their determination to live by their values. As we shall learn through their stories, many were willing to walk away from positions they had fought hard to gain when they felt the demands would breach their values or suppress their potential. Their colleagues often thought they were crazy to give up lucrative positions because of their beliefs and told them to just "suck it up." They did not understand that a values breach was not negotiable to these women. Their stand, and often their sacrifice, inspired others and started a

dialogue about the importance of authenticity in the workplace. It was from these three contributions that their leadership legacy evolved.

Opening Up the Playing Field

The Boomer women I have known who led workplace diversity or pay equity initiatives are very proud of what they accomplished, but they don't all look back on those days as happy times. As these programs progressed in the early 1990s, some of the women who led them felt very alone and isolated, many experienced hostility, and some were even shunned.

They experienced only token support from senior leaders as they pushed for change and faced both passive and overt resistance from start to finish. While some women led these programs, others pushed, and pushed for equity at an individual, personal level, sometimes at the risk of losing their jobs. The changes that occurred because of these efforts created a workplace that is far more equitable and diverse, bringing a new depth and richness through inclusion.

A woman I met at a conference in the early 1990s told me of her experiences working in a very male-dominated manufacturing industry. She described herself as "a tough-skinned person" and said, "I let much of the sexiest comments roll over me, and I suppose I became one of the boys. That all changed when I was asked to lead a pay-equity program in the company to ensure there was equal pay for work of equal value." She suspected they came to her because they wanted a woman to lead it, and they recognized she was tough. "When I saw the difference in salaries, I was appalled; it was simply unjust. I was determined to see this change, and I pushed very hard."

Her co-workers were outraged because they really believed they were worth more than women were, and the atmosphere became hostile. "When I went into the lunchroom, no one would sit with me. They would get up and leave me sitting alone, and that hurt. I lost friends, and it was very stressful, but I did not give up, and we made the changes." Even though the times were extremely turbulent, the

women leaders forged ahead, determined to create an opening for every employee to contribute and receive equal pay for equal work.

Employment Equity

Employment Equity is the term developed by Judge Rosalie Siberman Abella, Commissioner of the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment (1984), to describe a distinct Canadian process for achieving equality in all aspects of employment. The term was meant to distinguish the process from the primarily American Affirmative Action model, as well as to move beyond the Equal Opportunity measures available in Canada at that time. Recognizing that "systemic discrimination" was responsible for most of the inequality found in employment, the Commission outlined a systemic response and chose the term "Employment Equity" to describe the process.

The Employment Equity Act passed in 1986 was the result of evolutionary legislation dating back to the first Canadian Bill of Rights introduced in 1960. Its purpose was to:

"Achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits unrelated to ability and, in the fulfillment of the goals, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minority people by giving effect to the principle that Employment Equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences."
Human Resources and Social Development Canada

Initially, it gave the authority to the Commission to audit federally regulated employers' Employment Equity processes. By the early 1990s, companies exempt from the Act started to implement it to demonstrate a commitment to the principle. They also felt that in time the legislation would extend to them, and that it was better to be proactive. The program took three years to implement. In the first

year, the focus was on increasing awareness to ensure that employees and managers understood the program and to dispel the many myths surrounding it. Also, a workplace survey determined the representation of the designated groups in a company.

In the second year, the focus was on developing new policies such things as harassment or racism to support and sustain the program. And an audit of all employment systems was done to identify systemic barriers faced by the designated groups. In the third year, those barriers started to come down. One example of this was installing ramps in buildings so people in wheelchairs could access the building and, consequently, employment. Another was increasing flexibility in work conditions so working mothers could move into more senior roles.

Catching the Employment Equity Ball

In 1992, I was a senior manager in human resources reporting to a vice president. My role was administrative; I was responsible for strategic planning and budgeting for the division. I took the job in order to move up to a more senior position and to get more experience in areas that were new to me. I loved the strategic planning side of it because it came quite naturally to me, and I liked big-picture thinking. I did get the budgets done and on time and became quite disciplined in this work, but it did not feed my soul.

About eighteen months later, we were having our weekly meeting with our vice president, when he started talking about something called "Employment Equity." At the time, I thought this meant Pay Equity, and that it had something to do with compensation. So, as usual, when it looked like the conversation was diving into details, my mind wandered off and I found myself on my favourite beach. "Oh, what luck, Martini man is here!"

When I returned, I noticed that our vice president was looking directly at me as he spoke. I went a little red because I thought he had caught my momentary escape, but something else was going on. As

he continued, he kept looking down the table at me, and now my brain shifted gears toward how to dodge a bullet. Yikes! I hope someone is standing behind me. I knew about compensation and had taken courses in it; but it had never been my speciality, and I did not want to lead a compensation project. I had proved I could do numbers, but the work gave me as much joy as exploring engine parts on a sunny day. As the meeting closed, our vice president looked directly at me again and said:

"We have to do this Employment Equity project, and I want you to take it on."
"Hello? I don't know a thing about this! And I hate, hate, hate looking at data all day."
Translation: "Okay, I will look into it, but I don't know anything about the topic."
"Well, you are about to learn."

It is my guess that most women in the 1990s caught the Employment Equity ball this way. So, my first task was to get educated. I researched and found a bundle of books and loaded them into a taxi. I took all of the books into bed with me early that evening. I had it all—the latest Human Rights Act, the Affirmative Action story, a history of discrimination, literature on combating racism, gender-inequality issues, the Gay and Lesbian dilemma, the struggles and loneliness of people with disabilities, and the disaster of the Aboriginal residential schools—and crumpled beside me, a copy of People Magazine in case I needed a break. I was wolfing down a bag of chips as I started reading and kept yelling to my husband, who was in another room: "Do you know? Can you believe this?"

As an advocate for people with disabilities, he was encouraging me to take this on. Chip crumbs were flying all over the bed as I turned pages for hours. Greasy smudges stuck to employment law and to stories of fine people who had been hurt. As the evening wore on, I realized that while I had to struggle in the workplace to gain some decision-making power and had had some bad experiences;

in taking that journey I had missed something very important. Some people did not have a place on the road. There was so much injustice; and I had not seen it, I was so preoccupied with getting myself on the ladder. I pictured how some of the managers I knew would react to the program we needed to develop and threw the blankets over my head. "Yuck! There are chip bits in here!" The books fell in an avalanche, and my husband came to the door.

"What the heck are you doing?" My muffled voice answered from under the covers, "I'm going to take it on."

The next morning a female manager dropped by my office.

"I hear you are taking on Employment Equity. Are you nuts? That is very high risk," she said.
"Actually, if there was no risk, I wouldn't be interested. That's what appeals to me. So tell me, what do you suggest I do?"

This was not all entirely true. I think it was a chance to make a difference in some small way which called to me. She just annoyed me; I was okay with people who did not support the program, but I didn't need agitators covertly stirring. I was not naïve; I knew the project would be difficult, and that there would be huge resistance to some things. The request for the project had come from the Board of Directors, so it was political, but that was not the reason I wanted to lead it. I knew Board members would come and go. I wanted to do it because it was right.

Looking back now, if I had known how hard it would be, would I have agreed to lead it? I like to think so, but it was gruelling at times. Our goal was to even the playing field for the designated groups by removing systemic barriers such as job requirements that were not bona fide. In this way we would remove unnecessary barriers that prevented them from getting jobs they had the skills to take on – this was the easy part.

For the changes to be sustainable, we had to change the organization culture to one that both welcomed and celebrated diversity. We had to break prevailing stereotypes and misconceptions and deal with people's fears. We soon found this was going to be very hard. White males, especially, felt threatened, as they correctly perceived they would lose their edge and advantage in hiring and promotion, and a large number of managers in the company were white males. Others felt threatened by increasing cultural diversity as racial stereotypes prevailed.

In the first year, we focused on dispelling myths about Employment Equity. One of these was a belief that people with disabilities had low levels of productivity when the evidence showed the contrary was true – for example, people with disabilities had less absenteeism. Another was a belief that Canada was letting too many unskilled visible minority immigrants into the country. The facts showed immigration levels were similar to previous years, and as Canada was going to face a skills shortage when the baby boomers retired, we needed these skilled new citizens. I remember at one of the awareness sessions I was facilitating I noticed a young man who looked like he was seething. I drew him out by directly asking him to share his concerns. He jumped up and started yelling:

"So we are going to let all these people into Canada, but what about China? How many Canadians will China let into their country to work over there?"

The room went quiet, and I wondered for a moment how to explain to him I actually didn't work for the United Nations. And China did not have the same workforce challenges as Canada; and that China, in this project, was slightly out of scope. So I gave him the facts and he settled down but still looked a little mad. He did give me a gift—I could see other participants in the workshop thought his concern was irrational—and interestingly, this brought them more onboard.

It was such an emotional topic that feelings flared when you least expected it, and this left us constantly on edge. Conversations turned into explosions, presentations into battles, and in some locations, you could feel the hostility in the room. Every day it, seemed, someone was upset – a manager, an employee, one of the people on my team. My male colleagues thought I had turned into a "women's libber" and treated me differently. I would no longer laugh at their jokes. I was very disappointed, not just in them, but in the way a lot of people behaved.

It took three years to get it done, but it felt like ten because everything was such a battle. One day, we were running an awareness session for a manger and his team. The manager had not shown up at the session and it was crucial he was there, so I went looking for him. He was sitting in his office, reading a magazine, with his feet up on the desk. I remember he was wearing cowboy boots, and I wanted to shove them onto the floor. I told him his team was waiting, and it was important for him to open the session to show his commitment to the program. He refused to come with me and said, "I'm not really into that stuff." When his director learned about this, he did nothing.

If we were going to succeed, we needed stronger champions who had clout, who would visibly support the program. My team came up with a brilliant idea. We would run breakfast meetings and invite the CEOs from the companies that were working on Employment Equity and let them hear firsthand stories of discrimination. We asked some people with disabilities and some from different cultures to come and talk to them.

I remember one young man from Nigeria who spoke so nobly there was something very special about him. He told the CEOs about his experiences trying to find an apartment. "When I call, the landlords tell me the apartment is available, but as soon as they see me it is suddenly gone." The pain this caused him was evident. "I thought Canada was different, but this is not true."

Another young man talked about the isolation and fear he experienced when he became disabled, how separate from the community he felt. He talked of how experienced he was in his field and how he longed to work again. These stories touched the CEOs; they were moved, some even ashamed. This was the first time I understood the power of story. We had been driving the change with models, law, and data. But it was stories that helped people to really understand.

My team also went in search of other allies. They found them in different companies, among women like us, who were leading the programs. We formed a network to share our experiences about how we were implementing the programs and to give each other support. These women were all so very different. One, who was very assertive, explained how she got employees to complete a starting point for the program, the survey identifying designated groups.

"I just stood at the door of the room and said: Listen up, you lot. This is how this program is going down." They couldn't leave unless they handed me a completed survey. We blinked and said very little.
"Being nicey-nicey won't work for me," she added.

I wondered how sustainable her program would be. But she was running the program in a predominantly male company where nepotism was just another perk. She had guts and such tenacity, and I thought she was very brave. There was no way I would have led the program at the place where she worked. I admired her a great deal, even if she scared me a little at times.

The network also gave us a place to laugh and release tension. We shared crazy stories about our experiences, and voicing them together made us realize no one was alone. It also helped us understand how nuts things could get. Shortly after I had implemented the new harassment policy—one of the policies that supported Employment Equity—a male employee who was normally a calm person came to see me in much distress.

"This woman who works with me hates me. She has cut off a piece of my hair and made a Voodoo doll. She is sticking pins in it; I know she is. I have pains all over my body. You have to talk to her and make her give you that doll, or at least get back my hair."

I check out what I am wearing. No, it is not a tee-shirt with, "Witchdoctor" sprawled across the front. So, I walked him through the feasibility of this actually happening to get him to focus; he was genuinely spooked, but surprisingly we never found the doll or his missing hair.

On another occasion, a male employee had physically threatened his female supervisor, and her team had witnessed this. He had been verbally abusive and was on a warning, but things had escalated. After she called me, I wanted to get him to my office to tell him he had to leave, but he had disappeared. I phoned security, and we were all running around the building with walkie-talkies. We had closed off the area where he worked, and the security guards finally found him and brought him to see me. I told him he was immediately suspended and had to leave the building and not return until we investigated the incident.

"But I can't go now," he said. "Why can't you?"
"We are having a team potluck lunch, and I made my special chilli."

Sigh. Sigh. Somebody, anybody, hit my escape hatch button, pleeeaasseee! I had him escorted from the building, then fought with the union for months to have a psychological assessment done which we finally achieved.

Some years later, we won an award for our diversity program. While I was very proud of that, the program had changed the way I saw people at that company, and the way I saw people in my city. Even so, it was worth it. It gave me the privilege of meeting some amazing people from different cultures and orientations. Many are still in my heart.

Ruth Vice President, Born 1950s

"One department was very elitist. I had received a harassment complaint about a person who worked in that area. Shortly after, the most senior person in the area came to see me and he said: "Little lady, step away. You don't know what you are dealing with." He didn't intimidate me, but I went to see my male manager and suggested he take the investigation. I knew that, being a woman, I would not get the cooperation I needed on this one. Sometimes we had to pick our battles.**"**

Pay Equity

In 1976, Canada ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which recognized the right to equal pay for work of equal value. In 1981, Canada also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. This stated that women have a right to equal remuneration for work of equal value, and the United Nations adopted it in 1979.

The Canadian Human Rights Act, in force since 1977, also prohibited wage discrimination between male and female employees performing work of equal value. Between 1985 and 1995, the Canadian provinces implemented Pay Equity legislation requiring equal pay for work of equal value and introduced governing bodies to ensure compliance.

The precedent went back as far as 1948 when the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work." Who knew? Certainly not the companies I worked with during the 1970s or 1980s.

When companies started implementing Pay Equity programs in the 1990s, the process was very contentious and it felt as though some new idea had just emerged. Introducing compensation models with

salary bands for most positions had formalized the compensation process, but most Baby Boom women found themselves at the lower end of the range, regardless of their skill or experience. And jobs where women predominated, such as Human Resources roles or administrative assistants, were not highly valued but placed in the lower salary bands. The job evaluation for administrative roles often ignored the multi-tasking skills required to be successful. And the prevailing view of Human Resources professionals was that they were like nurses, having no impact on the business at all. (Unfortunately, some did match the perception.)

A woman who was the compensation manager at a large company in the 1990s had just implemented a pay equity program. She told me it had taken her months to review all the pay structures, and when she went through them, she realized when jobs were evaluated in the past some obvious things were missed and this surprised her. She felt that in some way, as women, we had just accepted the way things were − that it was okay to pay women less. It was a very stressful project for her because she had to work behind closed doors.

She had wanted to communicate more about the program, but her manager shot this down. She told me the day they announced the new salary structure was insane. Managers were on the phone screaming at her, telling her their male employees would walk. Her husband had to calm her down that night. People were hostile towards her for months, but she didn't let them see how much this bothered her because she had done what was needed, and she was proud of that.

Baby Boomer women fought for Pay Equity as individuals, insisting on the same pay as their male counterparts, and some found their careers stalled because of their efforts. Others drove programs or challenged unfair decisions that resulted in change and closed the pay gap. Many women feel the gap still is not fully closed.

Employment and Pay Equity – In their Own Voices

Victoria: Vice President, Born 1960

"In 1993-1996 I was implementing employment equity and workplace diversity in a large organization. I think it was the biggest career challenge I have ever faced. I didn't know anything about the topics. I had never implemented a cultural change before—though I had academic knowledge from my days as a psychologist—and I had no permanent team members. In my previous job, I had been a member of a four-person leadership team in the company; my salary was the same as the CFO. The CFO at this company was making 50 percent more than I was. I had to get over it because HR employees were not on the same scale in the company. I had seconded resources from all over the company, not all of whom were there to work hard!

I had a very steep learning curve and had to rely initially on external resources for advice. Once I had developed knowledge and some expertise, I found it challenging to deal with some of the consultants who saw themselves as the sole experts. Another challenge was dealing with the passive-aggressive behaviour of people who felt threatened by this cultural change – the overt, upfront behaviour was easier to deal with.

There were some very creative and high-energy, but tough, days, and some were a little scary. But I believe I overcame these challenges by trying to learn as much as I could really fast, by being compassionate but assertive (sometimes I didn't do this well and veered into an aggressive mode), by focusing on excellence in implementing the project, by taking it one step at a time, by developing strategic alliances across the entire organization, and by finding my own sources of intellectual and emotional support.

I had to learn to take mini-breaks to create lulls in my work so that I didn't burn out. I tried to surround myself with people who knew the subject matter. It was hard because you thought people were on board.

But their actions showed they weren't. It was a feeling of one foot forward, then two steps back. We got approval to make big changes in the building to accommodate people with disabilities. If you go into that company now, you see many employees with disabilities working there, and this alone made it worthwhile."

Jane: Key Account Manager, Born 1955

"I did challenge my pay structure when I was moving from retail sales to a new account manager role. It was around 1989, and it took five years of salary adjustments for me to feel that my salary was up to the level men were making at that time.**"**

Alice: Leadership Coach, Born 1957

"When I first joined the company in the 1980s, I was very pleased with my starting salary, until I saw the compensation data for the entire business. The Quality leader (a peer with the same number of direct reports) was making 40 percent more than I was, and he was 10 years younger. He had been at the company for a while, but there I was with 20 years work experience and paid so much less.**"**

Heather: Senior Director, Born 1955

"I was working at a university that was paying its administrative staff really poorly – most of them were women. I fought for them to get an independent study done on the salaries and the administration agreed. The study revealed a huge inequity, and the university increased pay by a small amount. But it was peanuts compared to what it should have been, and they tried to pacify people with this. Not long after, I noticed a clause in the Collective Agreement about salary, and, based on what I knew, we were not complying with this clause. I launched a salary grievance through the union, and they finally settled it at $8 million.**"**

Evette: Manager, Born 1957

"I was working with a sales manager during a time when the CEO role was vacant, and between us, we were pretty much running the company. When the time came for our annual bonus, I found out the senior person in finance received a 100 percent bonus, while I received 50 percent, with no regard for the senior role I had taken on. Our problem as women at that time was that we didn't ask for more money, or for what we wanted. In another job, when I was a single mother with two children, I negotiated a decrease in my pay to enable me to take Friday afternoons off to have more time with my kids. The VP I was working for knew how much I was contributing to the company, how many additional hours I put in, and he agreed to this arrangement. Sometime later, I had a new boss who was a bureaucrat, so everything was black and white and by the rules. He took the half day away from me, and I thought this was very unfair. So, I started looking around for another job, and I left."

Work-Life Balance: In Their Own Voices

Women who moved into management positions in the 1980s and 1990s had to make tough choices between their families and a career.

Roberta: Senior HR Manager, Born 1957

"I worked in retail, and became a manager in the 1980s. I often put the company first before my family; I didn't want the senior leaders to think I wasn't up for the job because I had a child. Looking back, I'm not sure this was the right thing to do. But we felt we had to prove ourselves. That was the constant tension. There was no concept of work life-balance then; this came much later and was led by women."

Cynthia: CIO, Born 1959

"In 1984, I was a microcomputer consultant in a Chartered Accountancy firm with a consulting arm. This was just on the cusp of women becoming managers and leaders. The company was very hierarchical—I don't remember a woman partner—and there were a

few female senior managers. I remember a big conversation one day about a woman who had a baby, and there was no concession for this. She was told she had to return to work one month after the baby was born. She could not talk the company into any alternate work arrangement to raise her child, so she left.**"**

Patricia: Consultant, Born 1963

"In the 1980s when I entered the workforce as a lawyer, the workloads and time commitment expected created the glass ceiling. Women who were also the primary caregivers, could not do both**."**

Marie: Senior Manager, Born 1953

"It used to be career suicide to talk about your children at work. I made up stories if I was late, something that didn't include attending to my children.**"**

Susan: Management Consultant, Born 1955

"One of my biggest challenges was being a mom and having a career in a senior management role. Making the decision to go back to work was incredibly hard: Would I be a good mom if I worked? Would I be a good mom if I stayed home? And I wanted both badly. I wanted more balance in my workday and work week, to spend time with my daughter and do some of the things stay-at-home moms do, like be a classroom mom, while also contributing at work.

With the support of my (female) boss, I decided to make it work. Why couldn't I have both? So I put a business case together requesting an adjusted workweek. I would work Tuesday to Saturday so I could be a classroom mom on Mondays. I had to promise to go above and beyond what I would normally do at work, and I had to submit the plan to the vice president for approval. He approved it, but only as a temporary arrangement he would assess after three months. And, he asked me to keep it quiet because he didn't want everyone to start asking for it until he saw how it was working.

When I think about it now, I was very appreciative of the opportunity, and I realized I was breaking new ground. I wanted to be certain it was successful so that others might benefit later. At the same time, it felt like such hard work just to get what was a very reasonable request. There was such an entrenched reluctance to create flexibility or be creative in work arrangements, even if there were no risks or negative impact on the business. God forbid that anything as personal as raising a child might interfere in any way with something as sacrosanct as work. You didn't see men running off to pick up kids after school or take their kids to the doctor!

Through the course of it, I worked my butt off putting in extra hours after my daughter's bedtime just to be able to show how well it worked. I continued with it for three years until I chose to resume a regular Monday to Friday schedule. I also worked on the first job-share arrangements for staff, mostly for women who wanted to work part time. While several partnerships succeeded, the program languished because of the inordinate amount of red tape and process required for the union.

The company was reluctant to open the door to more part-time employees, and management put all of the responsibility on the women themselves. It was up to us to secure a partner, manage the schedules, and ensure absolutely nothing fell through the cracks. I'm not suggesting that the women should not have handled making it work, but there certainly was no support for the process, as there normally would have been with any new processes. It was very clear we were fully accountable for covering all the bases. While I suppose in some ways this was understandable, it did feel like unnecessary rocks were put on the road and when you cleared one away, another came in your path.**"**

Evette: Manager, Born 1957

"We have made it much more acceptable to have a work-life balance. The younger employees want to work compressed weeks and have

flex days. They can do this because the Baby Boomer women introduced these arrangements. Sometimes, I find it hard to manage my team because there are times when so many are on flexible days. But even though I find this hard, I think the young people have it right, and I wish we had fought even harder, and earlier than we did for this."

Margaret: Company Principle, Born 1964

"There is permission now to have a family and bring your whole self to work; women fought hard for flexible work arrangements and benefits, and this helped. Many mothers brought empathy to the workplace, something good leaders must have today."

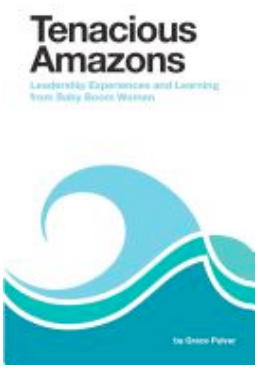
A Story about AIDS

Roberta: Senior HR Manager, Born 1953

"I am most proud of the work I did with my vice president (who was a woman) around HIV in the workplace. In the late 1980s, the AIDS virus started to take a toll on people, and initially, the most visible victims were gay men. I job-shared with a colleague who was gay and who developed AIDS. Prior to his becoming ill, some people resented him just for being gay and did not always treat him respectfully. When he became ill, through ignorance and fear, people behaved badly towards him. We were having a staff potluck luncheon, and employees did not want him to bring a dish he prepared, as they were afraid they would catch AIDS.

Shortly after contracting his illness, he got worse, and he died. We spent time in the hospital with him during his last few days. Seeing what he had gone through, my vice president and I were determined we would educate our company—that our thoughts and feelings about this would be counted— so the way he was treated would not happen to another employee. We created an AIDS in the Workplace Policy. This meant educating everyone, starting with the executive, and the policy included statements about how we valued *every* employee. It

also included the facts about how the virus was, and was not, spread. Sometime later, we pushed on with same-sex benefits and convinced our executive to implement this long before it was legislated.”



At last, a book that recognizes the significant contribution Baby Boom women made to the workplace. Drawing on over 25 years of experience, along with the shared experiences of Boomer women now in senior positions, the author brings their stories to life. From the 1970s onward, Boomer women fought for inclusive leadership and increased diversity, without compromising their values. It took tenacity and courage to drive these changes; it did not come without a price.

Tenacious Amazons

Leadership Experiences and Learning from Baby Boom Women