

#MeToo Is Us, Too

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By Gary T. Smith



Wednesday's program, part of the national conversation about workplace sexual harassment, began with women speaking openly about matters they once could not bring themselves to speak of at all.

Kari Tupper related that when she reported to the police that U.S. Senator Brock Adams had drugged and molested her at his Washington, D.C. home in 1987, the U.S. Attorney said her case had no merit.

When she made her claim public, she endured four years of criticism, and media coverage so intense that she came to experience PTSD from the exposure. In 1992, the *Seattle Times* published accounts of eight other women who had suffered similar experiences with Adams. Adams resigned from office. Tupper went on to earn a Ph.D. in English, became a lecturer at Whitman College, and is now a freelance writer.

Mona Lee Locke, a former First Lady of Washington State, described sexual harassment throughout much of her professional career. Locke was a KING5 reporter and held positions at Susan G. Komen, including national operations director. Once, a doctor conducting a pre-employment physical, asked her to do things that bore no relationship to the job requirements, such as performing sit-ups and push-ups while naked. A boss who insisted she work in his hotel room while he was not fully dressed. A boss who kept putting his hand on her leg. A boss who posted on his office window an altered photo of himself with Locke.

Locke said these experiences "affect how I dress, how I act. It impacts you as a person and in your work." You carry mental scars, she said.

And, apparently, a good head of steam. When persistent allegations of sexual harassment occurred in the fall of 2016 about a particular Presidential candidate, she realized, with encouragement from her son, that she had to speak out. She wrote a piece shared widely on Facebook, which led to media coverage and made her a visible part of what has become the #MeToo movement.



Wendy Gillihan was sexually assaulted in 1998. The assailant pled guilty and served "a whopping 21 days," Gillihan recounted. What happened next had far more impact: he began stalking her. His purpose, she said, was to harm, to "keep me in a state of fear."

In the face of those continuing travails, she founded and grew Gryffin Consulting, a management consulting firm. Imagine how difficult it is to run a company while trying to remain invisible, Gillihan said. She went on to serve as chair of the Seattle Women's Commission and co-chair of the Seattle Labor Standards Advisory Commission.

Dorothy Bullitt, standing in for President **Mark Wright**, disclosed she, too, had often been sexually harassed and even assaulted, and that “virtually all my women friends have been sexually harassed, and some assaulted.”

How do we address this?

Gillihan asked how we, as a community and in our workplaces, can support the sea change that our culture is going through. Most workplaces have an employee handbook, she noted, but what message is it giving? Is it instructive on this issue, is it contributing positively?



She spoke with men who work in large companies, and most said their HR training on this topic was focused on avoiding litigation against the company. “This doesn’t get at the root of the problem,” she observed. “We need to get at...the power dynamics and why are these things damaging. We need to explain why our workplaces will be better if this issue doesn’t exist.”

Locke, who is now Vice President of Strategy and Business Development for MG2 Design, said “as employees, we need to feel safe.” She said HR, in her experience, is there to protect the company, not the employee. “For those of you who have companies, you need to get the message out that if you are harassed you will be supported – not to get rid of a problem, but because that is your value.” It’s also important, she said, to speak up for others when you see it happening, because behavior won’t change unless you address it.

Gray areas

Jim Kraft noted that French actress Catherine Deneuve and others have said the *#MeToo* movement has gone too far, invading privacy and avoiding due process when there are claims that may fall into a gray area.

Locke and Tupper both agreed there are gray areas and the movement can go too far. Locke observed that society is applying new standards to past behavior. Tupper said it’s important to look at where there are power disparities. Both said we need more conversation.

Unsafe

Past member **Paul Dziedzic** said “I want to have the conversation, but this feels unsafe. It doesn’t feel unsafe because Harvey Weinstein did horrible things. It feels unsafe because of the other stories about misunderstanding that are treated the same way.”

Tupper said, “I think we’re past the point of no return on *MeToo*. We’re in a new era. There will be a backlash, and answering the questions will make the movement more powerful in the long run. We can’t shy away from the questions.” But, she said, “It’s very important to not paint all

men with the same brush, and to remember that men are and have been allies. We don't need to launch a gender war to talk about what happened historically.

"I see the next generation as being a great source of hope. The next generation growing up will have mutual sense of tackling this together," Tupper said.

It will take all of us

Bullitt thanked the Rotarians for their willingness to explore this challenging topic. "Though it may feel adversarial," Bullitt said, "it's not about women versus men. It will require the partnership of good women and good men, like the people in this room, to fight all parts of harassment. When people tainted by harassment, who previously would have relinquished opportunity are liberated to fulfill their potential, we will all benefit."

And so Wednesday's conversation came not to an end but to a pause, with men asking women how to hold a safe conversation, how they could help, how to move, once and for all, to a culture where power does not abuse its advantage, particularly in matters of sex.

