**What women want**

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REUTERS

HELEN CLARK: The third most powerful person at the United Nations - and the most inspirational Kiwi woman in the survey results.



CONTROL: Nurse Katie Moore got her own home in Lower Hutt last year.

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REACH FOR THE TOP: Yellow Brick Road founder Rachel Taulelei says women need to constantly update their ambitions and avoid becoming complacent.

Forget the husband and 2.5 kids: a home to call our own and the financial security to pay for it are top of the agenda for today's women. In fact, according to a Westpac Women of New Zealand survey, being financially independent is the main goal, with 43 per cent of the more than 1000 women surveyed ranking that at the top, ahead of the next highest, home ownership, on 14 per cent. That compares with 12 per cent of women wanting children - and just 3 per cent rating marriage as an aspiration.

Today is International Women's Day, and the survey looking at the aspirations and inspirations of Kiwi women come as Westpac and Fairfax Media prepare to start searching for the country's most influential women in the second year of the Women of Influence Awards.

But while the results show Kiwi women want to be financially secure, it also shows that those over 30 aren't aiming high in their careers. While most women aged 19-29 rank being a general manager, head of division, chief executive or boss as their career aspiration, those over the age of 30 opt for being self-employed or middle management - and the older they get, the more likely they are to aim for "team member". Global Women director of business partnerships Alex Mercer says the findings reflect a shift in the mentality of Kiwi women, befitting a nation that has led the way in women's rights. "Today, our women want to be financially independent. They want to work or own companies. This ambition can only be good for the success of New Zealand businesses.

"Research shows that harnessing the potential of our women will have a positive impact on business, balancing and complementing the skills and styles of men." But they also show there is work to do, she says. "At a time when we need to compete globally . . . gender diversity in New Zealand leadership teams has fallen behind many Asian countries including India, China and Singapore."

Indeed, the Human Rights Commission 2012 New Zealand Census of Women's Participation starts with the cautious phrase: "New Zealand is making slow, incremental but unspectacular progress for women in many areas." Examples include women holding just 14.75 per cent of top 100 NZX company directorships and only 55 of those companies have at least one female director. Women still fill less than 30 per cent of judicial appointments, less than 25 per cent of senior academic staff, and less than 20 per cent of top legal partnerships. Ms Mercer says these figures are climbing, but also provide "a stark reminder of the work needed to forge ahead to establish the New Zealand we want in generations to come".

Women need to start aspiring to and taking on leadership roles, she says. "It's time for emerging women leaders to step up purposefully and businesses themselves to take up the immense opportunity in diversity as a driver of business value and competitive advantage." That mantle is also on the radar of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which last year published a report looking at ways to increase the representation of women in leadership roles. Minister Jo Goodhew says "the potential is there, but more needs to be done to realise it".

Educating women about how to take on leadership positions has to be a priority, she says. "We also need to recognise that career breaks, such as maternity leave or raising children, are in themselves an experience which provide transferrable skills." The ministry manages a database of women interested in governance roles to help increase female representation on boards. "Consistently the research tells us that more women on boards means better governance and an improved bottom line."

**WORLD LEADER, WOMEN'S CHAMPION A TRUE INSPIRATION**

It's 7pm in New York, but the day's not over for Helen Clark. Our first elected female prime minister heads the United Nations Development Programme - making her the third most powerful person at the international organisation - and is in the middle of a global meeting of development programme leaders, a bit of a "boot camp" focused on targets for the next four years, she says.

Today she has been named the most inspirational living Kiwi woman in Westpac's survey on the aspirations, priorities and views of New Zealand women. Miss Clark, who has long championed the need for women in leadership roles, says the accolade shows that New Zealanders recognise she has gone all the way. "It opens up the prospect - 'maybe I could do that'."

All women at the top should aim to inspire others by creating a "ladder" for others to follow them up, she says, while expressing surprise that so few women aim for top positions. But she is pleased that, in the youngest age group, 19-29, being a general manager, chief executive or boss tops the list of aspirations. "They do have a drive to achieve the top; now the question is can they keep that drive . . . We are limited only by our level of ambition and sense of what's possible."

Kiwi women have led the way in proving that reaching the top is possible, especially compared to when her career began, she says. "New Zealanders accept that women can do anything, because in our own country women have done anything. They have achieved right across every field of endeavour." The key now is to create a "critical mass" of women who are able to continue taking up leadership positions, she says. Part of the challenge will be structuring society to allow that to happen - such as through men sharing more of the home duties. "Are we able to provide the kind of society where people can make a choice to follow a career all the way . . . It's very, very important for women to have that choice to combine career and family."

The biggest task is getting women to aim high and "not be limited in their assessment of what they can achieve", she says. "If your aim is nothing you'll hit it every time. You always have to have a goal and be working towards a goal."

For Miss Clark, now 64, that is leading her major programme of changes in the development programme, where she is in her second term. She has also been tipped as a frontrunner for the UN's top job. Secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon is in his second term and no-one so far has held the office for more than two terms. When asked if that role is her next aspiration, Miss Clark expertly avoids the question, saying it's good that debate about the next secretary-general has started. But she does not rule the possibility out. "I have got my hands full, but there will come a time when I think about the next move," she says. But for now it's back to the job at home - a room full of international development leaders eager to talk to their boss.

**GREATER FINANCIAL FLEXIBILITY BRINGS FREEDOM**

Marriage and babies can still happen, but for now, if Katie Moore wants to paint a feature wall, she can go ahead and do it. The 27-year-old nurse moved into her own home in Lower Hutt last year after getting fed up with flatting - and realising it would cost as much to rent a place alone as it would to service a mortgage. She also loves the freedom to decorate as she pleases.

"It is paying my own mortgage, not someone else's . . . I love it. I'm so glad I did it when I did," she says. Now, her main goal is chipping away at the mortgage. While home ownership is a goal she wanted to achieve, she is surprised it ranked above marriage and children for most Kiwi women. But it could be to do with the fact that women can have control over financial matters, she says. She contemplated buying a house with her boyfriend but "was waiting for his plans". When they broke up she realised she didn't have to wait for a partner.

Marriage and babies may happen in the future and rely on a partner - which often comes down to timing and luck. "I can't control whether I meet a man or not . . . I can buy a house on my own. That's something I can do without someone else. "That's something I can control and I can do - and I'm not relying on something that's out of my control."

The modern Kiwi woman is free to shape her own path, rather than following rules, she says. "There used to be a standard: get married, have children, stay at home, pick up the kids, maybe have a part- time job. But there's definitely a range now and whatever you're doing is accepted.

**SHOOT FOR THE TOP, DON'T SETTLE FOR THE MIDDLE**

Rachel Taulelei is disappointed to hear more women aspire to be middle managers than the boss. From her Oriental Bay office, with clean white walls decorated with carefully selected maritime pieces - a paddle here, a fishing photo there - the 39-year-old founder and managing director of Yellow Brick Road says women need to constantly aim for the top.

After working for Trade and Enterprise for 10 years, she saw a gap in the market and started the fishmonger business supplying fresh seafood to restaurants in 2006. She is also a co-founder of City Market, chairwoman of the successful food festival Wellington on a Plate and, most importantly, mother of Lilly, 8.

She hopes her daughter wants to be a boss one day.

"I would hope that she'd shoot for the top . . . if you shoot for the top and you miss somewhat, it's infinitely better than shooting for the middle and achieving."

Having built her business, she now wants to grow it and build on the sustainability message it promotes, while also building on her governance roles and work with children and young people. The key to reaching successful heights in both business and life is to refresh your aspirations constantly and avoid becoming complacent, she says.

For women, that means aiming high - and celebrating those who reach the top, so that it's easier for more women to follow. "If we highlight the activities of these women and show that it's just so eminently possible, I think it makes that path a bit more possible for women."

There is often a perception that women have to choose between family and work - but it's really about achieving the balance that works for you, she says. "I'm really happy to provide Lilly with a working-mother role model, because that's life. "I'm a much better mother for working."

For Kiwi women, there is no one-size-fits-all mould for career and family, but women need to aspire for what's best for them and make sure they're challenging themselves, Ms Taulelei says. "It's a pretty interesting and exciting time to be a woman."

**BY THE NUMBERS**

**What women want most:**

43 per cent financial independence

14 per cent to own their own home

12 per cent children

9 per cent to travel the world

9 per cent not to have to work

7 per cent to have a good career

3 per cent to get married

2 per cent to own their own business

1 per cent to live in another country

1 per cent to own a beach property

**What they aspire to achieve in their careers:**

23 per cent self-employment

22 per cent middle management

18 per cent team member

15 per cent general manage/head of division

12 per cent chief executive or boss

10 per cent other

**Most inspirational living Kiwi woman:**

34 per cent Helen Clark

13 per cent Valerie Adams

6 per cent Dame Alison Holst

5 per cent Lorde

4 per cent Dame Susan Devoy

3 per cent Lydia Ko

3 per cent Dame Sian Elias

3 per cent Rachel Hunter

2 per cent Dame Anne Salmond

2 per cent a non-famous person (family or friends)

2 per cent Robyn Malcolm

1 per cent Catriona Williams

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