

Girl, it's time to negotiate

Forum emphasises need for working women to speak up

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GIVE a woman and a man \$50 each to complete a task and the woman will put in 33 per cent more work than the man for the same amount of money.

Working on the assumption that the world is a fair place, 20 per cent of women will never negotiate to improve their status at work or in the home.

It may sound like a series of stereotypes, but according to affiliate professor of Decision Sciences at Insead Horacio Falcao, the findings drawn from research conducted in the United States are proof that there are gender-specific ideas about work and negotiation.

The Harvard-trained mediator was speaking to about 140 participants at the Insead Women's Forum held in conjunction with International Women's Day recently.

Examining how, sometimes, women use their voice and present their case in the workplace can be a factor in the inequality levelled on them on the job – lower salaries, being passed over for a promotion, etc – the forum discussed how women can manage their careers more actively.

“There is still this notion that women should essentially be nice, or that the only way to succeed is to take on male-

exemplified paths,” he said.

“But that attitude is changing because both men and women are realising that the raw use of power isn't the best way to go in service or knowledge based economies.”

Another speaker, Dr Melanie Billings-Yun, senior partner at Global Resolutions, who also taught at Harvard University, noted that while women have made tremendous progress in saying “yes” or “no” to situations in the workplace or at home, they lose out on opportunities that emerge when a problem is brought to the negotiating table.

“When it comes to themselves, women do tend to think in black or white. They may ask themselves: ‘If I bring this up with my husband, won't he get upset?’ So, they think you have to either attack a situation or keep silent,” she said.

Self-confident women, she said, still operate on the assumption that they should be grateful for whatever they get.

“So, we're always giving and receiving silent messages that we're not worth as much.”

Emphasising that negotiation can be “nice”, Dr Billings-Yun suggested that a better strategy would be to do one's research before going for a job interview.

One person who found the forum “different and practical” in its approach to women's issues was chairperson for Youth-at-Aware Harmin Kaur, who commented that more such sessions need to be organised for young women entering the working world.