

Pay equality starts when hours match the effort

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Professor Mark Wooden this week learned how shocking it is to tell people the surest way to earn more is to work harder.

Actually, that's not shocking at all, is it? Common sense, really. Refreshing.

But not if you're a certain kind of professional complainer. Then you gasp at the crass rudeness of blockheads such as Wooden. Literally gasp.

To illustrate, here's a report this week from news.com.au: "(The) pay equity gap between men and women in Australia will not close until women are prepared to work longer hours, an academic says.

"Social researcher for the University of Melbourne Mark Wooden said men were earning on average 15 per cent more than women because they put in more time at the workplace."

Quite true, of course, but read on: "The only male taking part in a National Press Club panel discussion about the pay equity gap, Prof Wooden's remarks drew gasps from the mostly female audience."

Gasps? Here were professional women being told of a link between hours and pay, and gasping?

I refuse to believe all these women, including ones as successful and seemingly bright as Minister for the Status of Women Tanya Plibersek, are actually so dumb as to not know that Wooden is actually right.

After all, we have laws banning people from being paid less just because they are women, and I know of not a single job where the pay for the sexes is different.

Do you? Nor can I imagine bosses paying less than market rates for workers in this tight market just because they are women.

And, indeed, Wooden wasn't sucking his opinion out of his trotter.

Sure, the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows the average female employee last year earned \$690 a week, or about 35 per cent less than the average male wage of \$1060.

Sexism, the professional complainers will shriek, demanding inquiries, subsidies, commissions, special hirings, affirmative action, "awareness" days, coloured ribbons and all the other trappings of our hyperactive victim industry.

But read on, dear hothead. Most men also tend to work much longer hours than do women - 38.5 hours a week compared with just 29 - so is it surprising their pay packet is plumper? Cash for effort. That's how it should be, shouldn't it?

Wait. Be fair, says Wooden. That still leaves a pay gap of 13 per cent, once you discount for those extra hours.

Aha! Sexism, shriek again the professional complainers, demanding inquiries, subsidies, coloured ribbons and the rest. But steady, sisters. Much of that extra cash is what you pay people for their extra experience - experience that women who have gone to have babies tend to have less of, for fine reasons you'd be a fool to disturb.

Or it's what a boss pays to keep on staff she's punting will stick around and put in even harder, which women in general are less likely to do.

Yes, I know I shouldn't say that, either - hear those gasps - but consider again the facts.

As a survey co-authored by Wooden two years ago gently noted: "Women's preferred hours and labour force participation decline sharply with pregnancy and the arrival of children; their preferred hours approach usual levels as children enter school and ultimately decline as they become empty-nesters."

There are plenty of exceptions to this, obviously, just as there are plenty of wildly talented women like my wife - but on the whole there just aren't as many women willing or able to go flat-chat at work as there are men.

That may make women emotionally smarter, but it shouldn't make them better-paid as well. There's got to be some reward for flogging yourself to an early grave.

All these arguments linking pay to effort and experience would be uncontroversial if they were put to white males demanding to know why Energiser Eddie was being paid more than Gone-fishing George.

But here's Wooden's mistake. He pitched his argument at an audience made up in large part of women summonsed by the victim industry.

He was preaching individual effort to collectivists who prefer to blame the system for private failure. In short, he was putting his case to people who just don't want to hear it's their own damn fault if they don't earn more.

The facts, as you see, are on Wooden's side. But he still got the gasps because ideology is so strong that it blinds people even to evidence in front of their powdered noses. As I can prove.

Last month the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency - part of the victim industry - issued a report complaining again that women weren't properly paid or promoted.

Here's how its findings were reported by AAP: "Many Australian women feel their workplaces are 'boys' clubs', which frustrate their ambitions for promotion and do not properly support a healthy work/life balance, new research has found."

Translation: Women want more promotion, but also more family time.

Oh, please. One or the other, ladies.

The survey itself contains the same contradiction. It finds, for instance, there's a big difference in the sexes' ambitions: "One-third of all women surveyed (and 43 per cent of men) aspire to a job involving more responsibility over the next few years . . ."

Yet a page or two later it denies what it's just admitted: "Organisations must remember that women are equally ambitious and as committed to their careers as men ..."

"Equally ambitious"? Er, no. Some are, for sure, but not as a sex. Check your own survey.

Gasp all you like, but it's the way of the world, ladies. You want the pay? Then just work like men, and to hell with your families. Happy now?