

A letter from the Right Honourable Kim Campbell

Canada's 19th Prime Minister

Getting to Workplace Equality – How WE's Published Resources Can Help Your Organization.

As we mark International Women's Day, I am struck by the changes to our public discussions about women's equality from developments like the #metoo campaign, drawing attention to the reality of sexual assault, but also, the overt misogyny being expressed in society and on social media. Responses to this, such as the global Women's Marches, demonstrate that women's equality is still a cause that needs to be fought for.

As Canada's Minister of Justice and Attorney General from 1990 to 1993, one of my proudest accomplishments was crafting and bringing forward legislation to better protect women in Canada by updating sections of the Criminal Code. My amendments to the sexual assault provisions of the Code, which came to be known as the "no means no" law, remain largely in force. However, the law is only effective if people know it, understand it and are willing to apply it.

Some 25 years later, the #metoo movement continues to push Canadians, and men and women around the world, to reject conventions and behaviours that we understand to be inequitable and even harmful. Because of my history of engagement with this issue, I am often asked how we can move from good intentions to institutional structures that protect the safety and dignity of women and how to ensure that all people, men and women, have the tools they need to promote good behaviour and hold bad behaviour to account.

In the workplace, employers are looking inward to ensure they have the right policies and practices in place to facilitate a safe, inclusive and respectful environment for all employees. In addition to ensuring they are compliant with legislated regulations, employers must invest in creating a safe space in which their staff can raise concerns about any issue in confidence and without fear of reprisal.

But for non-profits that often operate with limited resources and tight budgets, this can be challenging. That's why I'm so pleased that the WE organization, which is fortunate to have the resources and has invested so heavily in this area, is transparently making its materials fully available to others.

I have long followed WE's work and its impressive record of empowering women and girls around the world. Led by the widely admired rights activist Michelle Douglas as Chair of its Board of Directors, the proudly Canadian charitable organization routinely engages the leading minds in human resources and legal experts when developing and reviewing its workplace policies and standards.

WE has published its Employment Legislation audit, conducted by workplace legal experts Singh Lamarche LLP. The firm found that WE is fully compliant with employment legislation and, most impressively, represents the "gold standard" in terms of its commitment to employee safety, accommodation, and protection from any form of harassment. Of special note is WE's secure system for employees to anonymously raise any concerns via the WE intranet to the Chief People Officer.

WE also leads by example in terms of hiring women at all levels. Overall, 77% of the organization's employees are women, with 84% of its senior leadership, including the Chair of the Board of Directors, Executive Director, and Chief People Officer. In addition, all but three of the organization's departments are female-led, and 16 of the organization's top 20 salaries are earned by women.

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Having won 16 national and international HR awards for impact – selected twice for Waterstone Human Capital's list of Canada's Top 10 Most Admired Corporate Cultures, and three times as a Top Employer for Young People – the organization is known for its sector-leading policies on gender empowerment, child protection, and workplace safety and respect, among others.

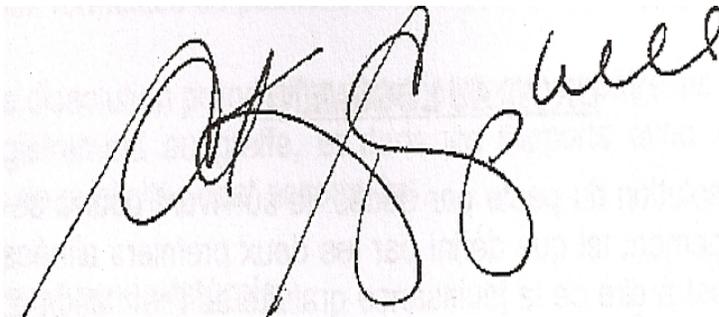
Importantly, WE places a strong emphasis on listening to its people. Every year, the organization engages an external firm to carry out an organization-wide, anonymous employee engagement survey, in order to hear directly from employees about what is working – and which areas need improvement. The data are aggregated and compared year over year to provide an honest picture of the organization's progress.

While no large organization is immune to instances of inappropriate behaviour in the workplace, what separates out top organizations is their willingness to put in place sector-leading policies, provide a safe and encouraging environment to report concerns, and transparently investigate and follow-up swiftly and fairly. By all accounts, WE excels in each of these areas.

But let's be clear, very few NGOs have the resources to engage the best experts in this area. That is why it is so important that WE has posted all of its HR policies and procedures on its website so that anyone or any organization can consult them. WE's supporters are generous but they are also fastidious that the organization be ready and equipped to deal with all manner of issues in workplace safety and empowerment. Because WE is a non-profit, it has no disincentive to share what it has been able to learn and incorporate into its culture with other organizations. I would say that even for -profit organizations could learn a great deal from these documents.

I'm proud that WE Charity was founded in Canada, with its global headquarters in this country. Although WE Charity's leaders would modestly state they are "always learning," by openly sharing its resources and expertise, WE is providing a great service to other organizations and demonstrating its ongoing commitment to being a world-class employer. I would strongly encourage all interested organizations to review these materials.

As we celebrate International Women's Day, let's be encouraged to take the steps necessary to make all our organizations and workplaces great places to be and work by taking advantage of the best thinking of how to make those goals a reality. Thanks to WE for helping to make this possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Campbell', written over a light grey background.

*The Right Honourable Kim Campbell
Canada's 19th Prime Minister*

March 8, 2019 (International Women's Day)