

Introduction

vicsport, with the support of VicHealth, has conducted research into the lack of women currently sitting on boards within the sport and recreation industry. Interviews were conducted with nine women who currently, or had previously, held a board position. The purpose of the interviews was to gather views based on firsthand experience and observations regarding common barriers faced by women, pathways onto board positions and possible strategies to encourage more women to get involved in governance positions of sporting organisations. Board positions held ranged from sporting clubs, State Sporting Associations (SSAs), peak bodies and government agencies.

One of the key themes discussed was managing the work-life balance.

“Enjoy what you are doing, a happy mum is worth squillions!”

Managing the work-life balance

Obtaining a balance between work and family can be difficult and in fact it is one of the main barriers cited for women joining boards. The addition of volunteer roles such as board positions only adds to the balancing act. Unfortunately women often perceive that there is pressure on them to perform every role easily and without fuss. In reality there are many organisations and individuals willing to help and allow for flexibility.

“Women have advantages over men, it is more accepted to take time out for family commitments for women.”

The majority of women interviewed have faced difficulties in balancing their professional commitments with young families. They shared with us the strategies that they used to find a balance that works for them in the hope it will help others do the same.

- Learn to prioritise and work around what is most important to you.
- “It is important not to over commit or stretch yourself too much. Set parameters for yourself.” One woman stated that she would only sit on one committee at a time.
- It was suggested by one director that it is important to really consider what board positions you want to commit your time to. “Ensure that it is something you are really interested in or you may find that you do not fully commit yourself to it.”
- Let people know if you have a family commitment that means you have to leave a meeting early. One director emphasised, “In business it is more accepted for women to leave for family commitments. Take advantage of this!”



- Some women struggled with feelings of guilt due to their board commitments on top of employment and juggling family life. One director explained how she uses her board positions to set an example and act as a role model for your children educating them on the importance of involvement in community and volunteer organisations.
- One interviewee detailed her experience in taking her child to a board meeting for the first time. She was encouraged by the Chair and other directors to bring her along and this turned out to be a positive experience even though she was nervous about it. She insists that you should not be made to feel uncomfortable and felt that attitudes have changed. “It is others who need to come up to speed if they have a problem with family-friendly policies.” She also emphasised that you obviously need to be courteous and limit disruptiveness but this is simply using your common sense.

**“Know your priorities and
make the right choices.”**