

# Women's Activism -

insights for empowering women  
from global women activists

Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey

Published by the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women (ACLW)  
[www.leadershipforwomen.com.au](http://www.leadershipforwomen.com.au)

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First published 2013.

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National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Author: Rodgers-Healey, Diann.

Title: Women's activism: insights for empowering women from global women activists /  
Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey.

ISBN: 978-0987334-183 (pbk.); 978-0987334-114 (eBook)

Subjects: Women human rights workers.  
Women political activists.  
Women--Political activity.  
Women social reformers.

Dewey Number: 323.34

Art work for Cover by Elizabeth Franklin

Book Design by Richard M Healey

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*This book is dedicated  
to the memory of my mother  
Shirley Rodgers*

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## Acknowledgement

I would like to especially thank all of the participants who took part in this research: Diane Goodwille, Anna Harris, Shamsi Kazimbaya, Justine Mbabzi, Lin McDevitt-Pugh, Suzette Mitchell, Barbara O'Dwyer, Shirley Randell, Veena Singh-Bryar, Gomathy Venkateswar, Anne Walker and Frieda Werden.

I would also like to thank Elizabeth Franklin for her unique art work and Richard Healey for his patience and talent in making this publication possible. Special thanks are extended to Lynne Wright for her support, Judi Christensen for her insights on valuing women and my loving family.

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How to support and empower other women

## Foreword

### Professor Hurriyet Babacan

There are undoubtedly many forms of activism, and predominantly, they are driven by a common aim, to change the world for the better. It is evident today that globalization has also influenced activism as we witness global engagement on issues that concern communities and more broadly societies. Many social phenomena have global impacts and have organisational forces operating it. While many believe that issues facing women, especially in Western nations, no longer need attention. Globally we continue to hear the inequities and hardships that women face. There is a call for women's activism across the world to address issues common to women such as access to and control of funds and resources, influence government and regional policies and to bring to the fore the discourses around the range of women's inequities and the widening gaps.

With, the President of the United Nations General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz al-Nasser, and the Secretary-General of the United Nations jointly proposing the convening of a Global Conference on Women by the United Nations in 2015 (United Nation Press Release 8 March 2012), 20 years after the last women's summit in Beijing, this book by Rodgers-Healey is timely as it shines a light on the heart of women's activism, women themselves, not the global activism machinery for women. Through the stories of twelve incredible women activists, Rodgers-Healey sensitively explores why they became activists and what shaped their values, actions and outcomes. In doing this Rodgers-Healey draws attention to a key link that remains submerged in the activism discourse – the link between an individual's consciousness to their intention and agency. Her insight that if we are to encourage women to be activists, then we need to dialogue with women at the grass roots to understand their impressions, appreciate their reactions and be there to support them if they need it, is a refreshing reminder that women's activism is indeed brought about at a personal level and must be offered from woman to woman.

Rodgers-Healey's work with women for more than a decade has been about understanding women and assisting them where they are at and in line with their core values. Added to this personal approach, she is also aware that systemic change for women demands a macro activist approach to dismantle the system. Both she and I have this in common, drivers which have shaped our professional careers. We also have in common childhood experiences of an immigrant witnessing hardship and struggle close to home. These experiences have been

catalysts in shaping our lenses to assist and appreciate women. In her interviews with the twelve women activists who took part in her research study for this book, there is a genuine sense of respect and valuing of the women. This is ultimately echoed in the key findings of the study which emerge from the women's insights about how to assist other women - with unconditional acceptance and valuing. Added to this is an insightful reflection of how conceived the notion of 'empowerment' is.

Employing a research methodology and a content driven interpretive approach for analysis, this book offers clear guidelines for how to effectively assist women, how to stay abreast of the challenges of such work, and more importantly, considerations about sensibilities surrounding one's desire to assist the woman and respect for the choices of the woman.

Rodgers-Healey's concluding remarks for any women's activist to "first and foremost to be present for the other person, to value them and enable them to value themselves, and to choose to assist them if and when it is asked for, and in ways in which the person wants to be assisted" inspire and point to the heart of activism as lived and owned by the participants of her study and carefully expounded through her analysis of these women's journeys.

I congratulate Diann Rodgers-Healey for this book and commend it as a must-read for all those involved in wanting to achieve social change and transformation.



Professor Hurriyet Babacan,  
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Professor Hurriyet Babacan is a Professorial Fellow at James Cook University (JCU) and former Director of The Cairns Institute at JCU. She has a distinguished career over the last 30 years in senior roles in higher education, public administration, and research and training.

Hurriyet has published widely in national and international publications on a range of issues including international development, public administration, cultural diversity, gender, health, economic and community development. She has authored numerous books and articles including two publications for UNESCO. She has delivered keynote presentation at numerous national and international conferences. She has served on numerous ministerial and expert advisory committees. She has been a member of two working parties for the Council of Europe/OECD on measuring well-being and social progress. Professor Babacan has led numerous national and international leadership, research and development projects, particularly in the Asia Pacific.

Hurriyet has been recognised for her work through a number of awards including the Bi-Centenary Medal awarded by the Prime Minister, 2002 and the Multicultural Services Award by the Premier of Queensland. Hurriyet was the Queensland State Finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Award in the for Government and Public Service category in 2003.



## About the Author

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**Dr Diann Rodgers-Healey** is the Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women (ACLW) a virtual Centre at [leadershipforwomen.com.au](http://leadershipforwomen.com.au) which she founded in 2000. Through the Centre she has established national leadership awards for women and organisations, interviewed international leaders, advocated and lobbied for equal opportunity and published reports on women and boards, and gender in politics and business.

Diann has held positions of leadership and management in Sydney and London in diverse sectors including education, business and the not-for-profit sector. She is an Executive Business coach, mentor and strategic facilitator. Her academic appointments include being Adjunct Professor of The Cairns Institute of James Cook University and an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Institute of Business Well-Being (AIBWB) at the University of Wollongong (UOW). She has lectured in leadership and management.

Diann's PhD thesis led to the development of a co-existential leadership model for workplaces for men and women. In 2009 she was awarded The World of Difference 100 Award from The International Alliance of Women (TIAW) in Toronto, Canada.

Diann is the author of *Abandoning Leadership for a Better Way of Being for Women and Men*, *Coaching Bites for Coaches – Listening to the Inner Game* and *Mentoring Yourself*.

## Preface

The field of women's activism is vast. One could say it is an industry and a movement in its own right. Personally, I have been a woman's activist for over a few decades, but did not really identify myself as an Activist, but as a woman wanting to give back to other women.

My formal involvement in the women and leadership space advanced as I became more exposed to the global machinery of women's activism, its frustrations and significance for effecting change. My informal involvement, though, began as a young child being influenced by my mother's personality, experiences and actions.

As an Activist I am keenly aware of the snail like pace of change for women in so many aspects of their lives despite political and activist forces to transform conditions and recognition of women through governments, institutions and organisations. I have always questioned why some individuals are motivated to create a better world, but others are not. Is it because one sees something in a situation that becomes a personal catalyst for action, whilst another person looking at the same situation, sees it through another lens and, therefore, does not choose to act?

I wanted to explore these questions for the 2012 International Women's Conference by the Cairns Institute of James Cook University in Australia and felt that the best way to do this was through the reflections of activists on their own journey of activism. I sought to find answers to some key questions around:

- what was the seed for their activism?
- when did this happen?
- what did it lead them to do?
- how did their journey progress?
- what could their experiences tell us about how to engage women to take a stance?

Through my research of leading women activists, this book presents some valuable insights for anyone wanting to be a woman's activist. It challenges the very notion of 'empowerment,' a word and an action that is familiar to most women activists' intent on empowering women.

This book will guide the activist to adopt an approach through which they can effectively assist women. It will challenge the activist to re-engage with why they want to be an activist and how they can assist a woman who invites them to do so.