

Women in STEM Decadal Plan Champions

gemaker Response

Leadership

Our leadership team are outspoken advocates of gender equity in the workplace.

We know many women who want to care for their children (or their parents) while doing meaningful work that utilises the STEM education and work experience they'd invested in.

So we built a business that was flexible enough to enable women not only to re-enter the workforce, but also take on leadership roles that were previously unattainable in the wider sector.

We publish [thought pieces](#) about women in STEM that challenge the status quo.

We mentor women both inside and outside our workplace.

We invest time and resources in up skilling - providing our team with development opportunities regardless of whether they are staff or a contractor.

We challenge staff to try new experiences and seek personal growth and development, while making it clear that their wellbeing is a central concern.

We give staff equitable opportunities to contribute their views, experience and expertise to high-level strategy meetings.

Our Managing Director sits on a number of advisory boards where she advocates for better representation of women.

We donate our time and company resources to support many causes in STEM and innovation, such as providing work experience opportunities, sponsoring prizes and awards for women in STEM and working with schools and universities to support STEM education.

We align ourselves with partners who share our vision and values. One example of this is our partnership with Refraction Media, producers of 'Science Meets Business', an online magazine that promotes the work of Australian businesses that either support scientific endeavours, or are active in the STEM ecosystem. Refraction Media and gemaker have partnered on Thought Leadership articles, live Tweet Ups, and by sharing content to amplify the voices of researchers and innovators.

We intend to continue these leadership practices as gemaker grows.

Workplace Culture

We run our company differently to most others in the technology transfer space. We seek to create unique working opportunities that harness the skills and expertise of a range of professionals who have left the full-time workforce. For a wide variety of reasons, the majority of people who fit this description are women.

Flexible work

We are proudly built around a sustainable, flexible and progressive employment model that is project-based, rather than hours-based. This means paying people for the work they do, rather than paying them for being in the office for a set period of time.

Because of this, we attract talent that inflexible companies overlook. Staff are selected, respected and rewarded for their contribution, regardless of their life circumstances. This model creates the opportunity to tap the skills and expertise of a range of intelligent, qualified and experienced people who do not want rigid jobs, but still seek to make valuable contributions through meaningful careers.

Importantly, this has enabled many women to re-join the workforce. Some had been out of the workforce for 10-15 years, so we updated their skills with ICT training and have provided support when they doubted their abilities. We appreciate that for women who have been out of the workforce, it can be hard to demonstrate recent vocational achievements. Therefore we hire on the potential they demonstrate and invest time in mentoring them to re-enter the workforce.

Staff development

Over the last five years we have invested profits back into the business, to improve our staff processes. We have a commitment to continual learning – all of our staff have participated in training in the last 12 months.

Because our team works from home, we have low overheads and are much more cost-effective, agile and scalable than bricks and-mortar consultancies, providing clients with precisely what they need on a budget for every stage of growth.

Our collaborative work mode promotes inclusion because it removes hierarchical barriers. Staff are allocated to work on a project-by-project basis, by matching their knowledge and skills to client needs. This means our team is constantly remixed so everyone contributes to work based on their unique experience and expertise.

Celebrating success

In running a virtual office, there is a risk of team members feeling isolated. We manage this through relationships. Staff have regular and open communication with our leadership team. Our wellness program offers comfort and celebrates effort, milestones or success, through:

- Financial bonuses for bringing in new clients
- Fruit/flower baskets, gift vouchers and thank you cards for project team members
- Lunches/afternoon teas to celebrate company anniversaries
- Day spa treats to show key staff appreciation
- Lunches and dinners with staff, clients and stakeholders for big wins

Structuring benefits to help women

We offer competitive remuneration and regularly survey our salaries to compare to market rates. We structure benefits to help women – we pay superannuation to all employees, regardless of how many hours they have worked in the month. Even though we are a microbusiness we have a comprehensive range of HR policies in place to ensure our workplace is safe and supportive.

We take a very thoughtful approach to staff recruitment and exiting. We ensure that incoming team members share our company culture and values. We spend time with team members to ensure we understand who they are and how they wish to grow. If a team member needs to exit the company, we do all we can to help them prepare for their next opportunity.

We also collaborate on turning negatives around or accepting our losses, looking for learnings and moving on. When things don't go as planned, we try to finish the day with an encouraging call or SMS to remind our team how awesome they truly are and that each day is a fresh start.

From surveys and other feedback, we know that our team gains a real sense of purpose through working with gemaker. They know that helping researchers and inventors to commercialise innovative products and services benefits the Australian economy while improving lives. They also take pride in our pro bono work for the community.

Our company culture of respect, trust and care combined with vision and passion has absolutely underpinned our success. Our values have informed our approach to growing our company sustainably and with integrity. As we enter our eighth year, we will continue to commit to activities that build a workplace culture that fosters the retention and progression of women.

Visibility

Historically, the celebrated STEM role models have been male “uber” professors – extraordinarily high achievers working in a purely academic environment, making world-changing discoveries.

We strive to provide girls and women with non-stereotypical STEM role models: women in attainable positions outside academia. We do this through:

- Devoting time to help women in STEM with probono mentoring (through programs such as Industry Mentoring Network In STEM (IMNIS)), award applications and resume writing
- Actively participating on university and company advisory boards
- Delivering award winning women-led industry engagement training
- Facilitating school excursions to the laboratories of outstanding women scientists (e.g. Australian of the Year, Prof Michelle Simmons)
- Coordinating STEM careers fairs. A recent event with Telstra and Robogals that showcased careers in engineering and coding has inspired K-6 students from Lucas Height’s Community School to attend coding classes.
- Speaking at schools, research organisations and university undergraduate and postdoctoral careers events and graduation ceremonies about “alternate careers in STEM”
- Publishing thought pieces about women in STEM that challenge the status quo
- Using social media (LinkedIn, Twitter) to provide advice and support when needed to students attending our talks
- Securing profiles of women in STEM and industry engagement in national media outlets (ABC, Sky news, SBS)

Education

At gemaker, we believe in supporting the health of our ecosystem, not just our company. We're determined to give back to our community with all means at our disposal. We believe an ethical approach to business should include investing heavily in our core values which, for gemaker, include supporting women in STEM, young STEM entrepreneurship, and work-life balance for our team. Some of the organisations and causes to which we donate our time, expertise, money and other resources are:

- Women in STEMM Travel Award – for a female researcher to attend a Women in STEM conference.
- Regional Female student scholarship to attend space camp
- The Enlightening Campaign by the Australian Academy of Science
- University of Wollongong's Science Fair - we sponsored the inaugural Innovation Awards for primary and secondary students
- Tech Girls Movement – Tech Girls are superheroes program
- Google – we took female school students on an excursion to Google where they toured the facilities and attended a STEM entrepreneurs pitching event
- Fitted for Work – we donated funds to their programs which bring women back into the workforce
- Black Dog Institute – we supported their work to help women rejoin the workforce
- Science programs at local primary and secondary schools - we sponsor incursions, donate funds to purchase STEM equipment and activities, and we launched the STEAM room at Lucas Height's Community School
- Work experience opportunities for Year 10 STEM students

You don't need to be a large corporation to have a positive impact on STEM education, as demonstrated by our small but powerful contributions.

Update: 2020

Adapting to COVID

As flexible work-from-home has always been core to our operations, gemaker was better prepared than most employers for the outbreak of COVID-19. We supported our team, including many women with home-schooling responsibilities, by allowing them to shift their work hours and providing take-away meals for their families to relieve the stress of additional demands on their time. We connected regularly with all staff to check in on their wellbeing and produced a special e-newsletter for our team and wider community entitled 'Rays of Sunshine', which included positive news and helpful information and resources for life in lockdown.

Throughout 2020, we supported women in our local area and ecosystem by volunteering to help them pivot their businesses. For example, we assisted IBSuccessful to switch to virtual tutoring of school students and built a website to support and promote this new business model. We also ran free webinars for researchers, many of whom were uncertain about future funding of their jobs, to help them adapt to opportunities presented by the pandemic.

Meanwhile, we converted gemaker's industry engagement training to flexible online delivery. This has made it more accessible for people who have carer responsibilities, including many women, so we will continue to offer this training model.

Showcasing women in STEM

In blog 'Insights' that we share via gemaker's monthly e-newsletter and related social media posts, we featured four deserving women from a diverse range of STEM careers to boost their profile:

- Niamh Chapman – a medical researcher using technology to improve healthcare delivery and Founding Director of national award-winning radio show and podcast *That's What I Call Science*.
- Milica Symul – Director of Research and Innovation at the University of Canberra and former Deputy Director of ANU's Institute for Space.
- Katrina Sealey – Chief Operations Officer for the Australian Astronomical Optics Consortium and National Coordinator of the All Sky Virtual Observatory.
- Tracy Burrows – Associate Professor in Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Newcastle.

Sponsorship

Being unable to sponsor a girl to attend science camp due to COVID-19 restrictions, gemaker instead sponsored one early-to-mid-career researcher to attend the 2020 Women in Science and Technology annual lunch and two attendees for the 2021 Women in Science and Technology International Women's Day lunch.

We also provided \$2,500 in sponsorship plus in-kind marketing assistance and mentoring for Niamh Chapman's radio show and podcast *That's What I Call Science* to help generate public interest in STEM, debunk myths, and promote diversity and women in STEM.

Work experience and mentoring

Work experience for school students was prevented by COVID-19. However, gemaker did employ a university student studying engineering (Isabella Price), providing her not only with valuable work experience, but also with mentoring, career advice, introductions to our networks and attendance at events including a luncheon with NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian.

Natalie Chapman (gemaker MD) mentored one woman and Julie Wheway (Strategic Engagement Manager) mentored two women through the Industry Mentoring Network in STEM. Natalie is also mentoring a female small business owner through Nandin (the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation's innovation centre).

If a small business can do it in a pandemic...

Anyone can support women in STEM! gemaker is a small business but, because it is one of our core values, we prioritise support for women in STEM, even (especially) in times of economic uncertainty. As well as being a moral imperative, it's fundamentally good for business and our nation: the productivity of the STEM innovation ecosystem – on which gemaker's success and the wealth and wellbeing of all Australians depends – increases with female participation.

Support for women in STEM doesn't have to be resource-intensive: it can be simply staying alert to opportunities and thinking creatively, leveraging networks to make introductions, or mentoring and encouraging staff, students and community members. Small contributions by many people add up to massive positive impact.