

Alex Correa Executive

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Letter of the Week: BRW June 10, p9

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## LETTER OF THE WEEK

### LEGAL PROFESSION NEEDS WOMEN TOO

As an executive recruitment specialist in the legal sector, many themes in your cover story (Why (business) men need women, *BRW*, May 20) were familiar.

The mid-career drop off of female talent that Belinda Hutchinson described is common. My experience has been that the high representation of female graduates means legal firms, too, invest heavily in building their female talent. Despite many outperforming their male counterparts, many young female lawyers are lost in mid-career fallout. Considering female solicitors and barristers represent nearly 40 per cent of Australia's total number of legal professionals (and 78 per cent are child-bearing age), this is a big concern.

The assertion that "children complicate the picture because of assumptions made about women" is also true in the legal profession. Some employers recognise the potential of their young, female lawyers. But when it comes to lateral hires, if they are nearing child-bearing age I have found some employers can be hesitant about investing in them. I have also known some female lawyers who have chosen to be very clear that they have no intention of having children in order to avoid such assumptions.

Like women striving for positions on boards, in the legal sector senior associates working towards partnerships in law firms also quickly realise that it is a hard road to balance with their personal lives. They, too, become disengaged and disillusioned before heading off to start families. Many don't return, simply deeming it to be not worth the effort. Firms, on the other hand, risk losing some of their sharpest performers, leaving no females to promote through to partnership.

Although there is an increasing number of law firms recognising the importance of this issue, many will agree we still have quite a way to go. May I also suggest the issue is not limited to how employers tackle the progression of women but also has a lot to do with the way our society places expectations on women, career-minded or not.

Alex Correa, director

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