

When I think back over the past year, it is with gratitude and appreciation. Gratitude and appreciation for the many opportunities I had – during my time as MISA Woman of the Year – to be enriched by all the wonderful people I have come into contact with, and for the very special opportunities I was given to touch the lives of others.

On paper, the MISA Woman of the Year award sounds daunting: it is made to an exceptional and visionary woman, one living her passion and determination to make a difference to women not only in her workplace, but also in the community.

This is a woman who inspires, encourages other women to reach for their dreams and fulfil their ambitions. She supports, nurtures, and allows others the courage to stand up to their beliefs and to improve the lives of those around her.

But, more importantly, this person is – like me – just someone who tries to do the best with what they have, every day. It doesn't matter what job title they have, or not have. They have an inner passion and determination that makes them shine.

When MISA and Martle Keyter initiated this award in 2009, they had no idea how significant this project would become.

The MISA Woman of the Year has brought about a magic to be shared with all the fabulous women in our industry – women from all walks of life, with different skills to offer and unique experiences to share.

During the year I met famous women, women who should be celebrated for the contribution they make, women who lead in commerce, and women who quietly labour in the back offices of our businesses.

I also had the honour to meet women who have risen from pain, abuse, rejection, and even rape. Women who refused to become victims and became heroes by helping others escape their hurt, allowing them to rise from the ashes. These are women who channelled their loss and tragedy into positive energy, uplifting others. I met women who would not let anybody stand in their way in serving fellow human beings and extending their efforts to our animal friends. These are women that opened shut doors for others and, in so doing, unlocked a better future for many.

I met women who managed to rid themselves of fear. For fear causes one to feel trapped; it paralyses you, prevents you from living life to the full, and doing what you are destined to do.

I also realised that, as women, we share many attributes. For me, the most important thing we have in common is that we are all amazing; we all have a story to tell. Each one has something unique they can teach someone else, and if we open our ears and our hearts, there is so much we can learn from each other. We all have different talents and we all have something special that we can offer others.

I now know that all women are role models in their community and families and that a woman can do much with very little.

I now know that violence is a real thing, that it is not only something that happens to other people, that only happens in communities where there is poverty, where there is opportunity, where people are not “safe because of the environment” - I now have experienced it first hand, in my “safe” world, in my prominent protected world, by people that I don’t know. The effect it had on my loved ones. The effect it had on my family, we are not protected, we need to all fight to stop violence, and the way to stop it is to speak about it, to name and shame those who think they have the right to it.

It has not just wakened emotions I never know that I had, it also made me understand that Emotions are powerful, not only for the positive but for the negative too – it is how you get up after it that determines your recovery – or –your failure.

In meeting the 2011 nominees, I again came to appreciate our women and the critical role they play in our industry and in our communities. Every nominee is a winner and I want to congratulate you all again. Your nomination is not just an honour, but it recognises the difference you have already made in the lives of others.

To quote American author Anna Quindlen, “It is so easy to waste our lives, our days, our hours... It is so easy to exist instead of live!”

I can vouch for the fact that the women in our industry do not just *exist*, they *live*. They work hard, and they work hard at balancing their lives, yet give their all in everything they do.

They are the best in business, they are the soft touch in our tough industry, they support their families, they make a difference to society, they lead without fear.

They don’t set any limits.

To those women: I salute you. And thank you for teaching me so much!

To the new Woman of the Year 2011 –  
Take the lead, Make a difference – Empower all – Walk tall – live your Passion! Live Life!

Thank you.