

*International  
Women's Day*

「UNBOXED」

by

33

# Your guide to getting it right on *International Women's Day*

April 2023





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International Women's Day: UNBOXED  
*We are ThirtyThree*

*We're ThirtyThree –  
one of the UK's leading employer  
branding agencies.*

As *visual creators and storytellers* for the world's  
biggest employer brands, our creative choices matter  
– they shape perceptions, enable conversations, and  
inspire change. And for years, we've helped our clients  
create communications that drive their diversity and  
inclusion efforts forward.

Find out  
more

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*Welcome to*

*UNBOXED*



*This guide forms part of UNBOXED, ThirtyThree's inclusive employer branding series.*

By bringing together forward-thinking companies, we're exploring how *DE&I is essential for an authentic and powerful employer brand.*

In our second event on 28th March, we discussed how companies can make sure their International Women's Day communications reflect their commitment to championing

women in the workplace. The content in this guide has been adapted from a short presentation by ThirtyThree's DE&I Communications Specialist, Amanda Faull, and a conversation with women's equality champion and UK DE&I Lead at GSK, Carol Rosati OBE.

*Watch UNBOXED here*





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# Why do we *need* International Women's Day?



Diversity days are opportunities for workplaces to *call attention to inequalities* and *address the barriers* faced by individuals through changes to policies, practices, and behaviours.

Key dates like International Women's Day (IWD) have become focal points for many companies keen to show their active support for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). They are often used to send signals to future and current talent that everyone can belong and flourish.

But some brands have been criticised for hijacking the day to promote products or adopting slogans without meaningful commitments.



So, what should companies do on IWD? How can they find *the right balance* in their campaigns between *celebrating women* and their achievements – and *challenging sexism* in all its forms?

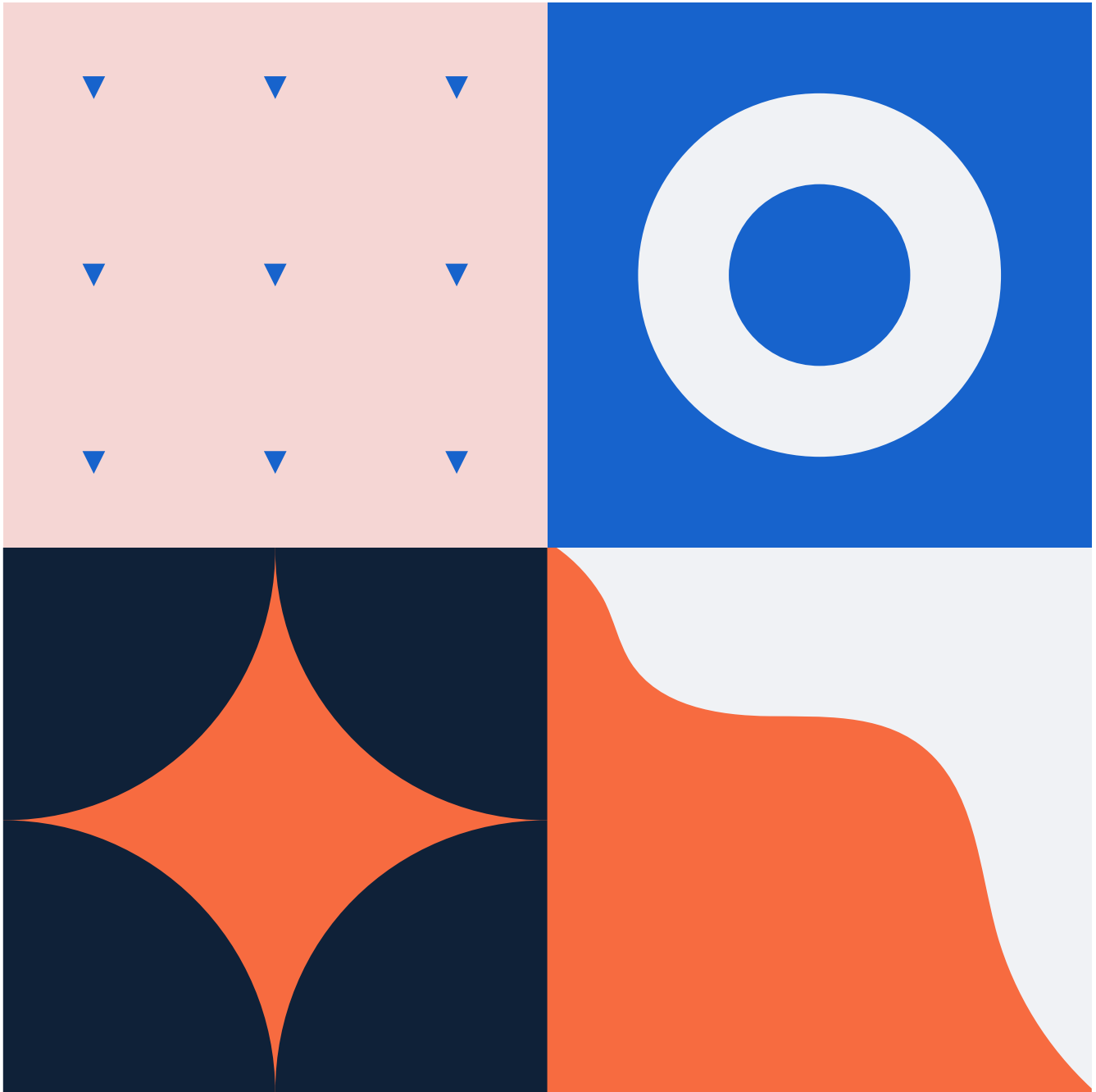


Before we can understand what constitutes a successful campaign, *we need to understand the problems facing women in the workplace.*





What's *holding back*  
women's careers?





It's been over 100 years since the first IWD,  
and headlines still feature gender inequality.

### *Why?*

Ambitious women in work today continue to face an uphill battle – from gender stereotypes and bias to microaggressions that undermine their authority and make it harder for them to be promoted.

On top of that, working mothers struggle to return to leadership roles after maternity leave. Without the flexibility they need, such as the option to work part-time, many women are forced to accept positions below their level of experience – or change careers altogether.

For women with intersecting identities, this bias and discrimination can be compounded due to their race, sexual orientation, or disabilities.

“

When you engage with women about changing roles, it's not just about the pay. It's about, 'Can I still spin all those plates that I need to spin to keep my life? Can you accommodate that?'

”



So it's no surprise that research from McKinsey<sup>1</sup> shows female leaders are burned out and are **more than 1.5 times** as likely as men at their level to leave for a company more committed to DE&I.

Without awareness of – and ways to address – these issues, employers and institutions are failing women. *That's why IWD is needed.*

<sup>1</sup> LeanIn.org and McKinsey & Company, Women in the Workplace 2022 (2022)



## Women are *not equal*

An 18-year-old woman starting work today will not see **pay equality** in her working lifetime.

Source: [PWC, 2023](#)

## Leadership gaps start at the *first rung*

For every 100 men promoted to first-level manager, **only 87** women are promoted, and **just 82** women of colour.

Source: [McKinsey, 2023](#)

## Gender stereotypes start in *childhood*

**74%** of parents say boys and girls are treated differently, and **6 in 10** say this has negative impacts.

Source: [Fawcett Society, 2022](#)

## We don't like *successful* women

**1 in 5** women who ask for a pay rise are successful in receiving one compared with just under a third of men.

Source: [Fawcett Society, 2022](#)



Women  
are *not safe*  
at work

**Half of women** have  
experienced sexual harassment  
in the workplace – this rises  
to **7 in 10** for disabled women.

Source: [TUC, 2016](#)

Mothers are  
*forced out*  
of work

Every year **54,000** women  
are forced out of the labour  
market due to pregnancy and  
maternity discrimination.

Source: [EHRC, 2015](#)

Women  
of colour  
*face greater  
barriers*

**75%** of women of colour have  
experienced racism at work.

Source: [Fawcett Society, 2022](#)

Children come  
with *a penalty*

**44%** of women are earning  
less than they were before  
they had children.

Source: [That Works for Me, 2023](#)



3

What are the  
*dos and don'ts?*





To be positioned as an *employer of choice*, companies need to prove that they're standing up to these challenges.

IWD is a great time to do this. So, how can you communicate this message with integrity? And how can you avoid getting it wrong?

At ThirtyThree, we work with clients to create meaningful and authentic messaging for DE&I campaigns. So we've put together some dos – and some don'ts – that will help with leveraging corporate communications for real change.



# The *don'ts*

First, let's look at some common pitfalls we see organisations making each year.



## Celebrating *without sharing commitments*

Any external messaging should talk about the actions you are taking. Transparency is welcomed – even if your story isn't the most positive, candidates and employees will be more receptive to clear action plans than superficial celebrations.

## Spotlighting women *without their permission*

Yes, IWD is about celebrating women's achievements and recognising female role models. But, while it might be obvious to you that this is a great idea, it might not be obvious for the people involved. It's important to gain their consent, explain how and where this will be used, and make sure they feel comfortable saying no.<sup>2</sup>

## Adding to women's workloads *without recognition*

If female colleagues are involved in designing IWD activities, it's important to recognise their efforts.

Research has found that one reason female leaders leave is that they shoulder undervalued responsibilities for DE&I on top of their job. This often means they're stretched too thin for work that is linked to promotions.

<sup>2</sup> See our '*Ethical storytelling in employer branding*' for guidance on telling employee stories.



“

*Don't* do the fluffy stuff  
like sending flowers  
or chocolates to everyone,  
then *not change anything*.

”



## Talking to women like *they're all the same*

The intersection of different aspects of an individual's identity – such as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, parental status, and socio-economic background – means that everyone's lived experience is unique.

To be truly inclusive, your messaging needs to acknowledge and celebrate these differences.

## Making it about *one day* and moving on

How often your company communicates about gender equality, and whether you have female advocates, will be something future candidates look for to decide if you're genuine.



# The *dos*

To bring about sustainable change,  
here's what your company should  
be doing instead – on IWD and beyond.



## Use the day to launch *new initiatives and campaigns*

We've helped many brands create campaigns to inspire, celebrate and address major challenges in the workplace and beyond. And they often use IWD as a starting point to show they're taking inclusion seriously.

## Communicate *throughout the year*

These IWD campaigns provide a theme that you can use to continue the conversation throughout the year, with regular awareness raising across social media, events, and internal communications.

## *Share progress* from the year before

What gets measured, gets done. So use IWD to report back on the progress and success from your previous campaigns. Launching with a clear idea of what needs to change will give you a focal point for your campaign, and will help you target your communications where needed.



## Promote *inclusive* policies and practices

If you've been challenging these issues and have implemented the infrastructure to support women's success, IWD is a great time to shout about them. And don't forget to send a reminder to your female colleagues about all the benefits you offer.

## Have conversations with women about *what they want*

It's essential to ask for feedback from women to ensure your communications and efforts are landing and achieving the desired results. This will also help you to tailor your messages so that you're speaking to the lived experiences of different women.

## Involve men as *allies*

Finally, don't forget about the important role men can play in creating an inclusive culture. Include men in your activities and talk about their roles as allies. For example, they can help to source input and feedback from women and shoulder some of the responsibilities often placed on female colleagues.



4

How does this  
*look in action?*



“

Change doesn't happen overnight. And it takes a huge amount of effort and buy in from everyone to make things happen. An effective campaign takes months and months of planning, from *ideation to execution*.

”



## Strategy and planning

### *Map out an annual DE&I calendar*

Often, the main DE&I events for the year will include IWD (March), Pride (June), UK Black History Month (October) and International Day for People with Disabilities (December). But don't forget to also promote employee resource groups (ERGs) and allied events, which shouldn't be overshadowed.

### *Start with what needs to change*

Understand what's preventing women from advancing and why they're leaving. Talk to women by running surveys, conducting focus groups, and holding exit interviews. These will inform your strategy and give the benchmarks needed to measure progress.

### *Collaborate with key stakeholders*

DE&I initiatives rely on the dynamic relationship between the DE&I lead, talent management, HR, internal communications, marketing, legal, and the rest of the business. Involve everyone early in the planning to avoid delays or major U-turns.



“  
DE&I is part of everything in the business.  
So you have to have fingers in every pie.  
”



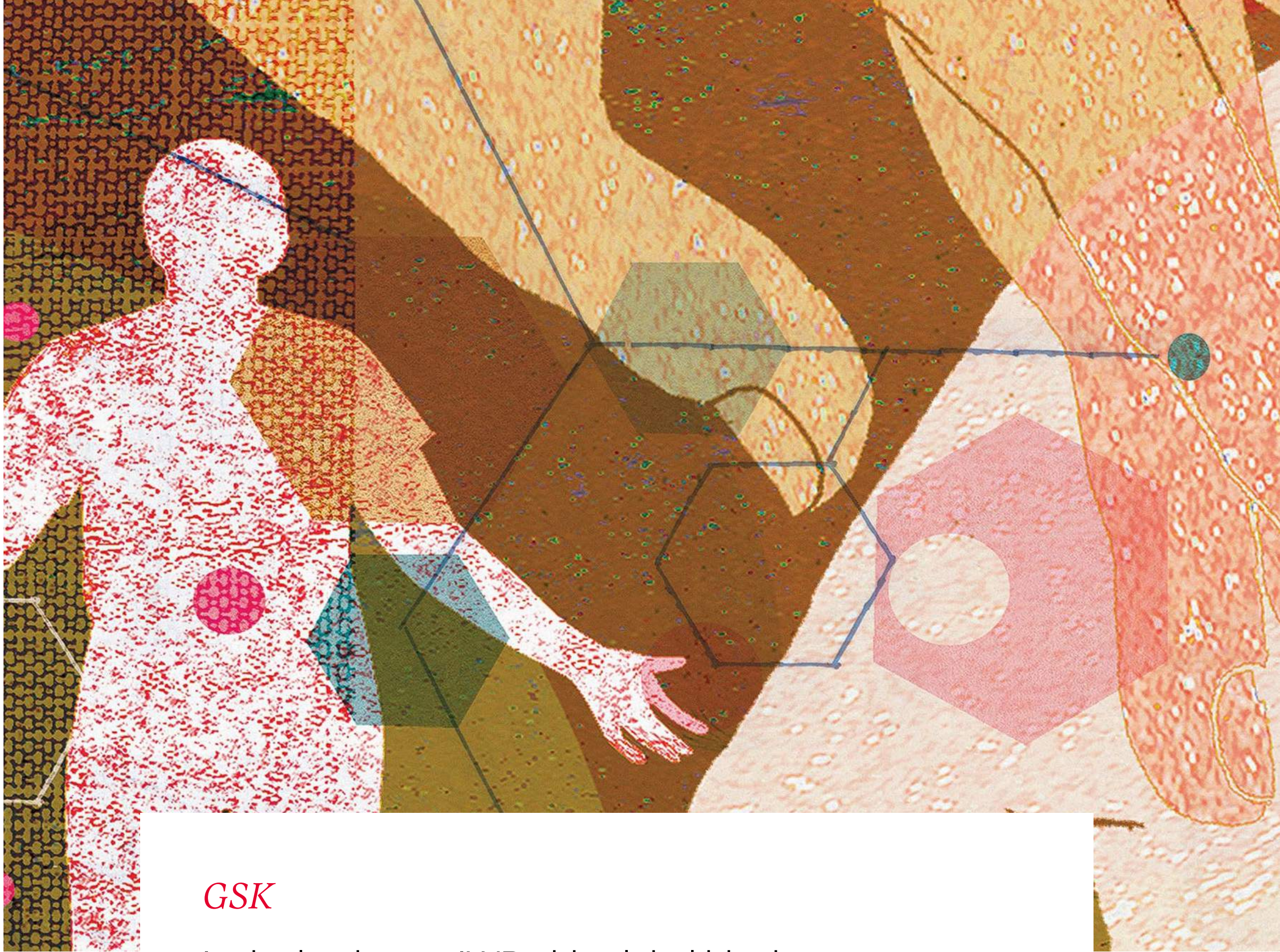
# Campaign building blocks

## *Align messages with actions*

Sustainable change comes from sustainable communications and actions. Messages should acknowledge both the problems facing your workforce and your company's forward-looking priorities.

## *Make content and events accessible to all*

Change hearts and minds with thought-provoking and intersectional stories and events. By featuring colleagues from all walks of life, this will make communications accessible to everyone.



### *GSK*

In the lead up to IWD, this global biopharma company increased UK paternity and secondary care-giver leave from 2 weeks to 18 weeks. They also standardised the return-from-maternity process, so that everyone has a positive experience.





## Launch and broadcast

### *Create a channel plan*

Consider the different messages and which broadcast channels will work best.

- Should this be a message for everyone?
- Does this go to select audiences or geographies?
- Should this be external?

Internal and external communications strategies should interlink. Check messaging with ERGs to ensure it's inclusive.

### *Cascade from the top*

Success depends on authentic and visible support from the leadership team. Leaders must really get it and talk about it with enthusiasm. This will then cascade down and encourage team leaders to embrace the company's vision and share it with their teams.

### *Ensure clear signposting*

Clearly signpost the support mechanisms, policies, and resources that everybody wants and needs. And make them accessible, not written in corporate jargon.



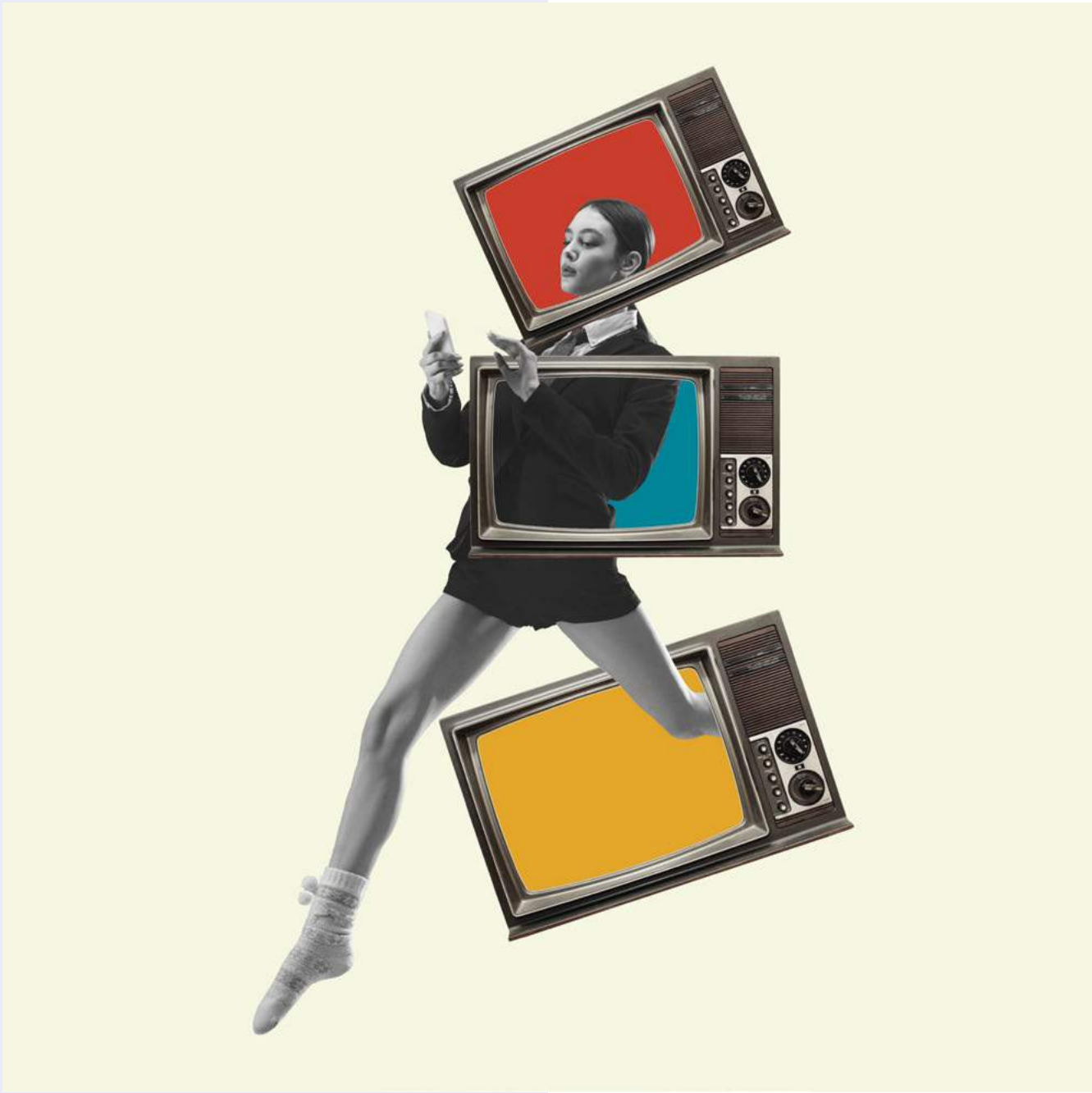
“

It shouldn't be a '*them and us*'  
thing. It should be '*we*'  
– or just people working  
together to make it happen.

”



Want to get  
*started* today?





International Women's Day: UNBOXED  
*How does this look in action?*

At ThirtyThree, *we're passionate about DE&I* and helping our clients live out their commitments through powerful communications – *whether that's attracting talent or creating a sense of belonging.*

We'd love to help you get started planning your next DE&I campaign. Get in touch with us [diversity@thirtythree.co.uk](mailto:diversity@thirtythree.co.uk) to find out more about our award-winning creative services.

From copy and art direction to social, digital, and film, our experts are dedicated to creating campaigns that are brave, inspiring, and above all, impactful.



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