



Biography

Summary

Dr Ellen Joan Nelson is an ex-army academic business mum, with deep expertise and practical experience in leadership, well-being and the future of work. Ellen has spoken at TEDx Auckland in 2022, advised many corporate and government organisations, and her research and ideas to improve the working world have been published multiple times. Ellen helps organisations to remove structural barriers facing women and parents, including the NZ Army, while simultaneously experiencing improvements in organisational metrics such as: wellbeing, retention, leadership, productivity, innovation and business performance. Her volunteer team evacuated 563 people from Afghanistan to New Zealand and she started the **#workschoolhours** movement. Ellen's philosophy on leadership is encapsulated in this article: <https://groundedcuriosity.com/high-performance-teams-and-leadership-lessons-afghan-evacuation-task/#.YvC9sXZBy5f>

Further Detail

Ellen began her career in the NZ Army (2003 – 2013). Her training was conducted on a scholarship exchange at the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA) and the Royal Military College (RMC) Duntroon, where she was awarded one of the top three prizes, across leadership, strategy, physical and academic criteria, at each of these graduations. Ellen graduated as an Engineer Officer in 2006 and led construction teams and projects in NZ and overseas, including the UK, Australia, Antarctica (where she ran her first marathon), Afghanistan and many nations in the Pacific. In addition to leadership and project management roles, Ellen's postings also included specialist recruiting for the military, reconnaissance, training and planning.

After ten years in the military, Ellen spent two years as a people and business improvement project manager at PTS Logistics. While there, she completed her MBA (exec) in 2013 and dedicated the dissertation component to improving staff performance monitoring processes at PTS Logistics. She also played a lead role in contributing towards their win at the 2014 Manawatu Business Awards. The following seven years (2015 – 2022) were as a Regional and Customer Manager at NZ Trade and Enterprise (NZTE). This period included several international work and study tours; in Brazil, China, Vietnam, UK, US and Canada. Including her work and personal travel, Ellen has visited more than 50 countries, in every continent. Ellen has worked with more than a hundred exporting organisations, helping them to grow their business internationally. During her time at NZTE, she has furthered her business acumen and commercial knowledge, eagerly learning from the customers in her portfolio, her expert colleagues and specialists in NZ and around the world, as well as her subsequent Strategyzer training in business models.

In parallel to working at NZTE, Ellen completed her PhD at Massey University in 2019, in line with her full-time peers. Her research focused on the social well-being of women in the workplace, including an understanding of the experiences of authentic leadership and the physicality of leadership. The study examined the broader corporate sector, with her case study focusing on the NZ Army. Ellen's



research found that while women had many amazing experiences in the military (as had she), there were recurring themes of gender-based challenges facing women.

Ellen then spent approximately 18 months working with the NZ Army, presenting her findings and recommendations, to the Chief of Army, his Leadership and Management Boards, and all leadership teams within the NZ Army at a wananga in 2020. Many of these recommendations have already been implemented, with a program of work underway to address these further. This research and subsequent engagement with the NZ Army has featured in the media on numerous occasions, including a television interview with John Campbell. The Chief of the NZ Army provided a glowing reference for Ellen's research and engagement.

Following this research and advisory journey, Ellen was asked to speak at several events, and to focus on the aspects of her research that were most directly applicable to the corporate sector – she chose the 'working Mum' theme from her PhD. This led to an unintentional further piece of research focusing on the experiences of working parents, with data from more than 500 parents (and growing) across NZ, Australia, US, UK and Canada. The findings, in brief, revealed that Mums either (a) returned to work full-time and resented time away from their children during the week or (b) they worked part-time, which ultimately saw them working extra hours anyway, and most prominently, becoming far more efficient at their job; getting a pay cut to do the same outputs. The heart of the issue is the mismatch between the work schedule and the school schedule.

Ellen's subsequent research has revealed that not only would it be better for staff and wider society if the work schedule was reduced to align with the school schedule (**#workschoolhours**), if done correctly, it can be profitable for organisations. They can experience improvements in staff attraction and retention, productivity, innovation, leadership performance, inclusion and diversity, staff well-being and ultimately, profits. Ellen has spoken on this topic at numerous events including TEDx Auckland in June 2022.

As a volunteer during 2021 and 2022, Ellen and her team (including Chris Parsons and Martin Dransfield) worked tirelessly to evacuate 563 people from Afghanistan to New Zealand. The team collaborated with the NZ Government taskforce, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) to overcome barrier after barrier to make this happen. Ellen and her team were in the media, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars from generous New Zealanders to fund the evacuation costs, used their various networks to complete detailed documentation for each of the Afghan families, and managed the logistical requirements for border crossings. This international evacuation from a Taliban controlled country with no NZ presence on the ground, has occurred in the middle of a global pandemic, with families on the other side of the world, who mostly do not speak English and have limited access to internet. In July 2022, Ellen and her team met with hundreds of the people they helped get to New Zealand: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gxb02PhX0rM>

Ellen now runs her own practice, to help organisations with leadership, well-being (aligned with inclusion and diversity) and the future constructs of work. She is married and has two little boys, born in 2017 and 2020. www.ellenjoannelson.com