



Keidanren Women's Executive Network

Leadership Mentor Program

Expectations toward Frontrunners in the Empowerment of Women



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Leadership Mentor Program Vol.10

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Thoughts and ideas on the empowerment of women and actions to implement them

My experiences as an international student enrolled at the Wharton School (University of Pennsylvania) in the 1980s provided the formative foundation for my perspectives on diversity and the empowerment of women. In the 2000s, I increasingly felt that most Japanese companies had fallen behind the foreign affiliates of European and North American firms in Japan when it came to fostering the advancement of women, and was convinced that unless Japanese banks freed themselves from their traditionally male-dominated monoculture, sustainable growth would be out of their reach.

Since becoming President and CEO of Sumitomo Mitsui Bank in 2011, I have pushed forward with specific initiatives backed by the realization that improvements in the soft, human resources dimension will be key to enabling women to better weigh their long-range career development options and fully exercise their abilities. Those initiatives have been influenced by five perspectives: a commitment from top management, the creation of a career environment that is not conditioned by life events, career development assistance, changes in corporate culture, and changes in awareness of women. In particular, to more clearly highlight the commitment of top management internally and externally and accelerate measures for diversity with a focus on the advancement of women, we set up an internal Diversity Promotion Committee in 2014 and moved forward with a range of company-wide, multifaceted initiatives that incorporate the candid views of outside experts. In addition to offering training programs for working mothers and hosting forums on work-life balance, we have also implemented a wide-ranging array of measures to assist in the career development of women at all stages of employment, from new recruits to personnel in managerial roles. To ensure that undertakings of this kind take firm hold throughout the organization, we have also been

working to encourage changes in awareness, namely, of male employees in management including top executive positions, and of women themselves through a strong commitment to the education of female leaders.

To make steady gains in the empowerment of women as we move forward, I believe the following three things are essential: an ongoing commitment from top management, the steady evolution of empowerment measures, and the penetration of enhanced awareness across the entire organization. Above all, sending a firm message that top management is serious about the empowerment of women will be key to encouraging organizational change and ensuring that the advancement of women takes permanent hold as corporate policy.

Expectations toward female executives

Nationwide, efforts to empower women appear to be a work in progress. We are now at a point where those efforts could translate into gains in corporate performance and economic growth. In the process, I look forward to seeing female executives do three things: (1) apply your perspectives and ideas as women to the context of organizational change, namely, to help build employee-friendly workplaces and create new products and services for the women's market—a market now poised for future growth; (2) draw from the professional insights you have amassed through your careers and on that basis actively participate in management decision-making and planning; and (3) be prepared to express your candid views and opinions within a rapidly changing corporate business environment. Finally, as frontrunners in the drive to empower women in Japan, I want you to stay mindful of who you are as individuals, be prepared to act decisively without fear of failure, pursue and exercise leadership, and serve as pacesetters in the quest to build a society where Japanese women have the opportunity to fully demonstrate their abilities and lead vibrant, active careers.

Mentor Profile

Takeshi Kunibe

Vice Chair, Keidanren

President & Group CEO, Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group, Inc.

Born in 1954, Takeshi Kunibe hails from Tokyo. In 1976 he graduated from the University of Tokyo with a degree in economics and joined Sumitomo Bank. Mr. Kunibe obtained his MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. In 2003, Mr. Kunibe was appointed to serve as an Executive Officer (SMBC) and in 2006, was appointed as a Managing Executive Officer. In 2009 he became a Member of the Board of the bank and was promoted to the position of Senior Managing Director. In April 2011, Mr. Kunibe was appointed President and CEO of Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation and in April 2017, he assumed his current post as President & Group CEO of Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group.

Mr. Kunibe served as Chairman of the Japanese Bankers Association in 2013 and 2016, and as Vice Chair of the Keidanren Board of Councillors in 2015. Since 2016 he has served as Vice Chair of Keidanren and Chair of the Committee on Finance and Accounting.

