



Keidanren Women's Executive Network

## Leadership Mentor Program

### Some Thoughts on Diversity and Inclusion



役員会副議長/アサヒグループホールディングス会長 泉谷 直木

#### Keidanren Women's Executive Network

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#### Concerns surrounding the empowerment of women in Japan

It has been over 30 years since Japan enacted its Equal Employment Opportunity Act. Although most Japanese companies have been making efforts to foster the empowerment of women in the workplace, Japan's ranking on the World Economic Forum's gender gap index remains low. I have five concerns about the current situation.

The first is, do business managers seriously consider the empowerment of women to be an important business challenge? Women have a much stronger propensity to consume than men. Given that reality, business strategies that take the consumer behavior of women into account are a must. But, to develop the organizations and functions that facilitate the implementation of such strategies, businesses also need women in roles of leadership. This is not a challenge that can be fully addressed internally; it should be explored within a broader context.

Second, although managers talk of diversity as a way to bring people from different backgrounds together, aren't they actually trying to achieve homogeneity through inclusion? You shouldn't use the sensitivities of women to complement or compensate for the mindsets of male managers. You need to give women roles of responsibility, enable them to harness their unique strengths, and integrate their individuality and other characteristics into your management regime.

Third, aren't management teams and female employees blaming a "lack of role models" as an excuse for the status quo? Business managers need to cultivate female executives as sophisticated role models that young employees will look up to. Moreover, it's important that those female

executives that become role models take steps to cultivate future generations of female employees to follow in their footsteps.

Fourth, are companies actually harnessing higher levels of managerial competence to achieve diversity and inclusion? After all, even if a company has employees with a mix of different qualities, the goals of diversity and inclusion will not be met unless collaborative relationships have been nurtured. Rather than holding all of its female employees to the same standards of expectation, a company needs to pursue management policies that are tailored to the abilities of each and every individual.

And fifth, aren't corporate management teams dismissing the idea that diversity and inclusion will lead to improved business results? They should probably take a closer look and realize that progress toward the empowerment of women is certain to spark more innovation.

#### Expectations toward female executives and having your own personal convictions

As female executives, you shouldn't compare yourselves with men. I'd prefer that you put more value on your differences with men and showcase your abilities and competence as women. When it comes down to enthusiasm and motivation, men and women are no different. Don't be swayed by popular notions regarding "male" or "female" attitudes or weaknesses. I would like to see you stick by your own style as women—a style that blends fashion, mission, and passion.

Having personal conviction, mettle, and self-respect helps you build yourself up and grow. Management is a battle where you have to rely on your own personality, and when you have perfected your own style, success will follow.

#### Mentor Profile

### Naoki Izumiya

Vice Chair of the Board of Councillors, Keidanren Chairman of the Board, Asahi Group Holdings, Ltd.

Mr. Izumiya joined Asahi Breweries, Ltd. in April 1972. After serving in posts that ranged from General Manager of the Corporate Strategy Department to General Manager of the Tokyo Branch, he assumed the post of President in March 2010. Mr. Izumiya was appointed to serve as the first President of Asahi Group Holdings, Ltd. in July 2011. He was later appointed its Chairman and CEO in March 2016 and has served as Chairman of the Board since March 2019. He has been pushing forward with efforts to strengthen corporate governance and improve the Asahi Group's corporate value.

