ASIAN WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP SUMMIT-CHINA
Friday, March 9, 2018
Shanghai

POST-EVENT REPORT
## OUR SUPPORTING ASSOCIATIONS

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Asian Women Leadership Summit – Shanghai had its successful launch in China on March 9, It marked the end of the week of activities to promote gender parity and advancement of women in leadership roles. While there was an acknowledgment that China has done better than many countries including advanced Western countries, more remains to be done.

Welcoming the attendees, Arvind Singh, Chief Executive, Quest ontheFRONTIER group Singapore, declared that diversity does matter and further pointed out that while companies with greater number of women leaders in the Boards and the Senior Executive teams perform better, it was not necessarily a causal link; it could be a hallmark of an enlightened management that makes the company a more engaged work place for talented individuals which in term may provide a sustained source of competitive advantage. This requires a deliberate effort to identify and eliminate “unconscious biases”, similar to the “curtains” in the music audition process.

First panel on “Practices on Diversity and Advancing Women in Leadership Positions in China” had insightful discussions on how leading organizations are introducing new practices and encouraging women leaders to use these practices. Linda Kiester, HR Director, Greater China shared her own career journey in 3M as an evidence of company’s deep commitment to gender parity; as a champion of change, Linda and top leadership team at 3M China have achieved greater utilization of flexible time and flexible work arrangements. Further, 3M China is one of the few companies that have adopted core working hours as a default and let the employees chose their specific timing arrangements. “I am less interested in knowing how much time my people spend in the office; I trust and empower them to do the best they can”, commented Linda.

Communications and technologies have blurred the boundaries between work and personal life. “We have moved beyond work – life balance; our focus is work life integration” says Jane Yan, HR Director, Greater China, Sodexo. The company- globally and in China – have set a target of having a certain percentage of senior women leaders as part of its strategy. While not in favour of quotas, the company leadership feels that such a policy nudges the organization to make effort and track progress in their effort in promoting gender parity.

Speakers’s Profile by Industry

25 Speakers
5 Sponsors
3 Keynote Addresses
Yuan Li, CFO Philips shared how have bosses have encouraged her over the years to move beyond her comfort zone and supported her in new roles. The company has a series of practices in place in China to promote women leaders including things like “mommy room” and “the makeup kits in the rest rooms. Volga Yanovskaya, Head, Sales Operations, Medtronic China shared the support provided to younger women leaders by Women Network- a volunteer network confounded. This session showed that many good ideas are being implemented in China by leading companies but there is no single source that lists such practices. It was suggested that AWLS commission this exercise and publish the findings which can be accessed by any organization who seeks to promote gender parity. Dr. Lan Ma facilitated this session and shared her insights gained from her successful career in USA, Japan, Singapore and China at leading companies.

Dr. Annette Nijs, Executive Director, China European International Business School (CEIBS) shared the research conducted by CEIBS, mainly by Dr. Jean Lee that showed that women leaders in China have done rather well. She highlighted that companies with women CEOs in China tend to have 3 times more women leaders as compared to companies with men CEOs. Another key observation was that women leaders have done well in corporate functions namely HR, Finance and Communications, there have been fewer women in P&L leadership roles.

“Fewer Women P&L Leaders! Who's responsible?” was the title of the second panel discussion. Lucy Lei facilitated a lively conversation on this subject. “I have seen many more men walk into my office asking for a promotion they did not deserve. And I have spent lot more time persuading competent women leaders that they are ready for the next role” commented Bruno Vaquette, President, Sodexo China.. Women are hesitant to raise their hand and ask for a bigger job; Bruno advised the young leaders to “raise your hands” and try it out. Under his watch, Sodexo China has consciously encouraged women leaders to seek career growth beyond their comfort zones and there is a flourishing pipeline of women P&L leaders.

“Often, Women leaders in China in corporate functions are very good at what they do and over time, they and their bosses get into entrenched into comfort zone” commented a participant. Another reason for women leaders’ reluctance for sales and business development roles may be need to entertain clients after office work as in many industries, contracts are negotiated and signed after work hours and over drinks. This may be changing now as the Chinese government is discouraging the culture of excessive entertainment. Also, demand generation in many new industries relies less on personal contacts but thru technology and internet.

Delegates’s Profile by Industry
“GE is a great company and I am blessed to have opportunity to work in so many locations. However, I needed some convincing to move out of my comfort zone and accept my current role. I am glad that I did” commented JinFu Chan, CFO, GE Power of her bosses who persuaded to move from GE Capital into Supply Chain Management business. She feels that she will get a P&L role when she is ready for the role as there are no obstacles and there are many women P&L leaders in GE within China and beyond.

Arni recently moved to Ford China after stints in the Philippines, USA and India and spoke of the culture at Ford that promotes women leaders. However, the individual have to also seek and seize opportunities as she had to decide hard before she accepted a position in the USA with her young family. The company supported her through flexible work arrangements. The same policies are applicable at Ford China and Ford Asia, says Arni F Rifareal, HR Director, Ford China.

Following lunch, Sandra Yu Chairwoman RB Group shared her successful life journey. All thru her life and career, she found mentors and sponsors who showed full faith in her capabilities and backed her up.. her father, her husband and then, a series of her bosses. She urged women leaders to seek out sponsors but not rush into it; they will find one when they are ready to receive one.

Dr. Marjorie Woo moderated the panel on the importance of mentorship and sponsorship. The panellists felt that both mentorship and sponsorship are necessary. However, importance of sponsorship goes up with seniority.

Xiomin Mou, Senior Investment Officer, International Finance Corporation (IFC) shared the importance of sponsorship at IFC. With nearly half of the senior most executives being women, IFC has developed a highly effective sponsorship program that she has personally benefitted from. For someone whose grandmother had to struggle to escape from “bound feet”, she exudes the confidence that she can achieve her fullest potential at IFC.

Sarah Kochling, Managing Principal, Blossom Innovation made interesting distinction between mentorship and sponsorship. To her, sponsorship could also be from junior to senior person and outside the organization. She also spoke of her personal and professional journey and the role her mentors and sponsors have played.

Speakers’s Profile Job Level
Mei Ling Zhou, Head of Bids & Projects, MAN Diesel Turbo has taken personal initiatives to hire an executive coach. In an engineering setting, her company treats her at par and her leaders fully support her. But there is a no one she can bounce things off and hence, she sought out an external coach at her own expense. Elaine Zhou, Co Founder traced her journey from a poor family in a village to starting a successful enterprise in Singapore and China and the role her mentors and sponsors have played.

Panel on Managing 2 career family brought out interesting dynamics. Including moderator, there were 4 working couples involved; of these, one of the spouse for 3 couples were travelling on business highlighting many challenges double career families entail.

“We have 2 moms and 2 dads”. This is how young son of Gautam Pathak, Vice President, Dealer Tire and Shilpi Biswas, Ex GE Senior Executive saw the frequent absence of one of their parents away on business trips. Richard Lin, Managing Director, Korn Ferry and Lin An, Former COO, Marsh China shared their experiences and the challenges faced in managing 2 career families. Despite the challenges, all the panellists felt that it was the only way they would do as professional aspirations and family responsibilities are both important and not mutually exclusive. This panel was moderated by Dr. Indira Ravindran, Adjunct Fellow, China Studies, Gateway House.

Last panel on “Women Entrepreneurship” brought out the professional journey for 4 women entrepreneurs. Claudia Masueger, Founder Cheers Wines shared her journey from scratch to over 60 outlets all over China and her ambition to help women entrepreneurs set up more outlets. Shew Chan CHE Oly, an ex- Olympic athlete who represented Malaysia at Beijing Olympics spoke of her transition into a commercial world. Sophie Wu shared her work at Women in Leadership League and how they encourage and support leaders. Corporate executive turned entrepreneur, Dr. Lan Ma, Founder Ta Xiang passionately talked about her ambition to bring delightful things handmade by women in rural and remote areas in countries with rich culture and heritage like India to women professionals in China.

Delegates’s Profile by Job Level
Our Distinguished Speakers
Thanks to All our Attendees, Sponsors & Partners for making AWLS CHINA a Big Success!

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