

what we heard

& Leaders 2017
Daughters

Leaders & Daughters

*“Women succeeding by overcoming internal,
external hurdles”*

New Delhi, India

March 3, 2017



EgonZehnder



what we heard

About 24 leaders and their daughters gathered at the Taj Mahal Hotel in New Delhi on March 3 to share experiences in bringing gender equality to India's corporate and government sectors. The roundtable discussion, with Egon Zehnder consultants Pallavi Kathuria, Malti Prabhu, and Vidur Singh as hosts, brought together participants with diverse backgrounds in private business and civil services.

Going the 'extra mile'

Ambitious women are finding more paths to corporate leadership in India, but are too often still required to outperform male colleagues while balancing competing life demands. Participants in Egon Zehnder's Leaders&Daughters roundtable in New Delhi said that talented women are succeeding by overcoming internal and external obstacles.

"Almost every leader said it was a very powerful event. These young women were pursuing their dreams. No one was following a cookie-cutter career," Pallavi Kathuria, Egon Zehnder partner in New Delhi, following the breakfast meeting. "There has been change and there has been progress, but it was very clear that women have to go the extra mile."

In an energetic discussion, participants agreed that women are still held to different performance standards than their male colleagues. "It is a tragedy that women still have to prove that they are better than men," said Naina Lal Kidwai, former chairman of HSBC India and member of its Asia-Pacific board.

Women around the table cited instances in which they were made to feel inferior to male peers. One young woman recalled leading a presentation to a

potential client, yet all the client's questions were addressed to a male colleague who was obviously less knowledgeable on the topic. Another participant related a similar experience, but said the client who dismissed her input was a woman.

Shared responsibilities

While the participants in the roundtable agreed that career women must step up to meet such challenges head-on, men in the office also have a responsibility to be sensitive to the different set of demands their female colleagues face. One of the leaders said that workplace equality will remain elusive until men like him acknowledge that society expects women to manage a home along with a career.

"There are different needs and different pressures in women's lives," Kathuria said, adding that families, organizations, and society must recognize this. "There needs to be a support system put in place at all these levels to help young women reach their potential."

Kidwai said when she started with the bank she was embarrassed to acknowledge that she had non-professional demands, like attending parent-teacher meetings at her daughter's school during business hours. "If we miss a birthday, we women feel guilty about such things; men just don't, even if they would have liked to have attended," she said. "We need to be upfront about the things that are important to us." She added that many young women today are more confident and comfortable with such conflicting priorities.

Finding an inner balance

Understanding the dynamics of the corporate world better will also help women as they reach for equality. They should be more assertive in

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their career demands and personal needs and also more introspective, at times. Without dismissing the gender challenges women face, some participants said sometimes the glass ceiling is an inner construct rather than a real obstacle and sometimes a perceived gender slight turns out to be traditional office politics as everyone fights to climb the ladder.

Overall, women, backed by a support network, must be at ease with the challenges they face and confident in their abilities to overcome them, the group agreed.

“Conditioning of women is important,” said Neelam D Sabharwal, former Indian ambassador to the Netherlands. “It is important to understand the female mystique and the desire to do everything themselves. Women shouldn’t feel overwhelmed from the stress of proving themselves.”

Participants said corporate leaders must also play their parts by promoting gender equality throughout the organization. Along with rank-and-file opportunities, women should also be given seats on boards and memberships to committees that help ensure that the company is on the right path.

Work at the grassroots

Participants said that efforts at the grassroots level are needed for opportunities for women in India to truly expand. “There are only a small fragment of women in India who can aspire to leadership. The overwhelming majority continue to be circumscribed by the social and economic constraints imposed by what is still a patriarchal society. So it is critical for us all to do something to pull up the base. Data points to shrinkage of women in the workforce over the years in India. We need to ensure that girls go to school and learn self pride and independence at the grassroots level. This seething, simmering bottom is where the change needs to take place,” said Meera Shankar, former Indian ambassador to the United States. “We need to ensure girls go to school and learn self-pride and independence at the grassroots level. This seething, simmering bottom is where the change needs to take place.”

Kathuria, reflecting after the the roundtable, added, “It was great sitting there in the room and talking about what we can do, but ultimately in India we will only make progress if change comes at the bottom of the pyramid.”

what we heard



what we heard

right

*Naina Lal Kidwai and
Kemaya Kidwai*



left

*Sonia and Sonam
Mathur*



left

*Sudha Pillai and
Malavika Pillai*

right

*Neelam and Aditi
Sabharwal*



what we heard

right

*Atul Dhawan, Naina
and Nupur Dhawan*



left

Kiran and Ketaki Karnik

right

*Pallavi Shroff and
Shweta Shroff Chopra*



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About Leaders & Daughters

To mark International Women's Day, Egon Zehnder conceived Leaders & Daughters, a global series of events that bring the world's most admired leaders and their daughters together to uncover the motivations, challenges and opportunities that face the next generation of professional women.

In 2017, we went further. In celebration of International Women's Day, we hosted Leaders & Daughters events in more than 40 cities worldwide – bringing together the voices of more than 3,500 participants to share their stories of success as well as the obstacles that are preventing progress. We share one common goal: to collectively pave a better future for the next generation of women leaders.

In addition to the events, we have also launched a campaign, “To My Daughter,” in which leaders write letters to their daughters about their hopes and dreams for the future. To participate, please visit www.leadersanddaughters.com.

Visit Leaders & Daughters at
www.egonzehnder.com

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