

THE BATTLE AGAINST BIASES

To mark the occasion of International Women's Day, HCL in association with its media partner Ascent organised a seminar that centred on the importance of women at the workplace. Titled 'Rebalancing the Workplace for Sustainability', the panel discussion touched upon key issues like gender inequalities in the Indian corporate sector, the lack of enough female presence in senior management and many more



(L-R) Gopinath, Taalkshop; Dr. Rekha Shetty, Farstar Network; Vaidyanathan R, HCL Technologies; Priya Chetty Rajagopal, Stanton Chase; Sriram Ayer, Nalanda Way; Saundarya Rajesh, AVTAR Career Creators

The 'Global Gender Gap Report' highlights serious gender inequities that need to be rectified. Keeping that in mind, HCL Technologies in association with its media partner, Ascent, organised a seminar on 'Rebalancing the Workplace for Sustainability' at the Park Sheraton Hotel on March 4. The panellists included senior management executives from far-reaching sectors of IT, HR and media. The seminar was moderated by Ravishankar B, senior VP, HR, HCL Technologies. It attempted to answer some of the pertinent issues concerning gender inequality in the Indian corporate environment.

Ravishankar threw the discussion open, thus raising the topic of leadership in the context of women in corporate India to Saundarya Rajesh of AVTAR Career Creators. She said, "Women have a greater predilection towards leadership than men. They have a greater capacity to take risks. Wrt the Indian context, the stereotype of only men occupying positions of power is slowly changing. It is tougher for a corporate Indian woman because she balances both - the home and office." In response, Gopinath, CEO, Taalkshop.com said, "The work done by women in offices is often ignored in comparison to their male counterparts. For a change to take place in the Indian psyche towards women, it must come from within."

With regards to the talent pipeline of

senior management women in the country, Priya Chetty Rajagopal, VP, Stanton Chase said, "There are two kinds of women I've come across in the Indian workplace. One who is focussed and strong and knows what she wants out of work and life. The other is the working woman who has come up the hard way with little or no support or inspiration from anyone around her. Over the last few decades, the female workforce has doubled in the country, thus indicating a positive sign. Because of various reasons, there aren't as many women in senior management as there should be - but this fact has seen a marked change over a period of time." In response to why women from middle and senior management quit jobs today, Vaidyanathan R, CCO, HCL said, "In the IT industry, people are its capital. There is a compelling reason to have women in the workforce; anything that adds value to the business must form an integral part of it. Women have benefited greatly by the IT industry due to its sheer numbers. Unlike the entry level, higher attrition is seen among women in the middle and senior management. The reasons may include biological factors, mobility and so on. It is imperative to keep that talent pool from leaving." On the girl child education front, Sriram Ayer, founder, Nalanda Way said that it's a huge challenge that needs to be addressed. A statistic he quoted states that a large majority of Indian women

get married and have children before the age of twenty. "A much stronger bias is seen in small corporates as opposed to large ones. Education should be our number one priority," he added.

During the seminar, societal and cultural problems were blamed for the biased approach that many harbour towards women in India. On the subject of having a quota system for women in companies, Dr. Rekha Shetty, MD, Farstar Network said, "Positions in the workplace must go to the most able people. So I don't subscribe to the quota system. It is a common misconception that women need to be terrorising task-masters to be successful at work. We should retain our individual characteristics and not be apologetic for who we are."

After a short Q & A session and tea-break, the panel re-convened for an open space discussion that brought the audience into the lively debate.

- Mrinal Rajaram

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