by chance, i happen to have been born female, and the daughter of a business tycoon.

by choice and desire, i’ve had four children, and i’ve pursued a high-level career in management. i have been incredibly privileged. but even so, being both a woman and an executive seems to me a constant struggle.

it’s a struggle, first of all, against yourself. you struggle against the guilt you feel when you get home after 8pm (most days) or 10pm (more often than you care to admit) - guilt that you’re not spending enough time with your children. then you have to contend with the guilt you feel when you go on a family vacation - guilt

 Sodaexo: Success through Gender Balance

Sodexo executives explain what it means to position gender balance at the core of Group’s strategy and performance.

We are committed to inspiring women worldwide

In 2014, Sodexo will take part in:

- The Women Corporate Directors Global Institute, New York, United States, May 16-17, 2014
- The Women’s Forum Meeting, Sao Paulo, Brazil, May 26-27, 2014
- The Global Summit of Women, Paris, France, June 5-7, 2014
- The Women’s Forum Global Meeting, Deauville, France, October 15-17, 2014

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Sodexo: Success Through Gender Balance

Recent studies show that companies with gender balance at every level of their organization perform better, are more innovative than those without.

Sodexo: Success Through Gender Balance

Gender balance drives performance

Gender balance drives performance

Women: a new framework for success

Sophie Bellon, Sodexo Group Special Advisor for Research, Development and Innovation; Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors

“This is clearly a struggle against stereotypes”

that you’re abandoning important projects, as well as your team.

When i got my first high-level job in the 1990s, there were very few women around me in senior management positions. for executives, balancing work with family simply was not an issue; nobody discussed it. then, about 10 years ago, Michel

Landel (now Sodexo’s CEO) arrived from the United States, where promoting gender equality in corporations was the norm. It was a revolutionary move when he organized the first meeting on the topic with senior management. As French and European women, we had been accustomed to dealing with our double lives in silence. This is clearly also a struggle against stereotypes. Five years ago, when i became the Director of a big Sodexo subsidiary in France, i found myself - the “boss’s daughter” - surrounded by 20 men. When i expressed surprise that no woman was serving on the management committee or held a job as Regional Director, i was told, “That’s no job for a woman”. That remark hit deep.

I became committed to a conscious, deliberate policy of women’s advancement. for every vacancy...

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Sodexo: Success Through Gender Balance

Since its foundation almost 50 years ago, Sodexo has been guided by the belief that, to create lasting value, organizations and society must place people at the center of their thinking — and that the women and men in a company must be the real beneficiaries of its success. This belief is the cornerstone of Sodexo’s gender balance strategy. By tapping into the full potential of both genders, Sodexo is stronger, more innovative and better at serving its 75 million consumers worldwide.

“BY TAPPING INTO THE FULL POTENTIAL OF BOTH GENDERS, SODEXO IS MORE INNOVATIVE.”

At Sodexo, the business case for gender balance is robust. “A big moment for us was tying (gender balance) to the growth of the company,” notes Michel Landel, Sodexo’s CEO. Mr. Landel elaborated on Sodexo’s strategy at the 2013 Women’s Forum Global Meeting in Deauville, France, “the face of our consumers is changing and we must resemble it, he pointed out. We know that women in women on the board correlates to a 21% increase in women in executive positions. This in turn leads to return on equity, return on sales and return on invested capital.

THE VIEW FROM THE SHOP FLOOR
A strong case for the power of gender balance among employees is made by a recent Gallup poll. Gallup examined the gender makeup and financial results at approximately 800 electronics retailers and restaurants in the United States. After controlling for various factors, such as geographic location and length of time the business had been in operation, the study found that the outlets with greater gender diversity performed better financially. At the electronics stores, with a stronger mix of men and women, same-store revenue growth was 16% higher on average than at those without a strong mix. Meanwhile, the restaurants with better diversity had average quarterly net profits per location that were 19% higher. Sangeeta Boddla, the study author and a senior consultant at the Gallup research institute, maintains that closing the gender gap is every bit as important on the shop floor as it is in the C-suite. Too often, Boddla says, the way hourly workers perceive their workplace “isn’t really seen as a close link to financial performance. I think there’s a stronger link there than people realize.”

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE COLLECTIVELY
So what is, generally speaking, that makes gender balance such a valuable asset? A 2011 Harvard Business Review study points to the “female factor,” who “when women lead, business booms.” Many other studies showing that when women lead, business booms. For example, Catalyst, a leading research firm that studies women in business, found that a 10% increase in women on the board correlates to a 21% increase in women in executive positions. This in turn leads to return on equity, return on sales and return on invested capital.

“CLOSING THE GENDER GAP IS EVERY BIT AS IMPORTANT ON THE SHOP FLOOR AS IT IS IN THE C-SUITE.”

Sodexo Senior Vice President & Global Chief Diversity Officer. “While we have accomplished much, we also know that we have more work to do to impact our 428,000 employees in over 80 countries.” “Showing ourselves as a diverse and inclusive company has given us a strong competitive advantage,” notes Sylvia Metayer, CEO Corporate Services worldwide at Sodexo. “Several major clients have cited Sodexo’s Diversity and Inclusion policies and programs as a key factor in their decision to partner with us.” Diversity and inclusion allows us to build robust offers and solutions that can only be designed with teams from different cultures, functions, perspectives, and expertise,” Mr. Metayer adds. Sodexo also receives requests from clients and other companies to share the story of the company’s diversity and to help design and implement similar strategies.

“We know that if we do it right, we will have stronger teams.”

Sodexo has received numerous awards recognizing the company’s initiatives to advance diversity and gender equality balance around the world. In India, Sodexo received the 2012 Will Forum-Best Employers for Women Award and Distinction. That same year, Sodexo in North America received the Catalyst Award, recognizing exceptional business initiatives that advance women in the workplace. And in 2013, Sodexo was recognized by DiversityInc as the #1 company on their Top 50 Companies for Diversity List.

Today Sodexo is recognized as a global thought leader in diversity and inclusion, and its commitment is at the core of Sodexo’s brand promise.
Fixing the “Leaky Pipeline”

Organizations seeking to improve gender balance and promote the advancement of women are often confronted with attrition among women in leadership positions: the higher one goes up in organizations, the fewer women there are. Researchers call it the “leaky pipeline” and explain that the issue is not about getting women into top positions; rather it is about creating an inclusive culture free of biases which allows everyone to reach their full potential as well as providing the tools that allow women to thrive at every step of their advancement.

From the get go addressing this issue has been a priority for Sodexo. At the heart of its commitment to gender balance lies the Sodexo Women’s International Forum for talent (SWIFT). “The idea behind SWIFT,” Sodexo’s CEO Michel Landel explains, “was to accelerate the attainment of gender balance within Sodexo, through personal drive, commitment and leadership of its high-level leaders.” In 2009, he appointed Dr Rohini Anand, Senior Vice President and Global Chief Diversity Officer at the head of SWIFT, to design, develop and implement a dedicated strategy.

Twice a year, thirty-four senior executives, representing 15 nationalities, meet up to identify specific executives, representing 15 nationalities, to design, develop and implement a dedicated strategy.

“OUR GOAL IS TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE FREE OF BIASES.”

and to make it sustainable across its geographically dispersed footprint. In addition, a six-member steering committee is in charge of the day-to-day management and the implementation of concrete actions. One of SWIFT’s primary objectives is for the company to reach 25% female representation among the top 300 managers by 2015 (from 17% in 2009), with a focus on women in operational roles with P&L responsibility.

SWIFT’s efforts have led Sodexo to make tangible progress towards fostering and maintaining gender balance among the company’s managers. When SWIFT was created only 260 women had participated in mentoring leadership programs. As of 2014 that number has more than tripled to 1,000. In 2009 a mere 10% of operational positions were filled by women. That number has increased to 17% in 2013. Furthermore, among district managers, engagement rates for women have increased from 51% in 2009 to 64% in 2013. Over that same time period, the satisfaction of those women with regard to gender balance has increased from 52% to 58%.

Another of SWIFT’s goals is developing “gender balance networks” to foster a culture of inclusion and facilitate the advancement of women at every level of the organization. And again, the numbers demonstrate progress. While in 2009 only one gender balance network existed, in 2014, there are 13 networks with dozens of regional chapters, contributing to a global dialogue and collaboration on the topic of gender balance.

“IT IS ALSO ABOUT CREATING GREATER VALUE FOR THE COMPANY”

Still, we should be wary of comparing male and female management styles. Comparisons rely on generalities, and from there it’s a short step to the stereotype. If women managers are often described as warmer, with greater empathy than men, this probably isn’t the result of genetic determinism. Simply, when they arrive in a new job without models they can refer to, women may be more likely to question established practice. Also, I believe you can be both warm and effective! Hiring and promoting women is not just about personal conviction, it is also about creating greater value for the company.

Ultimately, women need to learn how to project success, how to speak up with authority and confidence so that they are treated equally, when it comes to promotion, pay-rises, or everyday encounters. Often, in meetings, when a woman speaks, she struggles for her voice to carry the same weight as her male colleagues. Sometimes when a woman is told, “We’re considering you for this promotion,” she falls out of her chair in surprise. The first thing you have to do is pick her up and reassure her! Parity, this is about education and breaking the established mold, but more broadly, it’s a social issue that also concerns men. If male executives and leaders are not involved in gender equality — if they are not convinced that it is a strategic issue for the company — nothing will happen.

“It’s a Social Issue that Also Concerns Men”

In reality, we’re in the midst of a profound transformation. It extends well beyond gender, and will, I think, become a model for other forms of diversity. Women, who are striving to reconcile their professional and personal lives, are building a more inclusive and sustainable idea of what constitutes success. Many measures that were originally demanded by women — telework, flexible hours, parental leave, better work/life balance, and so on — now benefit men who would never have imagined pushing for them. I want to tell the women of today that leadership jobs are within their reach. They shouldn’t have to choose between their work and their private lives — neither should men. And when they get to those executive positions, my experience has shown them that they can handle the responsibility and the pressure just as well as men do.

Corporations also need to embrace this idea. Gender diversity is not only a source of balance, but an inclusive and sustainable idea of what constitutes success. Many measures that were originally demanded by women — telework, flexible hours, parental leave, better work/life balance, and so on — now benefit men who would never have imagined pushing for them. I want to tell the women of today that leadership jobs are within their reach. They shouldn’t have to choose between their work and their private lives — neither should men. And when they get to those executive positions, my experience has shown them that they can handle the responsibility and the pressure just as well as men do.

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Gender balance: men have their say

How we complement one another.

The Sodexo Women’s International Forum for Talent, an organization of women and men executives working towards gender balance promotion, I thought this could be a rewarding experience. This is what originally drove me to join. My experience at SWIFT – where men are in the minority – has really helped me understand how a woman might feel in a meeting full of men. You’re obliged to be more open and more responsive. I’ve often observed how women in the workplace ask more questions, contribute different perspectives and challenge the status quo. I find that more constructive for a team than to always be looking for a consensus. In my 30 years at Sodexo, I’ve seen real progress being made, and women are increasingly well-represented in our management teams. But still today, the higher the position, the fewer female candidates we see. I think we need to ensure that we always have as many female candidates as male. And a challenge we all need to overcome, especially us men, is not only so to make it possible, but also to encourage women to seek out the senior positions they so deserve. As a father, too, instilling that drive in my daughters is a matter close to my heart.

The biggest challenge I face today is finding a gender-diverse pool of employees who are attracted by the Facilties world. The facilities industry is still mostly dominated by men who have spent their career working in this field. We need to continue to find the talents – inside and outside of the company – and develop them to become our leaders of tomorrow.

One of the reasons why I sponsor the Sodexo Female Network in Sweden is simply because it’s good for business. By promoting an inclusive workplace that leverages our different strengths, we benefit from a definite competitive advantage in the marketplace. Networks also help us generate the right contacts and maintain the dynamism we need to be successful.

Furthermore, we must overcome the perception that leadership comes in one shape. If we are all the same, with the same background and experiences, we cannot progress. I see a great value in gender-balanced teams – the world itself is gender-balanced and in particular our clients and consumers. Gender balance has become commonplace at Sodexo. We naturally hire based on experience and skills, we empower our managers and promote based on performance – regardless of gender.

Having a balanced workforce is critical to the success of Sodexo. Developing a more gender-based workforce helps us create a more balanced pool of executives that delivers on our values to our clients. Currently, I am developing five female candidates to be positioned at higher levels in the organization. The program they are following consists of mentoring sessions with Regional Vice-President to discuss professional opportunities as well as training programs to develop their skill set. It is extremely gratifying to see how the mentees have grown professionally and developed their self-confidence.

Interview

Mixed double: a winning team

The French Open, the Tour de France, the Davis Cup and more: Isabelle Langolf and Laurent Hétier manage world renowned events for Sodexo. The pair tells us how they’ve turned their differences into strengths.

Do you find that working with a partner of the opposite gender is a plus?
- RL: Yes, it is a plus—when you take the time to get to know and understand one another. And in addition to our different genders, we both came from contrasting backgrounds with varied experiences.
- LH: Yes, it is an advantage because we quickly learned to understand and respect one another, and to make the most of the yin and yang of our partnership. I’ve been at Sodexo for more than 25 years and I come from the front lines—the kitchen. Isabelle has extensive experience in logistics and administrative management.

What is your greatest strength as a team?
- RL: How we complement one another. Our different perspectives, personalities and backgrounds mean we often have different takes on how to address certain issues. Nowadays that’s a strength—when we become very close and when we make a decision, we always make sure we are on the same page.
- LH: When we meet with a vendor to buy a service, for example, we negotiate more effectively because of our complementary skillsets. And we are always exchanging ideas so we never get stuck in a rut.

What are your proudest achievements to date?
- RL: Our clients are very satisfied. They, too, value our complementary perspectives.
- LH: When we work on high-profile events like the Davis Cup, it’s important to stay humble. We realize we don’t influence the attendance numbers for these big occasions. But when it comes to taking care of spectators, VIPs and players, we know that together we make a difference.

Didier Sandoo, Europe
Europe Area President, Benefits & Rewards Services

“i’ve always been sensitive to the issue of women’s advancement in the workplace. when i was offered to become a member of the sodexo women’s international forum for talent, an organization of women and men executives working towards gender balance promotion, i thought this could be a rewarding experience. this is what originally drove me to join.”

Ronald Gregory, United States
Region Vice President, Facilities Management, Campus Division

“This mentoring program has taught me that different genders have different needs. Each employer’s development goals depend on how far they want to move up in the company. I have become more aware of the different issues genders face as they work their way towards their personal goals.

The biggest challenge I face today is finding a gender-diverse pool of employees who are attracted by the Facilties world. The facilities industry is still mostly dominated by men who have spent their career working in this field. We need to continue to find the talents – inside and outside of the company – and develop them to become our leaders of tomorrow.”

Roberto Delpino, Italy
Chief Financial Officer, Benefits & Rewards Services

Diversity adds richness to the workplace. A diverse team makes it possible to consider each side of an issue and empowers everybody to make the right decision. I manage my gender-balanced team by focusing on simple principles that are easily shared and understood: expertise, reactivity, integrity, transparency and the achieving of results; and, as often as possible, I check in with my team to ensure that my own behavior meets these principles. Each one of my team members, men and women alike, work well together because of the strong mutual trust and respect for each other. To maintain this harmony and keep a keen focus on our business objectives, positions are assigned according to skill and merit. Merit and skill have no gender and in the last years, I promoted three new managers who embodied best the guiding principles. All three of them happened to be women.

Although prejudices or biases about women still remain in the workplace – for example with regards to maternity leave – I have never encountered serious issues in my team. As a manager, it is my job to understand the needs of all employees and find effective solutions.

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