



Women Still Woefully Under-Represented On The Board

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In an effort to formulate a legal regime for corporate India, the Companies Bill, introduced in 2012, proposes that at least one woman be appointed as a director on the boards of Companies. This was the result of India's quest for the [best](#) corporate governance practices sought out by policy makers and businesses alike. Women have been woefully under-represented on the board of directors of corporations, across the globe and efforts are being made in a number of countries to remedy this, India being one of them.

While ideally the role of a women board member is meant to be an earned position - to be filled in purely on the basis of merit and natural progression - many corporates elevated women relatives of their promoters to their boards in a bid to keep complete control in their hands and meet the deadline issued by Securities and Exchange Board of [India](#) (SEBI) in 2014. This drastic move not just defeated the actual purpose of the legal directive; it also left the women raised to such important positions pitifully ill-equipped to handle such a role. And understandably so, as managing the affairs of board meetings requires years of experience and qualification.

Based on the CS Gender 3000: women in senior management: Asia Pacific report, balanced boards that bring a woman's perspective to the table has always proven to have achieved better returns and outshine the others on the stock market. However, women appointed without any real merit would be unable to create any positive or significant impact in the decision-making process. Furthermore, in order to fulfill their leadership roles and responsibilities, these women come under immense pressure as they dash into board meetings with a crash course on leadership skills to make themselves deserving of the opportunity thrust upon them.

Undoubtedly gender diversity is slowly becoming more relevant globally. However, statistics prove that India is yet to catch up. The International Labor Organisation (ILO) has reported that India ranks 120 out of 131 countries for female representation.

The report further states that India ranks the second lowest in the Asia Pacific region in terms of representation at the senior management level, behind Japan and South Korea (both stand at 2.3 per cent). This is primarily due to mid-career dropouts owing to personal commitments faced after marriage and lack of support after childbirth.

This clearly proves that women who gain a seat at the boardroom through merit have to strive much harder for the position than any man. In my opinion, women need to outperform men at every turn and prove more in order to reach the boardroom. While leadership roles are hard to come by for any woman due to the glass ceiling, it is even more challenging for her to claim her position as a director of the board through natural progression.

It is frequently observed that while career women have to make sacrifices and strive harder than men to reach every milestone the insecurity of men in the boardroom makes it almost impossible to get a fair chance to contribute significantly to the decision-making process.

For any company that is looking for a sustainable eco system, it is hard to ignore the fact that the combined contribution of a group of people with different perspectives and backgrounds brings in a perfect balance and richness to the board. In order to stay ahead, women take their director roles more seriously and prepare more conscientiously for meetings. As a result, there is more attention to detail. When men and women ponder on issues together in a well-rounded, holistic way the outcome of such decisions is bound to be better.

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