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Q&A: David Andrews,
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It makes a lot of business sense to retain the women workforce and grow them into senior management positions—but without a gender agenda that's not going to happen /16

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Women at Work



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'The government should look at initiatives that would motivate corporates to institutionalize gender friendly policies'

—Priya Chetty, VP at Stanton Chase and convener, CII-WBLF (Women Business Leaders Forum)



A lot of companies are not convinced about the business case of gender...

A part of this is because, for some reason, gender sensitivity is associated with CSR rather than the business. Diversity, particularly gender diversity, is a globally accepted business imperative. Most companies, even if they choose to address this, club this with a 'desirable but not essential' world view. If you come with this focus, it can never be central to your plans. On the other hand, many companies have the best intentions, but because of preoccupation with the here and now, or lack of knowledge of how to go about it, get into an inertia mode.

loss (real or perceived).

Typically, this five year plus experience stage is also the time in the woman's career when she's on the verge of getting into a mid-management level. So either she decides not to marry, have children or to leave the lure of an important job profile—that is too difficult a choice for anybody to have to make. A decade back, or even five years back, the choice had

Some believe that the onus of 'empowerment' is on the woman herself, her family and the society, not the company?

Engaging multiple stakeholders is indeed required. We need the women themselves, family, society (and not to forget, the government). However, where is the stage for women to shine? The workplace, or in business. And therefore this effort needs to be mirrored at the organizational level. And this positively feeds back into the system, society and family, thereby again impacting the way women are perceived.

The organizational effort has another motivation—to educate and sensitize men at the workplace, be it peers, bosses or subordinates. This creates a huge partnership and alignment with the most important stakeholder in the gender diversity policy—the men. Most are very receptive and understand the fairness of such an initiative. Some need information and training. So the organization has a huge role to play, to action the stated policy, and walk the talk.

The government, you mentioned, is an important stakeholder. How does an association like CII involve them?

Organizations or industry fora like CII, Nasscom, Awake, TiE have impactful discussions and initiatives with companies and the government, such as events, panel discussions, white papers and surveys.

I feel that the government, apart from underlining this issue on a central level, should broadly look at some initiatives that would motivate corporates and SMEs to focus on, and institutionalize gender friendly policies within their company.

At the CII-WBLF (CII Women Business Leaders Forum) we are working on a white paper to present to the state government or bureaucracy, wherein companies who fulfill the criteria for women-friendly policies are incentivized in some ways, be it a subsidy or a tax break. It could be as simple as (although the current Budget has addressed this) removing the FBT component on providing daily transportation for women and men in night shifts or for those who are providing crèches at the workplace. These are heavy costs to companies, don't forget. Removing state professional tax for working women or providing a weightage for gender-friendly companies in the government tendering process, will send out a symbolic message that the government is serious about this issue and sees it as an important focus.

Many overseas clients pick vendors who follow (and demonstrate) basic policies of governance, compliance and gender sensitivity. This is another motivator for Indian companies looking to consolidate their position as a differentiated service provider in global markets. We need both motivators and disincentives to create the critical mass we need for a win-win solution.

to be that tough. But now, with a little thought and planning on the part of the woman and the corporate, it is easier for the women to continue with their careers. Of course, the journey doesn't end there.

Various surveys have proved, more famous being the Catalyst study of

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Fortune100 companies (which gathered data for over five years, holding for industry segment, time horizons, size, etc) that organizations with more women in leadership positions did significantly better. These are hard numbers, not perceptions.

Senior people in the industry have these observations to make about the value women bring to the table: the knowledge industry is a great place