

1 What motivated you to get involved in the WIL MY programme?

It's always lonely at the top, especially for young leaders. In my much younger days, I longed for someone I could trust enough to guide and provide me with the confidence to move in certain ways. I'd now like to be that someone to another starting out similarly.

2 What are the main factors that hold women back from pursuing senior leadership positions?

Women need to watch against creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Very often women may feel they are sidelined for senior leadership positions for gender bias reasons.

In fact, it could be this very thinking which becomes the mental block manifesting in an unnecessary inferiority complex, which then leads to the self-fulfilling prophecy.

ELIZABETH LEE

Senior executive director, Sunway Education Group & Sunway University



3 In your personal journey, what have been the main factors that have led you to your senior leadership position today?

I had a supportive mentor who dared to challenge me, who could see what I could become, who threw me into the deep end of the ultimate opportunity, but who always watched me from a distance and provided support and encouragement every time I needed it. This person helped to propel me to a senior leadership position at a very young age. Initiation by fire!

4 If you could tell your younger self three things about career and success, what would you say?

a) You must give your career your

heart and soul. Love what you do, give it your full and undivided attention, make your career your hobby and you will never have to work another day!

b) Make allies all over, across gender, generation and levels. Network with a genuine interest in your new found friends and develop meaningful relationships.

c) Never ever play politics or be drawn into any groups against any individual or other groups. Stay professional at all times.

RAJA TEH MAIMUNAH

Managing director and CEO, Hong Leong Islamic Bank Bhd



1 What are the main factors that hold women back from pursuing senior leadership positions?

A combination of things, but raising a family is often the main one. Many women make a conscious decision to step back when raising a young family, which is a selfless and noble thing to do.

What society needs to recognise is that effort is critical in building our nation. When mothers wish to return to the workforce, that option ought to be readily available to them, and this includes the provision of facilities to care for their children. That was perhaps the single most challenging thing for me when I was a young executive in a bank with young children to attend to.

2 In your personal journey, what have been the main factors that have led you to your senior leadership position today?

I am driven to where I am today primarily out of my desire to provide my children with the best I that I can give. They are my greatest inspiration. My father is another, who has shown me that challenges must be seized and my mother who showed me that one's love for the

family goes beyond one's own ambitions. She selflessly gave up her own dreams to raise her children.

3 Are there challenges that you face as a senior leader that you think are unique only to females?

I would say having to balance between home and work still poses a challenge to me.

The saying that a woman's work is never done, is even more so for us. When I get home, it always is "mummy this and mummy that". But I wouldn't have it any other way. They are after all the reason I am here.

4 If you could tell your younger self three things about career and success, what would you say?

a) Be true to yourself and never compromise on your values.

b) Retain your femininity and harness your positive female traits e.g. be a more nurturing leader. Inspire.

c) Be bold and conquer the unknown! (Which my younger self did do)

MENTORS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE

WHAT DIFFERENTIATES FEMALE SENIOR LEADERS FROM THEIR MALE COUNTERPARTS? WE INTERVIEWED FOUR MENTORS FROM THE WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME TO FIND OUT.

AZLIN ARSHAD

Group CEO, ECM Libra Financial Group Bhd



1 What motivated you to get involved in the WIL MY programme?

To share with others that there will inevitably be ups and downs in their career, but that they can equip themselves with the necessary skills to ride the tough moments.

This programme is important as it provides the platform for people, not just women, to realise that leaders are not necessarily born, but they can be nurtured and groomed, and that important element of confidence can be achieved.

As a mentor, I hope to be able to offer different perspectives on this.

2 Are women different to men in the context of work and careers?

There is this perception that professional women feel that they have to continuously justify where they are or how they got there. The important thing is to not let it consume you.

3 In your personal journey, what have been the main factors that have led you to your senior leadership position today?

The moral support I received and continue to receive from my entire family (my husband, my parents, my children, my siblings). It would have been that much more difficult if

they didn't understand why, at certain points in my career, there was just no work-life balance; Learning from the people I worked with (my superiors, my peers and my subordinates); In pursuing any given task, always try to strive for excellence (vis-à-vis perfection).

4 Are there challenges that you face as a senior leader that you think are unique only to females?

I've been very fortunate to have been (and continue to be) in organisations that did not appear to have a glass ceiling for women.

In saying that, I would say the challenge is then to acknowledge that different organisations manage women-in-leadership issues differently.

There are companies with the "boys' club" mentality, there are companies who provide a conscious and conducive platform for women specifically to excel, and there are companies that fall anywhere in between – and the most important thing then is for one to recognise which type of organisation you are in (or want to be in), and then manage accordingly.

1 What motivated you to get involved in the WIL MY programme?

Many capable women undermine the importance of a mentor and informal networking at the workplace. They believe that their technical ability and resourcefulness alone will assist them in reaching senior leadership positions. They only realise the importance of mentors when they want to be promoted to senior leadership positions which may be too late. As a result they are often relegated to support and not leadership roles. I hope that my involvement will be of assistance to many women and help them to be bold in pursuing their goals.

2 What are the main factors that hold women back from pursuing senior leadership positions?

In my opinion, one of the main reasons is lack of confidence and self-doubt. As a result, women can be their own worst enemy. Although women may hold the same qualifications as men, they have a greater tendency to second guess their decisions and doubt their capabilities.

I believe that women also hold back because of a fear that they may not be able to commit fully to the responsibilities demanded of that position. They slow their careers to achieve predictability in order to fulfil their role. They decline roles that may require them to travel or work longer hours in order to be available to their family members.

When women decline to work long hours or apply for promotions, their superiors may perceive it as

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disinterest in climbing up the corporate ladder or lack of commitment to their organisation.

This perpetuates the tendency of women towards self-doubt. They accept that employees who are unable to work long hours are undeserving of senior leadership positions and therefore they do not demand to be promoted although they have sound technical knowledge, good leadership skills and produce similar results to colleagues who work long hours.

3 Are women different to men in the context of work and careers?

Women have their unique strengths which include a collaborative approach to problem-solving and synthesising a number of viewpoints effectively and quickly. Women are also usually emotionally attuned to people around them.

Women should capitalise on their unique strengths and should be flexible and adaptable to different situations. For example, they should be prepared, if the situation warrants it, to confront and resolve difficult situations even if it hurts the feelings of some of their colleagues or subordinates. What is required is a high level of self-awareness to know which leadership style is the most appropriate under the circumstances.

4 In your personal journey, what have been the main factors that

have led you to your senior leadership position today?

I had clear ambition and drive starting from the early stages of my career. I worked hard and made the necessary sacrifices in order to be where I am today. I was fortunate to be in an environment that was merit-based and gave me opportunities to grow. I never felt discriminated against because I was a woman.

I had good colleagues who helped me and I had internal and external mentors. I attach significant importance to the people I work with and part of my success is due to them.

I also utilised my skills at work to organise my home to meet the needs of my family as I feel that being a mother requires the organisational skills as a manager at work. I have a good support system in terms of my extended family who I could rely upon whenever an emergency arose. I have a very supportive and understanding husband. When we are together as a family, I ensure that my attention is not diverted to my work or anything else as they are my priority. Lastly, I am blessed to have found such fulfilling work in the capital market space. If you enjoy what you do, you are more likely to succeed.