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Attracting female talent: flexibility and hiring for growth put us in the right direction

Published on March 8, 2021



Matthias Rebellius

Member of the Managing Board of Siemens AG and CEO Smart Infrastructure at Siemens

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For companies to attract female talent and build up a pipeline of women leaders, they need to focus more on hiring with a growth perspective and offering greater flexibility when it comes to work arrangements.

Still more to do

Today, 30 percent of the supervisory board of Siemens AG is female. Between 2010 and 2020, the percentage of women in our global management has nearly doubled. By the end of June 2022, one in five members of the company's top two management levels in Germany will be women. While our own data shows an increase in the percentage of women in leadership positions and we have come a long way, there's still so much more we can and should do. Two key adjustments in our own organization have highlighted areas for improvement and I'd like to share them with you.

Growth vs skills

Our achievements so far are due to effective planning of the leadership pipeline and programs supporting talent development. But another area we are transitioning to now is what we call the 'growth mindset'. By focusing on employees' potential to develop and embrace lifelong learning, we address their strengths rather than weaknesses. We look at their willingness to grow and learn over the long-term, instead of putting the biggest weight on the skillsets they have gained so far. This is particularly beneficial to women, given market realities. The female talent pools available in our space are often limited if we focus

primarily on skillsets and experience. This specifically applies to software engineering. In the U.S., for example, the Pew Research Center estimates women remain underrepresented in occupations across engineering (14%), computer (25%) and physical science (39%).

Shifting to hiring with a growth mindset means we present an opportunity for women – to learn and grow on the job, cultivating their hunger and willingness to do so instead of looking at their past achievements. Of course, this is also a mindset and cultural shift within our organization. I'm happy to say we have started the journey and that this shift comes right from the top.



Diversity is good for the bottom line

We are driven by the knowledge that having more women – and more overall diversity – in the workplace is good for business. A study by McKinsey in 2018 showed that companies with the greatest gender diversity in their executive teams were 21 percent more likely to experience above-average profits than their more homogeneous counterparts. Companies with more culturally and ethnically diverse executive teams were 33 percent more likely to see better-than-average profits. A 2019 article in the Harvard Business Review stated unambiguously: “The vast majority of corporate board directors see value in including more women and minorities. Nearly 95 percent of directors agree that diversity brings unique perspectives to the boardroom, while 84 percent believe it enhances board performance.”

I am personally a believer in the benefits of diverse teams. It's important that company policy should promote inclusion and eliminate obstacles which hamper it.

New normal working model

To this end, we have introduced a variety of initiatives to encourage and support our personnel at all levels within the context of a wider-ranging corporate program of diversity. One of the requests we hear most often from employees is flexibility. It is still the case that it is often women who take a lead role in parenting and other household responsibilities. According to McKinsey, mothers are more than three times as likely as fathers to be responsible for most of the housework and caregiving during the pandemic. Surveys taken

among our global workforce confirm their desire for greater flexibility and for personalized solutions when it comes to deciding where and when they work.

In July 2020, we established the “new normal” working model. It began as a response to a health crisis but has turned into a permanent standard. Today, employees worldwide can work on a mobile basis for two or three days a week whenever reasonable and feasible. The underlying premise is that the work schedule should be task-oriented. If you choose to do your work at home after dinner (when children may be in bed) or in the early morning (if you want to attend an 11 am yoga class), that is fine, as long as you meet your deadlines and attend essential meetings (physically or digitally, depending on the situation).



Leading by example

An encouraging story from one of our team leads in Canada demonstrated that culture change is already underway. When asked by one of his reports whether she can switch to part-time work to accommodate family needs during the pandemic, the manager said “no”, and with good reason. With women bearing the brunt of the pandemic, my colleague refused to allow his employee to sacrifice her career advancements and reduce her pay simply for being a woman in a pandemic. He reasoned that supporting one another to accommodate each other’s different needs and situations, is how successful, high-performing teams get through challenges together. The employee in question is still working full-time, without having to feel guilty if she takes time to make sure her children are learning from home.

As we celebrate International Women’s Day, I encourage all of you to look at your organizations and teams to identify obstacles that can be overcome and stereotypes that can be shattered to create more inclusive and diverse organizations. Whatever we are doing today, collectively, is not enough. In line with this year’s motto, let us all “choose to challenge”.

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Loïc Tassel • 3rd+
President, Europe at Procter & Gamble

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I couldn't agree more. I think it is crucial to drive flexible work arrangements to better reconcile personal and career needs. And – I think one positive point of the pandemic is that we actually all learned that agility and flexibility are great enablers of effectiveness. We should certainly transfer these learnings into the post-covid world, to enable our workforce, to drive gender equality, and to make equal opportunities a reality, always.

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Marjolaine Nicol • 3rd+
Head of Global Technology Portfolio Management at Schindler Group, CTO Division - EMBA IMD

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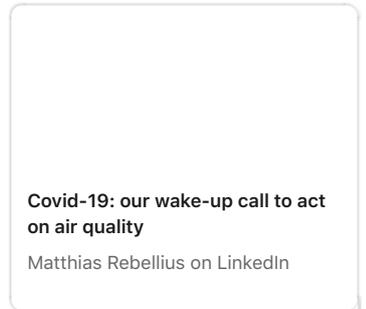
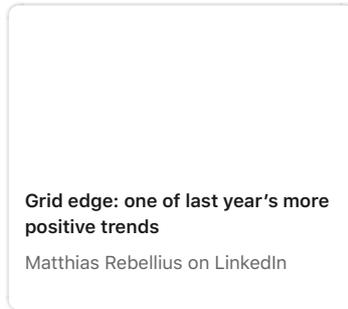
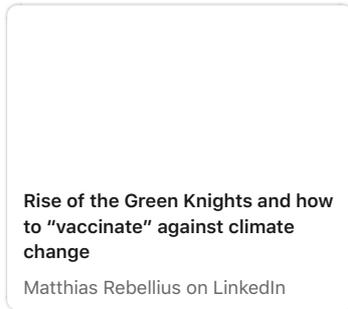
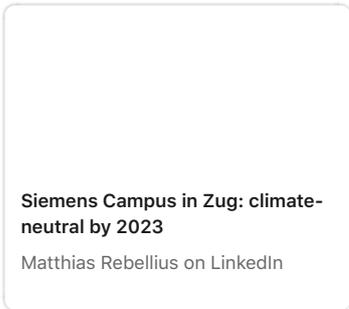


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