

Germany's female executives call introduction of women's quota helpful

Exclusive survey of 49 leading female managers in Germany

Legal provision is the only way to raise the share of women in German boardrooms temporarily

The Odgers Berndtson's Frankfurt Office has published a new study on women serving in top positions in major German corporations. For the first time, all of the leading female executives were interviewed personally, a total of 49 women in board positions in the 500 companies with the highest turnover in Germany. The goal of the study was to develop concrete recommendations for corporate and political policymakers, and for female managers themselves.

The boardrooms of the 500 largest corporations in Germany include only 49 women. This represents all of 2.4 % of the executive board and top management positions in these companies. 44 % of the female top managers endorse the introduction of a mandatory women's quota. Though the other women see the danger of board women being disqualified as mere tokens, nevertheless all of those surveyed say that a legal provision would sound the appeal and at least temporarily raise the share of women in German boardrooms noticeably.

Women are indispensable as top executives in German businesses

"It must be in the interest of every company to create a top managerial body that is as diverse as possible, as the positive effects on the atmosphere, on staff loyalty, on the image and last but not least on company earnings have been attested to many times", says **Gabriele Stahl**, a Partner at Odgers Berndtson and director of the study. "This means that the voluntary self-obligation to introduce a concrete women's quota, as instituted by several major corporations, is very welcome," Stahl says.

Breaking into the boardroom is the hardest step

More and more women are represented in middle management in major German companies. But only a relatively small number of them manage to break into the boardroom. 50 % of the participants in the study considered the last step in their career to be more difficult than any they had taken before. 47 % said they felt that prejudices against women in leading positions and a lack of equal opportunity had hampered their progress. Germany's female executives overcame these career constraints through stamina and outstanding performance. "Our survey shows that not only corporate and political policymakers are called to do more. Career women themselves have to be more consistent and self-confident in order to make it all the way to the top of the company", says consultant **Stahl**.

Women must become better networkers

34 % named a lack of existing professional networks as an obstacle to advancing their career. Most of the participants consider the existing networks to be insufficiently geared to women's needs. At the same time however they concede that most women find it difficult to use their professional networks to promote their own career. They consider this use of networks to be cronyism, whereas they want to make it into upper management based on performance. According to Germany's female executives, women have to let go of these prejudices and integrate into the existing – mixed gender – networks.

Family is not a career killer

The much-discussed difficulty of coordinating work and family life, surprisingly enough, was rarely mentioned as a career constraint. None of the women surveyed said that interrupting their career to go on maternity leave, or having to arrange child day care, or needing to deal with inflexible working hours had presented major problems. Yet 81 % of the female executives are married or live in a stable partnership; 44 % of the women have children. Balancing the family and the job is a challenge, but career women are skilled organizers and up to finding intelligent solutions.

Career women must become a part of everyday life in Germany

Germany's female executives call for society at large to give women more moral support, including promoting a positive image for working women – and for working mothers in particular, who should no longer be seen as the exception, but as the rule. Gabriele Stahl adds: "The lack of experts and managers in the coming years caused by demographic change will show the German business world clearly that it can no longer afford to do without talented, qualified and hard-working women if it wants to remain competitive."

Methodology

The 500 companies with the highest turnover, the 30 banks with the largest balance sheet total and the ten insurance companies with the highest premium income in Germany were considered in this study. The statistical data was obtained from Hoppenstedt Information for Businesses provided online as of June 2009. Personal interviews with the managers were carried out using a structured questionnaire in autumn 2009.

The complete results of the survey are available in the new report, "Germany's Female Executives – How women make it to the top in corporate management". A free copy can be downloaded from www.odgersberndtson.de or requested from presse@odgersberndtson.de.

About Odgers Berndtson:

Odgers Berndtson is one of the leading international companies in Executive Search and Management Audit in the world. The German company, Odgers Berndtson Unternehmensberatung GmbH, is owner-led and currently employs around 90 people in Frankfurt, Hamburg and Munich. Worldwide, there are 700 employees in over 50 locations in 27 different countries. The consultants work in globally linked industry and functional practices, focusing on the specific sector-related needs of their clients.

We will be happy to provide you with pictures on request. Please contact us at any time.

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