

A CEO's perspective

A one-on-one with Masahiko Uotani

How did you become involved with the 30% Club in Japan?

In 1981, I attended an MBA program in the United States. I was surprised to find that 40% of my classmates were female, all aspiring to executive positions. At the time, women in Japan were not generally on leadership tracks. I'm sure everyone is familiar with the perception of Japanese women in business as adopting roles subservient to men. In many ways, that was true then. Fast-forward to one of my first roles with a Fortune Global 100 company, working with CEOs and leaders from Western backgrounds. That experience inspired me. I saw a newspaper article about the 30% Club and contacted them, and my journey as an advocate for women in leadership began.

What recent trends contribute to the growth of diversity in the boardroom and in leadership in general?

Often, crises provide an opportunity to re-evaluate. When the Japanese economy was performing exceptionally, nobody talked about diversity and inclusion. If it wasn't broken, don't fix it! After the economic bubble burst, attention shifted to what was—and wasn't—working. I think that's when D&I really started in Japan. It has accelerated here over the past 10 to 15 years. Now, when we see a gender gap index¹ where Japan ranks 120th, we realize we need to change that.

What do you see as obstacles to women advancing to positions of leadership in Japan?

Japan is a very hierarchal society. Gender diversity is still relatively new for us. While many CEOs and leaders are supportive of change and elevating women to leadership and board positions, we still require a cultural shift, an expansion of the small bench of women qualified for these positions, and a long-term vision to guide women into career paths that leverage their education and skills.

What advice would you give women in Japan who aspire to leadership positions when starting their careers?

First and foremost, it's the individual mindset. Women need to set goals for the top and be proactive in developing skills to meet these goals. But developing practical skills, like relationship-building and self-advocacy, is not yet natural for some women. In my experience, once women overcome the obstacles put forth by tradition, they are highly successful in the boardroom and beyond. About four years ago at Shiseido, I started a workshop program, called Next Leadership Sessions for Women, and these workshops provide training specifically designed for female employees pursuing a career in upper management, with a focus on issues unique to women.

Last year, we started a mentoring program called Speak Jam, and it connects female corporate officers with female employees. This program provides information and support on the challenges women often face in life and the workplace, and our female corporate officers provide guidance based on their personal experiences.

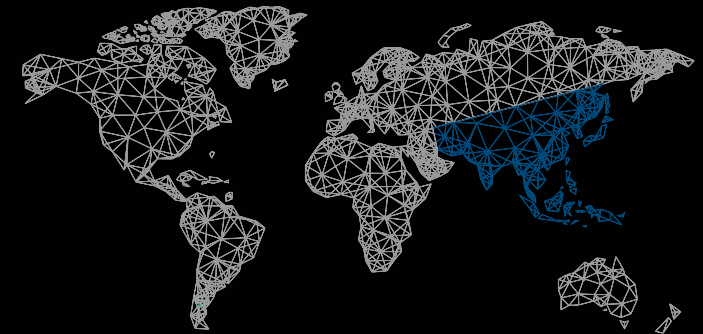
What is your advice for boards and CEOs trying to encourage D&I?

I think board members and CEOs need to employ actionable plans with defined and measurable goals. Like quality training programs focused on women's career advancement, succession planning committed to one or two women for every three candidates, or external board participation opportunities for promising women candidates.

¹ World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2021, March 2021

Masahiko Uotani is President and CEO of Shiseido, a Japan-based beauty company founded in 1872.

Mr. Uotani joined Shiseido in April 2014 as the first Shiseido president appointed from outside of the company in its 140-year history. Prior to joining Shiseido, Mr. Uotani had more than 30 years of experience in marketing and management at both Japanese and global FMCG companies. Among his various posts, he spent more than 15 years as CMO and CEO at Coca-Cola in Japan. Mr. Uotani also serves in other roles, including president of Japan Cosmetic Industry Association, member of the Council for Gender Equality of Cabinet Office, chair of Keidanren¹ Committee on Diversity & Inclusion, and advisory council of Columbia Business School Club of Japan. Mr. Uotani earned a bachelor's degree in 1977 from Doshisha University in Kyoto and a Master of Business Administration degree in 1983 from Columbia Business School in New York City.



Masahiko Uotani

Representative director, president and CEO of Shiseido and chair of the 30% Club Japan

¹ Comprehensive economic organization with a membership comprised of representative companies of Japan, nationwide industrial associations, and the regional economic organizations for all prefectures.