

Inside Inclusive Leadership

An interview with Ilham Kadri, President, Diversey Care Division of Sealed Air Corporation.



Ilham Kadri
President, Diversey Care Division
Sealed Air Corporation



IIC Partners interviewed Ilham Kadri, President, Diversey Care Division of Sealed Air Corporation on the advantages of diverse leadership teams, gender inequality across the globe and the traits that define a successful leader.

Why did you decide to pursue a career in the Oil & Gas, Automotive and Cleaning sectors?

As a chemical engineer with a doctorate in reactive extrusion, my career started in the oil and gas, automotive, marine and desalination sectors. I've always found that the most interesting opportunities were in fast-moving and highly industrialized environments. My current role is as the President, Diversey Care Division of Sealed Air Corporation.

I started in an R&D customer application center and then transitioned into sales in the automotive industry before moving into the marketing function. I have always been passionate about driving change in organisations and enjoyed playing key roles in business development, restructures, mergers and divestitures.

My career has been diverse and rewarding from the very beginning and has taken me to over 13 locations across five continents. In every geographical market, it was critical to actively maintain high ethical standards as a leader and understand the culture.

Who has influenced you as a leader?

My professor at Strasbourg University who offered me the chance to be the first female to operate a twin-screw extruder in his lab and my former President who appointed me as the first female leader in MENA responsible for leading investments in desalination and coatings in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. These mentors afforded me exposure to new opportunities. All of these experiences have shaped the leader I am today. I was simply given a chance and I accepted the challenge.



What similarities have you found across these highly industrialized sectors?

Competition is fierce and commoditization is incredibly fast. You need to identify the technologies and skills required for the future, rather than the present. A leader must understand a customer’s business and develop partnerships with them to deliver value. There is also tight control from regulatory agencies and a consistent demand for more sustainable solutions. The energy and chemical sectors share the vision of “do more with less” and aspire to minimize impact while efficiently maximising available resources.

What can be done to attract more women to leadership roles?

Culture begins at the top of any organisation. Various studies show that growing diversity in the boardroom can offer many benefits to a company including new ideas that aid in problem-solving, strategic planning and service enhancement. When company boards understand the value of women, they create environments that encourage diversity and inclusion. This trend has given credence to businesses around the world to adopt a more diverse corporate staff.

What is the most important quality a female leader should possess?

There is no stereotype, just simply be yourself. In the past, women needed to match masculine behavior in order to succeed, but those times are over. We are who we are, and women can bring a sense of belonging to a team. Women are also huge consumers, investors and have a great deal of experience with multi-tasking, prioritizing and managing ambiguity. Women participate in many decisions within our lives, for example purchasing a home or buying a car. Organisations need to tap into this half of the population and use this intelligence to better drive prosperity.

What are the most important decisions a leader makes?

The most important decisions any leader makes are related to people, resources and maintaining a vision of success. The first mission of a leader is defining clarity and formulating the “Why” of a strategy. This step is key in getting teams to collaborate, own a problem, create a solution and deliver results. Prioritizing and assigning key projects to the right resources empowers teams to perform at their best, and passion inspires teams to execute efficiently. More than anything, a leader must ask “Why” to define purpose and guide teams to the discover the “What”, “How” and “When” of a strategy. Teams are most effective when they love what they do, and are motivated to utilise their expertise to think and act outside of the “box”.



“The most important decisions any leader makes are related to people, resources and maintaining a vision of success...”



What are the biggest challenges facing female leaders across the globe?

Women do not have it easy, even in developed regions of the world. In some countries, 67% of businesses have no women at the senior management level. The global average of senior executive roles held by women is 24%. Some of the biggest challenges that women in leadership positions face are:

- ▶ The double burden syndrome – work and family (generated by society).
- ▶ Women can be less explicit in expressing their ambition than men. For example: 9 out of 10 men will declare their ambitions to become a partner, while only 6 out of 10 women will declare having a similar ambition.
- ▶ Organisations need more family supporting policies, modeled after examples seen in Scandinavian countries.

On the other hand, certain countries have excelled at elevating women to leadership roles. In New Zealand women hold over 28% of senior leadership roles, and Russia holds the lead with 43%. Nearly one third of companies in South Africa have plans to hire more women, and in China 63% of companies have a female CFO.

Is gender inequality still a major issue for companies within the industrial sector?

Huge gender gaps exist in leadership within the industrial sector and the glass ceiling exists at the top and bottom levels. There are very clear benefits to having more women in leadership roles in organisations. I currently serve as a board advisor to the CATALYST organisation whose research has proven that over 66% of illiterate adults are women. Many of the women in our industry are not offered the opportunities to succeed. Women earn almost 60% of undergraduate degrees, but only 15% of executive leadership positions are held by women.

How can these challenges be tackled or solved?

Diversity in the workplace is an important issue and has created avenues for discussion, and opened new opportunities for various age groups, ethnic minorities and women to assume executive level positions. Business dynamics are shifting across all industries and organisational leadership must adapt to these changes on a global scale. There are associations that are trailblazers in diversity and inclusion, and challenge companies to embrace diversity and to consistently do it well.

“Executive search firms that get it right know there is a need for more diversity in the c-suite, and this is good thing...”



Russia

43%

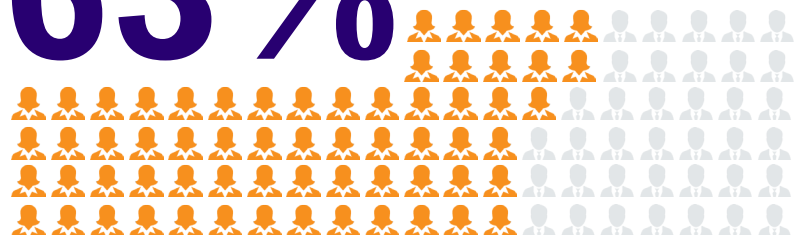
Russia holds the global lead with 43% of leadership positions held by women.



China

63%

of CFO positions in China are held by women.



What do you look for when hiring managers?

Always ask questions to determine whether a candidate is capable of inspiring others and driving a vision. Hiring a manager should not be based solely on skills or IQ. Hiring well and aligning team goals is the mechanism to achieve success. Managers must have resilience and adaptability in our constantly changing world, and must possess an international perspective. The digital world is also greatly influencing the way we hire. Millennials are digital natives and approach employment very differently than previous generations. They seek to drive more sustainable solutions and faster digital offerings, and will join a company due to the “Why” and will quit if an organisation does not deliver on that promise.

What trends are driving corporate social responsibility?

All large competitors in the industrial sector are beginning to take corporate social responsibility seriously. Globalisation as a key trend makes it clear that corporate social responsibility is required not only of governments, but also of companies and individuals. If a company truly wants to make a social contribution, it should examine the purpose of why they do what they do. Once a company defines its core values, it can identify the right corporate social responsibility initiatives to align with its purpose.

On a personal note, I have partnered with the worldwide cleaning association (ISSA) and helped found The ISSA Hygieia Network with seven other female leaders. We were challenged with combating illiteracy, building a curriculum, raising the prestige of cleaning jobs and spearheading fundraising initiatives to provide education to women in the industry.

What contribution has executive search made on your career?

I was called and am still called by executive search firms because women are in demand. Executive search firms that get it right know there is a need for more diversity in the c-suite, and this is good thing.

This interview was conducted by IIC Partners with special thanks to Envision Partnership and Sealed Air Corporation. For more features, articles, reports and thought leadership please visit www.iicpartners.com.

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5 Qualities needed to succeed as a leader



Be resilient and adaptable



Possess an international perspective



Understand your customer’s business and develop partnerships to deliver value



Inspire others and drive a vision



Identify the technologies and skills required for the future, rather than the present

About IIC Partners

IIC Partners (www.IICPartners.com) is one of the top 10 executive search organisations in the world. The network of “Independent International Consultants” is made up of 42 independently owned and managed executive search firms representing 52 offices in 34 countries, all considered to be leaders in the geographic and industry markets they serve.

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