Celebrating ‘100 Champions’ of gender diversity at work

By YUNITA ONG

ONE hundred leaders from a wide range of firms and institutions here were lauded last night for pushing for gender diversity at senior levels.

They included leaders from some big names such as Hyflux, SingHealth and DBS Bank.

The “100 Champions” event was organised by BoardAgender, which promotes greater awareness of gender-balanced business, and hosted by the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants at Four Seasons Hotel.

Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports Halimah Yacob, who was the guest of honour, said more foreign companies are adding women to their boards and management as they realise that “a diverse management team is good for business”.

“Singapore needs to recognise and retain our female talent if we want to keep our competitive edge.”

It makes business sense to put women in senior positions, noted one of the champions, Mr Michael Zink, head of Asean and Citi country officer for Singapore.

He said: “We believe it is important that the composition of our leadership team reflects our markets and customer base, so we can better serve them.”

Four in 10 of Citi Singapore’s management committee are female.

Citi Singapore has a mentoring, training and networking programme called Women Leading Citi to groom female leaders.

Part-time career tracks and some flexible working arrangements also help in legal firm Rodyk & Davidson, said managing partner Philip Jeyaretnam.

“We have among our equity partners women who, at one stage or other of their career with us, have taken substantial time off, or worked part-time, in order to fulfil family needs and demands. This has not been a barrier to career progression,” he noted.

SingTel group chief executive Chua Sock Koong, another champion, said: “In our Singapore business, more than 25 per cent of our top management are female. For a telecoms company steeped in a long tradition of engineering, we have come a long way.”

Madam Halimah acknowledged that the hard numbers show there is still some way to go for gender diversity.

Recent research into gender diversity by BoardAgender and the National University of Singapore Business School’s Centre for Governance, Institutions and Organisations (CGIO) revealed that 6.9 per cent of corporate directors at Singapore Exchange-listed firms were women.

This is, according to another champion, CGIO associate director Marleen Dieleman, “rather low compared to developed countries and regional peers”.

But Madam Halimah said: “The good news is that there is greater awareness and willingness to take steps to address this.”

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