

# The Journey to 50/50™

A series of articles in which CEOs share their experiences of moving their companies towards gender equality.



## Nina Jönsson, CEO of ICA Gruppen

*Appointed CEO of ICA Gruppen in August 2022, Nina Jönsson also sits on the Board of the Consumer Goods Forum, where she is determined to promote gender diversity.*



### **Be honest**

Be honest about your own diversity results. Track the company's performance and be ready and willing to communicate that in any management summit. If the CEO never mentions it because they don't want to show bad results, it leads to inaction. As soon as we are transparent, we have a better action plan because people get involved.

### **Get involved in talent management with HR**

As CEO, you must get into the talent management programme and understand the detail of the company's approach. For example, how do you identify talent; how do you nurture it; how many years are people normally in position; how do you expose talent to management so that they feel they are part of the future? Don't leave this to HR only. You as CEO need to actively work on it. It's not enough to look at the map once a year; every time you are setting up projects or working groups, consult your map and think about how to involve key people. For example, when I became CEO I started a transformation programme, and I looked at the diverse top talent, because those are the people we want to be key contributors. If you show that this is of interest to the CEO and to the whole company, then things start to happen.



### **Serve as a role model**

I sit on several boards and I am often only the European woman or one of the very few women in the room. Boards need to become more diverse and help offset the barriers for women to advance – one of the barriers being the double standards facing any marginalized group pursuing a career. To be included and to succeed, women can't afford to stand out, try a different approach or worse, make any mistakes. They must overachieve in order to stand a fair chance. As leaders, we must acknowledge this pattern and create an inclusive environment where imperfection, new perspectives, approaches and even mistakes are allowed and encouraged as way of testing and learning.

### **Don't get complacent**

Have a plan for how you run DEI in your company. What activities do you have; how do you communicate zero tolerance for harassment, abuse and discrimination; how do you continuously improve your processes and tools for internal mobility? Again, this is not a once-a-year activity, but a weekly one. I was in ICA for seven years before I became CEO, and things were already moving significantly. Today we have 72% woman managers and 42% women in the top team. But my aim is not just to maintain where we are, because things can change extremely quickly in retail and it is easy to slip back. My aim is to be the absolute best and to be seen as an organisation that women and other diverse talent want to join.



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### **Think of the future**

I want to contribute to LEAD Network wherever I can. I want to inspire others and share real-life examples, so that people know where to start when they become a leader. If any CEO isn't involved in the Gender Diversity Scorecard and CEO Pledge, it's a real shame. Creating opportunities for the next generation is our responsibility to the future.



### **Bridge the generation gap**

There's absolutely a need for the older generation to understand how young people think and how they see their workplace and their job. Things are very different than when people my age started out. At ICA we are constantly looking at how to adjust – on mobility, work/life balance, flexibility, but also on career advancement opportunities. For example, there is a lot of digital in retail now, and tech talent can work from anywhere in the world, so we have to be responsive to this.

### **Pay attention to detail**

As a CEO, you can't just be floating on top: you need to get into the details. I want to understand and find out what problems are so I can remove them. That is one of the things that has been successful in my career – I have got into the details, so I really understand what are the opportunity areas, and where we need to get better. For example, for women store managers it's much more important to schedule a month ahead so they can plan with their partners and families how to manage childcare. If scheduling is only done one or two weeks in advance, it creates a big problem for women. This is a little detail, but it's very important. If women can't take these jobs because they're expected to be so flexible, it's for the company to take away this barrier.

### **Devote time to listening**

You can only find out the details if you keep in touch with the activities and networks where these issues are being discussed. It takes time to really understand, so don't just come in for five minutes and then leave. Listen, and be open as a person so people feel they can give you feedback. This is how I found out about the scheduling issue.

### **Link company values and DEI**

Make the connection between company values and DEI, and ensure everyone understands it. One of ICA's values is entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship derives from diverse perspectives, and it thrives in an inclusive environment. So, the link is clear, as I see it: a diverse and inclusive culture will foster new ideas, while homogeneity will generate more of the same.

### **Contact us**

We hope you have found this article useful. Please share your feedback with Allyson Zimmermann at [allyson.zimmermann@theleadnetwork.net](mailto:allyson.zimmermann@theleadnetwork.net). If you are not already a LEAD Network member, we hope you will consider joining us. We have a fast-growing membership of more than 18,000, all of whom are committed to our mission: to attract, retain and advance women in the retail and consumer goods industry in Europe through education, leadership and business development. Visit our website [www.lead-eu.net](http://www.lead-eu.net) to find out more.

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