

The Journey to 50/50™

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



George Young, founder and former CEO, Kalypso

Career snapshot

I did my undergraduate degree and PhD in organic chemistry and my first career was in research and development at BF Goodrich, where I secured four patents for catalysts I invented. After an MBA, I joined Deloitte where I became a partner. In 2004, with Mick Broekhof, I founded Kalypso, a consultancy focused on innovation in the digital value chain. The firm now employs 530 people and was bought by Rockwell Automation in 2020; I've recently stopped running it and moved to a new position within Rockwell. I'm based in Houston, Texas, divorced with four grown kids, and since age 14 I've played in a rock 'n' roll band.



KALYPSO
A ROCKWELL AUTOMATION COMPANY

Kalypso's D&I journey

Until 2010 we were trying to get established, and I don't think anyone paid much attention to diversity. Then, around 2014, we started paying attention because we were showing up with an all-male team to meetings where half the client team were women. I don't know how many projects we lost because of that, but it was an obvious problem. Kalypso's three founders were men, and we made a conscious effort to hire female principals, because we didn't have a pipeline. My CMO was our first female partner, then about four years ago we appointed a female COO – a key moment because she was homegrown, from entry level. So by 2017 two of our three top people were women.

At entry level Kalypso has a 50-50 gender balance, our senior managers are 35% female, our partners are 25% female and our C-suite is 67% female, so as you can see, we have a problem with attrition between the manager and partner levels. I signed the LEAD Network CEO Pledge in 2018; it was a signal of intent to employees, especially women. We want to increase the number of women at all levels, eventually reaching 50-50, and we want to grow women in leadership by 10% every year. But I'm surprised how long it takes and how difficult it is to fill that pipeline; right now it's hard to hire anyone.

Kalypso's approach

Mick Broekhof co-founding LEAD Network was a critical moment for us, and we began a concerted effort to do more on D&I. Our Women's Initiative was started eight years ago and has since evolved into Kaleidoscope, a self-directed team of diverse leaders who act on all diversity issues and report to partners monthly and the firm quarterly. All our programmes have stemmed from there: we provide unconscious bias training; we have a network called Women in Tech to provide role models; we have a Women's Mentoring Group for senior women to discuss topics and situations; we run Lean-In circles and employee resource groups.

Learning 1: Introduce preferential hiring

Consulting is an apprenticeship model. The most effective people grow up within the firm, and it takes about a decade to make partner. You may have 50-50 gender balance at senior consultant level, but those women can't become partners for about 10 years and you can't afford to have any attrition along the way. If you are going to make up ground, the math tells you you have to hire preferentially. So the main thing we have done is to say we are going to make diverse hiring the norm. It is a bit controversial, and not just with white men; a lot of diverse people are uncomfortable with it because they don't want their peers to stigmatise them. But I think we have got to get past that. If you don't show up to meetings looking like your clients it is a business problem.

Learning 2 : Diversity = innovation

You create a more fun, innovative workforce if you employ different kinds of people from different backgrounds. As Kalypso has become more diverse it has become a better place to work and we are more innovative as a team. We have created something called the Kulture Krew which addresses all aspects of culture, in an effort to promote creativity, innovation and diversity.

Learning 3 : Focus on the data

You can paint a prettier picture qualitatively, but it's more important to be quantitative and report on your performance. I don't think we have done that enough.



The friendly face of Kalypso

Next steps for Kalypso

I have recently stepped aside as CEO of Kalypso, and I would encourage my successor to do whatever they need to do. But one thing I do think will need addressing is the issue of remote working. Kalypso has never had any offices; we have always worked entirely virtually. But pre-pandemic we would pick a location and get together regularly. During COVID we didn't meet as a group and we've found people have been saying, 'we are losing the fabric of the firm'. This has made it clear to me that a total work-from-home model is not good, you close yourself off from diversity, you go into a bubble.

Next steps for our industry

I think CPG is demonstrably ahead of any other industry in terms of gender equality, but I imagine it has suffered during the pandemic because corporations can't control what happens at home. You might think that remote working would make it easier on women and promote diversity, but in the US, research has shown that men took on less domestic responsibility than women during the crisis. As a result, significant numbers of women are dropping out, particularly young mothers. The biggest barrier now is us, society, it's not the consumer business. The US still hasn't had a female president, that's the next frontier.

Contact us

We hope you have found this article useful. Please share your feedback with Mick Broekhof at mick.broekhof@lead-eu.net or Sharon Jeske at sharon.jeske@lead-eu.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 12,000, 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 to find out more.