



Antonio Coto

Antonio is a corporate advisor to retailers and consumer-oriented companies, and the former CEO of international retailer DIA Group. He is also an executive member of numerous global organisations.

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The LEAD Network CEO Pledge outlines a specific set of actions CEOs will take to cultivate a trusting environment where courageous conversations about ways to create inclusive cultures truly are welcomed. The CEO Pledge aims for a significant increase in female representation and director level and above and building a plan to achieve gender parity over the next decade.

More information:
mick.broekhof@lead-eu.net

by Lidia Timkovskaya-Zykova

Why is it important for CEOs to sign the CEO Pledge?

All of us know people who say they deplore gender inequality but do little to challenge it in practice. Signing the CEO Pledge is an excellent way for ethical companies to stand up and publicly say they will do the right things to promote gender diversity and inclusion.

And it's a great way to communicate the message to their associates, customers, the industry, and society. There are two other main reasons for signing. Firstly, your company should represent a mix of people in society to avoid bias and disconnection from consumers. Diversity is a key driver for innovation: new ideas come from different backgrounds and diverse perspectives. Secondly, signing a public commitment to female empowerment reflects a strong resolution from a CEO. When a CEO signs the Pledge, it means there will be time, money, and resources available to make it happen.

What would you say to someone who is considering signing?

It's very important that the CEO Pledge is signed by as many companies as possible. LEAD Network is a great platform to support best practice sharing and progress monitoring. It's no longer a one-off company move, but instead an industry-wide movement, where members support each other and are united to tackle challenges and find solutions. The CEO Pledge is a 'seal', a public commitment, showing the company believes in diversity and will make it happen.

What role does diversity play for retailers?

Both consumer goods manufacturers and retailers are important in bringing about change in this industry, but it's retailers that are in direct daily contact with shoppers and consumers. Consumers can't see what's going on inside manufacturers' plants and offices, but when they go into a store, they can see if the retailer is focusing on diversity. So it's crucial for retailers to make sure their workforce reflects society.

In this respect, the CEO Pledge is a great way to commit to the change and make it happen. The most powerful way to demonstrate diversity is to have your people at stores, from cashiers to store managers, proudly speaking about the Pledge to their shoppers and consumers. This will only happen if retailer CEOs lead the change throughout the whole organisation in a transparent, clear and natural way.