

IIM Raipur enlightened by Women Corporate Leaders



Women took centre stage today at IIM Raipur as the institute held the first edition of the Women Leadership Confluence. The event, which celebrated womanhood and leadership, saw the presence of some of the most prominent female leaders from around Corporate India. Ms. Smita Nair Jain, the Chief Operating Officer of Barclays Technologies and Ms. Usha Ananthasubramanian, Chairman and Managing Director, Bharatiya Mahila Bank, shared their experiences as women leading from the forefront in their respective organizations.

Prof. Sanjeev Prashar, Chairman Placements, IIM Raipur welcomed the speakers. Quoting Margaret Thatcher he said, "Any woman who understands the problems of running a home will be nearer to understanding the problems of running a country". He stated that women leaders were growing in number as well as in stature. He urged the students, both boys and girls alike, to make the most of this opportunity to discover their identity and take the institute forward in its journey.

Addressing a gathering of students, Ms. Smita began with the disclaimer that she being gender agnostic, was not a person who vociferously defended the feminist causes. She remarked that she had always found it comfortable working with men and women alike. "Being one of the few women in the leadership team, I am often surrounded by men, but I have never found that to be uncomfortable", she said. She attributed this to her childhood, where her parents encouraged her to not merely confine herself to feminine activities but engage in daily chores like, fixing bulbs,

mixing paint and even cleaning spark plugs at times. This childhood training has helped her to not depend on male labour to get things done.

Recounting several amusing episodes from her professional career, Ms. Jain drew a fine line between gender equality and gender bias. "Gender equality is not about giving preference to one of the sexes. It is about treating both sexes equally", she said. She also added that she had witnessed several incidents where women used their gender as a means to achieve their ends and opined that it was important for women to respect themselves first if they wanted men around them to do the same.

"Under no circumstances should merit be compromised for the sake of the positive reinforcements in the workplace," she stated. These reinforcements should be in terms of greater opportunities for women and not in the form of quotas. She also stressed on the importance of communicating effectively with superiors as well as subordinates, and creating opportunities for oneself. Before winding up she shared her success mantra with the students- Relevance, Responsibility, Responsiveness and an unwavering personal compass that helped her distinguish between right and wrong.

Ms. Usha Ananthasubramanian took over after the lunch break. She noted that it was indeed a coincidence that such a conference should be scheduled on the eve of Mother Theresa's birthday. She went on to describe some of the qualities in women that made them natural leaders. "While women are great at multitasking, working with diverse teams and negotiating with people, they lack in areas like networking, mobility and aggression.

"We are in the era of labyrinth, where there is no longer a glass ceiling for women, however the path that leads her to the top is long, winding and fraught with difficulties" ,remarked Ms. Usha. Although she agreed that there is a greater distribution of males in the high positions and women being the minority have a reluctance to voice their opinions, she maintained that a successful woman should be responsible for her own advancement. The biggest challenge that a working woman has to face is that she has to juggle multiple roles on a daily basis. "Career progression is the defining choice for a man whereas a woman has to choose from the multiple choices before her," she explained.

She also reminded the budding managers that besides a career and home there exists a third dimension which includes personal interests and activities and any woman who wished to be truly successful should find the right balance between all three. She ended her speech with the inspiring story of Wilma Rudolph who overcame monumental odds to find success.

This session was followed by a Q &A session with the students where the guests answered the questions of the inquisitive minds of IIM Raipur. Prof. Vinita Sahay, Chairperson- FPM, in her address elaborated upon the significance of Women Leadership Confluence and differentiated it with any other seminar of leadership. Citing the example of female representation in public vote in UK which was merely 12.5 percent she conveyed the need to empower women world wide.

Prof. Sanjeev Prashar concluded the event with a big thanks and a token of gratitude to both the speakers. He was confident that the students of IIM Raipur were inspired by their powerful words to push themselves to greater heights up the corporate ladder.