

CHANGING THE GAME

HOW CANADIAN COMPANIES ARE GETTING AHEAD BY DEVELOPING MORE FEMALE EXECs IN-HOUSE

BY SUZANNE WINTROB

LYNETTE GILLEN HAS SPENT HER ENTIRE CAREER NAVIGATING HER WAY UP THE OLD BOYS' CLUB LADDER, BUT IT WASN'T UNTIL SHE TOOK ROYAL BANK OF CANADA'S WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP COURSE THAT SHE LEARNED HOW MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS ARE MADE. "AT THE COURSE, WE WERE TOLD THAT THE REAL MEETING IS THE MEETING AFTER THE MEETING," SAYS RBC'S REGIONAL VICE-PRESIDENT, COMMERCIAL FINANCIAL SERVICES, ONTARIO NORTH AND EAST. "THEY SAID, 'DON'T YOU NOTICE THAT THE GUYS LINGER AROUND AND ARE STILL TALKING AS YOU RUN OUT OF THE ROOM?' THAT'S TRUE. THAT'S WHERE ALL THE REAL DECISIONS ARE BEING MADE. EVERYONE HAS HEARD THE INFORMATION AROUND THE TABLE, BUT IT'S AFTERWARDS, WHEN THEY'RE ALL TALKING ONE-ON-ONE, THAT THEY'RE SAYING, 'IT MAY GO THIS WAY OR THAT WAY.'"

Since that "aha moment," as she calls it, Ottawa-based Gillen has added lingering to her schedule so she can get in on those big decisions. It sounds simple, but it's tough to implement given that everyone is scheduled to the hilt and there's always another meeting to run off to. But it's just one of the many lessons she picked up during RBC's

development and networking course, which is geared at senior, high-potential women. Gillen was among the first cohort to take the course when it was introduced at the bank last year, and it has another 27 women enrolled now. The idea is to push more women to the executive levels and attract top talent as a result. At RBC, 38% of executives in



RBC's Lynette Gillen: "At the course, we were told that the real meeting is the meeting after the meeting"

Canada are women, including three of the seven group executive members reporting directly to the CEO.

"One of the biggest challenges women face is that people still make assumptions about what they want and don't want — assumptions based on their availability or their commitment, particularly if women are raising a young family or they have a spouse who has a particularly demanding career," says Helena Gottschling, RBC's senior vice-president, leadership and organizational development, human resources. "You really have to ask women; let women decide whether they can take on a broader mandate or whether they're willing to be mobile."

In other words, an unconscious bias may be what's holding women back. Most people like to believe that they're open-minded and objective, but we still tend to gravitate to people who look like us, think like us and come from similar backgrounds as us. Consequently, we tend to hire people that fit that bill. Of course, most Canadian organizations say they are committed to creating diverse workforces that represent the clients they serve. But much like *American Hustle* actor Jennifer Lawrence's view of Hollywood, women in corporate Canada remain underrepresented and underpaid. As discussions heat up surrounding gender parity on corporate boards, executive diversity remains a sore spot.

Proof is in the numbers. Catalyst, a global non-profit devoted to expanding opportunities for women and business, is following 8,000 MBA students around the world to examine their experiences in the workforce. In Canada, the study found that women face a gender gap in pay and position right from the get-go, earning \$8,167 less than men and starting out at a lower level in their first post-MBA job: 72% of women started in an entry-level position compared to just 58% of men. These findings hold even when considering only women and men who aspire to senior executive/CEO levels. Doing "all the right things" helped men advance further and faster — but not women. The study found that when women used the same career advancement strategies as men, they actually

advanced less. The only strategy for women's compensation growth was ensuring that their manager was aware of their accomplishments, which those surveyed said they did by seeking feedback and credit as appropriate and asking for a promotion when they felt it was deserved — something that men do as well.

Bernadette Wightman, CEO of Cisco Systems Canada Co., understands that dynamic all too well. She's been in the IT business for more than 25 years, the last 15 with Cisco. Born and bred in England, her work has taken her around the world where men hold many top jobs. Though she says she's "noisy and disruptive" by nature, early on at Cisco she was afraid to talk in meetings in case her words came out wrong. One day, her male boss urged her to be vocal and promised he'd back her up. She did, and it changed her outlook. Today, Wightman is a strong advocate for female leaders. There was just one woman on the 17-member senior leadership team in Canada when she took the helm here, but now there are seven (Cisco's global executive team has a 50:50 split). If the CEO is on board, she says, change can happen.

"As I've transformed the leadership team, I'm going to challenge my leaders to look at their own teams and how they transform them and make sure that we have gender diversity — not just in the top team, but right throughout the organization," Wightman says. Of course, managers have to be careful of not hiring someone just because they tick off a check mark for diversity. Wightman says Cisco Canada hires the people who have the best skills, talent, experience and fit, and never for diversity alone. "Often a woman may be the best candidate, but sometimes you do have to look a bit harder to find them. For every search we do, we insist on a slate of diverse candidates for consideration." From there, a team decision is made on who the best candidate is.

Six years ago, Wightman and a colleague created JUMP to advance women to senior manager levels and higher at Cisco. Initially, 12 women signed up. Today, more than 1,100 Cisco employees around the world have benefited from JUMP, with 500 taking the program this year alone. Topics include using intuition in the workplace, discovering leadership energy, strategic thinking

CAN GEN Y CHANGE THE TUNE?

Catherine Wade started practising law in 1985 when she was 30 with two school-aged children. Maternity leave was almost unheard of, so early on in a woman's career "you'd have to put your head down and do the best you could." Women who couldn't take the pressure either gave up on the partnership track, sought jobs in government or in-house counsel, or left law completely. But Wade was committed, so she leaned on senior women to teach her the game and cut through the ranks. She asked questions, sought advice and put in long hours despite the call of family life.

Today, Wade is a partner in Dentons Canada LLP's Vancouver office and mentors young female associates. But she's finding that this generation isn't much into juggling work and play. They're big on work-life balance. They believe raising kids takes two people, despite or perhaps because of their demanding jobs. They're getting information instantaneously so they also expect decisions to be made quickly. And they aren't afraid to say how they feel.

"The expectations of the young people coming in are quite different than the realities of the people that are now at the top of the game in the organization," she says. "There will still be people who are very committed to career above all else, but I think we're seeing this ripple of men and women, and partners of any sort, making it a partnership when it comes to issues of family and relationship and maintaining child welfare. It's a bit of a different game."

and planning, influence and risk-taking, securing sponsorship, mentoring, presentation and communication skills, increasing impact in virtual meetings and more. There's also peer networking and group support. Candidates have to be nominated by a vice-president for the year-long program. It's in its second year in Canada, with 45 women involved, and several internal promotions have been made as a result.

It's programs like these that help women achieve C-suite stardom. National law firm Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt LLP, for example, sends its top women to The Judy Project at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. Named for the late Judy Elder, a Microsoft Canada Co. executive who encouraged women to "make stuff happen," the annual week-long program involves speakers, case studies, self-assessment, personal branding, and strategic thinking to teach future leaders how to navigate an organization's upper reaches. Participants are invited to join a personal advisory board for ongoing professional and personal support. There are more than 250 alumni, all nominated by their CEO to attend.

Colleen Moorehead, Judy Project co-founder and Osler's chief client officer, says the "real magic that we create in that room" is recognizing and understanding three things: a woman's roadblocks and systematic or unconscious bias; the value of her network in making her more successful in both her satisfaction level and her ability to advance; and her leadership voice and the things she has that make her powerful and effective. "Learning to leverage those becomes one of the things that you work through at your table," she says. "It's really positive."

It's not that high-potential women don't have the technical knowledge or ambition to attain C-suite status. They do, says Judy Project academic director Tiziana Casciaro, but they might not believe they have what it takes and don't speak up about their big dreams. "There's a lot of power, visibility, personal commitment and time commitment that comes with roles of that sort," she says. Women, she adds, have a lot of other interests and things competing for their time and their heart, so they "may not necessarily be truly entirely committed to becoming CEO so they don't even say it. It's better

for them to come around and say, "That's my ambition. That's what I'd like to do."

At Osler, 27% of partners are female. To boost the numbers, the firm recently launched a maternity/parental leave buddy system whereby male or female associates can buddy up with a more senior colleague to stay on top of what's happening at work while they're off caring for baby. As they get closer to returning to work, the buddy catches them up on files they'll be working on. Ten new parents in Toronto took part in a pilot project and the program has rolled out across the country. Osler also recently started a female lawyer network that meets regularly.

Having a cheerleader also helps. Osler, Cisco and many other companies have formal mentorship and sponsorship programs for men and women to help them grow through the ranks. RBC has mentoring roundtables and "speed networking" sessions for both sexes, as well as a Junior Pipeline geared to training, coaching and mentoring female junior employees, plus a book club for high-performing women.

BMO Financial Group ran a 12-month sponsorship pilot program last year to connect talented women with senior leaders. Close to 90% of all participants received a promotion or stretch assignment within the year. The program is rolling out nationally.

"Early on in my career, I met women who had become executives and... they would openly say that the way they got there was, 'I behaved like a man,'" recalls François Hudon, head of BMO's customer contact centre and a member of the bank's leadership committee for inclusion and diversity. "How engaging is that for a young woman?"

With that in mind, BMO tracks the number of women who are in senior leadership roles and those who are emerging as leaders each month. The information is used in leadership planning meetings with senior leaders. It's just one part of the bank's five-year diversity renewal strategy to set ambitious workforce and workplace goals and build a pipeline of diverse talent. The efforts have paid off: almost 60% of employees are women and 36.7% of them are in executive roles.

Like Osler, 27% of Dentons Canada LLP's partners are female. Besides mentoring and sponsoring women, the law firm hosts social events with topics such as "Ten Things I Wish I'd Known When Starting Out" delivered by partners to associates. Such programs are helpful, says partner Kate Broer, Canada region co-chair of diversity and inclusion, yet they are no substitute for having the message of nurturing female leaders ingrained in a company's overall goals and objectives. But until there's parity, she thinks programs focused on women are here to stay.

"The progress we've collectively made in Canadian business... has been made because people have been extremely focused on moving that needle," Broer says. "The second we step back, our focus is defused. Even for a moment, we tend to lose ground. I don't think we can let up. We have lots more work to do, and I'm convinced that if we do let up now, we're more likely to slide backwards than have momentum to keep us moving forward." **FP**

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