

Women in Leadership

BALANCE IMPROVES THE HEALTH OF OUR COMMUNITIES

BY MICHELLE LEACH



YVETTE SUMODI
VP OF HR,
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AILEEN WARREN
PRESIDENT AND CEO,
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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
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Midlands organizations are not standing still and waiting for others to pick up the torch that ultimately leads to lifting women within their respective businesses, industries and communities.

Thirty-three percent of Jet Linx's team, for one, is made up of women.

"Given that less than 10% of the pilot population is comprised of women, having 33% of our leadership team make-up be female is something we are quite proud of," said Vice President of HR Yvette Sumodi. "Jet Linx goes after the best and brightest in the industry. Locally in Omaha, that number climbs to over 40%."

When asked about the efforts behind such bright spots, Sumodi referred to Jet Linx's investment in Omaha's Aviation STEM Day (STEMaha) and the University of Nebraska at Omaha's aviation program.

"Programs like these are instrumental in garnering and cultivating interest from a young age to combat the shortage of pilots already being felt," she noted. "Specific to women, Jet Linx supports Women in Aviation International as members and sponsors of its conference each year. We also encourage our local base operations to foster partnerships with their local chapters of this important group."

Industrywide, Sumodi noted special interest groups — such as the NGPA (National Gay Pilots Association) and OBAP (Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals) — among others that she said Jet Linx supports and fosters relationships with to "attract and bring a diverse talent group to the company."

"Each of our female leaders is active in their community and field

of expertise," she added. "We recognize the importance of connection and influence outside of the aviation-specific industry groups."

The 'Can-do' Spirit

For more than 42 years, the Institute for Career Advancement Needs (ICAN) has focused its efforts on dialogues and uplifting issues related to the development and advancement of female leaders. This has been accomplished through leadership development programs, services and events.

On the heels of its 30th ICAN Women's Leadership Conference, in early June President and CEO Aileen Warren stated that the organization has created environments and spaces for authentic and impactful conversations on topics ranging from value-based leadership and quotas on boards to diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace, male allyship, and pay gaps and pay audits.

"Recent years have increased the need for ICAN to impact evolving and timely leadership needs within organizations surrounding unconscious bias, digital age leadership,

management of a multi-generational workforce, leading change, and post-pandemic hybrid team management and activation," she said.

Statistics seem to bear out the considerable need for such discussions and movement on these fronts.

"... less than 20% of women are in Congress and at the top levels of business," Warren said. "So, this is a human issue — not women's issue — and it is critical to continue investing in efforts leading to progress in order for us to truly have a reflective democracy and workplace."

For the first time in history, Warren said that females make up 10% of CEOs on the Fortune 500 list.

"Ten percent may not seem like a noteworthy statistic, but it represents something so much greater: Where we're headed," she explained. "It may not be a leap, but it's an important step toward having more women in C-Suite leadership."

"The visibility of female leadership is also paramount. It is

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important for there to be female role models via being 'seen and heard' at the highest levels of leadership for young girls – our next generation of leaders – for them to value their own voices and visions, which could lead to themselves one day as an executive leader."

Similarly, there is the issue of transparency, as organizations are facing more pressure on this front – especially from the Millennials and Gen Z'ers, according to Warren.

"Transparency helps to build employee trust, feelings of

inclusion and a healthier work culture," she remarked. "Companies who are willing to not only share more information with employees but also engage them in meaningful and collaborative discussions around critical topics could potentially have a competitive advantage when hiring and retaining talent."

Furthermore, Warren cited recent ICAN conference research, a poll by VitalSmarts, which revealed that 80% of employees are "avoiding a difficult conversation at work."

"While at times uncomfortable, critical conversations can

be refreshing and lead to a better understanding of the needs of others, personal leadership growth, and transformational development for teams and organizations," she said. "At ICAN, we celebrate the deeper awareness, stronger connections and business success that bold conversations, transparency and genuine employee engagement and development can spark."

Funding Change-Making Research

The Women's Fund of Omaha relies on and uses available research to inform its policy stance and grant-making efforts. Executive Director Jo Giles referred to its collaboration with UNO's Center for Public Research.

"We are gathering data right now ... related to women and girls across our state and will have a report featuring those research findings available later this year," she said. "Additionally, we'll have an update on our 2019 State of Domestic Violence report, also out later this year."

When asked about research-supported strides and areas for improvement, Giles addressed the good news first.

"Incremental change has been made toward gender equity,

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especially as it relates to representation in leadership positions," she said. "For instance, the Nebraska legislature currently has the most women state senators ever."

Regarding the lasting effects of the pandemic, Giles referred to how this public health crisis was unlike previous recessions – in that it impacted industries more likely to employ women and less likely to provide paid sick leave and other benefits.

"Also, women have had disproportionate caretaking responsibilities while schools, day cares and senior centers were closed," she added.

She cited research that suggests women's employment will not recover to pre-pandemic levels until 2024.

"And even 'recovering' to that level means Nebraska women being paid just 78% of what men are paid with an even bigger wage gap for women of color and LGBTQ individuals," Giles stated.

Pay equity in the workforce remains a persistent, economic opportunity-diminishing challenge for women, especially, Giles said, for those female-led households and households with children aged 18 and younger.

"The pandemic disproportionately impacted women leading to

a staggering 4.2 million women across the country leaving the workforce – a full million more than men – setting women's labor force participation back more than 30 years, in addition to their lifetime earnings potential," she said.

Best Practices, Inspiring Action

When asked for examples of unique approaches to effectively lift women's representation and equity, Warren said ICAN's partnerships address talent pipeline and women's advancement by providing transformative leadership development experiences.

"[Experiences] not only inspire the individual leader, but develop the skills needed to serve as a more effective and empowering leader for their colleagues – which translates to greater contributions and organization-wide impact," she explained. "We are proud to have over 1,300 graduates of our Defining Leadership program and engage with around 400 leaders annually in our custom programs, Emergenetics workshops and coaching services."

Additionally, Warren said that ICAN works with organizations

that take a "comprehensive approach" and that invest "recurring resources and frequent development experiences that allow their leaders the freedom of time to dedicate to their own development and career path."

In turn, they can "make the greatest strides in representation and display their commitment to their leaders' future growth within the organization."

She said it is critical for leaders to learn how to work most

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