

Women In Finance ‘Are More Likely’ To Attain Board Seats

Women in the finance sector can assess the immediate financial impact on a business, which raises their credibility across boards.

Mary Sophia
23-01.2014



Women with financial backgrounds are likely to attain board seats across corporates due to their ability to assess how finance impacts a company’s growth, according to Cynthia Corby, partner at Deloitte and Touche, Middle East.

“Anecdotal evidence suggests that women in finance- because they can talk about factual information and link it to strategy- and assess the immediate financial impact that things can have on the business, gives them a very credible seat in the boardroom,” she told *Gulf Business*.

According to research conducted by the accounting body ACCA, the majority of female board members in FTSE 100 companies hail from the finance sector.

“The ratio of women with a financial background on FTSE boards was 65 per cent versus men, who constituted for around 44 per cent,” said Corby, referring to the findings of the study.

“So it seems to indicate that having a financial background was an enabler to get women a board seat.”

However, Corby also said that the workforce in the finance industry traditionally has more women when compared to other fields due to the flexible nature of the work.

“There seems to be a bigger pipeline of women in the finance profession, which then fit the pool of professionals that you could draw to become board members later in their career,” she said.

Despite such a sizeable female workforce in finance, Corby says that the number of women eventually reaching board positions is unsatisfactory.

“So when you look at the ACCA statistics, 45 per cent of their members are women and 50 per cent of students who enrol for qualifications are women. But only 20 per cent get to senior positions,” she said.

The financial executive notes that women tend to get stuck especially when they reach middle management positions as they begin to focus on other priorities.

“It is really this gap in getting women from middle management to senior management that everyone is focusing on and to convince more of these ladies that a career in finance offers you the flexibility to have both.”

“And it is these sorts of flexible policies, allowing part-time and career break that really are enablers to keep women in the profession and help them to succeed.”

Many countries, including the UAE, have introduced compulsory quotas to increase the presence of women on boards.

“It is unfortunate that we need quotas for women to achieve those positions but maybe this is a necessary temporary step to get women in those positions for people to see the impact they can have,” said Corby.

“There is a strong correlation that when women are present on boards, the performance of a company improves. So maybe we need it as a temporary measure to bridge the gap and to enable the process to happen but I would not like to see it as a process that would stay with us forever.”