

BUILDING A DIVERSE FUTURE

Women are experiencing underrepresentation in business. Female executives in Japan are calling for change.

FOR CENTURIES, JAPANESE BUSINESS HAS BEEN RENOWNED

for its adherence to traditions and customs. Today, however, a new generation of female executives is shaking up the boardroom to encourage more women into the workforce and promote diversity. In a nation where women make up just 13.4% of executive roles, compared, for example, to the 35% of senior leadership positions occupied by women in the U.S., gender equality is a pressing concern. The pay gap is 22%, according to OECD data, while fewer than 1% of the 1,802 Tokyo Stock Exchange companies have a female CEO. In recent years, both government and business leaders have been working to address these statistics, with legislation enacted in 2015 to support parity.

According to the women working to narrow the gender gap, however, more needs to be done. “Many in the West might see countries in Asia as being behind when it comes to women’s rights, and in many cases, this is correct. However, we should be able to keep our own unique culture while opening up our minds to new ideas with greater transparency,” says Yukiko Teshima, president and representative director of stainless steel tubing firm Teshima Corporation. “Women really want to take on challenges [at work, but they can be limited by] the traditional hierarchy. The women of today need a place where [work and life] is possible so they can [explore career opportunities and still] take care of their children, which inspired me to install our own childcare facility at the factory,” she adds.

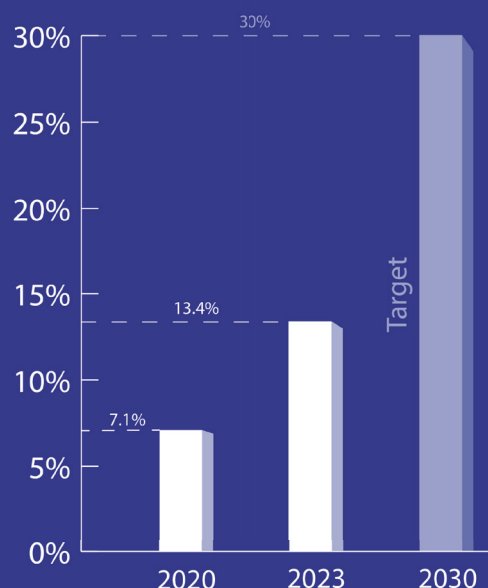
Akiko Naka, CEO of recruitment networking firm Wantedly, believes both public and private sector leaders need to work together. “When talking about diversity, it needs to be facilitated from the governmental side and the corporate side. We are now seeing a change in the number of nurseries and childcare centers creating opportunities for women to pursue their careers while still having children,” says Naka. Female recruitment is becoming an even more pressing issue due to Japan’s shrinking demographic and workforce crisis. With an aging population, staffing levels in all sectors are expected to be greatly reduced. “It has become vital to diversify and enable women to really take part in the workforce at the same level as men. I see huge improvements when it comes to women’s roles in the workforce, and I believe we will experience a big change in the coming years that will spread through different industries,” says Naka.

Since 2007, the Japan Women’s Innovative Network (NPO J-Win) has been working to help businesses improve diversity. “Tradition deeply influences Japanese society, making it challenging to redefine gender roles and promote women’s

empowerment. The ingrained gender expectations continue to hold back the majority of women from fully embracing their potential,” says J-Win Board Chair Keisuke Yokoo. “We [provide a space] for seminars and discussions that encourage women to take ownership of their careers,” he adds. With working patterns key to supporting a more diverse workforce, fostering inclusion in education can be of great impact.

In the wake of COVID-19 and more flexible and remote working and learning, Itaru Matsumura, president of Kindai University in Osaka, has championed his institution’s approach to accessibility. “During the pandemic, we set up recording equipment and recording studios to provide a wide range of online classes—the most important measure we can introduce is to customize our education according to the academic path of each student and modify the curriculum to their needs,” says Matsumura. ■

Percentage of Female Executives in Japan



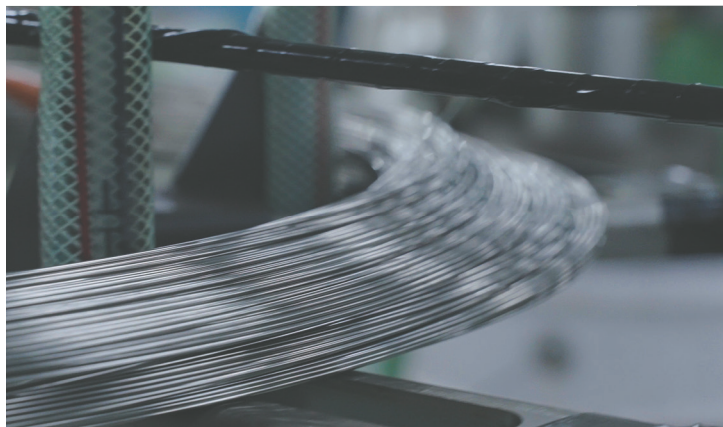
Cabinet Office, Government of Japan 2023.
Japan Company Executive Handbook (役員四季報) Toyo Keizai Inc.

For more information:
www.global-kigyo.com
info@global-kigyo.com
+81 3 6825 0812



THE JAPANESE FIRM TAKING THE GLOBAL STAGE

Stainless steel tubing business **Teshima Corporation** is building for the future by putting its people first.



TESHIMA CORPORATION IS A COMPANY STEEPED IN Japanese business traditions, such as hard work and high quality control. However, the stainless steel tubing firm best known for its needle products is also providing a forward-thinking example of how things can be done differently. Led by representative director and president Yukiko Teshima, the business has bold plans for global expansion and digital transformation while also prioritizing greater gender balance in the workplace.

Based in Japan's Gunma Prefecture, the 52-year-old company manufactures a wide range of steel tubing used in different sectors, including ultra-thin tubes for industrial production, as well as cylinders and pipes for automotive plants. Its flagship products, though, are health care supplies, such as high-precision stainless steel needles. Ranging from injection needles and suction nozzles cannulas and otoscopes, Teshima manufactures tubes as narrow as 0.127mm in diameter and is part of supply chains for clinics and hospitals all over the world. Teshima wants to build on this success and encourage women to break through the glass ceiling to succeed in Japan's corporate world. "We should be able to keep our own unique culture while opening our minds to new ideas with more transparency. Women need the courage to break through the invisible box that surrounds them in corporate life, especially in Japan," says Teshima. In addition to encouragement and positive thinking, Teshima revealed the concrete steps the firm is taking to make the workplace and the corporate ladder more attractive to female applicants.

Teshima believes that trying to make offices and factories more welcoming places to work is a solid start when it comes to improving the gender balance. "Changing the 'hard' aspects of the company, such as buildings, interiors, and furniture, to something that is clean, modern, and more accessible is certainly the first step in making a

company more inviting," says Teshima. "Ten years ago, we changed how the company offices look and feel. I changed aspects such as the benefits scheme, and in the last year, we added free lunches and a drinks bar with more than 20 different options. Companies in this rural area really do not offer these kinds of benefits to employees, so that can distinguish us from prospective job seekers," says Teshima. The business also prides itself on being as family friendly as possible, inspired by the president's time working and touring the offices of U.S. tech giants, such as Facebook, Nvidia, and Google, where she discovered a new approach to childcare and facilities that she has sought to replicate in Japan. "Our Kids Innovation Center is partly named after our Boston office, the Cambridge Innovation Center. Seven years ago, I had the chance to visit various companies in Silicon Valley who had family campuses on-site, where children and family members could visit, relax, and have lunch. I brought these ideas to our own site here in my company," says Teshima. The company's forward-thinking, people-first mindset is also evidenced by its embrace of digital transformation for management processes in the firm while still retaining a strong manufacturing workforce. "A human-centric approach is the best way for our business model. Regarding digital technology, we are changing other parts of our business, such as a new cloud evaluation system. That means we can evaluate employees more easily, based purely on their performances and ability to contribute, which is the baseline of why they should work at the company," says Teshima. "I think that one of the main positives is the diligence that experienced employees bring. They are able to 'make it happen' through the products they create," she adds.

A major element of the Teshima business plan going forward will also include further overseas development to build on its current U.S.-based subsidiary in Massachusetts. While the company is aiming for a greater international footprint, President Teshima is committed to retaining a strong Japanese manufacturing presence, as a firm believer in keeping jobs in her home country. "We have been exhibiting at various trade shows in the U.S. and Germany. I have been thinking about a potential new location elsewhere in Asia, although, at the moment, this is just a thought. Teshima will become a global company. That

"TESHIMA WILL BECOME A GLOBAL COMPANY, THAT IS FOR SURE. WE WILL POSITION OURSELVES AS A MATERIAL SUPPLIER FOR THE MEDICAL DEVICES FIELD."

YUKIKO TESHIMA

is for sure. We will position ourselves as a raw material supplier within the overall supply chain for medical devices," says Teshima. "An important point to consider is the need for domestic production of vital components. We want to ensure that we can protect manufacturing here in Japan," she adds. With big plans for future success at home and abroad, the company's priority will always be its clients. Teshima revealed that strong customer relations had supported the firm during critical rebuild and renovation phases. "I made the decision to renovate our factories, as we have been receiving new kinds of requests from our clients. Although we have had challenges over the past few years with staffing and running our machines, through the strong support from our clients, we have been able to get to the production capacity that we previously had before," says Teshima. "Even during times of production problems, we have been experiencing strong demand from the industry, which indicated to me that we must invest more in our production capabilities in the future, with new staff to accommodate this," she adds.

She also takes the responsibility of leading and inspiring her workforce seriously. "Making an effort and working hard is very important, as only this will turn dreams and goals into a reality. If you have something you want to achieve, the best thing is to take action and just do it," says Teshima. ■

For more information:
www.teshima.co.jp
info@teshima.co.jp
+81 276 73 1173

Teshima
Corporation



YUKIKO TESHIMA
PRESIDENT AND
REPRESENTATIVE DIRECTOR
TESHIMA CORPORATION

