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AND GLOBAL WOMEN@RECKITT LEAD

CHANGE FROM THE GROUND UP



Championing women at all levels helps make our organisation stronger – and creating more role models is key to inspiring the women leaders of the future.

Stephanie Lilley is ideally placed to report on how gender balance has changed at Reckitt over the years.

Joining the company on a graduate programme 14 years ago, Stephanie has worked in sales and trade marketing positions in the UK and Europe and now heads up the UK & Ireland sales team for Reckitt Hygiene. She leads the global Women@Reckitt ERG, launched last year to unlock the potential of women at all levels within the Company.

"When I joined Reckitt it would be fair to describe it as a 'boys' club,'" she says. "There were very few women in management positions. Lots of little things, like socialising on the golf course, or track days for team events, were so excluding for groups of individuals.

"That's all different now, I'm delighted to say. The experience of being a woman at Reckitt has changed enormously. There are still things we can improve but, overwhelmingly, it feels like a much more inclusive place."

"The more diversity you can create among the people who are making decisions, the better the decisions will be for everyone."

The importance of role models

One of the key changes Stephanie sees is that there are a lot more women in senior management positions.

"We have women in SVP, general manager, financial director, sales director and marketing director roles all over the world. The value of that role modelling cannot be underestimated.

"From my own point of view, it makes my job easier. I know a lot of women in the business feel the same. If you were the first woman to go into a role, you worried that if you did it badly, they would never put another woman in the role. You don't feel that anymore because you've seen multiple women do the role and do it well."

A more inclusive environment means women stay longer and achieve more. They don't leave the business to go elsewhere to be successful and make money for a competitor.

So what has changed in real terms to transform inclusivity for women at Reckitt?

Stephanie believes that the arrival of a new CEO and leadership team saw a new focus within the business on improving diversity and driving a more inclusive culture.

"For one, there's more flexibility in working patterns, so you don't feel you have to be in the office 12 hours a day, which is vital for people with caring responsibilities," says Stephanie. "And in recent years the focus has definitely been on creating an environment where gender balance can flourish."

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Why Women@Reckitt?

Women@Reckitt is an evolution of a programme called Project DARE launched in 2015, which aimed to Develop, Attract, Retain and Engage talented women within the organisation, and tackle the unconscious bias and barriers that saw many women leave the business.

"Project DARE led to some fantastic policy changes that have benefited everybody in Reckitt, not just women," says Stephanie. "For example, we created a new parental leave policy that provides 26 weeks' paid and 26 weeks' unpaid maternity leave, and 4 weeks' paid and 4 weeks' unpaid paternity leave for parents with newborns. The same benefits are offered to couples adopting or choosing surrogacy. We also changed the international transfer policy to offer more support to people's partners and families and initiated leadership development programmes for women leaders across the world. That started to make a big difference."

Women@Reckitt is one of three global ERGs established in 2021 (the other two are LGBTQ+ and Race & Ethnicity). Before launching the ERG, the team undertook some research into what women at Reckitt saw as barriers to their own success within the organisation. Eight key factors were identified:

1. Not everyone experienced the company culture in the same way
2. Too few senior women role models
3. Women, not the business, were seen as being responsible for change
4. Too many women leaving the business at middle management level
5. Women's point of view was underrepresented
6. Poor processes allowed bias to flourish to the detriment of women
7. Flexible working was not encouraged
8. A focus on international mobility was difficult for many

"A big issue was this: most of our consumers are women, but the majority of the people who made the biggest decisions within the organisation are not women," says Stephanie.

"Women@Reckitt is holding a mirror up to the business and holding it to account, making sure the 2030 target of gender balance at all management levels is achieved."

"Gender proportion in senior management is currently around 70% men to 30% women. Our research shows that the more diversity you can create among the people who are making decisions, the better the decisions will be for everyone. So, more inclusion leads to greater innovation and thinking. Which is why our commitment to gender balance at all management levels within Reckitt is so important."

For Stephanie, the driving force behind Women@Reckitt is all about the Freedom to Succeed.

"It's about enabling women and everyone within the organisation to do whatever it is they want to do and be who they want to be.

"I'm not suggesting that every woman wants to be the next CEO, but if she does, we'd like to help her get there. Equally, if she is happy where she is but wants greater balance at home and at work, we also want to support those women. It's not just about creating future leaders for the business."

Women working at Reckitt currently benefit from access to mentoring, global and local learning events, global and local ERG membership and tailored leadership and development programmes. Currently 17 local groups have been set up – the biggest ones are in North America and the UK, and there are also groups in Turkey, South Africa, Brazil, India, all over the world. They operate independently to address the specific issues that are important to women in that region or country, with support from the global ERG.



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Plans for 2022

2021 was all about establishing the ERGs and kicking off the four strategic objectives – creating a movement for change; championing a culture of inclusion; accelerating women on their path to leadership; and supporting the design and implementation of solutions.

"There are two big focus points for us in 2022," explains Stephanie. "One is around allyship – mobilising all those people who are what I call passive allies, rather than active allies: those who agree with what we're doing but aren't doing anything active to drive it. It's not just about women: a lot of men participate, too, which was one of the objectives of setting up the ERG."

"Secondly, we want all leaders to understand their numbers in terms of gender balance and equality. Understand where they are, where they want to be, and what they have to do to get there."

"I'm pleased to say this analysis is being done, and the data will be available to use in 2022, along with an action plan. Women@Reckitt is holding a mirror up to the business and holding it to account, making sure the 2030 target of gender balance at all management levels is achieved."

2022 should be a big year for the ERG. With COVID-19 receding, people will be able to meet in person more frequently which, Stephanie hopes, will energise the group.

Making it happen

"I don't know if this is a symptom of remote working, but a lot of people seem to be waiting for inclusion to happen to them," she says. "But inclusion is not a passive thing. It's something you have to proactively go out and drive. When people can't meet, it's significantly harder to create an environment where they feel they belong. Setting up a Teams call is harder than just meeting someone in the corridor, that's for sure."

"If there was one thing I'd like people to take away, it's this: don't wait for inclusion to happen to you. Join an ERG or set one up if you don't have one. We want to unlock the potential and retain more of our brilliant women to attract more brilliant women and, one day, to have these brilliant women lead our organisation."

A MORE INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT MEANS WOMEN STAY LONGER AND ACHIEVE MORE

Organisations with strong 'diversity climates' (i.e. inclusive work cultures characterised by the appreciation of individual differences and the adoption of practices to advance underrepresented groups) are likely to increase employees' job satisfaction and commitment to the company.

Executive teams with more than 30% women are more likely to outperform those with fewer or no women.

Women managers are doing more to support their teams in the following ways:

- Providing emotional support
- Checking in on overall wellbeing
- Helping navigate work/life challenges
- Working to ensure workloads are manageable
- Helping take actions to prevent or manage burnout

A 10% increase in perceptions of inclusion improves absenteeism, adding nearly one day a year in work attendance per employee.

Sources:

[Women in the Workplace 2021](#) and [Diversity Wins](#), McKinsey & Company
[Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter](#), Catalyst