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Interview with Hee-sung Kim, Otis Women's Council leader

“Respect for gender and generational diversity is necessary for continuous corporate growth”

Established a ‘Women’s Council,’ focused on spreading a culture of gender equality

In the 1990s, IBM faced market limitations and scouted external expert Lou Gerstner. His strategy was diversity. His theory that the company itself had to be diverse for it to create opportunities with diverse clients was a success. Today, many international companies, including Google, Microsoft, and Facebook apply a diversity strategy to their business. In Korea, Otis is the first elevator company to establish a culture of diversity, based on “a paradigm for parity.” The ‘Women’s Council’ is at the center of this paradigm. We met with the fourth president of the council, Hee-sung Kim, director and Controller, Otis Elevator Korea, to talk about their diversity strategy.



“The diversity culture started in Western countries. It started from the idea to prohibit discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or gender, and recognize each other’s differences. Furthermore, it incorporates an understanding of others, including minorities. At a global company where different races, generations, and men and women work together, you realize that diversity is necessary for creativity and innovation. United Technologies, the parent company of Otis, has been aggressively pursuing gender equality based on its diversity strategy .”

“Since creativity and innovation are not possible in a uniform environment, diversity is absolutely necessary for continued corporate growth,” she added.

Otis Elevators Korea (CEO IS Cho) is particularly focused on gender diversity. The Women’s Council was created to focus on spreading a gender equality culture. The total number of Otis Elevator Korea’s employees is 1549, and around 105 (7%) are women.

She said, “We are making an effort to expand the proportion of female leaders at Otis, and the Women’s Council is a part of that effort,” and added, “We offer support to help more female employees grow with Otis as well as strengthen their network and communication.”

The Women’s Council currently has 15 members from 4 divisions, including 2 males. It started in 2013, and is now in its fourth year, it has grown stronger and closer through its diverse activities.

She said, “We started to strongly express our ideas on gender equality through talks between management and female workers last year, and have held mentoring programs, workshops, and lectures for the development of female human resources.” She also said, “One of the business values of Otis is “safety.” We are making efforts to reunite workers and expand leadership through safety-themed volunteer work such as painting safety murals, which helps make our women’s leadership known in the local community.”

The mural-painting was received well by employees last year, and will continue this year. The Women’s Council plans to reinforce the activities of its four divisions: leadership, networking, communication, and work and life balance.

She said, “The Women’s Council is fundamentally different from a general corporate women’s gathering. Instead of focusing on the rights and benefits of women, it focuses on how women will contribute to company growth, and grow together with the company.”

She thinks that the diversity activities of the council is a good growth strategy for the company, and will be a foundation to achieve sustainable growth.

“A male-centered corporate culture is still prevalent in Korea. Men need to change how they think to improve the rigid culture. If we are able to view each other as equal people, with no gender discrimination, it will lead to diversity-based creativity and innovation, and ultimately, company growth. The final goal of the Women’s Council is to reach a situation where such a council is not necessary.

Suk-hee Lee, reporter

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