



With companies not willing to lose good talent, they are now walking the extra mile to retain women at the top. Sheetal Srivastava tells you how...

What is the one common factor that binds Indra Nooyi of PepsiCo, Kiran Shaw of Biocon and Chanda Kochhar of ICICI together? The answer: their leadership style. Organisations derive benefits from women because of their precision, dedication, honesty and above all, humane nature. And in doing so, companies are leaving no stone unturned in encouraging and retaining women at top positions.

“Corporates are increasingly experiencing a growing demand for soft skills such as communication ability, worker sensitivity and emotional intelligence. Since these qualities are traditionally associated with women, companies definitely benefit by having women in topmost positions. Also, women in leadership positions are more straightforward and candid,” says Rajkamal Vempati, head - human resources, ICICI Lombard General Insurance. “Women have inherent multitasking abilities and a higher emotional quotient. Hence, they are treated as assets in the organisation. Their peopleorientation skills make it even more fruitful for an organisation to have sustainable growth,” asserts Shyam Sharma, vice president - HR & corporate communication, Claris.

Companies are now rolling out women-friendly initiatives. With the rise in the need for dual income and growing nuclear families, organisations are gearing up to allow flexibility like taking sabbaticals that will help women in continuing their association with organisations. ICICI Lombard is sensitive towards this problem and thus, has a lot of initiatives for female employees to tackle this. “For example, any female employee planning to adopt a child can claim upto a maximum of 30 days of adoption leave. Also, women are entitled to work parttime or work from home. They can also avail maternity leave and have constant support from the organisation at various life stage events,” adds Vempati.

IBM provides its women employees with the necessary knowledge, resources, tools and opportunities. This enables and empowers them to successfully play active roles in the growth and development of the organisation. It also allows them to effectively and efficiently balance a demanding career with family and personal needs. “While we have a number of programs, policies and initiatives to ensure an inclusive environment in the organisation, our focus to build the women leadership pipeline is what makes these initiatives more unique. With these programs, we aim to grow the pipeline of women leaders who will be responsible for propelling the organisation on the growth path in the long-term. Specific need analysis has been done to identify the needs of women in the various stages of work life (early career, mid-management, senior leadership, etc) and focused initiatives have been planned and

executed to meet not just their needs, but also organisational goals,” says Seema Ajwani, chairperson for IBM's India Women Leadership Council (IWLC) and leader - work force relations and diversity for IBM Daksh.

“In addition to our active involvement in Women Conferences in India, we also have an annual Woman Leadership Conference (Winspiration) for selected women leaders which is a widely regarded opportunity to enhance networking and build leadership skills,” adds Ajwani. “Besides the regular programs, special training programs are designed and organised for women in managerial positions to help them build confidence and ‘take the stage’ in the corporate world.

We also conduct a two-day workshop called ‘Women Leadership Development’ targeted to women at top positions. Apart from this, learning from the experience of senior women on ways to face challenges and enable professional growth are some such initiatives,” she further adds. In today’s competitive environment, companies continue to look for ways to improve performance and achieve corporate objectives. They are also increasingly offering women employees the opportunity to work part-time or from home under special circumstances. Other options are telecommuting, which allow staffers to work for one or two days a week from home, a special relaxation room, lactation room and car parking for moms-to-be, are also provided. Whatever the route, the dynamics have changed now and with companies not willing to lose good talent, they are going a long way to hang on to it.