

The Japan Times

Friday, April 9, 2010

Importance of diversity explored at trans-Pacific forum

By MANAKO IHAYA

Contributing writer

LOS ANGELES — About 200 people representing a wide range of fields in the United States and Japan got together recently in Los Angeles to discuss the importance of diversity and inclusion programs in today's difficult economic times.

The symposium, "Leading and Navigating Tsunami Culture Across the Pacific," also provided an opportunity for leaders, present and future, to share insights on business advantages and how to succeed in a constantly changing, borderless world.

The third forum of its kind, it was organized by the nonprofit Global Organization for Leadership and Diversity. The first was held in 2007 in Los Angeles and the second in 2008 in Tokyo.

"I chose the word 'tsunami' to depict the urgency" of how the waves of change are requiring new navigational skills of today's leaders, GOLD founder Hiroko Tatebe said in her opening address.

Tatebe, a former executive vice president of Dai-Ichi Kangyo Bank of California, said it was her experience being a woman working as a bridge between the U.S. and Japanese cultures that motivated her to institute a concerted effort to achieve diversity and inclusion for businesses across the Pacific.

The forum opened with keynote speaker and best-selling author Roger Crawford's motivational story of how, despite being born with four impaired limbs, he went on to become an NCAA Division I college athlete, hold certification from the U.S. Tennis Association and continue to inspire others on how to celebrate diversity. He said the key is asking not "Am I gifted?" but "How am I gifted?"

A picture of where women stand in corporate executive management was presented by Barbara Adachi, national managing principal of the Initiative for the Retention and Advancement of Women at Deloitte LLP. Adachi has been working on the company's award-winning Women's Initiative for 17 years.



Stirring the melting pot: Paula Madison, executive vice president and chief diversity officer at NBC Universal, delivers a speech on inclusion in Los Angeles on March 22.
COURTESY OF GLOBAL ORGANIZATION FOR LEADERSHIP AND DIVERSITY

In 1993, when the initiative was instituted, less than 7 percent of the firm's partners, principals and directors were women, and the turnover rate was higher for women, with 7 percent more leaving the firm than men, Adachi recalled.

Today, as a result of the firm's focus on professional development, marketplace eminence, virtual communities using a 24/7 Web presence, and innovation and advancement, the number of female partners, principals and directors at Deloitte has increased to 22 percent, while the turnover gap has fallen to less than 2 percent, she said.

Asked for the secret behind the sustainability of the 17-year-long program, Adachi said, "Leadership from the top is key," insisting that men also need to champion the cause.

Mitsuru Claire Chino, who joined Itochu Corp. as corporate counsel in 2000, talked about how she shot off an e-mail to the CEO in 2003, saying, "something had to be done" because only 2.5 percent of the company's managers were women.

The CEO was very helpful and set up a committee to study why women weren't being hired and weren't staying. This led to the launch in 2004 of a five-year diversity program with the specific aim that 30 percent of new college graduates hired would be women.

"Today, Itochu has more than 33 percent women hired among new college graduates," Chino said.

She is now working on the company's second five-year diversity program, which has expanded to focus on non-Japanese employees. Itochu operates in more than 100 countries.

Diversity is needed "to remain competitive," Chino said. "Otherwise we have only similar experiences and similar mistakes to learn from."

Flying in from San Francisco for the day was Masaaki Tanaka, president and CEO of Union Bank, which for six consecutive years starting in 1997 placed top among the banks in Fortune Magazine's annual list of America's 50 best companies for minorities.

While noting that "harmony is of greatest importance" in Japanese-style management, Tanaka, who also is a managing executive officer of Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi UFJ, stressed that executives must have a "clear, strong appreciation of diversity" with all of the bank's partners, clients, vendors and community partners coming from all fields.

It is no accident, then, that Union Bank's financial position is "very strong and ready to expand." Asked if he would ever like to see a female CEO, Tanaka enthusiastically replied, "I would love to see that."

A heated discussion unfolded on "Diversity in Media Content Matters" among panelists Sandy Close, executive editor and director of New America Media, Lori Matsukawa, a news anchor at KING TV in Seattle, and Gordon Tokumatsu, an Emmy Award-winning reporter for NBC 4 Los Angeles.

The media landscape is in the midst of unprecedented change with the advent of social media and, according to Tokumatsu, the loss of 46,599 journalist jobs since Jan. 1, 2008.

The economic fallout of changes in the media has forced diversity to be put aside, leaving the public with an "echo chamber of tweeters and bloggers talking to each other," Tokumatsu said.

While Close said that "the newspaper connected me to the city" reading it on her commute to New York, today the cutbacks in staff at the San Francisco Chronicle left it with no Chinese-speaking reporter to cover a recent story that first appeared in the Sing Tao Daily. The son of a 91-year-old Chinese woman hanged himself because he couldn't find a place for her to live after she was evicted from her residence of 60 years when the building was sold.

The closing keynote speaker, Paula Madison, executive president and chief diversity officer at NBC Universal, insisted that diversity in the media is not about diverse faces telling the same stories but about recognizing 16 million people with 16 million stories.

She told the audience of how, as the daughter of Jamaican immigrants who were on welfare, she had to rely on scholarships for her education and now her family is worth more than \$500 million.

The Japan Times: Friday, April 9, 2010
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