

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka (CA Sri Lanka) together with the Women Empowerment and Leadership Development Committee continued to give leadership towards ensuring gender parity in Sri Lankan boardrooms.

In its latest initiative to fulfill this vision, CA Sri Lanka organised a forum titled 'A Journey to the Board Room' which focused on how to position more female accounting professionals including Chartered Accountants to serve on boards. The move comes amidst a massive dearth of female representation in the corporate boardrooms.



Delivering the keynote speech, Ms. Eshini Mudalige, Senior Group Director at Capital Maharaja Organisation Limited relayed her success story with the audience which mostly consisted of female members of CA Sri Lanka.

Ms. Mudalige said that both power of mind and passion are important if one is to achieve success. Ms. Mudalige who sits on the Board of the Capital Maharaja Organisation, noted that women have the unique ability to multitask successfully, whether it be raising children, having a career and doing charity work.

She also urged the female members to do an analysis of themselves and understand their competency gap, and work on improving such gaps which will help them evolve in the professional realm. "Also, get your family behind you. With their support, you can get there," she assured.

While highlighting that success is gender blind, Ms. Mudalige urged everyone to never resort to unethical practices in their pursuit to get to the top.



CA Sri Lanka President elect, Mr. Manil Jayasinghe noted that even though Sri Lanka was the first country in the world to elect a female prime minister and was a country with a female population of 52%, yet in the boardroom these statistics are not represented. “We need to create awareness and a support structure for our female members to reach these positions,” he said.

He added that in any board or organisation, diverse views are important, whether it’s the voices of females or of various ethnicities. “We must understand that we are working in a diverse society, and therefore views cannot be only of a particular segment, so this picture needs to change,” he added.

Chairperson of the Women Empowerment and Leadership Development Committee Ms. Aruni Rajakarier in her speech disclosed that women too are part of the problem which has resulted in gender disparity.

Elaborating her point further, she said that CA Sri Lanka had around 600 female members who were eligible to have their names in the board ready female members directory and an email was sent to all of these eligible members. “But we had 49 names when we published the directory and that tells a lot. □ Several hundred phone calls later, we faced an unpleasant truth and that is, we are part of the problem,” she said.

Ms. Rajakarier noted that it was clear that women also didn’t want to step up and one key reason for this is the amount of unpaid work they do at home. “Until we change that, women are not going to have the energy and time to step up.

But we can change it, and we can adapt and for that women must have discussions at home with their spouse, children, parents, in laws and siblings,” she added.

The forum concluded with a panel session featuring Ms. Chandrika Perera, Group CFO of Abans Group of Companies, Ms. Amali David, CFO at Bartleet Group of Companies, and Ms. Maya Jayawardena, Finance Director/Company Secretary at Renuka Hotels Group.



The panel discussion in progress



During the panel discussion, Ms. Perera urged female accountants to do more than what is expected from them, if they wanted to succeed, while Ms. David used the platform to elaborate the increasing need for female members of the profession to focus on building their soft skills and connecting with the 'right' network. The session concluded with some important advice from Ms. Jayawardena who said, "If you have the will, you can always find ways to keep working and succeed in your profession.'



A section of the gathering