

Female execs still scarce after labor law debut

Firms' needs, perceptions clash 25 years on Kyodo News

Twenty-five years have passed since the Equal Employment Opportunity Law for Men and Women was enacted to fight gender inequality in the workplace.

By this time, people might think that a horde of college-educated women are calling the shots at companies as corporate managers.

A survey conducted by Kyodo News, however, shows that is hardly the case.

According to the survey, which covered 110 major corporations, 107 said it is important to use women's talents. But there are large gap between those who have made it to "kacho" (section head) and the larger "bucho" (division head) positions.

Female kacho account for a mere 5.4 percent of managers, while female bucho made up 2.5 percent. That figure slumps further to 1.7 percent for women in executive positions.

By contrast, around 40 percent of the corporate managers in other advanced countries, such as the United States and Germany, are women.

The poll was conducted on top managers or executives in charge of employment matters at 110 companies between late July and early August.

The government is trying to boost the ratio of women in managerial or other leadership positions to 30 percent by 2020, but many companies do not appear enthusiastic about the idea.

When asked to state how many women they wanted in managerial positions, the responding companies said they wanted women to constitute 18.6 percent of section chiefs, 15.4 percent of department heads and 14.4 percent of executives on average.

Still, of all the new hires put into fast-track positions for

management this year, an average of 27.7 percent were women.

Companies do want to employ more women because they are in desperate need of highly skilled workers as the working population shrinks. The results suggest there is still a widespread notion that management is a man's job. On the other hand, a significant number of firms want female workers to do more to improve their fortunes.

Asked what they want from women, 27 firms said they want them to reform their companies and 22 said they hope to see them make more use of traits unique to women.

Of those firms who found female employees lacking, 28 said women should acquire a broader perspective, 13 said they should be more flexible and 12 said they do not want them to quit early.

Commenting on the poll results, Takashi Kashima, a gender studies professor at Jissen Women's University, said companies harbor the misconception that women do not possess a broad perspective and are less flexible compared with their male colleagues.

"If they really want female workers to engineer reform, corporate managers should do more to give women their say," he said.

Following the enforcement of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in April 1986, further legislative reform and in-house changes at companies have done a lot to put men and women on a more equal footing. Still, women remain quite disadvantaged when it comes to obtaining secure employment.

Nonregular workers, who are cursed with only flimsy job security, have become a serious social issue.

And male temp workers sacked by manufacturers have drawn much public attention over the past several years.

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