Japanese women ‘can have it all’

Successful CEO Kumi Sato urges salaried women to ‘stay in game’

By ALEX MARTINI

Skat(addr:20)

As a female CEO in a nation known for its male-dominated corporate ranks, Kumi Sato says it is her mission to spread the message that despite the challenges posed by social and gender expectations, Japanese women could “have it all” if they wanted. And she is not just talking the talk. As a testament to Sato’s decades of leadership in heading Cosmo Public Relations Corp., a communications and marketing consultancy in Tokyo, she became in November the first Japanese to be named “Agency Head of the Year” in the Asia-Pacific region by the trade magazine PR Week.

Sato, who has been president of Cosmo for the past 24 years, said she realized the award recognized how, despite the prolonged economic stagnation in Japan, her company has managed to adapt to the times and remain profitable.

“Despite the fact that the Japanese economy has been rapidly declining for more than two decades, we’ve been fortunate to continue to be above the line, in other words, we seem to do much better than economic indicators,” Sato said.

“I have three kids, the youngest is in college, one is in grad school and the other is working — and I’m only 51 and I’m an empty-nester, and I am so happy that I have a career. Otherwise, what am I going to do?” she laughed.

“Everybody’s dispensable, including myself. That’s why when I had my children, I made sure I came back into the workforce,” she said.

The reality is that if you drop out of any work for more than a year, it’s very difficult to get back into the workforce,” she said.

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