

Media: South China Date: 13-03-2012
Morning Post
(Online)
Headline: Promoting Women URL: [http://www.scmp.com/portal/site/SCMP/
at home and work template.printACopy/page.scmp_printacopy/
vgnextoid=9cd62a1c69706310Vgn
VCM100000360a0a0aRCRD](http://www.scmp.com/portal/site/SCMP/template.printACopy/page.scmp_printacopy/vgnextoid=9cd62a1c69706310VgnVCM100000360a0a0aRCRD)

Promoting women at home and work

Getting more females on company boards means a mindset change at home as well as the office

Enoch Yiu

Updated on *Mar 13, 2012*

How can we get more women on to the boards of listed companies? Maybe the answer lies with their husbands taking greater responsibility for child-rearing and companies realising the girls are just as good as the boys at the corporate game.

As this column discussed last month, women make up only about 30 per cent of partners of the city's major accounting firms despite the fact that there are more female accountants working at junior levels than men.

A Standard Chartered survey, meanwhile, has shown only 9 per cent of women are directors of listed blue-chip firms in Hong Kong, against 15 per cent in Britain.

Former British trade minister Mervyn Davies, now vice-chairman of Corsair Capital, is one public figure who has spent a lot of time and effort promoting more women in the boardroom, both in Britain and Hong Kong.

Before he became trade minister in 2009, Davies was a well-known banker in Hong Kong, serving as the chief executive of Standard Chartered from 2001 until he became chairman in 2006. During that time, he promoted talented women. Six senior positions at the bank were held by women in his era. He believes women have a different risk-management approach and could provide a balanced view to

men.

Last year, he completed a study for the British government on women in the corporate world, which found males still dominated the boardroom. Davies' theory is that as most chairmen are male they tend to appoint "old boys" to the board. This resulted in only 15 per cent of boards being made up of women although that was better than 10 per cent some years ago.

Davies believes that with the right encouragement, about 25 per cent of directors of listed companies in Britain will eventually be female. He said six out of 10 graduates were women while 50 per cent of white collar workers were female.

Hong Kong, like Britain, has a lot of female graduates and female junior or middle managers. But the top jobs are still dominated by males which the author of this column believes to be related to the domestic-helper issue.

Married women still need to pay more time with the family and children than men. If a domestic-helper family leaves or goes on holiday, nine times out of 10 it is the wife who applies for leave to take care of the children or family matters.

And if the family does not want to hire any domestic helpers and one parent has to take care of a baby, again, it is more likely the mother who quits to stay home.

To encourage women to be directors, there is need for more support from the government, companies and husbands to share women's duties at home.