



Keidanren Women's Executive Network

# Leadership Mentor Program

Acknowledging the limits of your knowledge  
— A Message for Leaders of the Next Generation—



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## Leadership Mentor Program Vol.14

March 25, 2019 Keidanren Kaikan, Otemachi, Tokyo

### The Sumitomo spirit: Harmony between individuals, nation and society

From its earliest founding days, Sumitomo Chemical has always championed the core idea underpinning the Sumitomo business philosophy: namely, harmony between individuals, nation and society, which means to seek to benefit not only its own business but also the nation and society, placing emphasis on maintaining harmony between its interests and those of the public. This is an idea that also resonates with the modern concepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR), creating shared value (CSV), the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs), and Japan's vision for "Society 5.0." "Change and Innovation 3.0," our latest medium-term business plan, embraces the slogan "For a Sustainable Future" and aims to facilitate the creation of a sustainable society through the acceleration of innovation that anticipate Society 5.0 as well as dramatic gains in productivity that are driven by innovations in digital technology.

### Lessons from my own career

I joined Sumitomo Chemical in 1974 and assumed responsibilities that involved budget planning and the management and evaluation of corporate business performance. Although my department had early access to an array of fresh internal data on our operations, my supervisor in those days taught me how to handle my duties with a sense of unassuming humility. In the 1980s, I was given a leading role in the task of exploring paths that would transform our company into a diversified chemical company with international scale. Becoming a global company confronted us with the challenges of respecting the diversity of business units and adopting speedy decision-making strategies that would enable us to stay ahead in a

marketplace of intense competition. To that end, I proposed that we reorganize by reducing the scale of corporate headquarters and transferring more authority and responsibility to each of our business units. Although it would be several years before that proposal saw the light of day, I gained valuable learning experiences that taught me not only about the importance of being prepared to present enthusiastic visions on ideas I felt appropriate, but also, from the supervisor who permitted me to do so, about how to conduct myself as a person in a position of leadership.

After fulfilling an assignment overseas, in the 2000s I had opportunities to pursue a multifaceted study of company-wide organizations, systems, and functions as the manager in charge of the working team preparing for integration with other company. Through my dialogue with other company, I gained a comprehensive understanding of our company, and also benefited immensely from the opportunity to objectively assess Sumitomo Chemical's comparative strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics relative to other companies.

### A message to leaders of the next generation

In recent years, the business world has found itself within an increasingly complicated environment exemplified by the decline of multilateralism, a wave of new innovations in technology, and a global-scale quest for sustainability. Precisely in times such as these, it is imperative that we be prepared to turn risks into opportunities.

As leaders of the next generation, I want you to place value on having an awareness of the things you do not know. In an age of turbulent change, it is important that we humbly accept the limitations of our own knowledge and show mutual respect for different perspectives. Assuming a position of leadership within an organization will demand that you develop personal magnetism as well as the ability to lay out clear visions.

### Mentor Profile

## Masakazu Tokura

Vice Chair, Keidanren  
Chairman of the Board,  
Sumitomo Chemical Co., Ltd.

Born in 1950. In 1974, graduated from the University of Tokyo's Faculty of Economics and joined Sumitomo Chemical Co., Ltd. Following roles as Executive Officer, Representative Director and Managing Executive Officer, and Senior Managing Executive Officer, was appointed Representative Director and President in April 2011 and assumed current post of Chairman of the Board in April 2019. Now serves as a Vice Chair of Keidanren and Chair of its Committee on Agriculture.

