



Keidanren Women's Executive Network

Leadership Mentor Program

Expectations toward Leaders of Organizations that Need Diversity



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Lessons from Past Experience

This year marks the 33rd year since the privatization of Japanese National Railways (JNR) in 1987. Prior to its privatization, JNR lacked initiative, its employees were preoccupied with their own, internal matters, and labor-management relations were chronically confrontational and strikes occurred frequently. Unable to adapt to the rapid trend toward car-based transportation, JNR eventually collapsed. The lessons of that experience taught us the importance of responding appropriately to environmental change. Following privatization, the newly formed JR East sought to foster a fresh "customer first" awareness and achieve independent, self-reliant operations. Further, the experiences of past earthquake disasters and rail accidents reawakened us to the societal role of our business, community expectations toward rail service, and the value of safety. In particular, we recognized that safety was not an absolute but something that ultimately depended on the abilities of the human actors involved, and sensed the importance of fostering this awareness throughout the company.

Management Imperatives and Expectations toward Leaders

Three management imperatives drive our business. The growth and evolution of the rail system is number one. Technological innovations in recent years have brought advances in railway equipment systems, and strategies of maintenance. New systems are always accompanied by a risk of the unknown. Consequently, we instruct employees to be

thorough in their routine duties and prepared to tackle new responsibilities, have made all-out efforts to encourage a renewed awareness of safety, and are engaged in a quest for "ultimate" safety. Contributions to the public and regional revitalization are the second imperative. We have sought to better balance the social value and economic value of the railway system with measures that include improved transportation services for an increasing number of visitors and tourism-driven programs for revitalizing regional areas. Accepting new challenges and risk count as the third imperative. At JR East, we have revamped our crew duty schedules and moved in other ways to promote work-style reforms and foster heightened diversity. Moreover, we are actively engaged in the development of additional mechanisms that provide employees with opportunities to take on new challenges through such means as participating in overseas projects and promoting open innovation. I think providing employees with new fields to apply their full potential is yet another important role that management should shoulder.

Going forward, society will expect more diversity along with the innovations that diversity itself generates. At JR East, the employment of more women has altered the work styles of our male employees and spurred retail shopping area innovations within our train stations. As these examples illustrate, the participation of more women in the workforce has and will continue to serve as a new engine of growth for the Japanese economy. You have all been involved as leaders in the movement to empower women. In the years ahead, I am hopeful that you will aim not for mere assimilation into a traditionally male-dominated society but to create organizations that allow people to fully demonstrate their respective strengths regardless of their circumstances.

Mentor Profile

Tetsuro Tomita

Vice Chair, Keidanren
Chairman and Director,
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After graduating from the University of Tokyo Faculty of Law in 1974, Tetsuro Tomita joined Japan National Railways the same year. In 1987, he joined East Japan Railway Co., later assuming the posts of Director and General Manager of the Management Administration Department in Corporate Planning Headquarters in 2000, Executive Director and Deputy Director General of Corporate Planning Headquarters in 2003, Executive Vice-President and Representative Director in 2008, President and CEO and Representative Director in 2012, and Chairman and Director in 2018 (current post). Since 2018, he has served as a Vice Chair of Keidanren and as Chair of its Committee on Labor Legislation and Committee on South Asia.

