

It'll take more than 60 years to bridge the gender gap

By [Catherine Estrampes](#)

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When I started, I was one of very few women in leadership roles in our company. It was extremely difficult to think about role modelling when there were no women to look up to. Overall, we have made a lot of progress and today we have some inspiring examples of women in leadership positions, but there is still so much to do.



Catherine Estrampes, president and CEO, GE Healthcare Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA).

The truth is women have reached the same level of education as men but there are still significant gaps in terms of work participation. In medicine for example women continue to lead a rather marginal existence. Although there are now more female than male medical students, professorships and directorships are almost exclusively held by men.

Looking more broadly the situation is still difficult. In 2019, [men occupied 75,6% of top management positions in South Africa](#). Today in Europe, women represent 15% of executives with only 5% in CEO positions. In 2021, the number of women running businesses on the Fortune 500 hit an all-time record: 41.

So, while there is progress, the reality is that if the world moves at the current pace, the World Economic Forum predicts it will still take more than 60 years to close the gender gap.

Several studies have shown how a better diversity mix influences bottomline results, as well as how diversity makes a team more innovative.

Leadership

Leadership is a topic close to my heart and for me good leadership is about creating a place of belonging; a sense of community in which you work on hard problems together.

Leadership is also about authenticity: being direct, challenging and demanding but also nurturing, caring and collaborative.

In a world where collaboration around innovation in ecosystems has never been so important, these are critical leadership traits.

One of the most important characteristics of a good leader is someone who can look after and care for others. It's often described as a "feminine" trait, but we all have this ability – not only women. My advice is, as leaders, let's not forget to care.

Women have habits that can hold them back in leadership roles though. Have you ever experienced being reluctant to claim your achievements as a woman? Are you expecting others to notice your contributions, without any efforts from your side? Have you ever fallen into the perfection trap?

Prepare to dare more

Many of these can be overcome if we are prepared to dare more – a behaviour which doesn't come naturally to many women. Daring is not about being fearless, but about not allowing fear to paralyse you.

Personally, every opportunity and move forward for me started with a strong sense of purpose and a dream to make a difference. In tandem, taking on assignments outside of my comfort zone, benefiting from great coaches and sponsors and ultimately finding the courage to jump were all factors which led to my success.

What also served me well was a combination of being ready for the next assignment and working in a supportive environment.

You need to be capable of accepting uncertainties and taking a leap of faith.

I believe leadership starts with our ideas and acts; with us taking responsibility and having the courage to develop the potential we unearth in ideas and people.

Being in a supportive environment is so important because it offers you a secure base from which to explore and think about embracing the next challenge.

You still need to have the courage to embrace that next challenge though! In reality, you will never be totally prepared for it, but back yourself all the way and embrace the support of your colleagues, family and friends.

You've done a lot right to be where you are. Be proud of yourself.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Estrampes is president and CEO of GE Healthcare Europe, Middle East & Africa (EMEA). She began her career at GE Healthcare Europe in 1990 where she held various business leadership roles in cardiology, interventional and CT product lines and gained extensive international exposure. In 1999, she joined GE Capital in the US where she held several general manager roles both for GE Capital Equipment Finance and GE Healthcare Financial Services Global Vendor division. In 2010, she served as general manager for the \$1.4bn mid-America business unit in GE Healthcare US & Canada. In February 2013, her responsibilities were expanded to lead the Central Corridor \$2.5bn business unit. In 2017, she joined GE Healthcare Europe, to lead the Imaging business unit, before being appointed president & CEO of GE Healthcare Europe the same year. In 2020, her role is expanded to lead Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA)

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