A holistic approach to building an inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplace for women

Mariana Cestau is persistent. It’s a trait that has served her well as an advocate for women in Chile, where she works for Medtronic as a senior business unit manager. Just seven months after taking the helm of the local Medtronic Women’s Network in 2018, Cestau led successful efforts to close a gender pay equity gap there. Today, women working at Medtronic in Chile earn the same as their male counterparts for equal work.

“We needed to achieve a balance between men and women,” Cestau said. “And it really wasn’t a difficult conversation to have because we had the support of our vice president and other managers who truly believe in the Medtronic Mission.”

The Medtronic Mission directs the company to recognize the personal worth of all employees. From engineers who help build lifesaving medical devices to sales representatives who work with hospitals around the world, women are a valued part of our global workforce.

As a global leader in medical technology, Medtronic is committed to building an inclusive, diverse, and equitable work environment for women. Because that aspiration is ingrained in company culture, Medtronic has recently made some notable strides toward creating a workplace where women can thrive. In 2019, Medtronic announced it had achieved 100% gender pay equity in several countries — including the United States — and 99% gender pay equity globally. In addition, 38% of all global leadership positions were held by women.

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As a result of the company's global efforts to advance women's careers, Medtronic recently became one of three companies to earn the prestigious 2020 Catalyst Award. To earn the award, a company must agree to a rigorous examination of its policies and complete several onsite interviews with the nonprofit Catalyst organization, which has honored only 89 organizations since 1987.

"Advancing women and supporting their ability to thrive — both inside and outside of work — is a priority for us," said Geoff Martha, Medtronic CEO. "Catalyst's recognition of our progress has so much meaning inside our company. We are all learning and growing together, and we will not stop until we achieve an inclusive, diverse, and equitable work environment for all."

**For Diversity to Thrive, Inclusion Must Come First**

Medtronic leaders believe building an inclusive culture must come first for diversity to thrive. The foundation for that culture began in 1960, when Medtronic co-founder Earl Bakken penned the Medtronic Mission, creating a powerful vision for the company. While Bakken's dreams were centered on making the world a healthier, better place for all people, he was also an early champion for women in the workplace, saying, "I dream of a world where women lead."

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Today, Medtronic leads the way in terms of women’s representation within the medical technology industry. Not only are women choosing to join Medtronic, they’re choosing to stay and grow their careers.

“Creating an inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplace is essential to our purpose, and Earl was absolutely visionary in this respect,” said Carol Surface, chief human resources officer, Medtronic. “Over a half century later, the business case is as real as ever: Bringing diverse perspectives, experiences, and voices together leads to better decisions and ultimately better business results. For us, this translates to meaningful innovations that help our partners deliver superior patient outcomes.”

**Accountability for Change Starts at the Top**

Building and fostering a strong pipeline of female talent at all levels of the company, especially in leadership roles, takes focus and dedication. Since joining Medtronic in 2011 as Chairman and CEO, Omar Ishrak – now Executive Chairman and Chairman of the Board – has emphasized the need for more women in senior leadership roles and in science, technology, engineering, and math functions. He has made inclusion and diversity a strategic priority, frequently emphasizing the role they play in fostering innovation and in helping the company to better serve patients.

In 2018, Ishrak committed Medtronic and its employees to accelerate change and gender equity in the workplace by formally joining the Catalyst CEO Champions for Change Initiative. This pledge — to work toward closing the gap in workplace gender equality — not only sets the standard for the type of company Medtronic strives to be, but also empowers managers at all levels to contribute to that change.

“Fostering an enriching and inclusive workplace is essential to our success. I truly believe that we are a stronger, better company by bringing diversity of thought to our work and employing a workforce that represents our patients and customers. A more inclusive and diverse culture also fosters a wider range of innovation. And that leads to a better business and better outcomes for patients,” Ishrak said. “Central to our effort is a commitment to gender diversity and the advancement of female leadership.”
Reducing Bias and Creating Balance

Recognizing bias can exist in the interviewing process, Medtronic developed programs to ensure diverse hiring slates and interview panels. In 2019, the company hired more than 17,000 new employees, of which 52% were women.¹

But simply hiring women isn’t enough. Women must have equal opportunities to become leaders. Medtronic provides a variety of development programs for managers, including unconscious bias training. Likewise, seeking input from women through a structured career development process opens a two-way street for women to share their goals and aspirations and help leaders support the growth of women’s careers.

Input from women across Medtronic has helped shape recent family-friendly policies like the Medtronic Family Care Leave for U.S. employees. Combined with already existing parental leave benefits, new parents can receive up to 18 weeks of paid time off. Employees can also take an additional six weeks of paid time off for a variety of life’s moments. For example, the benefit includes time away if a family member falls ill and needs care, or if a spouse is deployed to active duty.

Insights from women engineers also helped create the Medtronic “returnship” program, Careers 2.0, for individuals looking to get back into STEM-related careers. It provides paid internships that help engineers on-ramp back into the workforce after an extended absence.

“We are committed to providing all employees flexibility to manage their careers through different life stages,” Surface said. “Our job is to ensure women are not walking away and leaving the workforce because they can’t find advancement opportunities or balance.”

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Communities Provide Support, Open Doors

One of the biggest drivers of inclusion, and perhaps the strongest resource for women at Medtronic, is the Medtronic Women’s Network (MWN). The global network is comprised of more than 15,000 women and men at 115 hubs across 68 countries and offers professional development, networking, and mentoring programs and tools that empower women to grow their career and lead.

Employee resource groups like the MWN are critical, creating peer groups and helping individuals combat the feeling of being the “only one” in their respective areas of work. “The MWN is a way for women to connect with others across the company, who they might not otherwise have the opportunity to get to know,” said Liliana Gonzalez, vice president of the Medtronic Cardiac and Vascular Group in Latin America and member of the MWN leadership team. “At such a large, global company, it's really important to do what we can to make everyone feel connected in some way, provide support, and encourage individuals to pursue their goals.”

Since 2015, the MWN’s membership has grown by 585% — a staggering increase that reflects the group’s commitment to engage employees at all levels. That includes men who are essential to moving the needle on diversity within the company. In 2016, a global hub called Men Advocating Change (MAC) formed to focus on how men can help build a gender-balanced workforce. Since its inception, MAC has seen tremendous growth, with 14 groups across the globe. The company’s Latin America region is particularly active, with 10 MAC chapters and more than 200 members.
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The Work Doesn’t Stop

Cestau says having the support of her male colleagues and managers was essential to closing the gender pay equity gap in Chile. And, she says, it will be important to support future initiatives Medtronic and the MWN roll out in the region.

“The work doesn’t stop,” Cestau said. “For me, that means making sure women don’t have some of the difficult days I had at other companies early in my career. At Medtronic, I have the kind of support that I didn’t always have.”

While Medtronic is proud of the support it offers Cestau and other employees, company leaders acknowledge there is more work to do to increase opportunities for women in the workplace.

“If we expect to increase representation of women at more senior levels, then we must inspect metrics at all levels in the organization to make that happen,” Surface said. “We don’t have all of the answers, and our policies are far from perfect, but our commitment to getting this right is absolutely there.”

REFERENCE