

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES



LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS

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TO CHAMPION FOR WHAT IS RIGHT AND NATURAL CAN NEVER BE WRONG AND IS NECESSARY.

For Sunway Education Group, the motivation to do the right thing the right way is deeply rooted in the company's culture, underscored by the core values of Integrity, Humility and Excellence. Its Chief Executive Officer and Champion of the 2021 Malaysia WEPs Awards (Leadership Commitment category), Professor Elizabeth Lee shares why the Group decided to sign the WEPs and how being a signatory changed the institution.

How has Sunway Education Group becoming a WEPs Signatory, and more recently, you winning the 2021 Malaysia WEPs Awards for Leadership Commitment helped to contribute to SEG's gender equality ambitions and to the wider Sunway Group?

Firstly, signing up for both were opportunities for us to reflect on our journey as an organisation, what we have accomplished so far, as well as to benchmark our performance so that we can better understand how we compare to others, and most important of all, how we can improve and be better.

The WEPS award recognition affirms our journey in the right direction. It is a huge encouragement to our Institutions and to our people. At SEG, we are committed to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and women empowerment is a top priority. As a WEP Signatory, the recognition of our work with the given award, further cements our commitment towards the advancement of gender equality for our staff as well as our student and campus community.

What is Sunway Education Group currently doing or has done in the past to create an inclusive environment?

We look for talents who fill what our organisation needs, rather than who and what a person's background is. At the Sunway Education Group, we aim to create a culture where differences are respected and valued to promote equality and diversity, and to encourage individuals to grow and develop towards their full potential.

We aim to create a workplace environment which promotes dignity and respect for everyone, a workplace environment which values contributions of diverse ideas, backgrounds, experiences and perspectives of our staff members for the growth of the organisation and the communities we serve. Diversity and inclusion, which are closely tied to our core values of integrity, humility and excellence, are embedded into every component of our organisation and its goals.

In this regard, the Sunway Education Group looks to attract and retain a diverse pool of employees at all levels, provide them with fair and equal opportunities without discrimination while at the same time maintain its commitment to providing quality education for all, regardless of race, creed or financial standing.

“Being a WEPs Awards Winner is a public declaration of our commitment to gender equality and should embolden others to enable, embody and enculturate gender equality in their own organizations. It truly is the best practice.”

How does SEG’s leadership ensure commitment from others with regards to women’s empowerment as well as gender equality in the workplace?

Ensuring commitment on women’s empowerment and gender equality is an ongoing process which requires continuous effort, commitment, and collaboration from everyone in the organisation. Taking our cue from our founder and chairman Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah, we strive to treat everyone with respect, value diverse perspectives, and promote inclusivity in our interactions at work, by being mindful of language, behaviours, and actions towards others.

We seek to encourage commitment towards this through active discussions and by holding people accountable for driving positive change. We hope to influence advocacy for gender equality and empower women in our workplace by fostering an inclusive culture where open dialogue, feedback, and constructive discussions about gender equality and women’s empowerment are encouraged.

We are currently working to better ensure we have a workplace culture which promotes respect, dignity, safety and inclusion for all and to look into ensuring that all of our staff are well aware of their rights in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). We understand that training and knowledge, together with clear policies, procedures, a culture of openness and transparency will go a long way in making our organisation a safe workplace for all.

At Sunway, we take great care to foster gender equality as part of our efforts to build an inclusive work environment through events, campaigns and in all that we do on a daily basis. We will continue to advance our efforts, as we believe men and women bring different strengths to the workplace.

The Sunway Education Group as part of the Sunway Group, as a whole, is committed to an inclusive and progressive workplace where diversity is celebrated with talent policies and initiatives which support an equitable and safe workplace where employees can thrive and work together.

“Support is also really important especially as women leaders grow in numbers. Hence, we must find and support each other. As for myself, I do reach out and connect with other women in leadership roles in and out of Malaysia, while trying to support female leaders within my own organisation. By virtue of linkages, I have been able to ensure that the interests of women are looked into through making and instituting policies.”

What have been your greatest achievements as a leader and as an organisation?

As I mentioned previously, professionalism trumps sex or gender. I had to ensure our women folk could be and should be taken seriously as professionals in their field. For example, a simple tweak to archaically established dress codes to allow for the ladies to wear long pants at work rather than stockings was both empowering and liberating. But, respect must be earned and hence my fellow female colleagues need to show our mettle at work. That means rolling up our sleeves, and working along with other (male) colleagues outside normal hours as and when necessary.

When time permits, I still like to be involved with students, our future leaders in the making. Nowadays, there are all sorts of challenges faced by our young girls – from social acceptance, anxiety, body image issues, gender stereotypes being spewed out by the social media, all of which could lead to mental health related issues. We need to attune them to the need to break down gender stereotyping and to advocate for gender inclusivity.

It is for this reason that I've taken up a number of mentoring opportunities to speak with young girls and provide them guidance, both personal and professional.








Having been in the education space for over 30 years now and having gone through various gender-related challenges, I hope to continue motivating young people on inclusivity and gender equality. I myself have been blessed, and right now I am in a comfortable place in life. I've grown in confidence thanks to my experiences, and thanks to the people around me – from my Chairman to my colleagues both male and female, and my family.

Any advice that you would give to all the leaders and advocates of gender equality who are still struggling to see an impact of their work?

Women need to support women. Women also need men to support women. Vice-versa, women also need to support the men. We have to create an inclusive working environment. Society as a whole needs to change its mindset of gender in leadership roles and in decision-making to provide a healthy pathway for both men and women to thrive equally in the workplace.

Why is commitment at the top crucial to achieving change throughout the organisation?

Commitment must come from the top. At Sunway, it started with our Chairman's support, which ensured that today our environment welcomes both women and men alike. Those in leadership roles who advocate for gender equality will help ensure that people in the organisation promote the cause and are committed to it.

- Principle 1  Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- Principle 2  Treat all women and men fairly at work- respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- Principle 3  Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- Principle 4  Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- Principle 5  Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- Principle 6  Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- Principle 7  Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

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