

what we heard

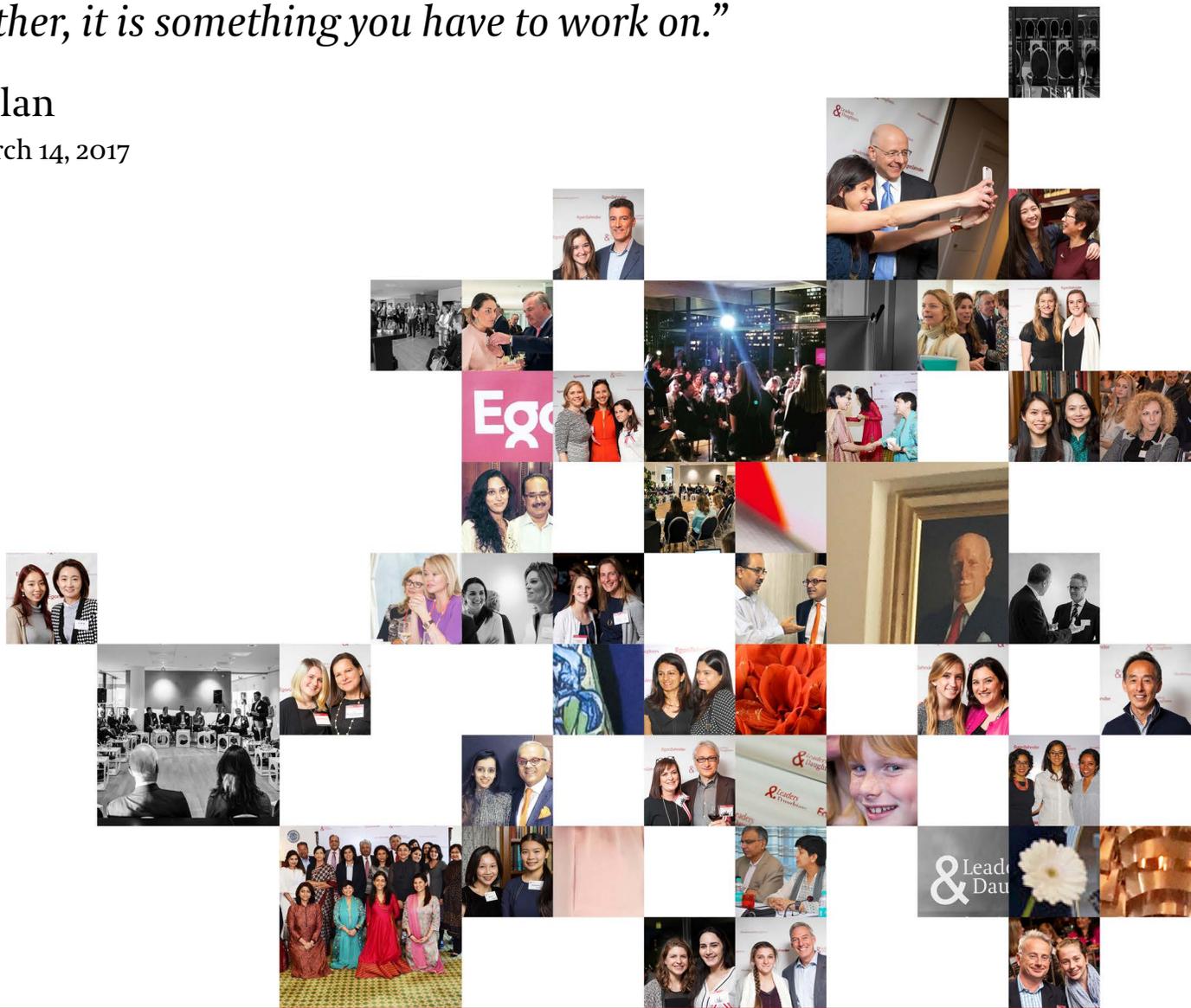
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# Leaders & Daughters

*“There’s no mysterious, innate ‘leadership skill’;  
rather, it is something you have to work on.”*

Milan

March 14, 2017



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The open-floor debate, held in the spacious atrium of Egon Zehnder's Milan office on 14 March, attracted around 90 participants and their daughters, from senior Italian executives at multinationals to local entrepreneurs. The overwhelming consensus: In recent years, Italy has made significant advances in promoting the cause of women who want their own professional success.

"Italy is still behind in terms of senior management positions filled by women, but this issue is now a top priority for companies and leaders," said Egon Zehnder consultant Mario Pellizzari. Under the so-called "Golfo-Mosca law", passed in 2011, women must account by the end of 2017 for at least one-third of directors on the management and supervisory boards of listed and state-owned Italian companies. Progress is encouraging. Last year, Egon Zehnder's Global Board Diversity Analysis ranked Italy fourth in Europe, behind France, Germany and Sweden, with an average of more than four women executive and non-executive directors at the largest publicly-traded companies.

Against this background, contributors to the debate focused on practical measures to widen even further the path to the top for the next generation of ambitious young Italian women. "There is not a mysterious, innate 'leadership skill'," commented the former CEO of a Milan-based private equity firm. "It is something you have to work on."

*"Professional fulfilment comes from pursuing your own personal happiness."*

There was plenty of advice from the floor from female business pioneers about how corporate Italy can finally shake off a patriarchal culture going all the way back to ancient Rome. The

CEO of a leading media group said "the two key elements" in building a different female-friendly corporate ethos are protecting the maternity rights of women employees and promoting an atmosphere that celebrates diversity.

Another female CEO from an Italian internet company, said her experience of being both a mentee and a mentor had "significantly improved" her leadership skills. "The programs helped me in particular to manage relations more effectively with my direct reports teams, which are today composed mainly of men."

Her view was echoed by a female strategic marketing executive, who noted that a lot of companies without mentorship programs "struggle to promote women's inclusion, because they lack clear models and structures."

One man at the gathering surprised the audience by reading a personal letter addressed to his three daughters. "Remember that professional fulfilment comes from pursuing your own personal happiness," wrote the CEO of an Italian catering industry manufacturer.

The nine-year-old daughter of a leading Italian CEO got straight to the point at Egon Zehnder's Leaders & Daughters event in Milan. "When you come home at night," she told her dad. "you find everything is perfect because of mom, who supports your career." Her proud but slightly taken aback father could only agree.

That was the cue for another woman leader to offer a key takeaway to the nine-year-old girl who had made the pertinent observation that her mom did all the home-making. "It will be important to have your future husband or partner supporting you in your career."

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### About Leaders & Daughters

To mark International Women's Day, Egon Zehnder conceived Leaders & Daughters, a global series of events that bring the world's most admired leaders and their daughters together to uncover the motivations, challenges and opportunities that face the next generation of professional women.

In 2017, we went further. In celebration of International Women's Day, we hosted Leaders & Daughters events in more than 40 cities worldwide – bringing together the voices of more than 3,500 participants to share their stories of success as well as the obstacles that are preventing progress. We share one common goal: to collectively pave a better future for the next generation of women leaders.

In addition to the events, we have also launched a campaign, "To My Daughter," in which leaders write letters to their daughters about their hopes and dreams for the future. To participate, please visit [www.leadersanddaughters.com](http://www.leadersanddaughters.com).

Visit Leaders & Daughters at  
[www.egonzehnder.com](http://www.egonzehnder.com)

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