

Opening speech

Christer Haglund

Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am so glad that so many of you have decided to invest your precious time with us today. For me there is one thing that I am really passionate about – in addition to tennis - and that is fair and equal treatment of all people, everywhere, all the time and equal opportunities.

Thanks to the proposal from The Cultural Institute of Finland, we started to plan this particular conference together. I, myself, had only one request; we should make an effort to engage also the business community in this discussion, since we want businesses in our region to prosper and be sustainable. I was in business before I was recruited to this job, so I know that in order to reach profitability and sustainability, you need to rethink and renew the way you are operating, all the time. And the beauty of businesses is that they are able to make quick decisions based upon facts that are favourable for them.

We know, that there are a lot of businesses around that have management teams or boards consisting of only 40-60-year-old men, all with a similar background. If that is the case in your business, then you know for sure that you do not have the best possible team, it is simply statistically impossible – you will get more or less the same answers when trying to solve new upcoming problems, or create new business opportunities. But it is of course comfortable to spend your days with likeminded people. Until you face competitive predators with new creative ideas, that is. Game over.

Countless studies all over the world show that diversity creates more innovation, increases market share, delivers greater profitability, increases performance and helps the overall bottom line. Diverse boards have clearly fewer cases of criminal business practices such as fraud, corruption and bribery. Your company top management, or organization, should at least be as diverse as your customers and stakeholders, present and potential, are. After all, it is quite obvious that the management team should reflect its customers and end users. Why would people and organizations fight against and resist something that benefits them in the most tangible of ways?

Some business leaders in our respective countries complain that the talent pool is too small. Well, ask them how many women or representatives of minorities they have on board. Usually very few, even though women in our countries have a clearly higher level of education

compared to men. Ladies and gentlemen, we cannot afford to waste our precious resources, we need all the talent we have around us in order to succeed. The talent pool is right here, we have younger and older people, men and women, Russian speaking, English speaking, Swedish speaking, whatever language, statistically also people representing a lot of other minorities. With some focused mentoring we would fairly quickly have new talents in action and more future leaders.

To put it simply. Diversity is great for your business, but there is of course no “one-size-fits-all” solutions.

So, what can we do in order to change things to the better and boost profits and a sustainable future for our organisations and companies? Well, first of all we need to accept facts, that is the beginning of all wisdom. We have the Nordic ambassadors present here, and I would like to invite each and every one of you present today to be ambassadors for this important cause. Remember, leadership is action. One step at a time towards a better future for all of us.