



KC INSIDER

Building Momentum

Nearly a year in, Win|Win is making significant strides in advancing female leadership

STORY BY SARAH AYLWARD | PHOTO BY SHOTBEE

Last fall the buzz in Kansas City's business community centered on the Win|Win campaign, which aims to increase to 20 percent the number of area businesswomen holding executive and board positions by 2015.

Though incubated by The Central Exchange, the movement soon took off on its own, largely due to the impact of Kansas City's low number of women in leadership roles, says steering committee chair Denise Kruse: "The national average of women within executive and board positions was at 15.4 percent when we began the campaign; Kansas City was at 7 percent."

Win|Win wants to change that. Since its September 2010 launch, the steering committee has been focused on recruiting signatures to the campaign accord. Signatories' support comes with responsibilities, such as promoting advancement for fellow female employees and sharing their growth with others.

But once on board as Win|Win supporters, companies, organizations and individuals become part of a community. "We can connect one organization to another," Kruse says.

The campaign also offers support to those pursuing the Win|Win mission, providing resources on how to implement programs for advancement. "We can help match qualified women with open board positions," Kruse continues. "Obviously the board will make the final decision of whether to hire a candidate, but at least there will be female candidate names supplied for openings."

The efforts are catching on. Most recently, Win|Win was endorsed by the National Association of Corporate Directors, which

is the governing body for all publicly traded and privately held firms in the nation.

But it didn't take a national endorsement to convince Bob Marcusse, president and CEO of the Kansas City Area Development Council (KCADC) to sign on as a supporter. "[Win|Win] had data that showed that the economic performance of companies [with] a higher percentage of women on the board and in senior leadership exceeded what might be thought of as normal in the business world," he says. "Those companies improved financial performance. That made a big impact on me."

Marcusse and the KCADC got involved in the campaign at the beginning. "For us, it's all about economic performance. That's really the bottom line of the [KCADC]—to help grow the economy—and if companies in the area can improve their performance by promoting gender diversity at the top or executive level, then we want to be supportive of that."

Great Plains Energy and KCP&L also signed the campaign accord. "I strongly

believe that we needed to strengthen the diversity in management and our board," says Mike Chesser, chairman and CEO.

To that end, Chesser's organization created an internal employee resource group. "The whole idea is to focus on barriers and how to help management recognize them, [as well as] create discussions about women in the workplace," he says. "[This] will help us identify company practices that make it easier for women [in our company] to deal with conflicting family and work requirements in the hope that [they] can move ahead and not be burdened."

In terms of advancement, Great Plains and KCP&L recently added three female board members. "We're making strides," Chesser says.

Win|Win is making strides, as well. "The thing that is hard to quantify, is that wherever I go, people want to talk about the campaign," Kruse says. "The buzz we wanted to create and the momentum that is important to a campaign are certainly being created." **KCB**

WIN|WIN BY THE NUMBERS ▶

- 20x15: This is the Win|Win campaign goal, to see women in 20 percent of Kansas City's executive and board positions by 2015.
- 7: The percentage of board and executive positions that, according to Win|Win, are currently filled by women within Kansas City's top 39 publicly held companies.
- 60+: The number of area businesses and organizations that so far have signed the Win|Win campaign accord. These include: Hallmark Cards, Sprint Nextel, Commerce Bank, AMC Entertainment, Children's Mercy Hospitals & Clinics, Truman Medical Center, University of Missouri-Kansas City's Bloch School of Management. For a full list visit winwinkc.com. Win|Win will host an event on November 9 for executive accord signatories featuring Joseph Keefe, president and CEO of Pax World Management LLC and Pax World Funds, who will address the positive impact and financial profitability offered by adding women to board positions.

