

Member Profile

An Interview with WCD Member Izumi Kobayashi

By Judy Macdonald

“Life goes beyond your imagination. Keep challenging yourself, there are many people who support you.”

- Izumi Kobayashi



Photo: Izumi Kobayashi (left) receiving the Visionary Award from Merle Okawara.

Izumi Kobayashi, Chapter Co-chair of WCD Japan, has been a corporate leader and an advocate for women for many years and in 2016, she was recognized for her accomplishments with the WCD Visionary Award for Strategic Leadership of a Women Corporate Director.

Izumi is not one to back away from a challenge, which is evident when you consider her career progression from a tea lady at a chemical company in Japan in 1981, to a stint as the director of the Osaka Securities Exchange Co., Ltd. before joining Merrill Lynch in 1985 and moving up the ranks to become the first woman and first Japanese person to run Merrill Lynch's Japan unit as President and Representative Director.

Izumi was recognized in the October 2005 edition of the *Wall Street Journal's* "50 Women to Watch", and in 2004 she received the "The Business Woman of the Year" award from Veuve Clicquot.

Between November 2008 and June 2013 she was CEO and Executive Vice President of the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency ('MIGA') in the World Bank Group.

Currently Izumi serves as Vice Chair of the Keizai Doyukai (Japan Association of Corporate Executives) and she is an external director of Ana Holdings Inc., and Mitsui & Co. Ltd.

Q1. How have you seen women make a particular difference on boards?

In general, women bring up very essential questions which men hesitate to raise. Often those are matters ignored or treated as a common understanding among even people outside of the organization/industry.

Q2. How can women best help other women get onto boards?

First I think that female board members must prove to be effective performers. Once the reputation is established, then it becomes important to share critical knowledge on effective governance with other women and encourage them to prepare for board service.

Q3. What are the hallmarks of a visionary board?

Visionary boards engage in open minded behaviors. They have diversity and are not afraid to ask the tough questions or consider changing positions on matters of importance.

Q4. What advice would you like to give to your younger self?

Life goes beyond your imagination. Keep challenging yourself, there are many people who support you.

Q5. What do you like to do when you are off duty?

I can be found in the local farmer's/fish markets getting fresh foods to cook for my family and friends or participating in competitive sailing regattas. Being near or on the water brings me a sense of calm and relaxation.

