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Post from Deauville: CEO Champions

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October 15, 2010 – 4:30 pm

<http://blogs.ft.com/women-at-the-top/2010/10/15/post-from-deauville-ceo-champions/>

James S. Turley, the chairman and chief executive of Ernst & Young, spoke at a press conference at the Deauville conference to discuss a new initiative called CEO Champions, launched by the Women's Forum for the Economy & Society with Ernst & Young's support.

The members of the initiative shared six goals:

1. As CEO, being visibly committed and “embed” women's advancement into the business strategy;
2. require diverse candidates as a priority when recruiting for leadership positions;
3. hold themselves accountable for progress around the proportion of women in leadership positions and running parts of the business;
4. building a CEO network;
5. create a catalogue of best practices; and,
6. developing ways to foster balance between personal and professional lives.

Chris Viehbacher, chief executive of Sanofi-Aventis, the healthcare company, says that looking back 27 years to his time as an MBA student, he recalls that there had been a 50-50 gender split in the class. Now, however, as he looks around he doesn't see that parity any more at the top. He adds that people *with ambition will always have to work very hard to get anywhere, and it will be impossible in most cases for them to manage a 9-to-5 working life.* The challenge, he says, is for companies to create structures that allow both men and women to work as hard as they need to in a more flexible way.

As always, the devil will be in the details. Turley noted that the CEO Champions aim to present a “thoughtful game plan” to the forum next year.