



Kaori Sasaki

*Creating a Place
Where Women with
High Aspirations Can
Connect Comfortably
with Each Other*

Well deserving of the title, “a forerunner of diversity building,” Kaori Sasaki has long pioneered the development of innovative products and services focused on promoting diversity in Japan. Since the summer of 1996, she has annually produced the International Conference for Women in Business (ICWB), through which she has built a platform for women with high aspirations to connect with each other.

Gaining Diversified Perspectives Is Key to Change

In 1987, even before the term “start-up venture” was coined, Sasaki had formed Unicul International Inc., an international communications consultancy, while she was in her 20s and working as a freelance interpreter. In 1996, she opened the first-in-Japan bilingual (Japanese/English) portal for working women, with the mission of serving as an online platform where women with great ambitions could interact candidly.

In the same year, she launched one of the first international conferences for working women – the International Conference for Women in Business (ICWB). In addition, in the year 2000, she formed ewoman Inc., and later introduced her proprietary schedule-organizing method – the “Action Planner” – a product that became a time management trendsetter and best seller in the years that followed.

As someone who is always ahead of the pack, Sasaki has also been promoting diversity for the last 30 years. She comments, “Increasing diversity isn’t about having more women in your organization – it’s about gaining diversified perspectives. Ultimately, how diversified your organization becomes depends on how diversified your perspectives are during discussions, just as a new scene unfolds as you change your angle of observation. Increased diversity brings about innovation, but that doesn’t happen unless the organization makes an effort to transform the awareness and behavior of each individual.”

As a first move toward a more diversified workplace, many Japanese companies are hiring more women, but how will they incorporate workplace diversity in their management strategies?

In November 2018, Sasaki formulated the “Diversity Index,” which quantifies each employee’s understanding of what diversity means to their organization. She adds, “Just like annual

health check-ups, I would like companies to utilize the index to promote diversity.”

Part of her extremely busy life is spending time with her two children, but her powerful, energetic smile shows how much she enjoys both work and family. She explains, “As I have many responsibilities, staying energized is as important as working effectively. Even if I get stressed about something, I can’t afford downtime, so I’m pretty particular when it comes to choosing what to eat and how my time should be spent, in order to keep my energy level high.”

It’s Important to Think “You Can Do It,” as Passion Opens Any Door for Anyone

Every year, nearly 1,000 motivated women gather at the one-day ICWB for 10 hours of intense interaction from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Many women participate on their own, without company sponsorship, but after being exposed to the positive energy of other participants and realizing how much they have in common, they become close. By the end of the conference, they feel like old friends.

“By the evening party, their appearances have completely changed from when they first arrive in the morning. The more positive-thinking women they get to know, the more their faces glow. They all exude energy in the evening, and I look younger in the evening than in the morning,” comments Sasaki laughingly.

The previous year, a 14-year-old junior high student had come with a handmade business card, paying the participation fee with money she had saved from her allowance. Some students share future resolutions to return as speakers, once they become working adults. These positive people spur one another on.

As these examples show, Sasaki is an innovator who keeps on creating “incubators” for other innovators. Her efforts exemplify a genuine desire to create a space where high-minded, positive women can connect.



ICWB is where people of any age, nationality, gender, or income can experience what diversity is all about. It offers an inspirational experience that is unique to ICWB.

Such efforts are an encouragement and inspiration to younger generations.

Sasaki comments, “I don’t want young people to think ‘I can’t do it.’ Not particularly ambition-driven and without a supportive background, I have always learned things the hard way, just like any young person. It’s important to want to try. If you have a passion to complete what you’ve set your mind on, you can achieve it. Discover that it’s fun to live outside the boundaries of ‘fixed ideas.’ The women at ICWB have an aura about them that is truly inspiring. They marry, have children, and work as executives. Yet despite their busy lives, they are happy and fulfilled. That’s probably a very different image from what one would normally have of a female executive, but I hope to show young women that anyone can become one.”



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Born in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan. Currently CEO of ewoman, Inc. and Unicul International, Inc. Also serves as the Chairperson of the International Conference for Women in Business, which is now in its 24th year. Serves as an outside board member for several public companies and is a former member of the Regulatory Reform Council of the Cabinet Office of the Japanese Government, to which she was appointed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Author of several books.

ewoman website:

http://www.ewoman.co.jp/2005_about/english/

International Conference for Women in Business website:

<http://www.women.co.jp/conf/about/index-e.html>

Unicul International, communication consultancy:

<http://www.unicul.com/english/index.html>