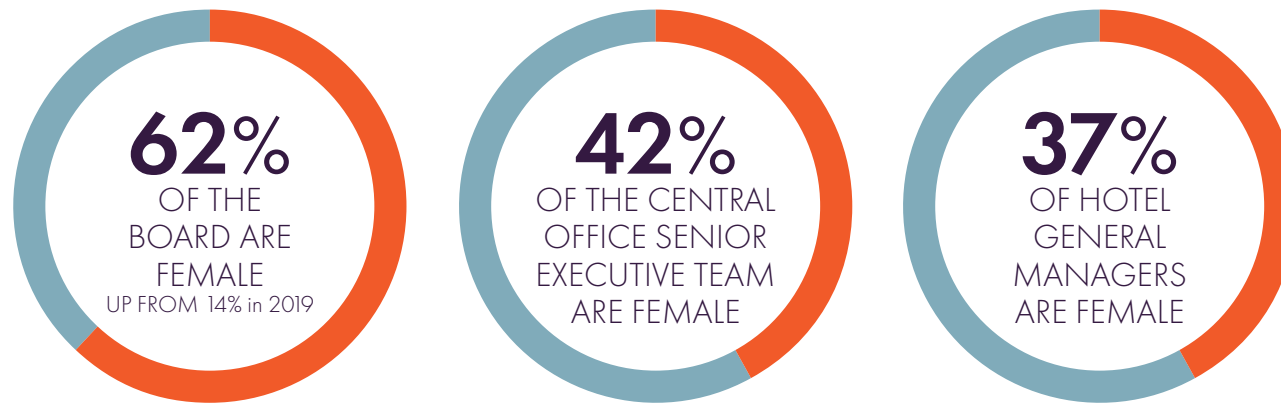


## Dalata

John Hennessy, chair of the Dalata board, was appointed at the time of the flotation of the company in 2014. The newly appointed board he inherited had one very experienced female director but was not gender balanced. The opportunity for change was limited in the early years; however, the board’s succession planning process (for both executive and non-executive positions) enabled a smooth transition to a gender -balanced board between 2019 and today. 62% of board members are female at the time of publication.



“We always want to get the best person for the job, but we also set the expectation that 50% of candidates be female, and we used this benchmark when working with recruitment partners to fill open board positions.”

[Read the full case study](#)

## TOP 5 TACTICS

Insist on a gender-balanced shortlist of candidates from recruiters

Monitor succession on the board and to the leadership team

Identify potential successors to the chair and grow their capability

Monitor key roles and position succession plans

Ensure the board reflects your people, your customer and where you operate

“The board should reflect the business in terms of where you operate, who your own people are and who your customers are. It doesn’t make sense not to have a representative board.”

## Dalata

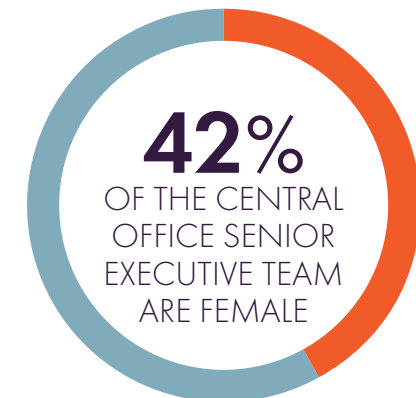
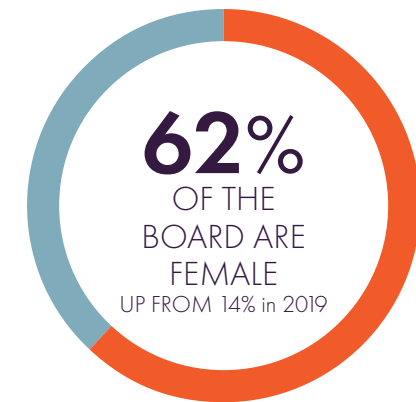
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With fifty hotels now under the Dalata umbrella, John regularly highlights that at least 50% of the time, the best person for the job is female. This, he feels, is the logical result of the lack of opportunity previously available to women leading to a pent-up supply of talent and potential in that half of the population.

When Liz McMeikan joined Dalata's board in October 2019, her's was the first new appointment since 2014. She was also the first member appointed from the UK, where Dalata has a strong market presence. John believes in a broad perspective on diversity, which moves beyond gender and that "The board should reflect the business in terms of where you operate, who your own people are and who your customers are. It doesn't make sense not to have a representative board."

2021 presented another opening at non- executive level. While one position was vacant at the time, the slate was so strong that the board made two appointments, and both were female. "The search process produced two outstanding candidates with very different skill sets and backgrounds – we jumped at the opportunity to appoint both of them to the board."

Since 2019, Dalata has journeyed from a position where 14% of the board was female to one where four of the five non-executive directors and one of the three executives are female. John acknowledges that at 62% female, the board is now slightly beyond balance something to keep in mind when the next opportunity to recruit to the board comes up.



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Mandating a balanced candidate shortlist has been an effective tactic to drive this change, but what else has Dalata leveraged? The company is committed to developing leadership talent internally and increasing female representation among senior managers. The company’s growth has provided many opportunities to succeed in both objectives. “We keep a watching brief on the pipeline of talent coming up through the organisation –37% of hotel general managers and 42% of the central office executive team are female and these proportions are growing.”

Group CFO, Carol Phelan, who joined the company in 2014, was appointed to the board in January 2022; her promotion is an example of the company’s long-term succession planning.

In John’s opinion, “women bring a different perspective to the board than men do; a different way of looking at things, of doing things.” We are conscious and deliberate about always recruiting the best person for the job, and we ask that the recruitment companies provide a balanced slate of talent. In our experience, recruitment partners understand this requirement. They hear it more

often from their clients and are aware that failing to produce a high calibre; balanced shortlist will send those clients elsewhere.”

Commenting on the lack of growth in female chairs and CEOs roles, John shared that on the chair side, there is no reason this lack of representation of women in the chair role should persist over time. He describes the role of the chair as growing people on the board who might be able to succeed and keeping an eye out while staying open minded. On the CEO side, the most important decision a board will ever make is appointing the right CEO. Looking for the right candidate, internally and externally, keeping an open mind and eliminating existing personal prejudices can help the board to pick the right person for the job, regardless of gender.

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