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Female Business Leaders and Entrepreneurs Awarded

By Lena Smirnova

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They can juggle the demands of work and family on a daily basis and, on special occasions, attend award ceremonies in their honor.

Top female executives and successful entrepreneurs took a break from their routine to attend an event at the end of last week when consulting giant Ernst and Young, or EY, handed out its Working Women awards for the first time in Russia, where businesswomen often face even more barriers than in other countries.

Women occupy 13.7 percent of the senior managerial posts in large companies in the European Union, but in Russia this number is just 7 percent, EY said.

Despite the statistics, the work of female entrepreneurs and executives in Russia is getting more attention and hitting new milestones.

This is the first year that EY — formerly known as Ernst & Young — handed out the Working Women awards in Russia after organizing similar ceremonies in the U.S., Australia, Indonesia and China. However, organizers had to modify the Russian contest to accommodate for a deficit of female entrepreneurs. In its other locations the event focuses on entrepreneurial women while in Russia it also includes managers because there are not enough women starting their own businesses here.

Even Russia's contest winners were taken aback by the small number of women in business.

"Seven percent! I was surprised," said Marina Zhigalova-Ozkan, chief executive of Walt Disney Company in the CIS, who won in the media leader category. "I thought there were more women business leaders because many of my female friends are in this category."

Businesswomen could nominate themselves or be nominated by others. A jury made up of successful entrepreneurs, investors and independent experts chose winners in 10 categories after interviews with the short-listed candidates. Nominees were judged based on their qualities like leadership, originality and professional results, such as financial performance.

Juror Anna Belova said she recognized the additional challenges of working in Russia as a woman.

"Often in large companies when there are a lot of men around the table and few women, men can allow themselves to say something stupid. That is accepted by others as quite natural. God forbid a woman to say something that is not right," Belova said." [A woman] must always be a head higher and smarter to reach the position she is in."

The prize for the 10 winners includes individual business consulting services from EY, as well as access to strategic networks that include other entrepreneurs, company heads, investors, and potential partners and clients.

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