

**Neslihan Nigiz Ulak**  
Chairperson of the Board  
LEAD Network Türkiye

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## Empowering Inclusion: Insights from LEAD Network's Approach to DE&I

Pedersen & Partners recently hosted **Neslihan Nigiz Ulak**, Chairperson of the Board at **LEAD Network Türkiye** as guest speaker of **Live Talks: DE&I Series**, an event organized by **Pedersen & Partners'** Consumer & Retail Practice Group and moderated by **Oyal Bayrak**, Principal and Country Manager for Türkiye.

The event highlighted LEAD Network's innovative "glo-local" approach—combining global DE&I standards with locally tailored practices to address the unique challenges faced in different regions. With over 20,000 members, 67 corporate partners, and 15 chapters across Europe, LEAD Network has become a key driver of inclusion and equity within the industry.

### LEAD Network's Blueprint for DE&I Transformation

LEAD Network's mission is to foster gender balance and inclusivity through practical, member-driven initiatives that combine education, leadership development, and collective action.

#### Mentorship & Leadership Development

- Through its mentorship programs, LEAD Network connects high-potential female leaders with CEOs, preparing them for senior roles.
- The mini MBA program, developed in partnership with universities, combines business leadership training with DE&I education to equip leaders with the tools to drive inclusivity.

#### The Playbook for DE&I

- A six-module framework designed to help organizations tackle DE&I challenges, from strategy development to measurable KPIs.
- The Playbook bridges the gap between large global companies and mid-sized firms, ensuring every organization has access to resources and support.

#### Localized Focus for Greater Impact

- Regional chapters adapt global strategies to their unique cultural contexts. For example, the Turkish chapter's Academy Initiative offers tailored training programs and mentorship opportunities to drive local impact.

## CEO Pledges and Accountability

- Corporate leaders commit to advancing DE&I through measurable actions, reinforcing accountability and fostering collaboration across the industry.

## Leadership Lessons from Neslihan Nigiz Ulak

During the event, Neslihan shared her inspiring journey as a leader. As the first female sales director at Unilever Turkey, she broke numerous barriers, navigating challenges such as gender bias and balancing family responsibilities. Her story underscored the importance of **resilience, curiosity, and passion** in leadership.

She also emphasized the critical role of supportive workplace policies, such as sabbaticals, in empowering employees to navigate life's challenges while advancing their careers. **"Creating breathing room for employees fosters loyalty, growth, and long-term success."** she noted.

## The Role of Male Allies in DE&I

Neslihan highlighted the vital role that male allies play in advancing DE&I. As decision-makers in many organizations, male leaders have the power to:

- Address unconscious biases and challenge existing norms.
- Advocate for inclusive policies and equitable opportunities.
- Mentor and support female talent in their leadership journeys.

**"Hand in hand, male and female leaders can create environments where everyone feels valued and empowered."** Neslihan remarked.

## Advancing DE&I Together

The event concluded with a clear message: achieving meaningful progress in DE&I requires measurable actions, inclusive leadership, and collective effort. Organizations can lead this change by:

- Investing in leadership development and mentorship programs.
- Embedding inclusivity into cultural policies and organizational practices.
- Fostering collaboration across corporate, NGO, and governmental sectors.

The discussion with Neslihan Nigiz Ulak served as an inspiring reminder of the critical role DE&I plays in shaping the future of the workplace. By embracing actionable strategies, fostering inclusive leadership, and championing collaboration, organizations can not only drive equity but also unlock the full potential of their teams.

At **Pedersen & Partners**, we are proud to support conversations and initiatives that advance DE&I across industries. Together, with leaders like Neslihan and organizations like **LEAD Network**, we can build a future where inclusivity isn't just a goal—it's the standard.