

## International Women's Day: How to make work (and traveling for work) work for women

Emma Woodhouse

0:05

Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening and wherever you are in the world, welcome to Business Travel On The Fly. I'm Emma Woodhouse, and I'm on the communications team here at CWT. For our March episode, we're going to be talking about International Women's Day. In 2022, the theme for International Women's Day is Break the Bias. The campaign invites us to imagine a gender equal world free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination, a world that's diverse, equitable and inclusive, a world where difference is valued and celebrated. From this theme, we asked Belinda Hindmarsh and John Pelant to speak to us about the role of the travel industry and work culture at this critical juncture. Belinda's SVP and Chief Operating Officer of RoomIt and China, she spearheads the commercial development of RoomIt, CWT's global hotel distribution division, and operations in China and she has over 20 years experience in the travel tech space having held various global operations, marketing, supply, management, and commercial roles. John Pelant is executive VP and Chief Technology Officer here at CWT. John's at the forefront of delivering the company's 3.0 strategy. Developing CWT's engineering and technology, innovation and IT. Together they lead CWT's, women's employee resource group. Belinda, John, thank you for joining us today.

Belinda & John

1:21

Thank you. My pleasure to be here.

Emma Woodhouse

1:23

So I'd like to start on a personal note, the pandemic has created a real fork in the road for women and inclusion in general. There's some real harrowing stats out there; women's jobs became 1.8 times more vulnerable in the pandemic, and mothers were 47% more likely to have lost their jobs in lockdown. I think we have an opportunity now to advance or regress. So I'd like to know, why is equality important to you? Maybe let's start with you, John.

John Pelant

1:49

When we look at how breaking the bias and how we make sure equality, for women, in particular, from a business standpoint, and how we operate our business, it's absolutely key, right and

making sure that we can drive CWT forward. But I'd say, from a personal side, you know, I have a daughter, she's currently attending university, and I look at her quickly approaching the workforce. And although this may sound cliché, it's really close to my heart in that I look at her as as talented as anybody that I see around. Energy, intelligence, and what she brings to the table for a future employer, I want her to have all the opportunity in the world to be able to prove herself on an equal playing field. And to me, that's what it becomes, is giving people an opportunity that really is equal, and let people prove themselves. And we know and we've seen what that does in the business world to make the companies a better place to work to make them more successful in the marketplace. And I think that's the personal side of it, for me, is I want that for all of our employees, and all my colleagues around the world, both in CWT and around the market. But on a personal side, I want to see my daughter be able to be successful in whatever she drives forward based on her own merit.

Belinda Hindmarsh

3:21

So it feels almost over logical to say this, but to John's words as well, creating an inclusive working environment where really everyone can contribute equally, and reach their full potential is the right thing to do, particularly in 2022. You know, from a business perspective as well, there are so much data out there now that you know the statistics really speak for themselves. And companies who embrace diversity and have greater gender equality, particularly at leadership levels, they have the stronger financial results. So I think there are sort of logical human reasons to do this, but also some really strong compelling business cases and information that's out there that prove that this is the right thing to do for businesses.

Emma Woodhouse

4:08

Excellent. And I really hope that in the years to come, things change for John's daughter and for women entering the workforce. So when we talk about work and the changing world of work, I think in some ways the world of work has changed for the better in the pandemic. Flexible and hybrid working is proven to benefit equality and opportunity, but it also has the potential to create new chasms, one of which is proximity bias. So proximity bias is the notion that employees with close physical proximity - basically face time with their team and leaders - will be perceived as better workers and ultimately progress further than physically present colleagues and also earned more and put forward for promotion more. Proximity bias disproportionately affects certain groups, including working mothers and those with disabilities. I would like to ask you first about your own experiences or thoughts about proximity bias, and also what role business travel management can play in preventing it.

Belinda Hindmarsh

5:08

I live in Rome in Italy, and I've been in Rome for over 18 years now, which is clearly not a major business hub from many perspectives, but I have made it work through business travel, you know, getting regular face time, with my teams, or with my leaders, with the various global organizations I've worked with, whilst being in Rome. And, you know, I think for sure there's something in this, right, proximity helps, it's important that everyone speaks the same language, understands the culture and the working ways within an organization to be successful and to progress and to build the relationships that can make getting business done so crucial. That said, you know, based on my own experiences, there are ways to work around that, right. So I think getting that face time in is absolutely critical. Having leaders who believe in you and really focus on the outputs and not where you're sitting to create those outputs and how you manage Pan European, for example, global teams, and in my case has been really critical. And I think that, if anything, the pandemic has accelerated the acceptance of this notion that we don't all have to sit in the same office, you know, Monday, Friday to make things happen. So from that perspective, I'm a big believer that, you know, we've actually fast forwarded in making it a more level playing field for men and women to be able to contribute and progress within their organizations, even without having that physical day to day contact Monday to Friday in an office location. Right?

Emma Woodhouse

6:46

Yeah, that's really interesting. I remember my own working experience before the pandemic and having to jump in an Uber because a meeting ran late, racing to collect my son. So there's definitely feels like there's more balance in the world. But there's definite value in meeting face to face. John, I'm interested from a male perspective, about your personal experience or thoughts.

John Pelant

7:06

I think, you know, if I look at the travel industry, and what CWT can bring to this subject, and where we can make a difference and how we are thinking about that, especially in the current situation, right, and where we have people working at home, and some people are starting to come back to the office. When we look at what we can bring from a product and technology standpoint, to make sure people when they're traveling feel safe. When we make sure that accessibility is there for all and we look at things that we'll be bringing like sharing your itinerary, making sure that others know where you're going to be and when you're going to be there. Messaging that's 24/7. Real time being able to get to someone, we have a tool we'll be putting out for check in safe, if there's a world event that takes place or an event in a certain location. Looking at those type of things to make sure that when people are traveling is really critical. And bringing kind of that inclusivity for people. When you look at meetings that are they're happening, both now as well as going forward and in this new world, if you will, making sure that hybrid is an option. So where working parents may have children at home, and making sure that they're able

to attend if they're not able to travel, making sure those pieces are in place. I think you know one of the key things as well as making sure that you're getting feedback from your employees and making sure that you understand and how they're feeling as they move forward through this and what that looks like. And several of our customers have run surveys for their female travelers, and making sure that they understand what's important to them, when they're on the road and traveling. What makes that journey, feel safe, feel accessible for them, and making sure that things go forward. We need to take all of those experiences and that feedback into play to make sure that we can truly make sure the overall environment whether that be you know, working in an office, getting on a plane, those journeys really do feel safe for people.

Emma Woodhouse

9:28

Right. I think as business travel resumes, this is going to be even more critical, the duty of care element and the products in tech that supports safety for women. So that's really wonderful. I am also interested cuz I know you both have combined, you know, a huge amount of experience behind you. I wanted to know what you think is the secret to creating a working culture designed to break the bias?

John Pelant

9:49

I can start and I think you know if I look at both my role within kind of the travel industry but also being a leader in technology, women in technology is a key part of our success for the overall industry, for CWT, making sure that there are opportunities. I think about that with school when young women are in school coming up, whether it be for university or even prior to that, making sure that they understand the opportunities that are out there, that it doesn't have to be a male dominated type of industry, when you talk about technology, and that variants experiences that people bring to the overall technology landscape is really important. And I think when we look at also promoting within an organization, and you look at varied experiences, and what those different leadership styles will bring to an organization, and different backgrounds, really makes it stronger. And I think we have to be intentional about that. And look out for those opportunities, and make sure that we are looking across the landscape on a global basis and making sure that we're giving the opportunities there that are well deserved to make us a stronger organization. And I think, you know, we can also do a lot around training, and making sure that everyone in the workplace understands where we have biases in place that may be at the forefront. Or they may be just conditional biases that people have grown up with, making sure that we're breaking that down. And doing that through training, but also being very visible.

Emma Woodhouse

11:48

That's great. And I know you're doing such amazing work with the women's employee resource group. So there must be some really interesting elements from that, too.

Belinda Hindmarsh

11:55

Absolutely. And once again, I would echo John here, Emma I think that one of the things he touched on is so critical, and these things don't just happen by themselves, right, the whole notion of being purposeful about what you take on to try and drive change. You know, the training and the education and information sharing is definitely part of the ERG and making sure that there's awareness. You know, one big thing I think that helps dramatically is micro inequities training, which we have here at CWT. And I think it's that unconscious bias, that often can make a huge difference if we address it at the forefront and people are aware of what behaviors or comments can make someone feel uncomfortable or knock confidence, which is often a part of the drivers why we need to overly encourage women in particular, to step up and to take on new opportunities or raise their hand. You know, if you think about the recruitment space, it's a well known fact that if there's a job description, there are 10 requirements, you know, women would be the ones that tend to look at it and go, okay, here are the things I don't have. So I'm not going to raise my hand and put myself forward versus their male counterparts. And I think things like micro inequities plays a role in creating confidence. And there's definitely a need to encourage and educate to make sure that we are addressing some of these issues at the core. I think also in recruitment itself. You know, it's another key lever, if we're looking at trying to get equality at leadership levels. There are opportunities, being smart about having candidates slates that, you know, for every senior role, you make sure that there's at least one candidate there that is a woman on the slate, it forces that thinking and it forces us to make sure that we're looking around and looking across it people who would be a good fit for the role, but haven't necessarily raised their hands. So yeah, I think there's a lot of things we need to do, but agree on, it needs to be purposeful in the way we approach it.

Emma Woodhouse

14:11

That's great. And it's so great to hear about this encouragement as I think it's a daily practice thing. Women experience sexism every day. We've all had so many experiences in our lives, and just really wonderful to hear that. So about that, when we talk about everyday sexism I would love to end the podcast with asking you both a quick question, which is: what is one real world example tip that you can share, to help prevent everyday sexism or discrimination?

Belinda Hindmarsh

14:41

So I'm happy to jump in here, John. I think for me, it's making sure that this is not a woman's issue, right. It's making sure that women aren't portrayed as victims that need special treatment or help. You know, women are super strong and resilient. But there are some well known structural reasons why gender equality is an issue in our world in our workplace. And I think that making sure that men are part of the solution, understand what needs to change to make sure that we address this at the root cause and really partner together to address this as a broader issue is one of the absolute key things and making a difference.

John Pelant

15:21

One from a male perspective for me, it is listen and learn. And that is just coming from a standpoint of being humble though, not thinking that you have the answers and not trying to jump in and necessarily try to fix these things right away, but really listen, and have that open ear to what you can learn. And look there. I consider myself very lucky and with CWT, should consider yourself very lucky, we have a women's CEO we have ELT members of a really high level of experience and knowledge and an ability to drive our business forward and working with people like Belinda that we're able to learn from, from a business standpoint and from an overall cultural standpoint, I think it really makes a difference. I think, you know, the other thing I would say, for men out there, but probably everybody is be vocal, be vocal about your commitment. So it is fantastic that companies are putting policies in place and training and all of that should happen. And that should be expected. But you need to be vocal in your commitment around this. And make sure that it becomes personal when you see or hear something. Take that personally, take it personally for who it's happening to and yourself and really take that opportunity to be vocal and your support and your commitment to bringing this forward.

Emma Woodhouse

16:54

Thank you, John, that really resonates. For me, particularly the deep learning and listening part with everything that we're seeing in the world with conflict and autocratic leadership, the deep learning and listening feels really relevant for all of us, whatever agenda. Belinda and, John, thank you so much for joining us. We're really, really excited to be continuing this conversation and progress, not just on this day, but every day of the year so that the future is better and more equitable for all of our kids going forward. Until we meet again next time On The Fly, if you're keen to find out more about the future of travel and work from experts around the world, subscribe on Spotify, Apple podcasts or wherever you get your podcasts.