



2023

SPACE

EXECUTIVE

Women in Business Series Two

Celebrating and Learning from Inspiring Women in
Leadership



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Introduction

Welcome to our 2023 edition of Celebrating Women in Business. This year's #EmbraceEquity theme for International Women's Day, highlights the difference between **equity** and **equality**¹. "Equity recognises that each person has different circumstances, and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome."

Businesses should aim to get more women into leadership roles and retain their current female leaders if they intend to make meaningful and sustainable progress toward gender equality.

Our interviews celebrate the individual success stories and although each story is unique, there are certain themes that bring them together. Each one has benefited from supportive employers or advocates (both male and female), recognised what they enjoy and what they are good at, and been open to opportunities. They have also all given something back either in the form of mentoring or supporting other women.

The interviews span a range of industries and job types, and we hope that they provide the inspiration and celebration of what can be achieved by women in business today – **studies show that greater diversity is associated with more customers, greater sales revenue, and higher profits**. As reported by McKinsey Insights², \$12trillion dollars in additional GDP would be seen if the gender gap is narrowed by 2025.

I am confident that you will have some incredibly interesting takeaways and actionable insights off the back of this series.

Marek Danyluk

Managing Partner & Group CEO, Space Executive

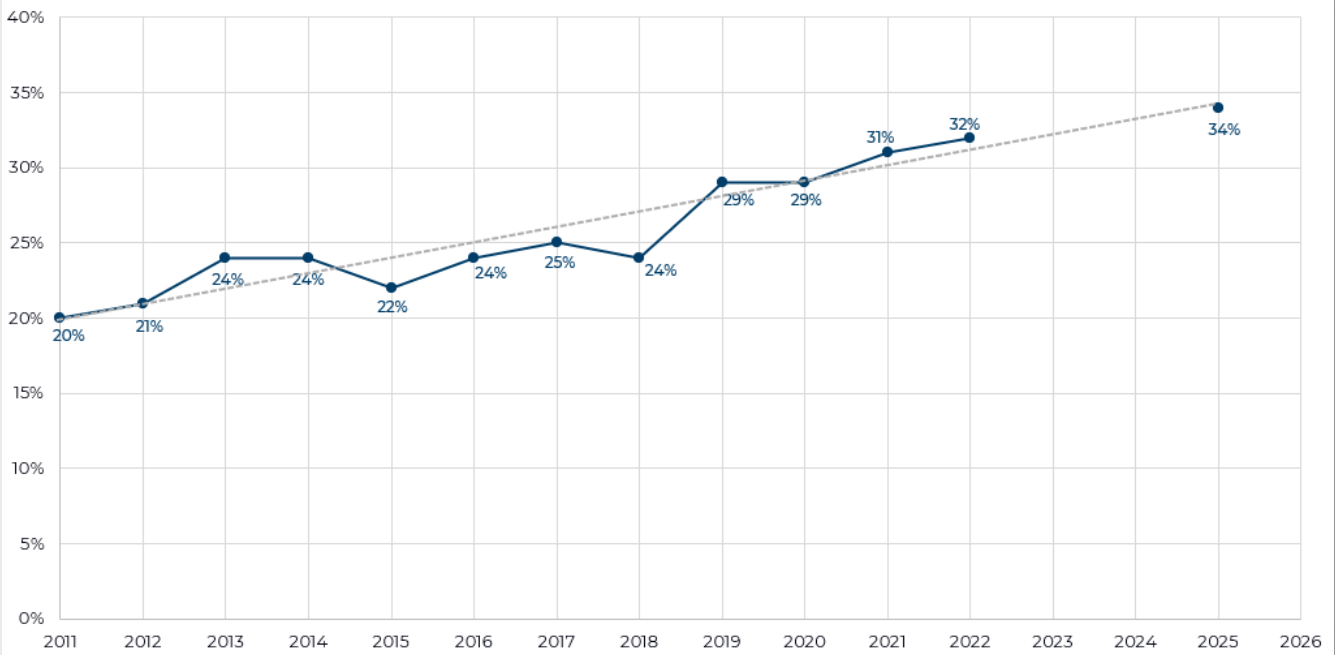
¹ IWD, 2023

² McKinsey, Diversity and Inclusion

Key Trends

Numbers globally have remained above the 30% tipping point required to precipitate significant change for the second year in a row. The proportion of women in senior management has increased from 31% to 32% in 2022 and never dipped below the first recorded level. They now see a clear trajectory for greater gender diversity in senior management and lasting transformational change.

Global Percentage of Women in Senior Management



Source: [Grant Thornton](#)

Actions To Support Making A Difference



Embed and Practically Support Work-Life Balance



Inspire and Enable Women to Raise Their Hand



Provide Mentoring and Coaching Programmes

Jessica Robinson



MENA Sustainable Finance Leader at EY

Increasingly, more and more of us want to see our investments, pensions, and money create a social and environmental impact to avert climate breakdown and create a fairer society. Female stars are paving the way in this field, but the gender ratio remains unbalanced.

We are celebrating diversity and women in leadership positions in this story, and that is why we are shining a light on [Jessica Robinson](#), Sustainable Finance Leader at EY and author of [Financial Feminism: A Woman's Guide to Investing for a Sustainable Future](#) to understand her career journey and desire to make positive changes in a turbulent world. Using her industry experience and leadership platform, she conveys powerful messages on how to succeed as a woman in sustainable finance.

Where it all began:

It is interesting that before you sit down with someone and begin to uncover their story, you never really know what you'll find out. Jessica's journey showcases the wide breadth of experience she has under her belt. Having studied Economics and Politics at University, Jessica tells us that she started out wanting to be a politician and her love of policy to drive positive change in the world would be ideal, so she started working for a Member of Parliament. Having completed her studies she worked for a short time in the House of Commons and states; "I loved it, but it became very apparent to me that it wasn't going to match up with my love of travel and wanting to live and work overseas."

This experience supported Jessica's step into public affairs consulting where she advised companies on political and legal strategies. The move into Management Consulting at EY accelerated her consulting career. Her desire to recognise problems and solve in a collaborative manner showcased that her personality is a perfect fit for that sector. At this stage her career was fulfilling her love of travel, taking her from London, New York and China. Whilst in China she recognised a fundamental philosophical shift into being able to make more of a difference through Sustainable Finance.

The Global Factor

Through Jessica's opportunities to travel and work in different organisations, countries and markets, she built up a strong skillset with a global perspective. As we know, Sustainability ESG is really important because these are not things happening in a microcosm – it's global and it is important for sectors such as Financial Services to see the holistic view. This is what set Jessica apart from others in the industry – she has that global experience and a commitment to make a positive difference. Her understanding of policy, politics, government and economics put her in strong stead.

After a long tenure as Chief Executive and Board Director of the Association for Sustainable and Responsible Investment in Asia, Jessica was Head of Asia for the United Nations-supported Principles for Responsible Investment (UN-PRI). A leading think tank in Asia that promotes sustainable finance and responsible investment allowing her to be an advocate on this passionate subject. Her move to the Middle East allowed her to carry on the theme of Green Finance within the private sector.

Personal Growth & Following Your Passion

Jessica is a strong believer in growing and learning throughout life, taking opportunities that come to you and never seeing an “end destination”. These experiences all contribute to our growth, and she is always looking to learn and develop. She lets her passion drive her decisions and has taken every opportunity to pursue professional education where she has acquired her ACA Financial Management Diploma, Non-executive Directorship Diploma and an impressive second Master's in Environmental Economics – she truly has a growth mindset and seizes every opportunity to grow academically as well as professionally.

Jessica mentioned that she was particularly impressed with the INSEAD Business Sustainability Programme on Sustainable Finance for directors and above at EY. When companies invest in programs that employees benefit from, this showcases a commitment to growth.

“It's important I feel to take every opportunity with an open mindset, as you never know where the journey is going and is something I bestow on my teenage daughters.” Women as we know are less likely to apply for jobs or say something in a meeting and more likely to feel imposter syndrome - Jessica firmly believes that this is a narrative that we need to shift. She notes that you have to embrace failure to allow for success, citing examples which we have all experienced of being knocked back in many cases within the workplace yet having a dream opportunity around the corner which is where you are actually meant to be.

Advocating The Female Perspective

When asked about the barriers Jessica or women in general face in the workplace, her response was that yes, it is challenging, and these barriers do exist. She tries not to get too hung up on it and instead it drives her rather than defines her.

Jessica is a huge advocate for having more women at the table because “the dynamics in the workplace shift so fundamentally”. It is extremely challenging being a woman in the industry she is in and it has always been male dominated. However, she understands the benefit that the female mindset brings to an organisation such as the compassion, listening skills, considered understanding and having a constructive nature which are invaluable to support success.

When Jessica is recruiting, her priorities are to understand the individual’s work strategy and approach. She has personally felt the negative reaction albeit subtly when needing to attend a family commitment which is not justifiable when she and others go above and beyond. Flexibility goes beyond the catchphrase – it is more than a desire and companies should ensure it is an ethos. Understanding the pressures of parenting is not always easy, it is important for men to find that understanding to support cultural shifts.

Impact of Mentors & Building Belief

Jessica has always been an avid mentor and has in her past navigated towards strong personalities who have in some instances taken her under their wing. What is delightful in these experiences is hearing about how people have impacted lives through advice, sponsorship or sound boarding. Jessica candidly speaks about both men and women who have given her opportunities because they saw her passion and intelligence. She works hard to reciprocate that and makes it a priority to respond to people that reach out to her for support or advice. Having formal and informal mentors supports growth in terms of mindset and opportunities.

Jessica mentioned the “Confidence Code” which is based on scientific data; outlining how women do not possess the same confidence levels as men. It delves into the consequences of this lack of assurance on women in different aspects of life, particularly in the business world, and recommends ways for women to gain more confidence. She encourages women “to find opportunities to build confidence because this is actually one of the things that is holding us back”. Having experienced first-hand questioning her own abilities and hearing of women who too question their worth, Jessica is a fan of women's groups for mentoring, formal schemes, s and committees and anything else to be able to lean on your sisterhood.

Jessica is vocal that leaders should be “kind and gracious” and support young people in their route to success. Here are Jessica’s invaluable nuggets of advice:

Give Your Time

Be generous and support those who reach out to you because you could be the link to success.

Run With Your Passion

If you feel that you may need to retrain in a particular field that interests you, then it is worthwhile taking that time to gain those skills and qualifications. With relation to ESG, you could be a subject matter expert within a few years. So, don’t doubt yourself - embrace this new future of sustainability as the world in five years’ time from a career perspective is going to be very exciting.

Don’t Be Afraid

There are always people out there that are like you and want to help you.

Find Your Purpose

We need compassionate people trying to figure out solutions to global problems and that is why the ESG Sustainability space is so interesting and why I love it!

Serene Lee

General Counsel at Revantage Asia, A Blackstone Company



McKinsey & Company research found a strong correlation between increased gender diversity in senior executive teams and improved organisation performance. Women leaders provide different skills and perspectives to the table which can lead to improved solutions and uncovering of finer details. We were delighted to speak to [Serene Lee, General Counsel at Revantage Asia](#), who discussed her appreciation for the role that has provided her with great opportunities and learnings despite initially being in uncharted waters. She provides invaluable insight on staying the course and putting your own stamp on your success.

Stepping Up - Accepting challenges to develop yourself and grow your career:

Serene's career journey is one of resilience and ambition. After working as a corporate lawyer at an international law firm with brutal hours, she decided to transition into an in-house role with the Swiss-based investment firm, Partners Group, with USD 100+ billion assets under management. This role was mainly transactional and gave her the opportunity to gain experience in various lead buyouts, joint ventures and secondary transactions across private equity, real estate, infrastructure and debt asset classes.

In 2019, Serene was recruited to join Revantage Asia, a real estate operating platform newly established by Blackstone, the world's largest alternative asset manager. She saw this as an exciting opportunity to partner with the Blackstone powerhouse while embracing the challenge of establishing a new legal team in a startup-like environment with fewer than 30 employees at the time.

Serene was brought in to implement a new service line providing legal support to Blackstone real estate investments. After two years went by, however, she often felt as though nothing seemed to move forward despite her best efforts. There were many unexpected strategic changes beyond her control, and she began to wonder whether this role was the right move for her career. Nonetheless, Serene was determined to be successful and to make it work, so she decided to stay and focus on what was within her control. She believed in the business and strongly felt that she had more to offer in the role.

Serene Lee, General Counsel

Having started as sole legal counsel without a team and without established processes, it would have been easy to feel overwhelmed, and she had to quickly figure out how to navigate the unexpected changes she was facing. This was a massive learning curve, with many of the pressures also self-imposed due to her own high standards. Serene states that it is “important to remind yourself of the bigger picture to stay on course. While it might be easier to lean back and let circumstances dictate my role, I decided to step forward proactively by focusing on what I could control.” As she continued to learn and grow, she slowly became more confident in her ability to make decisions and provide guidance. Eventually, she was able to navigate the pressures of her job more easily and felt a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment from the work she was doing.

Her journey is proof that at first, it may seem overwhelming, but as time goes on, you will be able to find your footing and settle into your role. Taking on these challenges will grow you both as a person and within your career. Serene says, “feel comfortable in knowing that you are doing your best.” At first, Serene was intimidated by the thought of leading a team, but she quickly realised that she could handle the challenge. She had to rely on her resilience and confidence to face any hardships that came her way. Whilst also practicing a lot of patience, she had to learn to take a stand when it mattered and remain true to her decisions. She was determined to see the bigger picture and not be deterred by the challenges she faced. She even found herself disagreeing with senior stakeholders on occasion and being comfortable with engaging on that level because she knew the topic of discussion better than anyone in the room and could also trust her instincts.

Inspirations that aide her mindset:

In her journey towards leadership, Serene has been inspired by other female leaders and quickly formed a strong bond with her all-female legal team at Partners Group who provided mutual support and encouragement. When asked to pick out a particular person, she named ex-Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, describing Jacinda’s charisma and leadership as inspirational who handled her role with grace, empathy, authenticity and showed that you don’t have to be brash or fit the mould to win people over and make a difference.

Serene Lee, General Counsel

She is equally keen to give credit to her manager who saw potential in her and encouraged her to take on an expanded responsibility. He was very supportive and flexible, allowing her to adjust and develop based on her needs. She notes that having a manager that supports you is always a massive benefit knowing that someone has your back and can provide that extra substance when needed. She would recommend reaching out to those above you and highlighting that you are open to new challenges and wish to grow in your career. She suggests that those in senior positions also take it upon themselves to recognise and support talent and in turn this will help to create a stronger team and workforce.

Today Revantage Asia has over 100 employees in Singapore and Serene leads a team of 10 lawyers and corporate secretarial professionals.

Working with external stakeholders to reach your objectives:

Serene knows that external stakeholder partnerships are often pivotal to success. Working with our Director of Legal & Compliance in Singapore; Eng Chang (EC), she describes him as skilled at understanding her resourcing needs within the business and providing relevant candidates that fit the specification provided. She was delighted when he hired her entire legal team and after hiring the first three people, it enabled him to get a good feel for other candidates that would fit well into the culture and structure of her team.

Further to this, she commented, “EC was also able to provide guidance and advice on the best way to market the company and how to best position it to potential candidates. This critical collaboration between myself and EC was essential to the success being able to hire my in house legal team.”

Advice To Readers

“My advice is to take chances – if it’s in line with your career goals, give it a go and give it time when things are tough. Don't be afraid of taking on a challenge, even if it doesn't work out – it's all part of the learning experience. It's important to remember that nobody expects you to know it all, and to ask for help when you need it. You can achieve a lot if you have the support and resources to do so. Lastly, don't judge yourself too harshly when things don't go as planned – take it as an opportunity to learn from the situation and move forward.”

Carlotta Zorzi

Senior Partnerships Manager at Shopify



Women in technology are essential to the success of the tech industry. They bring unique perspectives and skills to the workplace, often leading to more innovation and creativity. Women are often underrepresented in the tech field, but their presence is becoming more visible as more programs and initiatives are created to encourage and support women in technology at all levels and across both technical and business roles. Women are crucial to the growth of the tech industry, and their contributions should be recognised and celebrated. Read [Carlotta Zorzi's](#) story to truly gauge the experience of a woman in tech and her fruitful advice to all.

Introduction to Carlotta:

Carlotta's story is an inspiration for women in business. Back at 19, had the drive to move away from her hometown in Italy and pursue her dreams abroad, which ultimately led her to the tech world. Her experience has allowed her to develop a wide range of skills and understand the importance of building a network. Over the years, she was able to move from her first roles in media on to ad tech and then ecommerce, leveraging her background and experience to develop an extensive cross-industry network.

When she initially left Italy, Carlotta made the decision to move to Scotland to study communications & advertising which then led her to an opportunity in San Jose where she was accepted for an exchange at SJSU in Silicon Valley. Here she joined a tech startup which focused on the olfactory experience – it had a device which would allow you to smell what you see on the screen! Her role here was Marketing and PR for the firm and co-ordinating interns which provided her with management experience at quite a young age. After that, Carlotta completed a MSc in Business & Economics in Sweden at Lund University and then proceeded to move to London to kick off her full time career in Customer Success and Partnerships. After a few years at ZenithOptimedia and Mediacom, Carlotta joined Oracle as a Sr Consultant and grew to lead global account teams in a Brand Partnerships remit. Since then, she moved to the Partnerships team at Shopify where she works to grow existing partner relationships and identify new potential ones. In addition to this, she also joined the Women in Shopify ERG Leadership Team where she led communications and operations for 3000 global members.

Carlotta Zorzi, Senior Partnerships Manager

Outside of her daily remit at Shopify, Carlotta is also a startup NED and consultant, speaker and tech career coach for School16, a NYC-based startup which focuses on social mobility through helping individuals land business roles in tech no matter their background.. Her experience spans a wide range of areas in media and technology, which she uses to help individuals and high-growth businesses develop in the tech industry through expansion strategy consultations, 1:1 professional coaching sessions and inspiring speaking engagements.

Growth, Development and Ambition:

Carlotta's experience in the tech industry has been one of growth and development, but also one that has seen her face some gender-based barriers. Her experience has shown her the importance of having mentors and investing in yourself to develop your skills, as well as the need to be strategic and adaptive in the way you communicate and position yourself, particularly when it comes to being an ambitious woman. Her advice to other women in business is to find mentors and sponsors who can help you develop and progress in your field and to be mindful of how you communicate and position yourself.

Her inspiring story is an example of how ambition and hard work can pay off. For women in tech, Carlotta advises finding a trusted mentor and an organisation that celebrates their ambition and encourages them to take risks to grow. She also emphasises that it is important to focus on self-awareness and empathy, so that you can understand the bigger picture and be open to different perspectives.

Joining Boards and Building Your Network:

When asking Carlotta about her thoughts on building your network, she had some important advice: "As a technology expert with experience both in executive and non executive roles, I can attest to the importance of building a strong network within the area you'd like. I believe that networking is essential for anyone, especially for women in business. Having a strong network can open up a world of possibilities, from job opportunities to access to resources and advice.

There are many amazing organisations out there who focus on different areas - from industry-specific to cause-focused networks. I personally found organisations like Women On Boards (womenonboards.net), The 30% Club and Connectd very helpful to expand my network in contexts that focus on non-executive roles as well as on emerging businesses, tech startups, and investors. Through these networks, I was able to start my non-executive career to really stress test my leadership and strategy muscle.

Being an advocate:

Carlotta's experience has allowed her to become a strong coach when it comes to helping others develop their careers through growing within their craft, improving their skills and developing themselves.

As a vocal advocate for the importance of having equal gender and socio-demographic representation at all levels, Carlotta believes that the low number of women in leadership positions in tech can be attributed to a lack of infrastructure that allows both men and women to contribute equally to both business and personal life, such as flexible working conditions and equally shared parental leave. Whilst things are moving in the right direction, Carlotta also believes that there is still a lot of work to be done by most organisations and it needs to be a priority to develop into a more equitable society.

Facing your fears and handling the competition:

Carlotta loves public speaking and inspiring people to take action without the fear of failure. She believes that women are often reluctant to take more visible positions due to the fear of not being enough, whereas there is power in what is often referred to as "imposter syndrome". Instead, she encourages people to accept this uncomfortable feeling and embrace it as their next step into growth. Lastly, she describes her biggest achievement as helping others gain clarity when it comes to identifying their strengths and purpose.

Advice To Readers

Carlotta's advice for women in business is to focus on building their network and to not be afraid of being ambitious for themselves and their organisations. It is important to seek out mentors, both formal and informal, who can help you develop and grow your skills. Additionally, she advises identifying companies that value your ambition and look for opportunities to try new things. Finally, she advises to always be open to learning and growing and to never be afraid to take risks.

Her mantra is one from Maya Angelou: "If you learn, teach; if you get, give". She believes that by helping others, it doesn't take away from what you have done, and encourages everyone to share their knowledge and experiences. When one boat rises, all boats rise.

Penny-JY Koo

General Counsel at AIA



According to a January 2022 article by law.com international, “Singapore’s latest senior counsel appointments take female representation to just 15%”. Space Executive was fortunate enough to speak with [Penny-JY Koo, General Counsel for AIA](#), about her experience in the industry and what advice she would give to young women entering the industry or aspiring to be senior executives.

Finding your voice and your passion:

Arts, Literature and Language: these were some of the things that at an early age, Penny had shown a deep interest in. According to her parents, she also demonstrated an aptitude for public speaking - she always had a voice and was not shy about using it! Penny explained: “Studying law was hence quite a logical choice for me as an 18-year-old when I was exploring what to major in. It was either law, literature or history, to be honest. I’ve been told that I am quite a principled and rational person, so pursuing a legal career came naturally to me.”

Penny started her career in private practice in Singapore, subsequently moving to China to practise with a Magic Circle firm a few years later. In 2012, a unique in-house opportunity with the AIA Group in Hong Kong presented itself, and Penny took up the challenge. This role focused specifically on the Health and Wellness side of the business, and came with a blend of commercial and legal responsibilities. She quickly established a strong track record of success in this role. Soon after, other opportunities within the Group arose. In 2017, Penny took on one of the biggest stretch assignments in her career – she was appointed as the AIA Singapore General Counsel. She shared: “the long and short of it is that AIA has always put its people first. As an organisation, they have provided me with numerous exciting professional growth opportunities through their formal mobility programme.” This programme provides individuals with a desire to grow professionally and personally, the opportunity to acquire new skill and strengthen their capabilities as they continue developing their career with AIA.

Penny-JY Koo, General Counsel

Oozing confidence and following your passion:

When asked about barriers or challenges Penny faced during her career, she admitted that she had been “blessed growing up and studying in Singapore”, a largely meritocratic society. Penny recognises that she was fortunate enough to have been supported at home and in school, and attributes her self-belief and drive to her parents’ constant and encouragement – that she could “be whatever I wanted to be.”

Penny spent 10 years in an all-girls school, and believes that spending her foundational years in an all-female environment helped to mould her confidence. She described her upbringing and experience in school as one that was very positive - free from distractions such as comparisons between male and female development, and gender bias. On the topic of gender discrimination, Penny said: “frankly, throughout my childhood and career, I rarely felt limited by my gender. That said, I do recognise that there are still many women around the world who have not had the same privilege and opportunities that I had growing up and pursuing my education in Singapore, where opportunities abound. Many women face immense challenges juggling the multiple hats they have to wear – at home, in society and at work. I am hopeful that in my lifetime, we will see this change for the better.”

Recognising that such challenges in the workplace still exist, and given Penny’s passion in empowerment and mentorship she and another management peer setup the AIA Women’s Network in 2020. Penny described this network as a “safe environment for women in the organisation to come together and help each other.”

When asked about the details around the uptake of those attending the network, Penny said that she was pleasantly surprised to see strong interest from women across all levels of the organisation. The AIA Women’s Network provides a broad spectrum of events: everything from informal lunches, which provided a safe space for people to ask for advice or discuss projects they’re working on; to keynote speakers discussing their experiences. Penny endeavours to take a bottom-up approach in structuring the programming of the network, and strives to consider requests for activities from all members of the network.

Mentors and the power of observing:

Throughout her career, Penny has benefited immensely from mentors, formal and otherwise. She has also been a mentee and a mentor of AIA's mentorship program. Penny said: "every corporate individual should bear in mind that there is something to be learnt from everyone, even if it's what not to do." She encourages our readers to always put their hand up and to use their voice: "tell someone you like what they did, tell them you were inspired or motivated by what they said in an article or at a conference and that you'd like to learn more about it. Ask them how is best to connect to take a conversation forward." This is something that Penny has always believed in and has done throughout her career.

She takes the time to observe people and understand the 'whys' behind their behaviour - "Listen more than you speak. There is something to learn from everyone." She considers if their approach is something that she should take on herself. She explained "I look at different styles of leadership, their communication styles, their ways of organising their teams, how they attract and retain talent. I'm a bit of a sponge, and I do like to observe and see what is working well and what isn't – mentorship is a big concept but when it comes down to application in terms of how as an individual you can grow and benefit – the possibilities are endless."

Outside of work development:

When asked about whether Penny takes time outside of work to develop her skillset, she responded with an interesting fact. She states that she is cautious about her digital footprint, keenly aware of emerging cybersecurity risks. In a bid to enhance her knowledge in this area, she has taken technology related courses to expand her expertise. Penny expanded on this saying "technology is a big word; it could be anything from cybersecurity controls to digital tools/apps to analysing buyers' data on records to AI usage, chatbots etc. I've come to realise especially as in-house counsel, that just being a technical lawyer isn't enough anymore." She discussed how the world has changed over time with the pandemic only accelerating this change. "Business trends and needs are running way faster than legislation is. One's value and effectiveness as in-house counsel is in finding solutions for the business within the regulatory framework. To do so, the counsel needs strong internal business familiarity, as well as a keen eye on how the external business world is evolving."

Penny explains that undertaking even short simple courses can lead to self-improvement and elevating your skills, taking your value to the next level. Next on Penny's list are courses around corporate governance and ESG.

Penny-JY Koo, General Counsel

We moved onto the topic of public speaking or effective communication given her role requires this expertise. Penny said: “everyone owes it to themselves, especially if they are aiming for a senior role in an organisation, to learn to be excellent communicators.”

When we asked her for a tip, she said “a great tool to improve your skills is to ask someone close to you to video you while you’re speaking or presenting a topic without you knowing and then watching it together.” Penny explained “you then see how you appear and sound to your audience. Validate what works well and what doesn’t with a trusted friend or partner.” She admitted that “it may be a little painful or awkward to watch yourself, especially when you notice gestures or expressions you didn’t know you were making! This exercise helps you to assess what to adjust so that you are more effectively heard and understood.”

As we began to close our discussion, we asked Penny what her key takeaways and advice would be to anyone looking to take a role in the legal sector. We found her advice detailed and valuable:

“Follow your heart but be practical”

Penny explained “I think that work is only meaningful if you can find purpose in it. 9 times out of 10 it’s purposeful only if it speaks to something in your heart.” To give further context, Penny mentioned that her very first in-house role with AIA was to head up the legal function for a newly set-up health and wellness joint venture. Her passion for health and wellness was the key driver behind that decision. Passion and belief in the impact and importance of the business made the late nights and challenging clients easier to deal with. She closed this piece of advice off with “it is that passion that will keep you going because it’s meaningful and worth doing, to you.”

“Don’t be afraid to ask for help”

We have seen from past conversations and insights from studies compiled by the likes of McKinsey and Gartner that women are often generally more reluctant to ask for promotions or salary reviews or stretch assignments. Penny said “I don’t think it’s because women are less confident than men generally. I suspect it is to do with the fact that women are slightly more risk adverse.” This approach can be self-limiting for women, so Penny’s advice is to “put your hand up for stretch assignments or to ask for help with development goals because it’s a sign of strength.”

“Figure out what your enablers are for success”

Penny expanded to say, “for example, these can be your trusted inner circle, work seniors or mentors, talent you want in your team, the boss you want to work for eventually, the kind of courses you are interested in taking.” Her advice is clear, take time to figure out your career ambitions, and find these enablers to support you getting there.

Heather Ribbans

Director at Ribbans Consulting



According to Deloitte, “among the most senior roles across the globe within financial services institutions (FSIs), women held 21% of board seats, 19% of C-suite roles, and 5% of CEO positions in 2021.” These statistics illustrate that more work needs to be done to advance gender equity across the industry. They should also motivate firms to review and evaluate how they plan to advance women in leadership across their organisations.

Women are playing an increasingly important role in developing new payment technologies, driving innovation, creating customer-centric experiences, and leading the way in financial inclusion. That is why we are delighted to have the opportunity to talk to [Heather Ribbans, Director at Ribbans Consulting](#) about her journey and advice for readers on how to advance their careers and succeed in the industry.

Introduction to finance and building expertise:

Heather's love for finance had been deeply ingrained within her for as long as she could remember. Heather's career in finance began in business recovery, restructuring and turn around management. Balancing her career and being a mother is important to her and through determination and hard work, she has been able to succeed.

Heather's entry into the world of embedded finance began with her joining the team at PCS, where she played a key role in the development of their corporate expense solution. Working alongside the team, Heather utilised her expertise in accountancy to identify specific product features that would help differentiate the offering and make it a best-in-class product.

With her in-depth understanding of accountancy requirements, Heather was able to bring a fresh perspective to the table, helping the team drive new business opportunities and gain a deeper understanding of the market. Her keen attention to detail and her commitment to excellence helped ensure that the final product was aligned with the latest industry trends and met the unique needs of businesses.

Heather Ribbans, Director

She was then headhunted by a foreign exchange company to build out a multi currency card programme. Heather was able to leverage her expertise and experience to create an impressive commercial proposition across the company's portfolio.

Heather's appetite for challenge led her to join Railsr, where she was tasked with building out their card proposition from scratch. Determined to succeed, Heather and her team worked tirelessly to gain the necessary licenses and create a successful product.

Today, Heather continues to bring her unique blend of skills and experience to the embedded finance space, helping clients achieve their financial goals and stay ahead of the curve. With her unwavering dedication to excellence and her passion for driving growth and innovation, Heather is a valuable asset to any team looking to excel in this rapidly evolving industry

Questions around equality and the battle to succeed:

Heather faced discrimination in a field that promoted equality, but she refused to let it hold her back. She embraced risk-taking and her unique perspective as a woman, building relationships and demonstrating her expertise. Despite initial challenges, Heather persevered and gained the respect of her colleagues, succeeding in a male-dominated industry. Her inspiring story shows how determination and staying true to oneself can lead to success.

Early years and experiences which contributed to her success:

Heather's upbringing in Crystal Palace, with limited resources, instilled in her a de-termination to make something of her life and find a way to be successful. After travelling for five years and living in Australia and Southeast Asia, she developed a fierce sense of independence and self-reliance.

She became passionate about mastering her product and understanding the value chain, striving to present her work in the best possible way. This focus led to her be-coming a subject matter expert in her field. She cites Louise Murray, the first female trader at Barclays, as one of her inspirations, and working alongside successful women like her was instrumental in Heather's learning and success.

Heather Ribbans, Director

Heather's success in the payments industry is largely due to her ability to build strong relationships and her willingness to step outside of her comfort zone to net-work with others. She emphasises the importance of treating others with respect and kindness and has always believed in treating others as she would like to be treated.

Heather advises young women looking to break into fintech to focus on building relationships and leveraging the resources and support available within their organisation. She stresses the importance of understanding people's needs and approaching them in a way that makes them feel comfortable.

Heather encourages everyone to attend events, engage with peers and leaders, and immerse themselves in the industry. By networking and building strong relationships, one can create a supportive network that will help them achieve their goals and overcome obstacles.

In Heather's view, success comes from putting in the extra hours and effort, taking the time to build one's network and relationships, and embracing the opportunities available in the industry. By following Heather's advice, young women can learn to navigate the fintech landscape and achieve success in this exciting and dynamic field.

Contact

Special thanks to Jessica Robinson, Serene Lee, Carlotta Zorzi, Penny-JY Koo and Heather Ribbans for their kind participation.

Should you wish to discuss this series or your hiring needs, please do not hesitate to reach out to our specialist team or visit our website.



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