



Season 5, Episode 6 – Women in Global Careers

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Stacie Berdan:

Welcome to the global careers podcast sponsored by GW-CIBER – THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world. Whether or not you've considered moving abroad or taking on an international role, globalization will impact your career. So join us for a lively discussion as we explore what an international career really means. My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and I'll be your host!

In Season 5, we focus on women in global careers: the challenges and opportunities and how things have evolved over the last few years. Join us as we hear from eight global women as they share their inspiring stories working around the world in such fields as tech, diplomacy, investing, marketing and so much more. Today's guest is Cherie Weible, Senior Director of Strategy and Global Affairs, Responsible Care®, Sustainability and Market Outreach for the American Chemistry Council. Although she's based in Washington, DC, Sherry has extensive international business experience in trade policy, international market access, global government affairs, and commercial diplomacy, which she uses to advance the commercial interests of U.S. companies around the world. A natural communicator, Cherie builds relationships with stakeholders, and has worked across Asia, Europe, and Latin America, including 15 years at the U.S. Commerce Department. And I am very happy to say that she is a GW alum. Welcome, Cherie. Thanks for joining us today.

Cherie Weible:

Well, thank you, Stacie. I'm delighted to be here.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah. Right... So, one of the objectives of our podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there – more than just titles. Tell us, what is it that you do?

Cherie Weible:

Great. Well, in my current role at the American Chemistry Council (ACC), I lead efforts to advance globally the chemical industry's voluntary initiative to really help drive improvement in the safe management of chemicals, right, because many of these products are hazardous, so we want to manage them safely. And we're looking to help industry achieve excellence in their environmental health, safety, and security performance. And this program is really the industry's commitment to sustainability. So, ACC is a part of a global organization called the International Council of Chemical Associations, and most of my work is really done under that framework. So, what I do on a daily basis is I work with 63 other chemical associations around the world, so the ACC counterparts if you will, to really help them strengthen the performance of their domestic industry to do things like reduce their emissions and advanced their environmental performance, and, of course, work to ensure the health and safety of their chemical workers. I will also add, I do work with a lot of multilateral stakeholders, such as the United Nations Environment Program. You know, there's a lot of overlap between our missions, and we have a lot of mutual



priorities, like, things like the adoption of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals. So that's a really interesting part of my job.

Stacie Berdan:

That's so cool, you know. Because you think of, you know, the American Chemistry Council... oh, that must just be U.S. based, right, U.S. focused. But it is amazing. Of course, there are chemicals around the world. And it's great. The U.S. takes the leadership role in helping these councils and associations around the world safely use, dispose of, I guess, the products. That's really cool. What a neat international and global career. But you've been there a few years now, right, but you've started out working for the U.S. Commerce Department, you've successfully switched jobs. And I love to see this, you know, from public sector to private sector now in Association... Tell us how and why you shifted.

Cherie Weible:

All right. Well, so, in the Commerce Department, you know, I really worked for many years to help companies do business overseas. And over the course of my year, my time there, I worked on a whole wide array of things, including trade remedies, trade promotion, trade policy. And for much of that time, I was really looking to help companies by removing market access barriers that inhibited a U.S. firm's ability to compete fairly in those overseas markets. And so, you know, when I thought about leaving the Commerce Department, what happened was the Commerce Department offered something called a buyout, which meant that employees that met certain criteria could leave early without penalty to their retirement. And those kinds of offers, of course, they don't come along very often, and it just seemed like a great opportunity to explore options in the private sector. And so, that's what I did. I took the buyout and I left commerce and was fortunate enough to take on this role here at ACC. In terms of, you know, differences, I do think that there are many. But there are also a lot of similarities too.

Stacie Berdan:

What are some of those differences?

Cherie Weible:

One of the differences that I've experienced in my transition from government to private sector is the way in which we communicate. And I think that's largely driven by the audience to which we're directing our communications. So, the example I would give is that while I was at Commerce Department, I would draft a lot of briefing memos for Secretary of Commerce or other senior officials, and then I would verbally brief them in advance of a meeting or an overseas trip. Now here at ACC, my audience is largely either ACC member companies or the counterparts that I work with overseas (so folks in associations around the world). And so, instead of writing a briefing memo, what I would do is I prepare a PowerPoint presentation. And I then brief officials or counterparts using those slides. So it's a bit more informal. It's just, I think, again, the audience that you're speaking to... Another difference that I've seen is the sort of the administrative process, if you will, in the government versus the private sector. And here an example would be what I would call the clearance process, right? So when I wrote one of those briefing memos at Commerce, there was a form that I had to have signed by, you know, the five or six people that had to officially review and clear that memo. Here at ACC, sometimes my boss will review my work product, seldom does it go really, you know, much above that. I do oftentimes have peers review information. But you know, there's a bit less of... I guess you would call it bureaucracy. But again, you know, there's a reason for this. It's the audience, who is receiving that information, right. When I was writing a memo for someone at the Commerce Department, let's say it was for the Secretary of Commerce, it was very important that the talking points that were provided, were factually correct, that the policy direction implied was accurate, and that it really fit with the broader political goals of the administration at the time. So, a difference but I think a reasonable one. And I guess, a final difference would be the types and amount of collaboration, right, I would say that there's a lot of collaboration with others in both spaces. In the U.S. government, it was a little more formal. And again, thinking about the work that we were doing – if we



were working on preparing for a trip for cabinet member or president, you know, we had, there was a formal structure that was led by the National Security Council. In the private sector, when I collaborate, it's a bit more informal, less structure to it, but obviously looking to have the same, you know, the same types of outcomes.

Stacie Berdan:

So interesting, that's great for our listeners to really, truly understand. You painted a really good picture. So thanks for that. I want to go back to something you said earlier regarding working for ACC, and sustainability and ESG. What are some of the challenges and opportunities that you see today in the industry on a global scale?

Cherie Weible:

Well, there are certainly challenges, you know, in the chemical sector, and one of those really relates to... in the ESG space, right. Stakeholders are increasingly calling on industry to be very transparent, they want us to report on our environmental health, safety, security performance. And I would say that, you know, this is something we're experiencing in the chemical industry, but I think we're seeing it across all industries, right. And it's a challenge, not because there's a lack of interest or willingness on the part of industry, but sometimes the data that we are being asked to provide is quite challenging to actually collect and report. And I'll go back to the point I made earlier that there are 63 chemical associations around the world. And some of them are in places like Sri Lanka or Myanmar, right, and industry in those parts of the world may find it a little bit more challenging than say, you know, we might here in the U.S. in coming up with that kind of information. So, it is a big part of what I do. I would say another challenge that we're facing in the ESG space relates to plastics pollution, right. There's a global call for a reduction in plastics pollution, and that's a global problem, it's quite complicated. There are a lot of factors and, you know, the cause for the issues that we're seeing, not only in the marine space, but elsewhere, you know, another very complicated aspect of the work that we do. And then a final challenge, I would sort of note is, how to share the work and the learnings that are being done in all parts of the world, right. And I go back to, sort of, the developing parts of the world. You know, not all countries around the world have a framework for the safe management of chemicals. Right. Here in the U.S. we do, you know, Europe, many of those countries have a regulatory framework. But that's not, that's not globally applied as of yet. And so that's something that we're working to address here, you know, working to help other countries actually build that framework and that structure, to make sure that they are safely managing their chemicals.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, so you're painting a really good picture of how... we are beginning to really understand how your job is so global, yet you're based in DC... How do you successfully build these relationships and collaborate with people around the world?

Cherie Weible:

Well, being able to collaborate and build successful relationships with folks around the world has been key to not only my job here at ACC, but also to my job at the Commerce Department, right. I mean, at Commerce, I was helping U.S. companies but I was dealing with my Commerce Department colleagues around the world, based in our embassies and consulates. And I was also dealing, working with foreign government officials around the world. And so, I think there are some key things that you have to think about when you're looking to develop and maintain those relationships. And I would say, first and foremost, you have to be very culturally aware, right. Customs and norms, they differ around the world, and one shouldn't assume that the way we do business or the way we conduct ourselves in meetings here in the U.S. is the same as what's done in other parts of the world. So, first step is always be aware of, you know, those types of things with whatever, whoever the counterpart is that you're looking to engage with, or the country that you're going to visit, right. Be sensitive to those social and cultural norms. And then, the next thing I would say is communication, right, that's key. I would recommend establishing a regular cadence of meetings, right. So what I do is, depending on the counterpart and the issue that we're working on, set



up monthly calls, or monthly or quarterly meetings, right, to put some type of structure to the relationship, and to really demonstrate that it's important to your work and your portfolio. I would also encourage people to, you know, be reliable. You know, especially when you're dealing with folks around the world, you're not meeting face to face all the time. And so, there can sometimes be a tendency to sort of minimize the importance of those relationships, or maybe somehow think that they may not be as important as those relationships with people that you are seeing and meeting in person. And I would, you know, strongly dissuade people from having that mindset, right. You need to make sure that you do what you say you're going to do, whatever you commit to in these discussions – make sure you follow through. And even go beyond what you've committed to, when possible. An example would be, you know, if you come upon some information, or you learn some topical news, share it with that person, you know, outside of your regular meeting cadence, just to demonstrate that, you know, you do value the relationship and you're trying to be a constructive partner. And then, the last tip I would have in this space is to actually meet in person when possible, right. Video calls and meeting via Zoom is great, and, of course, it enables us to do a lot of things we couldn't otherwise do. But there really is nothing like, quite like human interaction. And so, if and when possible, really try to actually meet that person in person.

Stacie Berdan:

Do you travel a lot? Those are great tips. Cherie, fantastic tips. Thank you for those... But do you travel a lot – I know COVID maybe interrupted some things – but throughout your career?

Cherie Weible:

Well, I started my time here at ACC just before COVID, the end of 2019. And I was actually in Mumbai, when ACC decided there would be no more international travel. So, like the timing was not ideal. And so, really, for the first couple of years here, I didn't have the opportunity to meet any, any of my colleagues and these folks in person. Thankfully, we're, you know, past that, and I am able to travel. So, at this point, internationally, I'll probably travel, I'm guessing, four times this year, and I'm working on building up my schedule now. You know, of course, it all depends on your, your resources, you know, does your company or association have the budget to send you, you know. Travel has actually become more expensive since COVID. But probably about four times a year is what I'm looking at.

Stacie Berdan:

That's manageable, that's pretty good. It's pretty good. Do you have one piece of advice – I know, this is very tricky, because you... there are probably so many – but one piece of advice for the people looking to pursue a career, an international career?

Cherie Weible:

I would say, be open to all opportunities, whether that's in the Government, private sector... You know, I was a Wolcott Fellow at GW, and was planning to go into business, to corporate America. But as part of my fellowship, I was expected to work in the public sector for four years. And so, that's why I pursued my, you know, my first job out of GW at the Department of Commerce; and it really led me to a lot of fascinating, different jobs and positions, and travel around the world that I never would have thought of or anticipated. So, be open to all opportunities, take that first job, you just never know where it'll lead you.

Stacie Berdan:

I love it. Excellent advice. Excellent. How about navigating a career while working in, I'm just going to make a leap of faith here that it is, a male dominated industry, chemicals?



Cherie Weible:

Well, it is... Um, you know, I would say probably, particularly in the manufacturing space, you know, but I have to say, you know, in my time here at ACC, my gender has not been an issue. You know, ACC is actually quite focused on diversity and inclusion. And they've even developed a program called FOSSI – the Future of STEM Scholars Initiative – you know, they're looking to provide scholarships to students providing STEM degrees at historically black colleges and universities. So, there's a definite awareness in the industry that they want to be very diverse and inclusive. Now, my time in Government... you know, that was... it goes back always, and so, there may have been a bit more of an issue, during my time at Commerce, in the gender space... But, really, I think I was able to overcome that by just really being prepared, you know, knowing your... what your position is, you know, going to meetings prepared, you know, participating in meetings as appropriate, and really just doing your job well, and, you know, being a good example, an employee that, that anyone would want to have on their team.

Stacie Berdan:

Right. So, rise above it all, essentially, right, rise above it all. You're just there to do your job, doesn't matter what your gender is. Good, I like that. I like that. Do you have a story, maybe, or something to share – one of the most challenging issues you have faced in your career? It's one of the questions that students are always interested in hearing about.

Cherie Weible:

Hmm. Well, that's a great question, and, you know, a difficult one. I would say, one of the big challenges for me was, you know, and this is somewhat personal, it's really choosing, having to choose sometimes between personal and professional goals. Right... And that's... So it steps a little bit outside of just a career issue, but it impacts your career, right. I mean, I had a plan in mind when I came to DC, I wanted to join the Foreign Service, and, you know, then I met, you know, the person who's now my husband, and so my plans changed, right. And so, sometimes you do have to, you have to make choices, and you have to alter or what you think is your career path. And, you know, in my experience that I have was, of course, the right choice. And, you know, I think you just have to be mindful that when you make those choices, you may be what you think, you know, forgoing one opportunity or one path but it always lead you to other opportunities and options that you may never have thought of.

Stacie Berdan:

That gets back to the point you made earlier, piece of advice, which is just be open, right. You can have these paths, you can have the strategies and these 17-point plans, you know, but usually by about point three, it all breaks loose and you have to start thinking about something else, yeah. That's good.

Cherie Weible:

You never know what life will bring.

Stacie Berdan:

No... And the personal and the professional – they are so intertwined, definitely intertwined. So, yeah... How about a risk? Is there a risk that you've taken in your career path, you know, and what did you learn from that?

Cherie Weible:

Oh, yes, I have taken a few risks, with a significant amount of stress, I will say. So, two big risks come to mind, right. I was in Commerce and I had spent, you know, many years working on European issues, right. I had been in the Office of Europe for, I don't know, probably close to a decade, and so I had a depth of knowledge, I had a network, contacts (domestically, overseas), I, you know, hired and trained people. So I, you know, had a certain amount of, you know, subject matter expertise, if you will. And there was a promotion opportunity that was going



to take me into the area of Southeast Asia. And I knew nothing about Southeast Asia, I had never been to Southeast Asia. So it was, it was a bit of a leap, it took me out of my comfort zone. I really had no contacts, I didn't have the depth of knowledge. But I took the opportunity when it presented itself. And it was just, it was a great, a great thing to do. And same thing when I left the Government, right... I had been in the Government for so long, and leaving all of that behind and sort of starting over in the private sector – again, you start with really no contacts and you don't have that in-depth knowledge and expertise – it can be very frightening, very, very, you know... can cause you a lot of anxiety. But I will say that I found both times that I took the risk and made the change to be very rewarding, broadened my depth of knowledge, learned new areas, and found it to be very rewarding professionally.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah. Is there a specific tip, maybe, you can give people to help them (or a couple), some strategies, if they're making such a big change?

Cherie Weible:

Well, I would say, don't be afraid to take a chance. Yes, right. And honestly, trust your gut. If, you know, there is an opportunity that presents itself, don't be afraid to take that chance. If you make a mistake, you can always, you know, change course down the road, right. It's hard to make a fatal mistake in your career, right. One opportunity will likely lead you to others; it may just help you identify what you don't want to do for the next 20 or 30 years, which is, in and of itself, a good thing. So, don't be afraid to take chances. You know, be open to those new opportunities that it might lead you to.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, that's great. You're so thoughtful, so wise, you have depth and breadth of experience that, I'm sure, our listeners are loving hearing from. Is there a piece of advice that you were given, anytime along your career, that you think is maybe one of the top pieces of advice and you're glad you got it?

Cherie Weible:

Um, well, I think, you know, someone said to me, you know, trust your instincts. You know, as I said in the last question, they said, you know, really just trust your instincts. Don't underestimate your ability, right? Don't ever think that if an opportunity comes along that you can't do it; commit yourself, jump in with both feet, do the best you can, and you will most likely be successful.

Stacie Berdan:

Good advice. Great advice. So, as we wrap up... This has been terrific, I could keep on talking with you, Cherie, but I know that you have a very busy schedule. So, one last question – is there anything else you'd like to add for our listeners, maybe something that I didn't ask you or something you want to make sure that you communicate?

Cherie Weible:

Well, one thing that I would share with your listeners is that I would encourage students or, you know, who are about to graduate to really do consider working in the public sector. It really wasn't top of my mind when I was at GW, but for the reasons I've shared it was a path that I pursued. I know, given the discourse in our politics now, there may be some sort of disinclination to explore those government opportunities. But from my experience, there are opportunities in the government that you just can't get in the private sector. And it really gives you an opportunity to... Particularly for the international field, international affairs, international business – that type of knowledge and firsthand expertise is highly valued and sought after in the public sector. So, it is a really good first job as you start your career path.



Stacie Berdan:

I love that advice. Yes. And you have shown how you can start in public and move to private, and you can move around, and you can have these great global jobs. And the different crossover... really, they are all benefit each other. So you're bringing something different to your new employer, right.

Cherie Weible:

Exactly.

Stacie Berdan:

That's wonderful. This has been a terrific conversation, Cherie. I really appreciate your taking the time and thanks so much for being with us.

Cherie Weible:

Well, thank you for inviting me. It was my pleasure.

[Music]

Stacie Berdan:

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!