



Episode 7 – Global Trade

Lisa Schroeter, Global Director - Trade and Investment Policy, Dow Chemical Company
Stacie Berdan, International Careers Expert (Podcast Host)

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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 about what it's like to work globally. If you love adventure and thrive on taking risks and operating outside your comfort zone, join us as we explore the ins and outs of pursuing an international career! My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, and I'll be your host! Our First Season dives into what it's like **Working Globally Through the Pandemic** – and the outlook for global careers in a post-COVID-19 world.

The staggering impact of the coronavirus pandemic on global trade continues to reverberate around the world. Closed borders, travel bans, export restrictions, and interrupted supply chains have exposed the dependency on the worldwide interconnectedness of goods, services, capital, and people to the average consumer. All of a sudden, we couldn't get the supplies we needed. Yet despite the many challenges, our guest today sees opportunities. Lisa Schroeter is the Global Director, Trade and Investment Policy for Dow, the material science company. She is a GW alumna, the President of Women in International Trade WIIT Trust, and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Lisa's passion for trade and her consensus building, problem-solving approach have enabled her to identify current industry challenges amidst the pandemic and turn them into opportunities. What solutions does she envision? And how will those impact working globally in a post COVID-19 world? Have a listen as Lisa shares practical ways to gain experience during these virtual times and her tips for growing a network in the virtual world - and hear what she says is the best decision she ever made – and wants listeners to follow suit. Welcome, Lisa, it's a pleasure to have you with us to talk about international careers and working globally through the pandemic.

Lisa Schroeter:

Thank you so much, Stacie, I appreciate the opportunity.

Stacie Berdan:

One of the objectives of this podcast, Lisa, is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there. You've had such a successful and fulfilling career in global trade. What a time to be in trade, wow! Tell us, what does a career in trade policy really encompass?

Lisa Schroeter:

That is such a great question and, as you mention, pretty topical these days. And, for me that's one of the great things about trade policy. There's never been a more interesting time to get involved, both because there's so much activity in the policy space and that creates opportunities whether you're working for a private sector company like mine, or you're working in the public sector for government or at any of our embassies around the world. Or, doing the same on behalf of other countries or in companies that have spent so much time and effort investing in the United States. But what I really think is interesting about trade is that it's such an open area in terms of covering so many other interesting issues that are playing out in the world today. Trade is a great avenue to work on broader issues like environment. We're having conversation about WTO who wants to work more on the trade and environment space. Development! When you think about how trade agreements are trying to drive economic reform in emerging economies in places like Africa, and others around the world. Or even women's empowerment or global health. The great thing about trade policy is it's not black and white. It's very hard to set a border around



it, and at the end of the day, it becomes a great avenue to address, to be able to work on a lot of issues. And for me that has always been an exciting part of the job.

Stacie Berdan:

You make quite the compelling case for a career in trade! If a student is considering such a career, what do they need to know, tell us – how can they prepare to enter the field, especially now?

Lisa Schroeter:

So, a great thing about trade is that it's really a very skills-based and diverse area. You need to know things like, how to get access to information, how to concisely pull together information and analysis that you've got in a one-pager, what's going on in the world and what does it mean to us and what are we going to do about it. Do you have the ability to communicate those issues in a clear, compelling way to senior executives? A lot of this is communications skills but a lot of it is also about building a network and resources so that you have access to what's going on. Not just locally, but in whatever part of the world you are dealing with. So those social communication skills are really critical.

Stacie Berdan:

And I imagine these skills are even more important these days in our mostly virtual world. So, how has your industry been affected by the pandemic?

Lisa Schroeter:

For the chemical industry, clearly we have been, for the most part, essential providers throughout the pandemic. A lot of our materials go into, what have been incredibly important necessary covid response and recovery materials, like PPE, like pharmaceuticals, like hand sanitizer. So, that's very much has been something where from an operational standpoint, we've been able to keep facilities running, and clearly for an industry like ours, where safety and security are such a crucial part of everyday operations (much less now during the pandemic), we've been able to do everything we can to ensure the safety and security of our workforce, too. From an industry standpoint, that's something where, to relate it to where we are on trade policy, I happen to chair, we have an international council of chemical associations, the ICCA, is a group that brings together leading chemical trade associations from around the world. And as the chair of their trade network, that was something we were looking to leverage to really demonstrate how the industry was trying to be supportive and how we could translate that into some of the lessons learned through the pandemic, ways to translate that into opportunities for policy going forward that could help us not only recovering from the pandemic but looking more broadly at economic recovery writ large. So, at the ICCA we had submitted a letter to the G20, to really help demonstrate kind of those essential contributions, but then also look at the things we've learned along the way, like customs allowing electronic documentation – something that many countries have been committed to for a longtime, may or may not have fully moved into implementation but something that's really been proven through the pandemic that helps us get things like medical materials and PPE to communities that much quicker. So, it's really kind of gone hand in hand when you think about, you know, how companies have looked to evolve and continue to contribute in this space, and the also how those lessons learned can help us do better as we go forward.

Stacie Berdan:

I'm really glad to hear that some good is coming out of it, especially as it relates to a more efficient global supply chain for essential materials and supplies. Is there a particular geographic example that you can point to that you've seen around the world that has made great progress in this space?

Lisa Schroeter:

Well, for the chemical industry, really being such a global industry to begin with, obviously so many of us, like my company, we've got operations, we operate in 31 countries around the world, we sell in 170. So, from a supply-chain standpoint there was a lot of opportunity making sure that particularly where there were economies that have



may be shut down more there were still opportunities, ways to ensure that we could maintain that security of supply. I think that has certainly been a challenge, I think that a lot of us are re-looking at kind of how that globe spans out... Again, it's one of the areas of opportunity from the perspective of, you know, how can we make sure identifying some of these may be antiquated or outdate barriers. You know, are there opportunities for growth... When you look at Africa, for example, where many of the countries actually came together while they already had a broad commitment on driving a continental African free trade agreement, which would be obviously something that would take some time to actually implement, but it's a huge step forward in building really more of an intra-Africa market. Those countries, some countries, look to accelerate by building a platform, public and private sector together that could facilitate, streamline, and make more efficient the delivery of covid response materials. So, I think for a lot of us, this has been an opportunity to really re-look at supply chain and what are the upgrades we've been talking about for so long, but what are they ways we can all work together - public and private sector - to make things more efficient, especially as we look at, and hopefully as we all see soon, as we start to come out of this pandemic, that we can look at ways to accelerate and secure the economic recovery that'll benefit everybody.

Stacie Berdan:

Oh, that's a great example, and one that I'll try to follow the progress of in the coming months. I mean – Afrika! That's really neat. There's lots of opportunity out there but it has also been such a trying time for most of us. What positive changes have you noticed, have you seen any, you know, are you hopeful? What do you think is going to continue post-pandemic that you look forward to?

Lisa Schroeter:

I have to say I think that's one of the good things kind of coming out of this time period is that as people being at home without doing their commutes or big travel trips, there is more time to, basically invest more time in these relationships. I feel I really noticed that as I'm doing Zoom and Teams and Webex calls all day long you do take the time to be more personal, to get to know colleagues, to spend those first 10-15 minutes rather than it being transactional and jumping straight into the project, finding out how they're doing, how is their family, how their community is responding.

Stacie Berdan:

That's really good advice for all of us. To use technology to connect with teams and people, each other, on a deeper level. Bring back some of the humanity that has gone missing from many of the work environments caused by this 24/7 digital demand – we are always on, on, on. It's something that I know I learned when I've worked internationally in my days in Hong Kong. Yet the pandemic has highlighted some problems with globalization. What's your take on the long-term impact of COVID on globalization?

Lisa Schroeter:

Well, I think clearly, as you've said, this is definitely two sides of the story. So, you really see where a lot of the concerns come from and very valid concerns. There are serious inequality issues that have come out, both trade and the broader economic system. There are also real reasons to rethink, particularly the way globalization has happened, better diversification of your supply chain because no one wants to be stuck with a single supplier at a time where that territory may end up in lockdown. That said, it does still create a lot of opportunities... At the end of the day, no one country produces everything. And no one country has access to everything they need to produce, nor do they have access in one country to the consumer base that's going to make commerce and innovation successful. But where we CAN really come together is, you know, how do we take a lot of these lessons learned through this pandemic time period and think about what we can do together to make this a better place. And I think particularly when you look at issues like women's economic empowerment, innovation, and sustainability – these can be great examples of where, when we think of globalization, it isn't just that production element, it's also that sharing of ideas, and creativity, and practicality that helps us solve real challenges around the planet.



Stacie Berdan:

That's really well said, Lisa. It sounds like the global workforce will require different skills, right, to work though and achieve some of these goals? What are some of those that you think are needed in a post-COVID world?

Lisa Schroeter:

The opportunity to continue to learn new skills and to really continue to grow your network. I think, I know particularly in trade policy that's a critical element of it. Because knowing who to talk to, how to find out what's going on – just what we talked about before – learning what's going on in other economies or other cultures. What's the real draw, not just what you've heard or what you've read on the internet but what are people on the ground really saying. That ability to kind of continue to ensure a strong resource of information and connections, is going to be really critical, whether it's because you're looking to move on and try something new or you really need that expertise to contribute to the job that you're doing right now.

Stacie Berdan:

Building on that, can you focus a bit more closely on students (boy, my heart goes out to them)? They are not having the traditional college experience these days... What are some of the things they might be able to do now to help them prepare to go global?

Lisa Schroeter:

I do think there are ways, kind of similar to what we've talked about when you think about technology and the opportunity... people do have a little bit more time on their hands nowadays. And I feel like, particularly I can speak for the trade community here in DC, that's a lot of people who have had really good experience that enjoy giving back. So, whether it's, you know, getting on the WIIT distribution list, or dialing into a couple of their webinars, pick out issues that you find interesting and find opportunities to be educated in a way that's outside of your textbook. We've done a couple of WIIT seminars recently, on USMCA for example, and the trade negotiations, and those panels are led by some of the people who did the negotiations. It's a great practical learning on many of the topics that you might be learning in class, but now you're getting a very real world interpretation. So, looking for those opportunities to engage and, in particular, hear from the community that maybe you're thinking about joining. You want to get a sense of what experts are out there talking about what they are doing, and also start to create the network that we're talking about. Many of those individuals are committing to do a panel, they'd also be happy to do a coffee. And while it's a virtual coffee these days, being able to connect with people, get a sense of how things really operate at that practical level in a town like DC, or for that matter a town like Brussels, reaching out through the alumni group or some of these trade organizations, I think really gives you a way to balance the opportunity of looking at how you're learning in class vs how people are really conveying how these issues are playing out in the real world.

Stacie Berdan:

Lots of terrific, practical advice, Lisa! Wow, terrific! You know, and as a GW alumna, very special, you know firsthand the benefits of the GW community. Tell us, how did GW prepare you for a career in this space?

Lisa Schroeter:

I have always said that I am so lucky that I chose GW and was able to study there, because I think what was really unique about the experience there was location. I know it's hard to imagine and having grown up in a small town I really wasn't sure a city school was where I really wanted to be. But what I loved about GW was the opportunity to get out into the broader Washington professional community and start to learn things, especially learning what I did not want to do for the rest of my life.



Stacie Berdan:

So important! And as students explore the options that DC offers, they can also begin to hone skills learned outside the classroom. Can you share with us some of those skills, traits that you believe helped you to be more successful when working internationally and living cross-culturally?

Lisa Schroeter:

Well, I think maintaining that lifelong learning is a big part of being able to work internationally and especially across cultures. You have to be interested in what's going on in the rest of the world, and I think that's especially important when you're in an area like trade policy where you're working on negotiations and trying to build consensus. One of the critical elements of that is understanding where your counterpart is coming from, what motivates them. How do you help kind of convey the direction of what you want, whether it's a trade negotiation, or a common joint-position paper between trade associations, or just resolving issues that you have at hand. If you know where the other side is, you can build a strategy that helps both sides win, creates a better opportunity for you to be successful. So, I think maintaining that interest in really learning at a deeper level how another culture operates, what's going to be successful, what motivates them, is a really critical part of being successful in the international arena. You have to listen, and you have to ask questions.

Stacie Berdan:

Indeed, indeed... And not only listening with our ears, but also with our eyes – paying attention to the non-verbal cues as well. Yet it's not always that easy. There are so many speedbumps along the way, right?

Lisa Schroeter:

Oh, there absolutely are, and I think for anyone, particularly when you get into a big organization, you know, one of the first challenges is always just the bureaucracy and the culture and figuring out how things operate.

Stacie Berdan:

So, what are the key priorities in the trade policy today that students considering a career should be aware of?

Lisa Schroeter:

I think one of the really important things is (especially as you process issues these days) access to multiple, trusted sources of information are really key. One of the things that I learned, particularly in studying abroad – and actually there was a great class when I was at GW on political geography, that really talked about a lot of how you learn to look at the world, obviously is based on somewhere you come from. But that also means that the counterparts you're working with who come from other cultures, they have their own inherent and historical cultural biases. So, having multiple sources of information, helps you get much more credibly to what's truly going on.

Stacie Berdan:

I'd like to step back for a moment, Lisa, and reflect on your career. What advice do you wish you had been given and at what point?

Lisa Schroeter:

It's OK to change your mind. Go ahead and make the change! You know, I feel there were times when I definitely held on longer than I meant to, because you worry about that... What if I never get that next job? There's plenty to do out there, and it might take time and might take a lot of effort. But make sure you're doing the work you find value in.

Stacie Berdan:

You know that's true. And I think it's a great advice, because I think so many people today have become risk averse! You know, we've had to retract a bit during the pandemic. So yes – be brave, be courageous, be curious,



move forward! Great, great advice. Before we wrap up, would you share a favorite experience or a memory from somewhere along your global life?

Lisa Schroeter:

I have to say studying abroad was without a doubt, the best move I've ever made in my life. And at the time, I actually had to transition out of GW in order to take the program to study in Paris, and actually Brussels as well, it was a different school. And I can remember that panic attack before I left – I'm leaving my school, I'm leaving my friends, I'm moving to another country. I've never even been out of the country. But it was such an opportunity to, Stacie, you said it before, really learn who I was. To have that opportunity to be independent, to be out of your comfort zone, and just to plant your own two feet and figure out how to make it all work and how to really enjoy and benefit from it. Hands down best experience of my life, best decision of all. It's worth taking that time whether you find an internship, a temporary post, or work for an organization for a bit. Actually, being on the ground somewhere teaches you so much about who you are, learning their culture and also better to learning to appreciate ours. I certainly know I came back with a much greater understanding for how much I love the USA.

Stacie Berdan:

That is a beautiful story, thank you so much for sharing it. Yes, study abroad, so near and dear to my heart, so many ways to go abroad – but for now, they are on hold. Fingers crossed we emerge soon enough that students can go next semester and have as life-changing an experience as you just described. It's beautiful. Before we wrap up, is there anything else that you'd like to add, or a piece of advice, something you'd like to share?

Lisa Schroeter:

Everybody's path is a little bit different, but the great thing about this kind of conversations is, you know, you can get a sense of how have others been successful. But translate that into a way of what is really going to be my unique path. And, I would say it's a piece of advice I've always given out on informational interviews especially is you really want to think about the culture of an organization in terms of not just, you know, the name and the growth, that's working for Trade Reps office or it's Dow Chemical... You know, these are all great organizations, but you also need to think about where you're going to be successful.

Stacie Berdan:

Wonderful, great advice, Lisa. It has been an absolute pleasure speaking with you today. This conversation has been a wonderful source of information and inspiration. Thanks so much for taking the time, I really appreciate you.

Lisa Schroeter:

Absolute pleasure, thanks so much for the opportunity.

[Music]

Stacie Berdan:

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast "Working Globally Through the Pandemic" and the outlook for global careers in a post COVID-19 world. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!