



## Season 2, Episode 1 – Public Policy / Government Affairs

**Christine Davies, CEO & Founder of Poligage**  
**Stacie Berdan, International Careers Expert (Podcast Host)**

[Music]

### **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 2 we find ourselves in a fast-changing world still affected by the pandemic where we must adapt to succeed. Come with us as we share with you how to craft your space in the new global workspace.

Today, I have the pleasure of interviewing Christine Davies, the CEO and Founder of Poligage – an online marketplace for companies seeking policy insights and government affair services. Christine started the company in May of 2020, after two decades of working at the intersection of public and private sectors including the Asia Society, Microsoft, U.S. Department of State and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, as well as a stint in Thailand for the American Chamber of Commerce. Welcome Christine, it's great to have you!

### **Christine Davies:**

Thanks you Stacie, it's great to be with you and your listeners.

### **Stacie Berdan:**

Perfect! So let's get started. First question: one of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there. You've had quite a diverse career, working in many different places – tell us about it, and what you do in your role today with Poligage.

### **Christine Davies:**

Absolutely. It has been a bit of a mosaic, by design, and I've been fortunate to sit in a few chairs around the table that really brings the public and private sectors together. Because, ever since, you know, I was starting out my career journey, I have been really interested in kind of the intersection of those two sectors. So, I'm grateful to have spent that first chapter of my career at the office of the US Trade Representative and with the US Department of State where I was based in Washington, DC, but really travelling the world. I think I made it to about eighty (eighty-zero) countries during those six years, and then with the American Chamber of Commerce where I was on the ground in Bangkok, Thailand. Because those experiences gave me so much valuable opportunities to see firsthand the global business issues, what companies and civil societies were facing from government activity, how they could work together to be more effective combatting different challenges related to the global economy. I then had a great experience with Microsoft working with public sector customers, and then global non-profit experience at the Asia Society – all of which fed into the creation of Poligage where we are really seeking to help executives at organizations of all sizes have access to the policy intelligence and the government affair services that they need, right when they need them, from a curated and vetted network of experts. So, I continue to work every day now with a network of executives that I literally began building right out of college, as well as many new partners whom I am meeting every day, which is exciting – trying to help them mitigate risk and solve problems that come out of regulation, as well as helping them work more proactively with government leaders to help with job creation and economic growth.



**Stacie Berdan:**

Wonderful! So, is your job now, your role, is it global? Do you have global clients, do you have large multinationals that work all over the world, that deal with issues all over the place?

**Christine Davies:**

You know – all of the above... And I think one of the most exciting sectors that we are working with are startup companies or, you know, small businesses. Sometimes we reserve the term 'startup' just for tech companies, but I consider even small businesses certainly to be startups if they are may be not using technology as much that are very interested in global engagement. And so helping them to assess, you know, markets that may be interesting for them to consider moving into or thinking about the steps they need to take before they formally set up shop or sell something into that economy. And then vice versa, you know, companies from outside the United States that are looking to do the same thing here. And I would just say, especially because in the United States Americans don't appreciate it so much, but, you know, our system – with fifty states, all with different regulations and approaches to industry, as well as, of course our Federal Government based in Washington – companies from outside the United States have a lot of questions. So it's great to be able to help them navigate those challenges and opportunities too.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah, that's so interesting. So I can see how you really filled a void of what was needed out there. I mean, just thinking about the small companies – I work with some SMEs around the world – yeah, there's so much that they don't know, and they don't even have the capacity to begin, or even know where to begin investigating... So, that's terrific. How exciting! What a neat job, yeah!

**Christine Davies:**

And don't get me wrong, there's a lot of navigators, you know, out there, who are helping to do this. You know, we are trying to really help kind of on an immediate and more modular basis. Our business module is a little different, but it's great to be part of this community, trying to help these companies get their footing and anticipate the types of things they might encounter so they can avoid crises once they get started.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah, that's great. So, for students interested in some type of public policy / government affairs – kind of take a step back a little bit – what are the greatest opportunities and challenges that you see today in this industry that you've described? And those you see coming in the next few year...

**Christine Davies:**

You know, I think that it's a great time to be interested in public policy and government affairs. I think it's also a great time to be looking at doing, you know, working in those areas through business, through the private sector. You know, I would say that, you know, largely because of the pandemic, but maybe it's also just a unique chapter, you know, kind of that our world is going through, possibly encouraged by the climate issues that we're facing, globalization certainly, you know, continues to grow our global connectivity every year. And so I think that, you know, the activities of Government, the regulations cross border, as well as domestic that are coming out of governments all over the world, you know, all across the United States and all over the world – it's never been more inherent for companies and organizations to stay on top of those issues. And they need smart people to help them do that. You know, this is a human management issue largely. There's a lot of tools from technology, artificial intelligence, etc., that can help with that, but this is largely a human intelligence game. And so, getting involved with these organizations to help them navigate the issues that will impact their success I think is a really strong opportunity. And I think, you know, in particular working on these issues – government-private sector intersection issues – from the business realm, whether as a consultant or as an inside hire, you know, there's really a huge opportunity, especially right now, for the private sector to have a strong role in addressing problems that have previously been left to government. So, I am always a champion for people that are considering government



service, you know, civil service. But, there are a number of polls out there – I think the Pew Center just issued one in the last couple of months that shows that, right now, the public is trusting companies more than they do government leaders to address the challenges facing our society. And so, those working in business have a huge opportunity to take action, to use their products and services to drive impact as well as profits – the two are not mutually exclusive anymore. And so I'd also say, based on my experience and where I sit, those who are interested in the role that technology can play specifically, I think the sky is the limit, you know, on creative ways for entrepreneurs to try and solve pain points using technology, which can drive awareness and efficiency in the development and delivery of products and services of all types.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That's amazing, sounds like a booming field, so good for students and people in their early careers to pursue. But, can you get very granular for me (because a lot of times that's what our listeners ask for), very specifically – if a student or someone just about to launch into their job search were interested in something like this – what exactly would they do?

**Christine Davies:**

So, you know, my advice certainly, as they consider what they want to do, is always about aligning interests and passions with job opportunities, because I think that, as cliché as it sounds, you know, making sure that the company or the organization or the mission is the right fit is really critical. Sometimes, finding an opportunity that isn't a great fit in that regard could turn someone off from a career in an industry. And that's unfortunate, because there may be another fit, you know, with a job that would be particularly... that would be a better fit and would allow them to thrive and contribute, you know, in that industry as a whole. But I also think that if a student recognizing that someone in the early stages in their career – you are not locked in, you know, you've got mobility, opportunities to learn and to adjust, you know, as you begin this, hopefully incredibly exciting journey. I think it's really important to lean in during those early years and engage with your organization, you know, that you've started with as much as possible. I often tell people, for example, don't wait to be asked, you know, offer to work on things that you do have an interest in, or where you think you can learn from leaders, you know, of that project who are particularly interesting to you or you think offer something that you'd really just like to learn from them, learn how they developed their expertise or their approach. You have to do this while managing what you were hired to do, of course, but really working to understand your organization, your industry, where you think there might be room for improvement from a different process or an approach, even though you're young. You know, I think that while a lot of people in the early days of their career need to be open to receiving learning from their managers on a lot of occasions, they can also be very proactive in how they learn and what they learn – by, again, really leaning in, and exercising a lot of curiosity, trying to learn as much as they can from those early experiences to then assess if it's the right fit for them or if there's possibly some tweaks that are needed.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That's great, awesome. So, you've mentioned some of the skills – I want to follow up with that – some of the skills, critical skills that are important for new hires in your field... You mentioned initiative, listening, learning, kind of leaning in, kind of the passion... what else?

**Christine Davies:**

So, I think it's a couple of things. I think that in business, and in the grinding world of startups in particular, although it certainly goes beyond just having a conversation about working in startups, attitude is everything. You know, I know I hire much more on attitude than I do on technical skills because the latter can be taught. New hires who offer to help without waiting to be asked are golden – you know, those who offer thoughtful ideas based on the research that they are doing, which really signals their interest based on the types of things they are learning on a day-to-day basis. That makes them a really distinctive, you know, employee or team member. But that said, it's also important to lean into data collection and interpretation, because every activity you do as a business results in data that you can learn from, and you need to learn from. And so, while I don't expect new hires to be data geniuses, or



to even have a real love for data... I can honestly say I do not, you know, I do not have a numbers dispensation, but I've really learned to be thinking every day, and I would encourage others to be thinking every day in their roles about what data are you gathering, what are you learning from it, so that it can guide your organization's future decisions. So, I do think and I've heard a lot of, you know, very accomplished people talk about that – you don't have to be, again, a numbers genius, but you have to respect and really work to make sure you're factoring, you know, data, what the data's telling you, trying to learn what the data's telling you, into the decisions that you are making.

**Stacie Berdan:**

And that applies, obviously everything you've said applies to a global role. But what specific skill that would relate to working on a global scale do you see is important?

**Christine Davies:**

I do think the additional layer to what I've just shared, if someone's going to be working globally – whether that's in another country or certainly across cultures – is to have that layer of understanding cultural contexts. In some places, you know, passion can be mistaken for hubris, you know, trying to demonstrate enthusiasm, trying to come up with new ideas can be taken as a sign of disrespect. So, you know, one caveat I would say, in a global role is to determine how best to demonstrate interest and energy in a way that makes sense culturally. I think you can do that by at least starting in more of an observation posture – you know, take the time to kind of learn how ideas are best presented and how work, you know, is best appreciated. Sometimes, by the way, that can be a corporate culture, not just a country or a geographic cultural issue. And also, I would encourage folks to talk with people who've worked there recently – whether that's within the company itself, certainly in the country or the region, to really make sure they understand, you know, how best they might navigate cultural sensitivities. But I will say that second point I made about data – I haven't found a company or an organization yet where data appreciation isn't pretty universal, and so, again, bringing that dispensation and understanding to a global role will be just as important as bringing it to one that may be US-focused, at least initially.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Wonderful advice for our listeners – thank you for all of that. With information on data especially...It really has changed over the last five years or so, I see, growing in more importance. Let's change a little bit now, turn a little but to the workplace trends that have emerged, besides the data, such as remote work, hybrid schedules, rapid advances in technology, AI – those are just a few of the things that we've seen in really just the last eighteen months. Can you pick one, just tell me about one of them – how you see it affecting the future of work.

**Christine Davies:**

Ah, it really is enough to make your head spin, isn't it?

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah, it sure is!

**Christine Davies:**

Yeah, we are really living through a period, not just in the last eighteen months... But I think you are so right. Just recently, I would say with the advances of technology in particular, maybe the focus has been on that, I think changes in technology are going to drive the future of work – especially in facilitating how we work and what we work on. You know, there's really never been more access to both tools, software, other types of tools, in the technical realm, that can quickly analyze data and provide access to subject matter, you know, intelligence, than we've ever seen. So, organizations, you know, now can easily tap into these products and services to really catalyze the impact that their teams and company can have. I think it's important to stress – I'm not seeing this as a huge displacement, I'm seeing a lot of the technology that's out there as a major enabler. And even if we think about this on a global scale – everyone might think that "Oh, the internet doesn't have borders and so, really, it's a global



realm in and of itself", which is true, but, again, you know, it's very human, and trying to connect with other humans is still a very important element of doing business or working within an organization, trying to achieve goals. And so, from what I've seen, technology is making the search for global partners – whether they are sell-to or they are sell-with partners – easier than ever before – whether it's through online marketplaces or just online networks that are accessible and active. And this, you know, not only expands what an organization is then capable of acting on but the ability to search so efficiently saves them a lot of time and money. So, technology, again, to me is really an enabler for organizations to advance in their industries – whether globally or locally. And also for those that are already having impact – can really springboard the reach and the impact that they can have. And so, that's certainly an area that I think, as people are moving into their careers, those exciting early chapters, staying abreast of the technologies, you know, whether it's in your role or it's in your industry that can help you do more, do more better, do more more quickly, have better impact – I think those are going to be... that's a very important area for all of us to watch.

**Stacie Berdan:**

I'm glad that you say that and you call it out, because so many students I hear: "no, that's for the computer programming". No, that's not what we are talking about; we're talking about, as you said so much more eloquently that I will right now – technology is an enabler, so that is so important, yeah... And it makes me think about this emerging trend – you know, the rise of the global independent worker, right? I read a piece recently that there are two billion independent workers around the world – that's kind of a lot of people when you think about it. And some study is showing that organizations are going to hire less full-time employees with benefits for the long term and just more temporary contract workers – to fill a need or to 'rent' these employees for a while. How do you see this affecting your industry, or do you?

**Christine Davies:**

Yeah, definitely. So, this trend is one of the reasons that companies like Poligage exist. We really want to help organizations benefit from the talent fluidity that, quite frankly, is being more and more desired by the labor force. You know, there's a good bit being said about companies trying to cut cost and reclassify employees as contractors. But, from my experience, you know, that is more of a reaction to the preference of many workers, as you mentioned that figure, who want to have that flexibility to still be able to be engaged with their organization, to be professionally engaged, while they also want to devote energy to other aspects of their life – whether they are raising children, they are taking care of an elderly relative... or maybe they just want to take their foot off the gas a little bit and still have the ability to participate. But I also do think there's a huge driver, and certainly the pandemic and some of the opportunities that it provided to sit back and think about our lives and how we want to get the most out of, you know, the days and months and years that we have to be active. People want to have the flexibility to work on projects that motivate them, instead of being in a static role that's sometimes interesting and sometimes not. So, I do think that this is a powerful trend, I think there's a lot of opportunity on both sides... There's a desire by companies to tap into this sort of talent fluidity and be able to have great expertise in certain roles where they're going to need it, and make sure that that's fresh and is very... as business needs change they can tap into the folks who are the best for different functions that they need covered. I think it's also though coming out of the desire, again, by the workforce to have that sort of flexibility in the work that they do throughout the duration of their careers.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That's interesting to know. I would think that it's applicable to your industry and makes a lot of sense to me certainly, yeah. I've heard some listeners are like, early in their career – it terrifies them to think that they actually have to go looking for contracts on a regular basis. But we've all seen the shift of work, how things have accelerated.





**Christine Davies:**

Right, and I think it's important to stress... I mean, I do not see employee situation going away. I think that for the most part companies need employees, companies need team members who are dedicated, who have the historical knowledge of all the different activities and efforts that a company has made. But I do think that there is now an opportunity – whether is both through technology as well as through just workforce preference – to supplement those types of roles with the ability to have more flexibility with... sometimes on a case-by-case basis. It's not just related to a particular function, but it can be related to an issue or a topic that the company is dealing with. So hopefully it will create, you know, a lot of win-win situations for both the companies/organizations as well as the workers involved.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Right, absolutely. So, global is everywhere, right? You know it, we live it, we live these lives, and whether students/recent graduates think they need or want a global career or not – all of us are affected by globalization – our lives, our lifestyles, we've seen that clearly with these recent couple of years... really more – five-ten years, with the ubiquity of communications technology, internet, as you mentioned. So we are affected and impacted by global events. So it's critical for our listeners to understand what is globalization, how do they prepare for it. As you said, you and I have worked in these global roles – I'm sure you have seen so many changes. But what specific advice do you have for those students who are either a) interested in pursuing a global career or b) just pursuing the knowledge and experience that they know they need but they don't really know what to do in order to succeed in the workplace today?

**Christine Davies:**

So, I think it's such an important question Stacie. I mean, the reality is global roles I don't think have ever been more competitive than they are today, and part of that is due to the wonderful rise of the fact that there's a lot of qualified talent in markets outside of the United States. So, for Americans looking to work abroad or even for other countries, you know, nationalities looking to work in other countries themselves, there's a lot of competition to have those types of roles with multinational companies and be able to work cross-border. So, I would say, you really have to think about how you can drive value. And I think that on a relatively simple level, although I think it's overlooked, people have got to stay informed. They really need to understand what's happening in the markets or the industry areas that they are covering. And they also really need to use that knowledge that they are getting from reading, from watching, from listening different assessments and being connected within their industry groups. They need to use that information to anticipate the challenges that may be coming down the pike. Some of them will turn out to be true, others won't, but using that sense of understanding and anticipating potential challenges – that helps you come up with ideas that you can propose to your organization that they can act on, that you can act on together, that can help mitigate risks before they become crises. Sometimes it doesn't take a whole lot of investment, you know, to at least prepare for scenarios that could face the company – one, five, ten years down the line – and prevent those scenarios from becoming billion-dollar risks, if you will, or multi-billion dollar risks. So, I know in some ways it sounds easier said than done, but starting that type of effort to be a really good anticipator and think long term on behalf of your organization really starts from just, again, leaning in and trying to learn as much about your region or the country that you are focused on and the industry that you are involved in is a great first start.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Wonderful, great piece of advice that everybody can do. You don't have to have a passport, you don't have to get on a plane – you can do it right there in your home, your office, what have you. That's great, beautiful advice, thank you for that, Christine.

**Christine Davies:**

Absolutely.



**Stacie Berdan:**

As we begin to wrap up, tell me, and share with us – what's a tactic that you have used in dealing with change (we've experienced a lot of change lately) any time in your career, and how has it helped? I think a lot of listeners are struggling as they adapt to these rapid changes that we are seeing in the workforce.

**Christine Davies:**

Absolutely. You know, I have... indeed, I have faced a lot of change over the course of my career – whether it be, you know, during a specific chapter, a specific role, certainly across the scope of the many roles that I've had. And I've really tried to look at change as an opportunity and not a threat. I think it's very easy when we face a change situation – whether it's a change that we're considering proactively ourselves or one, especially I would say, being forced on us, you know, by the organization or some other force that we're working with to – to be very defensive and to turn that... begin thinking about that change situation as something that could really harm us. And so, I would say my tactic is: take a deep breath when you're faced with change, find the space – you know, whether it's a couple of hours, or maybe even a day – to really think about "How can I turn this change experience into an opportunity?". Or, "What is the opportunity that I'd be looking to get out of this change that's being proposed or being forced on me?" And I think when you truly do look at change through a positive lens, a lens of opportunity, that's what gives you more control of the situation, that's going to give you the mental clarity and the energy that's needed to, hopefully, at least to have a better chance of making that change more of a positive experience for you.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Great stuff, change is opportunity, in no matter what areas of our lives – work, personal...

**Christine Davies:**

That's the short version, you got it...

**Stacie Berdan:**

That is great, thank you for that. So, as we wrap up, anything else you'd like to add, that you want to share with our listeners?

**Christine Davies:**

You know, I do want to say, and this is something that I share with folks that I've been directly mentoring for years, networking is really important for career success. And I think many people are comfortable with making friends, but for some reason they clam up when it comes to workplace or industry networking and I would say that, especially given what we're going through – you know, with more of our work being virtual, I think that as listeners move into the workplace and on to their career tracks, they're going to face a bit more isolation. And may be those of us who were active in the workforce pre-pandemic, and so I think they are going to need to find new ways to network and to identify those contacts since they won't have exposure directly – around whether is the water-cooler cliché or just through other types of collision bearing opportunities. And so, I think it's really important for people to carve out some time to be thinking about the ecosystem of potential contacts in their industry or geography...again maybe it's folks learning about through their research trying to stay informed, those types of activities that they are doing. I would say, don't be afraid to reach out, get to know people in your company or your industry, even if they are not people who you are directly working with on a daily basis. Leverage your networks – whether they are networks from your schools, from sororities or fraternities or other organizations that you are part of. You know, sending a friendly email introduction, maybe couched with an offer to be helpful to that executive if you ever can be, letting them know what it is you're working on, but offering that... making that offer to be helpful, and then, you know, saying that you'd love to seek their advice or learn a bit more about their journeys over a virtual coffee (or hopefully, an in-person coffee as we are moving back into more of that and hopefully this will change a bit). But I would just... I would hate to see students miss those networking opportunities that I think are so important for laying a foundation for the next opportunity, and the next opportunity earlier in their careers. So, definitely I point I wanted to make sure that I get in today.



**Stacie Berdan:**

That's wonderful. Great advice. And persistence – because a lot of time people do not respond to newbies and people entering the workforce. So, just be persistent.

**Christine Davies:**

And don't take it personally, right?

**Stacie Berdan:**

Yeah. Absolutely, don't take it personally. Move on and keep pursuing. And also send follow-ups, right? Because, even though we are not necessarily ignoring people – a person can be busy, executives are busy, and they may forget about that solicitation for a couple of weeks, so...

**Christine Davies:**

And I would totally second that Stacie. Don't take it personally. And I think it's so important for people that are just entering the career... their career trajectories, you know... these are early days – you're not have everything figured out in a year, even ten years. You may not feel that you found the perfect fit for a while as you begin this, hopefully, this long and exciting journey. And so, again, looking for leaders you can learn from, really trying to be selective as much as you can with organizations that are working on things that you care about, that are going to excite you to get to work every day. I think that can be...that leads to the great foundation for happiness, which, I think will really drive career satisfaction long term.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Well thank you very much for your time and I'd like to kind of shout out Congratulations because you were named to the business 20... B20 Task Force on Employment and Education during Italy's G20 – host last year – so well done, that's amazing stuff. And thank you so much for taking the time out of your very busy schedule and kudos to you and congratulations on starting an amazing new company.

**Christine Davies:**

Thanks so much Stacie, now we'll see if the G20 leaders act on some of the employment and education policies that we recommended, but if they do hopefully it'll be beneficial to all of us.

**Stacie Berdan:**

I hope so. Great, thanks again Christine. Take care

**Christine Davies:**

Thank you.

[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!