



Season 5, Episode 3 – Women in Global Careers

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[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 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, I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak with Jenny Buccos, a multi-award winning director and producer and the founder of EXPLR Media. Having explored at least 50 countries in depth, Jenny is a global citizen who brings the world up close and personal into classrooms and living rooms for teachers, families, and students to explore together. She has been creating entertaining and educational content for educators to enhance and expand their curriculum over the past two decades, after leaving her job in the corporate world of finance, oh so many years ago. Welcome, Jenny, it is great to have you with us today.

Jenny Buccos:

Thanks, delighted to be with you.

Stacie Berdan:

Great. So let's dive in... One of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there – more than just titles. Tell us what you do.

Jenny Buccos:

That's an interesting question, what don't I do? Well, my title is CEO and Founder of EXPLR. But, in reality, what that sort of means is I do everything. By education I'm a storyteller, I studied theater, and I thought I was going to be an actress. And then I realized I didn't have the talent to be an actress. And then I thought, hmm, if I want to stay in entertainment and storytelling, maybe I can be a producer. And then I realized I didn't have the money to be a Broadway producer. And then I thought, you know, my mom's a teacher, and that's storytelling – maybe I can do something there. So after, you mentioned, I was at an investment bank, I left the investment bank, and I decided I was going to become a children's entertainment producer, using the web as my medium. And this was in 2003, before YouTube even existed. So the space was wide open at the time. And I basically taught myself to become a director, producer, editor, writer, and ran my own production company. So CEO and Founder obviously, because it's my company, but really what I do is use digital media to help tell children stories. And when I say children, I'm really talking teens, tweens, and their families. Stories about the world, stories about unseen people, stories about careers you may not know exist, stories about people dealing with mental health – basically, anything a child could ever want to learn or need to learn all in one place. And it looks and feels exactly like Netflix, Amazon, Hulu.



Stacie Berdan:

Wonderful. Cool. That's great. Well, so I know a lot of what you do is work all over the world, bringing the world into the lives of these young people, right? So you've been to 70 plus countries where you work with local teams producing multimedia content, locally... you deal with local issues, cultures, histories... What steps do you take to prepare?

Jenny Buccos:

Yeah, it initially started filming everything outside of the U.S. And then I realized, you know, we can film things within diverse communities in the U.S. Steps to prepare... I mean, first thing we do is we sort of go to teachers, students, and families and say, if we waved a magic wand, what would you like to learn about the world? And we were very specific when I started. So, we're going to Thailand, what do you want to know about Thailand? And that drove a lot of the decisions we made from an editorial perspective. So, are we telling, you know, the history of Buddha? Or are we telling how Buddhist architecture has influenced modern architecture? And you'd be surprised like what kids come back with and the questions they have. So picking the content first, but then really looking to who the local experts are to be our storytellers. So I think one of one of the things that I've really excelled and really tried to do over the last few decades doing this is, even though I cast and put a presenter in front of the camera to be the guide for that episode, really letting the people we feature locally be the heroes of their own stories, the tellers of their own stories, the experts of their own field. And I think that's really important. That's the biggest thing for what we do is looking for the storytellers, looking for the experts, and then just letting them share their expertise, their experience, and their stories. So, it's really understanding that local knowledge. On the production side, on the admin – the administrative side, it's understanding what it takes to operate and work in a different country. And that's different for Jordan as it is for South Africa as it is for Israel. It's different in Singapore. So really sort of diving in and having a mini culture crash course for every community, region, and country we're going to work in. And I can't underestimate the importance of that. You can't underestimate the importance of that... it opens so many doors, even if you just speak a couple words in the local language, or understand how to approach a business situation.

Stacie Berdan:

So give me some of the tips like what is part of your crash course?

Jenny Buccos:

Part of my crash course? Well, in the Middle East, obviously, being a woman, it's how you dress. So just making sure you're respectful and you try to follow what you would see other female business leaders wearing in the area, that I think is critically important. In most countries – "please", "hello", "thank you"... I usually like to say, "How is your day going?", understanding how much does it cost, you know, just the local language of that... When I was working in Jordan, we were working with Syrian refugees and I quickly learned that women don't shake hands with men. So it's a simple gesture of putting your hand over your heart when you meet someone. Because, obviously, when you're trying to work with someone, you don't want to make them uncomfortable. So it's little things like that. Yeah, so those are like the key ones... Specifically in South Africa – and I've spent a lot of time working in South Africa – understanding the history and legacy of apartheid and what it means to be a white person walking into a community that has experienced so much racial injustice and racial tension, what that means to walk into a room of all black South Africans, and to present your business and your story, you know, how is that going to be perceived? So it's a lot of preparation, before we even get on the ground to create our content.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, that's wonderful, great tip. So, in saying that, I mean, I think to myself, because some people like oh, well, you can just read a book, or maybe you can just dive into the internet and just check out some sources. I mentioned



you do... you really do a deep dive, you look at all different types of sources, lots of time spent doing this real true preparation, not just skimming a couple of websites, right?

Jenny Buccos:

Yeah, I very rarely skim websites... You know, we're all living in the sort of, well, people are saying post-COVID, but, you know, sort of like everybody's okay with Zoom now. But I've always used Zoom, Skype, Facetime to connect with people within that country to prepare. And I think there's no better way than trying to find people who have that lived experience that you can, sort of, go to as an advisor before you hit the ground. And that really like sets me up to be successful in these places, when I make those contacts. Even if we don't work with them there... When I'm not, I'm in Amsterdam today, but when I'm not in Amsterdam, I'm based in New York, and we have access to people from all over the world. So why not take advantage of that and try to, you know, try to understand, before you get on a plane, before you get that stamp in your passport, what it's going to be like to set foot in that country and try to do a job, which is very different than living.

Stacie Berdan:

Hmm, that's great advice. I love that – speaking to somebody there. Terrific, terrific advice. That's great.

Jenny Buccos:

I mean, Twitter lets you connect with anyone, Instagram lets you connect with anyone. And I usually go to, you know, artists, chefs, musicians, because they're all storytellers themselves. And they tend to be really tapped in, tuned into what's going on politically, culturally, and socially in their countries. So not just the historical sense. But what is the snapshot this moment in time before you hit the ground?

Stacie Berdan:

That's a great tip. Excellent advice. Thanks for that. Wonderful. Yeah. So, I want to go back to something you said earlier that you just kind of like started out in finance, kind of like a blip in the beginning of your career. But how did you switch? Because I know a lot of our listeners may be in business school or getting MBAs, they may think of that kind of a traditional business path, but they may want to do something like you've done as an entrepreneur. So tell us about that. How'd you switch?

Jenny Buccos:

So I was I was forced into it. So I mentioned I studied theater. And then, when I moved to New York, there were a lot of stops and starts, like – you're not going to make it in this industry. And then, talking to friends who were in the industry, or at least trying to break into the entertainment industry, they said well, you have to get a day job. And they said, you know, there's sort of two pathways you can follow if you want to be an actor, and that's waiting tables, or working as a temp at an investment bank, and this was in the late 90s, so, like, investment banks were loaded with temp employees. So I sort of fell into the job I had. I was placed at a major global investment bank and within two days, they had given me a job offer. And I took it, because I didn't know what I was going to do. And like the reality of just having to pay off student loans and be you know, in your early 20s. And I stuck with that job at the bank for about three years, I worked in the HR department creating the MBA recruiting videos, you know, like, "Why do you like working at this place?". And so, that was my job, that's how I learned how to become a producer – by managing this film company that came in for this bank to make these recruiting videos. I worked, the bank sent me to Hong Kong and Tokyo, and that was the first time I had left the country. And when I returned, September 11th hit and the entire HR division was laid off, because they weren't recruiting anymore. So I was sort of forced to change careers. But that was okay, because that was... I don't feel that that was my intended path anyhow, it was literally the job that helped me pay my student loans and make a living. But what I did get out of the bank is I know how to run a business, I know how to do spreadsheets, I know... I understand what, you know, a good HR contract looks like, I understand what employee benefits look like, I understand basic finance... I went



through Series 7 and Series 63 courses to be a licensed broker dealer. And then, in working in the HR division with this film company, I learned how to produce. So when I got my severance package, there was no question for me – that that's what I was going to use my money to do was create entertainment for kids. It had always been brewing in my mind, but I didn't know how to make it happen. So, sometimes those tragic or upsetting events tend to work out in your favor.

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely. Especially if your eyes are open, and you're paying attention. And you've got these. Yeah, that's fantastic. And I know how passionate you are about, you know, increasing student access to the world, engaging them and becoming maybe more global citizens, thinking about the world differently... How do you see that this has changed? I mean, you mentioned 9-11, that was, that was a while ago, but even the last five years touching on, if you want, COVID or not, but yeah, how has student engagement and access changed since pandemic and others the last five years?

Jenny Buccos:

So, let's go back to 9-11, and why I started it... because literally anything foreign was something to be feared. That's what the media was portraying. And there was a lot of othering going on. So, that was the initial... I didn't want children to grow up in a world where something foreign was meant to be feared. I just didn't like that. I felt that I really helped lay a lot of groundwork for a lot of kindergarten through 12th grade public schools to understand that global citizenship and global competence are two very different things. Global competence... you know, you can sort of say, I've done my global studies by understanding where Ukraine is on a map – that isn't really global competence. Global competence is what you do with the world knowledge you have, and you don't have to travel to be globally competent. So it was a lot of education there for ten years. Then things were looking really good and I felt, okay, we're on the right path, this is my life's work, I'm going to change a generation. And then some things happened around 2016, 2017, 2018 – without getting political – where we sort of went back into this finger pointing... anyone outside of America's borders is to be feared, they're taking our jobs away from us... So, you know, I think education also shifts with the political environment. You know, and I don't want to... I don't think... it's not a question of where I sit, but I try to be very careful with the schools and children, and families we work with from a political standpoint. But I feel like we've regressed, and not just here in the U.S., but everywhere. Xenophobia is at an all-time high, racial injustice, I think, is still at an all-time high. And then... So that's where I think we are – I think we're moving backwards, which is extremely upsetting. From a COVID perspective, I don't think that that has put us any further back. I actually think that's put us further ahead in terms of education, by making people realize the inequities in digital education. I think we've now solved sort of the connectivity and device issues that are in the United States, and now it's just up to us to make sure that kids, because they're constantly on their devices, have access to these global perspectives and stories – and stories that are solution driven and not doom and gloom, and not fear mongering. So I'd like to say we're in a better position, but I don't think we are.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, I agree with you. I agree. I agree that COVID actually helped move us forward in those spaces, as well as just people understanding the global supply chain that you just cannot... we are a global society, we are a globally interconnected world, and you cannot think otherwise. Or you can think otherwise. And you can't go back to actually thinking, oh, let's just do it all here, the whole nativism... Even with nearshoring cropping up and all those kinds of things, we just can't go backwards, because we are interconnected for a reason, um, at least business wise, if not from all of humanity standpoint.



Jenny Buccos:

That's such a great point, I, you know, the global supply chain was like the thing that teachers asked most about, like, can you create a video so I can explain how everything is interconnected? And, you know, why we don't have chips for our cars to patch a software issue? And, you know, why is that? I just think it's fascinating... And strange things disappeared from shelves. Like, in the Netherlands, we had a nail polish remover... like, you couldn't buy it anywhere because it came from China. And you wouldn't think of things like that, like, well, this whole product is just gone now. I wasn't in the U.S. during COVID, and we weren't hit as bad in the Netherlands just because of the EU cooperation. But there was still, you know, things would just disappear. Very, very interesting. And I think it's impossible to ignore our connectivity now.

Stacie Berdan:

That's good. Yeah. So those are some of the challenges kind of along the way... What are other types of challenges that you've faced in your career, so far?

Jenny Buccos:

Faced in my career...huh... Being a woman! I am in an industry, at least when I started, So as director-producer behind the camera, only 10% of the people behind the camera are directors-producers... And when you start to drill that down to, like, factual travel programming – so things that you would see, like, on the Travel Channel, Discovery Channel, History Channel – female director-producers, I can't name another one. So, that's been a huge challenge. And showing up in places and people not realizing that I'm the decision maker, and I'm the boss, and I'm the person who writes the check. I'm in my mid- to late 40s, and as recently as three months ago I've been called a girl on set before, as someone in their mid-40s with 20 years of experience in their field; and a man would never experience that. And it doesn't matter if it's in the U.S. or abroad, some places abroad it's even worse. So, that's a huge challenge for me. And then I think on a personal level, it's incredibly difficult working the way I do because I do travel about 150 days out of the year. Maintaining relationships with your family, maintaining relationships with friends, becomes a challenge. So you have to have very supportive people in your life and very understanding people in your life.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, absolutely. What you've said so much, I'm gonna unpack... but at least being a woman, let me ask you, what do you do about it? What do you do about you, give us some examples? Great challenges, yes. And they... I'm sure there are so many more rampant here and around the world. What do you do about it? What kind of advice do you have?

Jenny Buccos:

So, until about three years, I kind of just let it go. I let those comments just go. Now, because I work with a lot of young women, and I've also gotten to the point in my career where if somebody doubts me – right now I'm going through a fundraising round – if somebody doubts me, because, well, in the startup world, because of my age and because I'm a woman, I immediately shut those meetings down now. Because it's a waste of my time and I'm not going to convince these people otherwise. If somebody calls me a girl on set, I immediately correct them by saying, No, I'm a woman on set, you wouldn't say that to a man and I have 20 years of experience. And I've earned this, I've earned this respect. I think that's important for the young women on my team, to see that. Not everyone can do that. I've just reached, I feel like I've reached a place in my life and a point in my career where I do have the power to just shut that down. When I was working in a Middle Eastern country (and I'm not going to say which one), one of the people we were working with needed to be... one of our experts needed to be paid, and he wouldn't accept money from me because I was a woman. And he kept talking to the men on my team saying, well, I need to get paid, but I can't take money from her because she's a woman. And it... I mean, it came down to you're either not getting paid or you're taking money from me. At the end of the day, he finally took the money from me. But, you



know, I'm trying to be culturally sensitive and respectful of his boundaries. But also, you know, it has to go both ways, I think, to say, you know, this is the boss, she has to pay you, right...

Stacie Berdan:

As long as it's not illegal to be paid by a woman...

Jenny Buccos:

But no, it's not illegal. He just... he culturally, he didn't like it. So, yeah, it was very interesting. But yeah, I just, I feel like if you're at a point where one, you know it isn't going to hurt your career or advance your career, what's the problem standing up for yourself?

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, and you're absolutely right. And I hope that our listeners, men and women actually, hear what you're saying, and actually do it earlier, stand up for yourself earlier. You know, you I mean, you as you said, you have the gravitas now, you can't, you know, put up with it, you know... Fabulous. But there's no reason people should have to wait, there's no reason anyone should actually have to wait, although we know that there are reasons and it happens all the time. So, I hope other people feel empowered by that and to stand up because it's actually self-worth and value, and it really matters. And I really appreciate your sharing that story.

Jenny Buccos:

Thanks. Well, it's even gotten to the point where I'm doing pitch meetings right now for venture capital. And before I get into my pitch, which are incredibly stressful, and you know, very... you just have to be so "On". They always say, would you like to hear a little bit about our fund, and do you have any questions before we start the pitch? And my question is always how many female founders and how many minority founders do you have in your portfolio? And if they say no, to me that's the end of the meeting. Because I'm not going to convince them otherwise.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, absolutely right, absolutely right. Well, good for you.

Jenny Buccos:

And again, this is everywhere in the world. This is not just us. Yeah, it's very interesting to see this.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah. Well, in this vein, woman or not, but as a global entrepreneur, you know, what kind of advice do you have for our listeners in that space?

Jenny Buccos:

What advice...? Well, if you're gonna... it depends... so, I sort of think there are kind of two pathways to having a global career – you can have a global career like mine, where you're not in one set place, you work all over the world so you're sort of like a global nomad, and then you can have a career where you can say, I'm gonna go work three years in Singapore. But I think in both cases, having the support network, both in your home country, and then the countries you're working in, is so unbelievably critical, especially if, like, you're married, and you wanna have a kid – like, that support network, before you make that decision to have that global career, needs to be in place. So, for me, like, I've had multiple emergency surgeries and procedures in foreign countries, and if I didn't have the support network there, I wouldn't even know how to navigate the medical system. I've been in places where I don't speak the language, and I'll get to a hospital and there won't be a single person there who speaks



English. So don't underestimate the value of having a support network in place. That would be number one. I mean, I'd say that's the biggest thing, and then going back to the local knowledge. It's a lot easier than you think, to live and work abroad. But there are just some basic things that you need to have in place.

Stacie Berdan:

And I know you're coming to us today from Amsterdam, but you split your time, between Amsterdam and New York City, Brooklyn in particular. What's that like?

Jenny Buccos:

I love it. It's the best of both worlds. When I'm in New York – I want to be in Amsterdam, when I'm in Amsterdam – I want to be in New York. And that's, I guess that's great. I have a very understanding partner, so that goes back to your support network. I moved to Amsterdam for love. And it just happens to be that I can work here, everybody speaks English, it's just very easy to be in Amsterdam. Again, it's... I wouldn't have it any other way, but I do see my friends and family saying, oh, I haven't seen you for, you know, a year. And this is before COVID! So, just, you know, it's how open can you be with people in your life to say, look, it's not a personal matter that I'm not seeing you, it's just my six months in Amsterdam now. But I have the luxury because I do have two places that I can fly back and forth whenever I want. So it's not like I'm here for three months and then I'm home. Well, wherever home is... I can just I can be fluid in my decisions.

Stacie Berdan:

That's great. But yes, clearly a nomadic lifestyle, which is always sounds a lot more... to some people it sounds a lot more glamorous than it is. But there are the basics that are... that you've described – you kind of miss people, sometimes you want to be in a different place and maybe it's easier or more difficult depending on where you are. But it's exciting nonetheless, I'm sure, right?

Jenny Buccos:

Yeah. And, and I wouldn't say I have a nomadic work style just because I'm doing television, but my life is... like my home in Amsterdam is very much my home in Amsterdam, and my home in New York is very much my home in New York. And then I just have... when I buy clothes I always buy two sets of everything so I just have both outfits. And then I just always have, like, my little overnight bag ready to go in case, you know, somebody says, hey, can you be back in Amsterdam tomorrow? It's just a different lifestyle, and one that I couldn't imagine doing with children, so... I'm sure people can, I just... I personally couldn't imagine it.

Stacie Berdan:

But I think those are, those are some of the choices that we make. I mean, you talked about support relationships, you talked about having a supportive partner, it is very important to talk about it if you want to global career, any type of global career, because we don't always get to define what that means at the beginning, before we go on our first adventure. You really have to have somebody who thinks the same way, who's going to support you all the way. It's not just, sure I'll follow you to London, but if you're going to Singapore, no way. Right? They have to be in kind of... the whole mindset has to be there as well.

Jenny Buccos:

Yeah, because it was really lonely when I first moved to Amsterdam. It's... the Dutch are very friendly people but you, you make your group of friends either through work or school, so for expats moving in, it's a very, very different and difficult community to sort of infiltrate. So, the majority of my friends here are all expats, which frustrates me a little because I'd like to speak a little Dutch and get to know some Dutch people. But that's just not how it works here. So the first two years were incredibly difficult, until I sort of figured out what was wrong.



Stacie Berdan:

And what was wrong, and how did you fix it?

Jenny Buccos:

When I say wrong, in quotes, it's that the Dutch are very committed to the group of friends that they already have. This is not like – at five o'clock when everyone in the office says, hey, let's go get a drink. You have your dedicated group of friends, and they may have come from school. So, you know, in New York, you can sort of just walk up to anyone and say, oh, hey, talk to the person, make friends. Like I've made friends with, like, my grocery delivery guy and the person at the coffee shop. It's just a very, very different culture. And, as I started talking to more and more expats here, they've all had the same experience, how hard it is to make friends with Dutch people?

Stacie Berdan:

Well, I've talked with lots of people, as you know, over the last couple of decades myself, and it's actually true in many countries. There's the Dutch, the Swiss, it's... all the Scandinavian countries – it's similar, and you have to really work at breaking into it. And it's different by country and culture. But there's a lot of that, there's a lot of that in many places that... it's even in small town America. I mean, there's... it's in many places... But you can always find global souls, I find, somewhere... they're not... there are diamonds in the rough, they are few and far between, but sometimes we can find them when we go different places.

Jenny Buccos:

Absolutely. Yeah. There's a great offline networking event here, for a club that I belong to. And that's literally what it is like, you tell us what you're interested in, like, professionally and hobby wise. And they sort of do, like, speed dating for you to meet new people. Just friends. Very, very interesting that it's not like a dating thing. But it's, like, these are six people who share your interests. So I've been using that a little bit lately.

Stacie Berdan:

I love it. That's so cool. It's not speed dating, it's much better... finding new friends...

Jenny Buccos:

Isn't that cool? I know. They should do this in every city.

Stacie Berdan:

That's great, neat! Well, speaking of many cities and countries, do you have a favorite place that you've worked? Or been?

Jenny Buccos:

Favorite place that I've worked? Yeah, I'm gonna say there are two places – I'm gonna say London and South Africa. London goes back to my theatre days. So having access to all of the arts at very little cost is my favorite. And I love the British accent. I married a British man who happens to live in the Netherlands. So, London, I adore, I'm there next week. And then South Africa, just because it was so early in my career, and everyone I worked with... this is when Nelson Mandela was alive, Desmond Tutu was still alive, Winnie Mandela... very famous musicians... they sort of all said yes to working with me. And understanding what had happened in that country under apartheid, and letting a young white woman come in and help tell their history to the rest of the world through these world leaders – it means South Africa will always have a special place in my heart. I've been back about a dozen times. I'm friends with the people who are still living from that series, and now and now their children and their grandchildren. But I think South Africa is an incredibly unique place, full of possibility and potential, but also heartbreak everywhere you go.



Stacie Berdan:

That's great. How wonderful. Cool. So before we wrap up... It's been a wonderful conversation, Jenny, I really appreciate your taking the time, I know how busy you are as well... What are you working on now? Tell us what's going on now.

Jenny Buccos:

What am I working on now? I'm working on two really cool series. I'm working on one called Boom Kitchen, which is a cooking class for families, but then it also has a follow the ingredient... I look to do a lot about solution driven... So, let's imagine we're making strawberry jams and scones; our field trip is to a strawberry farm in California, to understand how climate change is affecting their crops. So that's... what can we do from a young activist solution, global citizen perspective to make sure we can still have strawberry jam and scones. I just, I love this for kids. And then we are working on something called Generation Space, and it's the careers that we need to go to the Moon or live on Mars or live on the Space Station – so things like heating, waste management, food production... And then, what's that thread to that job back on Earth? And I love the idea that somebody is going to a highly skilled technical training program to become your plumber – that's the same skill set that we need on the Space Station and on Mars. I just, I love this idea... that it's other-worldly but we are still so connected as human beings. And that takes global citizenship to a completely different level.

Stacie Berdan:

Oh totally. And it puts at perspective the skills and the jobs that we look at in a totally different light. You know, you flip it 120 degrees and you look at it very differently.

Jenny Buccos:

Yes. So, those are the two I'm working on filming right now and they're just a blast. It's different cultures, and people, and backgrounds, and stories, and histories... You know, there's no better way to get into global understanding than flick, food, and music. So, the fact that we get to do an international cooking class, it's gonna be great.

Stacie Berdan:

I love it. I can't wait to see that one because I'm a foodie. That's fantastic, I love it! Thank you so much for taking the time to be with us today. It's been a wonderful conversation, I really appreciate it Jenny.

Jenny Buccos:

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!