



Season 3, Episode 7 – Intersection of Ethics, Finance, and Tech

Stacie Berdan

*International Careers Expert
(Podcast Host)*

Lizette Robinson

*Senior Director II, Global Ethics & Compliance,
Walmart*

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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 three, we explore the rising trend of ESG and how it is shifting the talent landscape on a global scale. Come with us as we share with you how responsible active engagement is changing the face of the global workforce today. Our guest today is Lisette Robinson, Senior Director for Walmart's Global Ethics and Compliance team. As such, she heads up the Global Transaction Monitoring Financial Intelligence Unit and Advanced Analytics for Financial Compliance. Lisette is a multilingual international business executive, who has worked for some of the biggest corporations including EY, PwC, and Citibank, and throughout Latin America and Asia. She's also an angel investor, and advises VC funds on emerging technologies. Welcome, Lizette, great to have you with us today.

Lizette Robinson:

Hi, there, Stacie.

Stacie Berdan:

So one of the objectives of our podcasts, is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there, more than just titles. Tell us about it. What do you do?

Lizette Robinson:

Okay, well, let me start off, maybe I could start off by trying to define a little bit about what is financial crimes. So if we kind of think about financial crimes, you can think about it two different ways. So the first way is that, basically, someone out there is trying to generate wealth in a dishonest way by exploiting someone else. So that might be something like a fraud scam, for example, someone that's out there, you know, all the COVID scams that were out there during COVID, cures for COVID. Or they might be trying to scam someone that's elderly. So that's kind of an exploitation. And then the other part of financial crimes is someone that's obtained their wealth dishonestly. And what they're trying to do is really protect that wealth now that they've obtained in a dishonest way. So, for example, you might have someone that's obtained their wealth through a hacking, where they've maybe hacked or maybe they've gone in, and it's a drug related or human trafficking related. So what do they want to do now is they basically want to launder their proceeds, and make the funds that are unethical, right, basically go into the money, money supply and become... considered washed or laundered. So those are basically the two main areas that financial crimes focuses. So basically, overseeing financial crimes at Walmart, right, is basically leveraging technology and resources as a whole team of investigators, right, that are going to go in and investigate any alerts or potential financial crime events, and they're going to investigate them and make a determination as to whether the activity was fraudulent or not, and then report it to regulators. So that's it in a nutshell.

Stacie Berdan:

Wow, that's really interesting. So give us a little bit of the backstory, how did you get there?



Lizette Robinson:

So, in terms of how I got there, you know, I think first of all, it's about having the right skills at the right time, right. So, really started off my career internationally, because I had language skills, I got an opportunity at Citibank as a management trainee. And initially, my career wasn't international, I was in the US and initially servicing an international book of business, but it was all US based. But then there were opportunities to extend the model in the US internationally, or go extend the international capabilities. And because I'd had experiences living abroad when I was younger, and then also had the language skills that put me in a prime position to take advantage of that opportunity. And then it really just built from there... Then I started to develop global rollout capabilities. And then that became very valuable at consulting firms. And then from there, I moved into the regulatory compliance space. And then... and that's how I basically ended up where I am today. So it's really kind of the global language, plus kind of developing the skill set of global rollout technology, and then also working that into the regulatory and compliance space.

Stacie Berdan:

Well that's really cool. So, you've had experience and roles at all kinds of big, big companies, you've done all kinds of things, you've worked around the world, whether it's leading teams internationally from one location or traveling around the world. You've done so much... As you as you look back, what are you most proud of?

Lizette Robinson:

I think it's... it's two key areas I'm most proud of. And so one of the things that, you know, saying that I have is that talent in the world is equally distributed, but opportunity is not. So one of the things that I'm most proud of is in that in my appointments or in, you know, just different assignments that I've had around the globe, I've really driven a very diverse and inclusive structure. We're really kind of giving opportunities to those that didn't have opportunities. And I'm most proud of teams of people that are working in local countries around the world, and now they're leading teams out of the US. And so that diversity/inclusion also extends to areas like the military. So I know that Ernst and Young hired a large group of people from the military, and they drove a lot of just wonderful things in terms of the culture, they were basically fearless, they would come into and just be fearless to try something new and really excel. So that's really what I'm most proud of, I think. And then from a skill set perspective, you know, some of the complexity of applying emerging technologies like AI into traditional spaces, like regulatory and compliance and having that kind of integrate. So I've been very proud of my accomplishments in that area as well.

Stacie Berdan:

Oh, that's cool. That's wonderful. I love the human element and all that you've done for people. That's really, that's really neat. This podcast, I want to turn to ESG, because that's what this podcast, this season is focused on... And ethics plays an important role in business, clearly your space as well. Can you tell us about how it plays out in business ethics and ESG, the interplay there?

Lizette Robinson:

So, I think sometimes, when we think, you know, I... as we look to define what ethics is, right, that, you know, it isn't just about what you achieve. But to me, what ethics is really about is, is how you actually go about achieving it. And that's really important. It's about, first of all complying with the rules and regulations around the world, which is, which is not easy. I know how many times as a consultant, I would go out and help corporations just to identify all the rules that are out there. I mean, there's just so many different rules that you have to comply with, and those rules are constantly evolving and changing. So there's a whole process just around determining what the rules are and complying. But it really goes beyond that. It's really about a core value of integrity, right? You've got to really operate at very high standards, right? And it's really about respect. It's about how you service and just your integrity. And what do I mean by integrity? You know, it's really about a code of, it's a code of conduct, right. So, what are your actions, the actions that you're taking? Right? Are you ensuring that the products and services that you sell – are they...are they safe? And are you selling them according to the law? You know, as we use



technology and data, are we doing that ethically? For example, there's a lot of questions around AI and, and unconscious bias as we look at AI. So, having programs in place to ensure that, that you're applying AI, Artificial Intelligence, in a legal and ethical way, that you're maintaining data privacy, right, and that you're being responsible. But, but even it goes beyond that. So for example, if our customers raise any complaints, if our associates raise any complaints, are we addressing their complaints to the best of ability, ensure that we have a level and fair playground... playing level for everyone that works in our echo system?

Stacie Berdan:

Okay. And so you mentioned a few examples for technology. Can you talk, can you expand on that a little bit? Because tech is everywhere, and it's so much a part of our lives and business? What else is there to think about, for our listeners when it comes to tech and ESG?

Lizette Robinson:

Right. So tech... so, a lot of times if we think about sustainability, and ethics, you know, technology plays a key role, because you have to think about, well, how to identify occurrences where something isn't functioning the way that it should. And so technology plays a key role in terms of rules and algorithms that go out and they'll basically survey... survey the landscape of data that you have available to you and will identify any potential anomalies out there that you have to go investigate. So a lot of that... if that were to be manually driven, it would just... first of all, it would probably not be as effective, right, and the costs would be tremendous. So, the monitoring capabilities, right, which times can leverage AI as a critical component of that. And there's also new technologies that are coming out, like, for example, blockchain that's being used for food and safety. So you have a sense of provenance, right? So new technologies are out there and you're beginning to see them applied more and more.

Stacie Berdan:

Well, it's really helpful to think about, and you've described some big initiatives and tech, we've talked about ethics and ESG... And so many times people think, oh ESG is this big initiative, but there are some things we can do every day, can we, if we're not on the ESG team or on the sustainability team, there are things that we can do every day that drive businesses forward that harness good, you know? What tips do you have for listeners like that?

Lizette Robinson:

So you know, one of the things with regards to ESG is, and that I find really important, is the concept of inclusion, right. And inclusion isn't just about how, who you hire, and who you pick on your team, right. But it's also the way that you kind of act day to day. So I'll give an example. Let's say, for example, you're in a meeting, and you'll see that they'll be some individuals that are going to dominate the conversation, and they're going to be the ones that are going to do the most talking. And then there might be other individuals who are really quiet and don't feel comfortable stating their opinion, because maybe someone's dominating the conversation. And so you know, what I try to do is, if I see someone out there that's quiet is ask them. So you know, Jane, for example, what do you think about this topic? Do you have any ideas and try to get people, to give people an opportunity to speak and provide their ideas. So that's examples of how we can kind of drive inclusion in the things that we do day to day.

Stacie Berdan:

You have worked around the world, traveled, lived in so many places, you've witnessed the world changing, evolution of all kinds of businesses, I'm sure, politics, geopolitics... What advice or specific tips do you have for listeners who are interested in working internationally?

Lizette Robinson:

So, you know, I think working internationally starts off... So if you get to... first of all, I know, it might be a little hard for some of the listeners, because it's probably a little older. But one of the things that I do advocate is that people get opportunities, and maybe you know, in the future as a parent, and you say think about your kids... giving your kids the opportunity to travel internationally, and maybe even independently, I mean, that was my



opportunity. My parents had us go away when we were between the ages of 10 and 12, to go internationally. And we had to learn a new language, and we had to learn a new skill, we had to learn to live internationally and to see the world as a global place. And that experience was so profound on me that it really led to me having and wanting to have an international career. So I think taking advantages of any opportunities that you have to learn languages, and being strategic about the languages that you pick, right, either languages that are going to play a big role in the future, or languages that are very widely adopted, right. So I think you need to think about the types of languages to learn, and be strategic in that way. And then when you have some, you have your international opportunities, I think it's really critical that you immerse yourself into the culture, it's so easy for... and I see it happen all the time where I've had year-abroad programs, I also participated in a year abroad program. So I thought that was also another wonderful opportunity was to participate in that year-abroad program that really helped me. But if you're really going to take advantage of it, it really means integrating yourself into the culture and not attaching yourself just to the expat community, right, you really need to embed yourself in the culture. So that would be my advice.

Stacie Berdan:

One follow up question. So that's great advice – languages, culture... For someone's working in a big company, whether it's a Walmart or EY and Accenture or PwC, whomever, what could an employee in the first, say, five years of their experience, their five years on the job, what do you think they could do within the confines of a corporation? Generally speaking even...

Lizette Robinson:

So, I think there's a couple of things that could happen there. So, you'll probably see, let's say, you'll go into an organization and you'll see certain individuals, certain partners that are doing a lot of international work, and they themselves will have an international footprint to my career. So I know that what would happen with me would be that people would come up to me and say, hey, you know, what I just wanted you to, here's my resume, I just wanted, you know, my background is, and I think I could be a good fit for you here, here, and here. And then I would, as I looked at opportunities, I would think about these individuals, and then I would kind of bring them into my engagement. And a classic example, Stacie, is Maria Villaquirán from GW, who did exactly that. She came to me and gave me her resume and said: by the way, I'm Colombian and I'm fluent in Spanish. And so then I helped her guide her career to get the experience that she needed, so that she could then be deployed on my engagement. So I said, well, you need to do these four things in the US. And once you've shown me, you can do these four themes, and I will put you on an international assignment. And that's how we started working together very extensively. And I'm proud to say that she just graduated with her MBA from Columbia and is one of the top 40 under 40 in an area of consulting, so really proud of what she's been able to accomplish.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, that's amazing. And that's a great tip. Raise your hand, find people with international experience, and be bold, right? That's great, wonderful. What do you see on the horizon that those entering the workforce in the next year or two need to be aware of, to kind of step back a little bit? There all kinds of big issues out there. Name a couple.

Lizette Robinson:

So, one of the things that I'd say is be careful about some of the benefits that you'll be receiving in the future. And what I mean about that, as we're all moving to this remote work structure. And while, you know, while I love remote, in fact, I would prefer remote right now in my career, I do recognize the importance of in-person meetings and kind of connecting with people. So, one of the things that I would caution about is don't underestimate the importance of connectivity with individuals. And also understand that as a digitally native person, some of the people that are going to be the key decision makers early on in your career, may value face time more than you're anticipating. So, I think we're in a period of flux, right, where we're moving from what was a traditional working model to a new working model... And so I think, try to get the advantages of both sides of that model, right? Work remote when you have to, but understand the importance of face time and how do you maximize face time, because some of the connections that you will make, you're not going to get them over Zoom... it's going to lunch together,



it's going to dinner together. It's some of that team building, it's just hard. So please don't underestimate that. That would be my advice.

Stacie Berdan:

Great advice. And thanks for sharing that. Because I think it's really important to hear so... I'm going to turn a little bit to the personal before we wrap up and ask you – is there a piece of advice that you would like to go back and give your younger self?

Lizette Robinson:

So I think there's a couple bits of advice, first of all and foremost, is start saving and investing early. And it's never too soon to do that. I think your first paycheck... You've got to maximize your savings and incentives and start investing early and, and aggressive investing, investing in areas like angel investing. So I invest in startups and angel investing started really, relatively very late in my career. And it's something that I wish I would have started to look at much earlier in my career. So that's one piece of advice. But as I think about my career, I think I would have invested more in understanding and learning technology early, early on. I would have probably spent more, more and more of my career in the techs early on in school, more on tech than I would have... that I did. And then, I think the third one there, and I know you only asked for one piece, but I think this is so important, is, you know, understanding how important the soft skills are later in your career. I mean, you can accomplish anything, and you can have any kind of skill set or capability. But if people don't like you, and people don't want to work with you, then you're not going to be successful. You know, and it's something that I've seen is that as I transitioned from consulting, which probably has a more kind of aggressive posture in terms of getting things done, because that's kind of what they're paid to do, versus, you know, internally in the corporate world, very different kinds of cultures. So you can't underestimate the importance of understanding that the softer side.

Stacie Berdan:

Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up?

Lizette Robinson:

Yeah, I think I think with regards to careers, I had someone that gave me a great piece of advice is think of your career as a bit of an hourglass, or the early part of your career is really about being broad, and getting as many experiences as you possibly can early on in your career. But being strategic about those experiences, and trying to figure out how those experiences kind of tie together. And then as you kind of progress in your career, you take those different experiences, and you kind of narrow them into kind of a domain area, right, and you really got to set your domain, and then from there you're going to expand in your domain. That was some really good advice. Because I know early on in my career, I was doing that for more of a global perspective and the way I was working. And then for me, it was really kind of linking in that area into more of a regulatory compliance that really helped kind of set my domain and the path that my career has navigated.

Stacie Berdan:

Oh, so, it's really interesting. That is fantastic advice. And thank you so much, it's been a pleasure talking with you today. I could, I could keep on asking you questions. But, unfortunately, our time is up and we're going to wrap it up here. So thank you again, I've loved every minute.

Lizette Robinson:

Thank you. And thanks to everyone out in CIBER team at GW.

[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!