

# cedar

## FEMALE LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

### PROCUREMENT & SUPPLY CHAIN PRACTICE

Having worked in the Supply Chain and Operations industry for over five years now, I have found that the topic of diversity and inclusion is one that always comes up in conversations with my clients. Regardless of the sector or industry, most of my clients tend to ask me about how they can improve their gender diversity, stand out against their competitors and, especially, how they can find the best female talent. After spending some time thinking and brainstorming with our team, we decided to interview four senior Female Leaders from the Supply Chain and Procurement functions at the beginning of the year. This is with the idea of bringing some

clarity to the topic, inspiring the new generation of females, and telling the stories of these four impressive ladies. We hoped this would help us understand how they reached their position and how they overcame the challenges that they found on the way.

I believe it serves as a very interesting read and I hope that you enjoy their stories.



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VP Supply Chain Philippines | Unilever |  
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## How women can compete in a male-dominated industry



Audrey Davin has had (and continues to have) a stellar career in the FMCG industry, working her way up through a variety of international roles in engineering, technology and supply chain to her current post, as VP Supply Chain, Philippines, with Unilever. Progressing through the ranks of different FMCG corporations, she has amassed a substantial breadth and depth of experience about what it takes for a woman to succeed in traditionally male business environments. However, it was during her first job in her native France that she experienced some of the problems that beset working women.



"I started working life in a factory. I was a young, single lady and as the first woman working on the shop floor the environment was challenging, with a lot of 'jokes' and misplaced comments. I understood very quickly the challenges caused by my gender. I was fortunate though because I found people who believed in me, inspired, developed, and sponsored me.

"I became a mother and had two young children but I also wanted to progress in my career. Consequently, I looked to new horizons and decided to develop my career abroad. I had a discussion with my husband very early – two or three years into our relationship – and I told him about my international career intentions. I was highly involved in humanitarian missions, with already a quite long list of travel records, so it wasn't really a surprise. There will always be one of a couple who has to sacrifice something and usually it's the lady who follows the man; however, my husband embraced this as it was fulfilling his strong desire to stay very close to our two sons and contribute to their education (he is a professional educator) and we have never looked back. This, I feel, is one of the keys for women who want to advance in business: if you are in a relationship, you must have the support of your partner and not keep your ambition secret: this helps avoid conflicts as you progress in your career.

In 1996, I was a graduate trainee, working in various engineering and production roles within the brewing industry. This, as you know, is a male-dominated arena. Although I was promoted to the head of the department, I knew that more senior roles were unlikely to come my way because men were the obvious preferred choice. My next move, however, was a crucial one and it had a big impact on me. I moved from France to start a new position in Denmark, and this was a big change: a new, very different country with a different culture and new 'rules.' The Nordic culture was an eye-opener, with gender diversity being a step ahead of anything I'd experienced up to that point. Today, I would never accept what I had to put up with in the early days of my career, but when you grow up, as I did, in an environment where gender inequity is the norm you start to accept it yourself. Even if you are a strong character, which I am, you start to consider discrimination against women as not shocking (business as usual!), but in Denmark, even the men would start looking at their watches in the afternoon and

say, 'I need to go now to pick up the kids from school.' Gender equity was in all body language, words and the ways people looked at me. It was a breath of fresh air. I realised I had reached the point of no return and from then on considered gender equity as a personal compass and a light to guide me".



"After a 2-year passage to Switzerland, our next move was to another country with a very different culture - China. That said, although Asian cultures are very different there was no sense that men dominated in business. In China, I saw women having the same opportunities as men and, in my case, I went there as a director, leading a big supply chain team in a factory and subsequently being promoted to manage a network of 25 factories across China. The attitude there is

'everything is possible,' and I learned a lot. I have switched to a "just do it, straight forward" attitude.

"Having all this experience on my CV made a difference: I was not challenged on my sex because my CV did the talking. This made it much easier because I was accepted for my ability and my gender didn't enter into it (as should be the case at any level). When I returned to Europe, to the UK, I moved into a global role as Unilever's Home Care Division Supply Chain Director. After 2.5 years it was time to pack our bags again as we headed for the Philippines, where I am currently VP of Supply Chain.

It was evident during this first part of our discussion that Audrey has packed an enormous amount into her career so far and consequently has a lot of very useful advice for women, of any age, who want to compete at the highest levels of business. In the second part of our interview, she gave me some insights which, we hope, will be of use to anyone seeking to emulate her success. We began by chatting about other women who have influenced and inspired her...

"In my first job, I was recruited by a lady. She gave me my first chance and she was so inspirational. Not only was she a hard worker, but she also had three children and I looked at her and thought, 'this is possible - I can do this too!' Then, when I became a mother, I realised how hard it was for her - and that was with only one child at that time. I didn't feel alone; I listened to her and other women, including one friendly more senior colleague in HR, and we shared thoughts and problems. I think it's very important to share with other women. I would go to them and say, 'how did you manage this? I'm struggling, what do you suggest?' They gave me all their tips (have a housekeeper and a nanny, make time for yourself, etc.). They helped me to balance my life but they also showed me the importance of having a 'never give up' mindset and high expectations. It is really important to seek help and inspiration from other women. If you don't, you can easily give up, so speak to others and learn from them. You'll be exhausted at times, especially with children, so you need people who can show you there is light at the end of the tunnel.



"Next, it's very important to be mobile, and in industries such as mine, that means being mobile internationally. Women have to have a powerful conviction that they are as strong as men and a desire to pursue their journey. They just need to go for it - just do it, even if there are kids, husbands, mothers, fathers saying that "you should not," or "why do you take so much pain....". There are so many reasons to abandon dreams, but women need to be resilient and willing to go where they want to go. Keeping the dreams as a compass will help you not to give up.

"The world is changing fast on this topic, but not everywhere. For women, the choice of company and location is very important. You have to ask yourself, 'is it a place you will have a chance to grow? 'You can use a lot of energy and get nowhere. You can fight to be the best and still not get a chance. Much depends on the people at the top. Their attitudes colour everything else and attitudes vary from country to country and culture to culture. I think that unless a company is located in a place where equality is the norm it can be hard to go from manager to director to VP unless there is a strong willingness from the leaders to bring diversity in gender.

Finally, we moved on to talk about bias in recruitment and interviewing and what women can do to maximise their opportunities for advancement.

“In general, I have been interviewed by men and there hasn’t been an equal split in the interviewing panel. However, I have always had firm support from HR, often ladies, although sometimes that can backfire. I remember one time when I had to stop the interview, telling the male interviewer, ‘I’m sorry, there is a misunderstanding here and I don’t want to waste your time or mine.’ That was in France, and it was obvious that he wanted a man for the role. I knew I was the right person for that job and HR had pushed me forward, but they didn’t realise the extent to which the guy was not giving credibility to any woman’s application. It was a long time ago before anti-discrimination laws were tightened up. HR told me they were sorry but in retrospect, they probably shouldn’t have championed me as they did because, as I told the interviewer, it really was a waste of time for us both. Incidentally, I have to say this also applies to head-hunters: they need to know their clients and candidates and not put the latter forward for bad experiences.

“To compete with men, you need to project your self-confidence, charisma and communication skills. Remember how quickly interviewers assess people, so come across as bold and confident, but don’t forget your soft skills, at which women tend to better than men.

One area where I think women can learn from men is networking. In my experience, men are stronger here. Females are more action-orientated and focus on results, but we - by which I mean senior-level women - need to support the next generation(s) of women as they come through the ranks. This means networking and talking to them, inspiring them to make sure they get an equal chance.

“Finally, here’s one thing that applies in my field but is, I think, going to be of even more importance in the future in every branch of business. In the supply chain today, it’s not all about working in factories and logistics. Those who succeed in the future will be those - women and men - who understand the lead that technology gives us, in a fully integrated E2E business model



These people are rare and, no matter your area of specialty, it’s important to find them if you want your company to succeed. My final piece of advice for women who are striving to make it to senior leadership roles is to make sure that you understand how technology is changing your business and how to take advantage of it to the benefit of your company and, of course, your career.”

**INTERVIEW BY  
CEDAR RECRUITMENT**



Global VP of Quality, Mattel | Global Supply Chain | Global Procurement | Global Quality Digital Transformation

## Three things that help women succeed

Gladis Araujo is VP, Global Quality Systems for Mattel, based in Mexico. On two counts, she is one of a rare breed: firstly, as a very senior female executive in business and secondly, as someone who has spent her entire working life with one company. However, as she explained to me, while it has been 30 years since she began with Mattel, it doesn't feel like her only employer.

"It really feels like I've been with four or five different companies because of the huge range, breadth and diversity of the jobs I have done in different countries across the world," she told me, "and I learned almost from Day One that there are three key things that a woman has to do if she wants to succeed in a traditionally male-dominated environment.



### ONE: FACTS/DATA

"I had trained as a chemical and systems engineer and my first significant job at Mattel, three months after I started, was to take charge of building a chemical lab. As the only woman in the manufacturing arena, I was subject to a lot of unconscious bias. People would ask me things like, 'where is your boss?' or 'who oversees this project?'. It was then that I realised that having control of facts and data is vital. When I started talking, those questioning me soon realised that I knew what I was saying: I did know the facts, the data, and the rationale behind what we were doing and what the goals were. Things changed after that and we all concentrated on what was actually important - getting the lab built.

"This emphasis on facts and data is, I'd say, the first thing that women need to take on board to eliminate bias. If you are organised and on top of your emotions, any unconscious prejudice usually gets put to one side and you can get on with the task in hand.





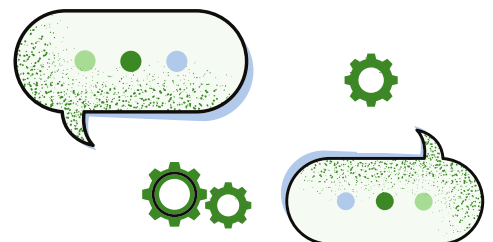
## TWO: BEING A TRUE MANAGER MEANS CARING FOR PEOPLE

“Underpinning this is the need for women to be experts in their field, but also to understand how to connect with others to share their knowledge. That’s why the second thing ambitious women need to do is to be true managers. You do this by being inspiring, respectful, motivational, and engaging. That last word is key: engaging with the rest of your team really is vital and again it’s something I learned very early on in my career. Moreover, it’s a two-way process where everyone benefits. For example, the Operators in your team know what’s going on at the micro-level, so speak to them, motivate them and show them you care, and then you’ll get both respect and support to make things happen. As leaders, we also need to ensure that we provide the tools and coaching that will help our people to succeed. There are many ways to do this, but, in my view, there are some simple steps that make a world of a difference. Simply “recognising” people is fundamental. Just kind words of appreciation are often all that is required to make magic happen.

## THREE: COMMUNICATION

“When you have a global role like mine, you learn that different cultures have different response times. People in diverse locations react at different speeds to what you think is urgent. When you are managing 52 labs and everything is moving very fast it’s vital to know what’s going on. Crucially, how quickly people react impacts how (and when) you make important decisions.

To help tackle this, I have established a communications code playbook in which, regardless of culture or different mindsets, we can be aligned as a single team. For example, for something really urgent, they can call me on my mobile 24/7 or via WhatsApp, email, etc. We have a format where we ask them to specify what the problem is, what their suggestions for resolving it are, what information they need, and the time required to deal with it. As a result, the communication flow of our day-to-day work has improved significantly and, in particular, there are fewer instances where people misinterpret what is an urgent matter, what needs to be done, what information needs to be provided, etc.



## EQUALITY FOR WOMEN IN INDUSTRY?

We then discussed the extent of the gender gap in industry today and I began by asking Gladis about how much of a problem this is.

“In Quality, we are generally looking for engineers and a recent UNESCO study showed that only about 20-23% of engineering graduates in the US, UK, and Germany are female. There is a huge gap, made worse by the fact that UNESCO also predicts that by 2030, over one-fifth of today’s jobs will be displaced by technology and more of these will be jobs held by women. The future of work is increasingly digital and there will be many new roles that don’t exist today. Consequently, I believe it’s vital to motivate more girls to study STEM subjects and then pursue a related career. It will also be important to make sure companies don’t just hire women, but also work very hard to support and promote them throughout their careers. This requires a focus on retention programs and an inclusive work environment free of micro-aggressions and with plenty of development opportunities.

“If we continue to underutilise female talent then our communities and industries simply won’t prosper. If we can achieve at least 30% female representation then our key financial indicators will increase by c. 15% and our countries’ GDP by c. 6%.”



## BREAKING POINT

Real commitment is required on all levels to make this happen. Gartner’s 2021 survey of women in leadership in the supply chain showed that a majority of respondents said that retaining mid-career women is an increasing challenge, mainly because of a lack of career opportunities and a lack of development. The two are, of course, linked!

“We also need to consider that these mid-career women are experiencing a breaking point: young women come in at entry-level, then they grow into the company, then the breaking point comes. The majority have small children when they reach between 30 and 40, then in the next few years, they have not just their business hours but often a tremendous workload at home. This all puts pressure on women, and it’s not helped by the underlying unconscious bias that kicks in and results in women getting bypassed by men at this point in their careers.”



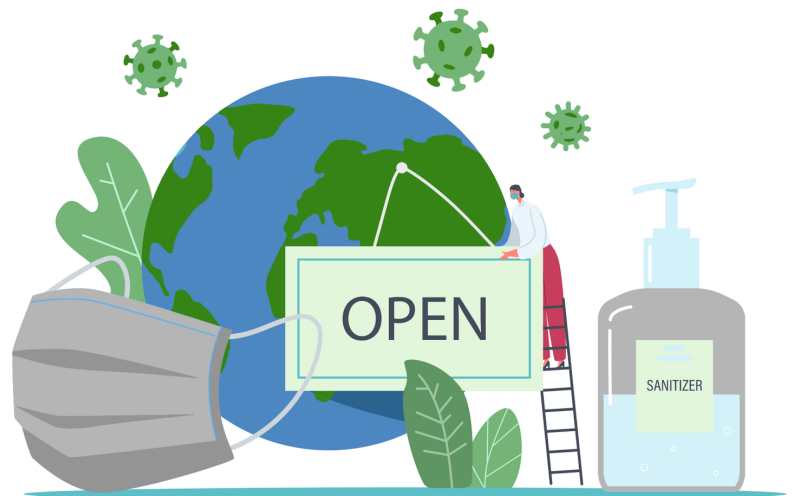
"We need to give these women support by attending to their flexibility needs and developing the soft skills required to overcome this breaking point. Men and women are brought up differently, so we need to change the paradigms that we are creating at home. We need to start educating our children with a diversity and inclusion mindset: we should ask, 'can everyone be required to have equal responsibilities at home - say, one day she washes the car, one day he does the dishes?'"

"What's true for the home is also true for the workplace. In the workplace, a successful diversity, equality, and inclusion program is essential. This requires real commitment from the top leadership down. It's a cultural thing. You then need to develop policies, procedures, and KPIs for your strategy and tie it to your monthly reviews, making everyone accountable and highlighting female role models to show others the way ahead. You need to create an environment where women can succeed, but nowadays the challenge is that our organisations are not prepared culturally to support women.

## POST-COVID

"Post-Covid, with so many people wanting to change their working hours to have a better work-life balance, it's even more difficult. Employers need to let their employees know what the new boundaries are with flexible working: it's things like barring calls and emails at the weekend and after 5.00 pm that will make a difference. Our leaders need to be role models."

"There are four key initiatives that will underpin the future for women in work. Firstly, we need simply to hire more of them. Secondly, we need to retain them. Thirdly, we need to develop them, and fourthly we need to promote them. And crucially, we need to measure the results of these initiatives."



Senior Director of Supply Chain | FMCG

## East is East and West Is West, But Diversity is Universal



Olga Pavlenko is a senior leader and an expert in Procurement and Supply Chain. She is a Swiss Citizen of Russian origin and currently lives in Switzerland with her husband and children. I have known Olga for several years and was delighted when she agreed to share and compare her experiences of diversity and inclusion within Eastern and Western Europe.



### STARTING OUT...

"I was a teenager in Russia when the Soviet Union collapsed. My mother was a university professor and had a major influence on me. She taught me to make the best of what you have, and that by embracing change rather than staying paralysed by fear you can ride the wave and enjoy life and work. I had been dreaming about an international career as a Diplomat and in preparation for University, I had to learn English to a high level. It was fairly unusual for Russian people to speak English at the time as the country was effectively closed for many

years and usually the only reason to learn the language was to become a professional translator. However, the country changed so fast that the education system was unable to follow and when Western companies started

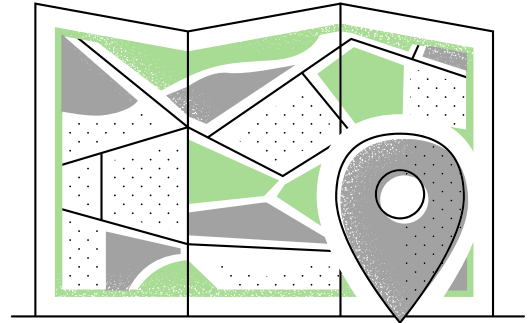
coming into the Russian market, I had a big advantage over most of my contemporaries.

"At that time, if you had a talent for business the opportunities were huge. I was only 18 when DHL offered me a job that paid 800 times the salary my mother was earning as an academic! By the age of 22, I was managing cargo operations at the biggest airport in Russia, with 700 people reporting to me.



"I had then - and still have - a real love for learning. I think that's very important for everyone in their careers: you should never stop learning. Taking on huge responsibilities early in my career, I learned it wasn't necessary to pretend I knew everything and not to be afraid to ask questions. No one expected you to know it all at this age so I asked a lot of questions! This was really helpful as I moved onwards and upwards into leadership positions, but even then, I continued to be inquisitive. I think that's important. People need to see you are interested and authentic - then they help you to learn more.

As a result, I was in daily contact with lots of people in many countries, which, in turn, helped me develop my career once I came to the West.



"Both on-the-job and external learning is important. I completed my MBA while I was at DHL and that helped me when I moved to PepsiCo, where I was responsible for leading the Supply Chain across Russia. At this point, the biggest challenge for all businesses in Russia was getting enough products into the country. The novelty of bright, new Western products was at its peak and these were exciting times for Russian people. Logistics was the cornerstone of every business's operation: without an efficient logistics function, no one could do anything.

## CHANGING COUNTRIES AND CULTURES

"My first global role was in London, working with consultants to open my employer's first European Supply Chain and Procurement office. Then, when the Swiss office opened, I went to Bern as the Supply and Capacity Manager for Europe, along with my one-year-old baby. As everyone does, I had certain expectations when moving abroad. Mine were mostly formed from watching movies. Coming to London, my image of the country was based on Sherlock Holmes and ladies and gentlemen gathering for afternoon tea.

Russia has a patriarchal culture, a bit like Britain did a few decades ago. This means that Russian men would help you with your coat or hold doors open for women, but when I first came to London, I remember following a man through an office door and he just let it fly back in my face. It was, literally, painful at times to acclimatise to a new society!

At the same time, my curiosity and love of learning made me explore a lot and enjoy every moment of the 20-plus years I spent in Switzerland and my one year in London.

## HOW DO YOU BALANCE RAISING A FAMILY AND YOUR CAREER?

"I am actually a very mothering mother, but on many occasions whilst I was trying to combine raising a family with an international career, I felt horrible. I knew very few mums at school and couldn't participate in any parent-led initiatives because of my work. Thankfully, Russian families are very close and supportive, and after his retirement, my father spent six months of every year with us in Switzerland, giving all of his love and time to my children.

Additionally, I had a full-time nanny until my youngest child turned six and went to school. Despite this, it remained challenging to manage at times, such as when the children were sick, or during long business trips. Switzerland was, and remains, a very traditional society where mothers are expected to care for their families. Support systems for working mothers are often unavailable, therefore in order to excel in business, you have to accept that at times you will miss out.



## WHAT MAKES AN INSPIRATIONAL (FEMALE) LEADER?

"In my view, a great leader is someone you can talk to about your vulnerabilities and still feel comfortable and not worried that it will impact on your career. Such leaders really do inspire their colleagues, who, in turn, get so much more from having a confident relationship with their manager than those who are scared of approaching them...

"There are undoubtedly differences of style between male and female leaders but there are still far too few women in senior positions, not just in my discipline but across the business world generally. That said, I have to say that for a woman it isn't always easy having a female boss. In my early days in the West, it was so rare that, more often than not, women managers needed to be three times better and four times more devoted than their male equivalents. The bar was set very high for them, and they applied the same expectations to others. It is very rewarding to work for good female leaders because they tend to be very intuitive - they feel things that male bosses don't. Men tend to take things more at face value. I was very fortunate to have great female mentors and sponsors who made a mark in my professional life and many still remain close friends.



## WHAT ARE THE THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY FOR BUSINESS?

“A key consideration nowadays is the diversity of your team and I think it’s important to keep in mind the benefits of diversity for the business. It’s easier to focus on gender, ethnicity, etc., because it’s easier to see, but to my mind, it’s the diversity of thought that matters. Most of the teams have a lot more diversity than we see. In my view, if people pretend they are all the same it doesn’t bring any benefit and group-think takes over, making it more difficult for original and creative ideas to come to the fore. That’s what I focus on: I’ve never looked to ‘create’ diversity, rather I ask, ‘will they bring their own thinking to the team?’. Do we as a team create an atmosphere that allows people to bring their best true selves to work?”

Throughout my career, I’ve seen the contribution that women make to business success and I want to help many more to enjoy working life as much as I do. That’s why I devote a lot of my time developing young female talent through CIPS, LEAD or direct mentoring”



Vice President of Sourcing & Raw Material Management | Burberry

## The Procurement of a Fashionable Female Career



It's funny how people often never end up in the careers they thought they would. When she was at school in New York, Isabelle von Watzdorf studied languages and wanted to work in that field. Naturally, she ended up in procurement. It began, she told me, purely by accident, when she took a temp role at Ralph Lauren. An "amazing boss then took a chance on me, and when a role came up in London I went for it," leading to a steady rise up the ranks of the procurement industry with a variety of major fashion and FMCG companies, such as Tommy Hilfiger, J Crew and Burberry, amongst others.

It's often said that fashion is a male-dominated industry, with a Forbes article in 2019 highlighting a number of salient facts, including that only 40% of womenswear fashion brands are designed by women and only 14% of the major fashion brands are run by women. More specifically, it seems clear that women tend to be in a majority in some areas of the industry but a minority in others...as Isabelle agreed...

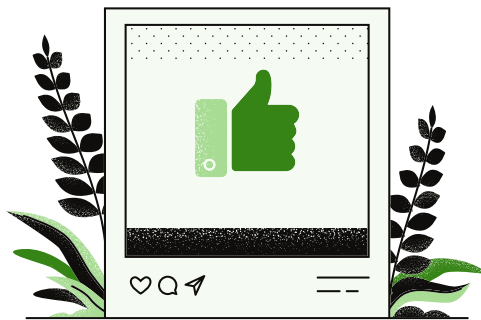


"Well, it's true that in fashion retail the shopfloor is predominately female and it's equally true that a lot of senior positions are filled by men. I think it depends on the CEO: some prefer to be surrounded by men, some by women. I have had a female CEO who surrounded herself with men. In my view, what's more important is how a company is structured. There are Divisions that are male-dominated - logistics tends to be male-dominated for example, but merchandising, where I've worked, is very female. For women dealing with these male-majority areas, the key question is, 'Do I have the confidence to push back, for example to a truck driver?' In many areas, women are used to dealing with men at one level only - in many of my roles my vendors were all men and I didn't have a problem - yet when we come up against a man in an area that is outside our comfort zone, we act differently. Why? Is it a lack of confidence?"

When women reflect on senior, male colleagues I've heard them say, "I could do that ... or at least I could do most of it, but not all." I suspect that in many cases they could do all of it, but the reason we say we can't is that we don't want to over-promise and then under-deliver. To illustrate what I mean, when I began to get more senior roles in the supply chain, I'd want to know everything so everyone could see I knew what I was talking about - a form of impostor syndrome if you like. A man, in contrast, might think, 'I'm here to lead, not know the detail.' At first, I was anxious that if I didn't have the same depth of knowledge as a male colleague, I might be asked questions by senior people who expected me to know something I didn't. As my career progressed, I took the approach that, like men, 'I'm here to lead.' When I took on new Divisions, I told myself, 'people are signing this off, they want you to take yourself to the next level, they believe in you.' To get to this position, I needed to flip my previous thinking around and focus on the fact that I brought as much to the table as anyone. That's why I was there! Women need to know that they have the right to be at that table on

their own terms. I tell my people this, stressing, 'I believe in you but you need to believe in yourself too.'

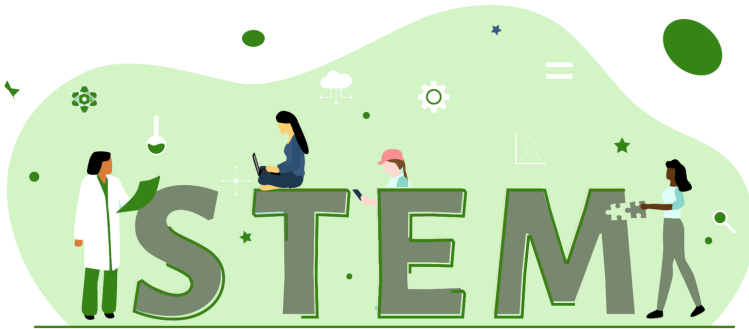
"One of the biggest problems for women, in my opinion, is that we compare ourselves all the time. It's almost ingrained from school and it manifests itself nowadays on social media in particular. We seem conditioned to offer the best version of ourselves on Instagram, Facebook, etc. Again, I think there is an element of impostor syndrome here, plus a bit of this is down to the way women speak. More so than men, we tend to say 'to be honest, I don't know if I can do that... I want to be transparent with you etc.' We're making excuses but aren't entirely sure why. There always seems to be an apology lurking.



"At the other end of the scale, some women are super-confident. I saw one lady at a conference who was at CEO

level, but she was so intimidating. We all sat there thinking, 'what have I done with my life, I've done nothing compared to her, everyone looks up to her, I feel completely overshadowed.' But she had very little warmth; it was down to business straight away. There was no 'how are you?' and it was all about her. I felt, 'do I want to be that person?' I didn't think I did, I wanted to be a more rounded person. I do wonder, is that what you have to become - and if so, how many women really want to behave like that? Men seem more adept at this. I had one boss at Burberry who would send emails at 4.00 am. He was a real pressure cooker, taking in as much stress as possible and containing it. I don't think I'd want to have that feeling every night.

"On the other hand, there are women I've met in business and I've gone away thinking, she's really nice, but nice people don't get there, you have to be a ball-buster if you want to succeed. Then I ask myself, why is it always assumed that niceness doesn't get you to a senior level? Success is almost always associated with aggressiveness and looking after No. 1 - traits we probably associate more with men.



"I said previously that the extent of women's involvement at a senior level varies from industry to industry and business to business. It was 60% women at the VP level in Burberry and I and all my other VP colleagues were very vocal, strong women who would not shy away from pushing back at the CEO when necessary. I think this preponderance of women was partly because there is such a big product association between women and fashion/retail.

"Outside fashion though, in, say, chemicals or oil and gas, what can businesses do to attract women? Not only is there not such a big product association, I wonder if there is a natural propensity for things? A lot of it stems from school, where there are not many women studying in these fields. If it's 70% male-dominated at school then that ratio will translate into the workplace. I know there is a huge focus on getting girls into STEM subjects at schools, but it takes time to work through the system and other industries don't have the same focus as science, engineering and IT.

Sadly, even in STEM subjects, there are still not enough young women coming through. Occasionally, I wonder how much this is simply because men and women are different. Is it heresy to say this? We know we are different, hormonally, genetically, etc. so does it all come down to whether

we are prepared to sacrifice other things - and especially whether our partners are prepared to sacrifice their careers to allow us to succeed? We know that women can do everything in business as well as a man, but sometimes I wonder if our under-representation at the senior level is simply because a lot of women don't want to make the sacrifices involved. There is no avoiding the fact that women's childbearing years are the years when men climb the corporate ladder. Family means different priorities for some women and, of course, it's different in different cultures/parts of the world. For example, Americans are terrified about being out of the office in case someone else might steal a march. In contrast, in Asia, three months of maternity leave is regarded as ample, compared to one year in the UK.

"There's no doubt that this is a complex, multi-faceted subject with a wide variety of contrasting opinions. In my experience, most people in senior roles won't put a man or woman into a senior job just because they want to tick a box on diversity numbers. They want to make it the right person. I agree with that, but I'd add that for women to continue to make progress and increase their representation at the senior level, it's vital to create the right work environment. It needs to be one where you can turn off the phone without worrying that it will affect your career. You don't have to sell your soul to the company. You can succeed on your own terms as a woman. I and many of my female colleagues have done just that."