



WOMEN IN AVIATION

INTERVIEW SERIES

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Women In Aviation

Interview Series

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INTRODUCTION

Faced with financial crises, pandemics, supply chain issues, talent shortages, and climate change challenges, the aviation industry has had a turbulent time over the past few years. But what it has continuously succeeded at is pivoting and adapting to change – not least societal shifts and calls for greater diversity and equality.

For the longest time, gender equality and diversity has been at the forefront of all our minds. The representation of women, particularly in senior and executive positions, has been under the spotlight, and the aviation industry has not been exempt from this. Fortunately, the international, globalised nature of the industry makes it one of the more progressive sectors in terms of diversity and equal opportunities. However, where it risks lagging behind is in exposure and visibility.

This year's Women in Aviation campaign compiles the insights, experiences, and successes from some of the leading and most influential women in the industry, delving into the key trends they've seen throughout their careers and the advice they offer to budding young female talent looking to enter the industry.

From breaking taboos and pushing boundaries to building female support networks and ignoring limiting beliefs, these remarkable women pass down the advice they've learned to help promote the industry as one of the most progressive, inclusive, and diverse one can join. The overarching theme readers will digest from this report is that gender needn't determine one's success.

As Aircraft Interiors Expo (AIX) prepares to return this June, we're reminded once again of the important platform it offers, as the home of conversations that influence the industry of tomorrow. By highlighting the achievements and challenges of these women, we can help to carve out a clear path to even greater diversity in the industry and encourage more influential, ambitious women to join the industry and help drive it forward.



Polly Magraw

Event Director
Aircraft Interiors Expo

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Magraw'.

MARIYA STOYANOVA

JETBLUE

To kick off the 2023 Women In Aviation campaign, we revisited the women who featured in the 2020 campaign to find out what progress has been made, and the emerging challenges facing the aviation sector. Here, Mariya Stoyanova, Executive Customer Experience & Product Development at JetBlue, discusses the impact of the pandemic and the future of a diverse aviation industry.

Mariya, what progress or notable changes have you witnessed in the industry over the past five years?

I am very fortunate to work at a company where diversity has been always a main focus. Over the past five years, we've continued to make progress on our diversity goals and I feel extremely proud to be part of an executive leadership team where women have a very strong representation, even at the C-suite level.

Being based in New York City has also helped us over the years since it gives us a strong and diverse pool of candidates for all levels.

The pandemic had a clear impact on the aviation industry. In your opinion, has this had any impact on the industry's efforts to diversify?

The pandemic had a rather devastating impact on the industry in many aspects, one of which is the ability to attract talent.

That being said, every challenge represents an opportunity to look for new ways to do things. As any other company in the industry, we had challenges ramping up once travel restarted, and we had to find creative approaches to bringing talent onboard quickly as well as getting them excited about the potential of the aviation industry and various career paths they can have.



Fortunately, we have a multitude of programs that keep our talent pipeline diverse and quick to adapt to any unforeseen changes.

Are there any best practice examples or companies that are driving progress in this space?

I am a firm believer that in order to have a meaningful and long-lasting impact you need to start building from the bottom up - by growing and developing the next generation of diverse leaders. Investing in diverse talent and sustainable systems to help them to progress is key. At JetBlue, we have several programs that aim to do exactly that – JetBlue Foundation, The Gateways Program, JetBlue Scholars, and more.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry in the next five years?

The post-pandemic world hasn't settled yet and there is a lot of outstanding uncertainty. Travel patterns and customer segments have shifted over the past two or more years; business travel is not what it used to be, remote work has allowed for more flexible travel schedules, and consequently has triggered more leisure and visiting friends and relatives (VFR) travel.

Airlines had to adjust capacity and new carriers have emerged. We see the industry evolving and adapting to that new normal and with this process, there is always a lot of challenges as well as opportunities. Pivoting quickly and in the right direction will define a lot of companies in the industry.



"Investing in diverse talent and sustainable systems to help them progress is key"

MELISSA RAUDEBAUGH

DELTA AIR LINES

Fellow 2020 Women In Aviation participant, Melissa Raudebaugh, General Manager, Delta Air Lines, reflects on the steps made to embrace women and diversity in the workplace, and the importance of being able to respond quickly to emerging market conditions and trends.

What progress or notable changes have you witnessed in the industry over the past five years?

I think the industry has come on leaps and bounds in the last 5 years compared to the 5 or even 10 years prior. Companies are taking a closer look at how they've historically handled diversity and are making great strides in addressing this head-on. We've definitely seen positive changes at Delta in the way of diversity.

Are there any best practice examples or companies that are driving progress in this space?

I think the change in thinking has been key. Companies are realising that diversity matters and they can make a difference. Focusing on hiring diverse candidates – not just the candidate pool but the candidates.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry in the next five years?

I think technology is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry. Technology is changing/developing faster and faster. It is so hard for the airline industry to keep up because everything we do is so expensive (upgrading IFE systems or seats).

We are going to have to think of ways to be more nimble so we can react faster.



ALINA NASSAR NASSAR ABOGADOS

Alina Nassar, Former President, International Aviation Women's Association returns to the Women in Aviation campaign to highlight how the pandemic has driven the industry to embrace diversity and inclusion, and the ever-growing need to be bold.

Alina, what progress or notable changes have you witnessed in the industry over the past five years?

I am seeing more open and profound conversations on the impact of diversity and inclusion in the industry, particularly in light of talent needs and the crisis of Covid-19.

I am also seeing more concrete and consistent actions to change companies' policies, for example, to guarantee equal pay and diverse participation in the decision-making processes. Progress, however, has not been at the speed we'd like to see; some of it caused by the recent global crises.

The pandemic had a clear impact on the aviation industry. In your opinion, has this had any impact on the industry's efforts to diversify?

The pandemic's effects on the aviation industry were truly devastating. But it made us see clearer than ever the need to be bold about several aspects of our business and the companies we want to be (and lead!).

Conversations and actions are taking place around teams' wellbeing in broader and deeper terms: mental health, opportunities for better work-life balance, chances to growth within the companies, talent attraction and retention.



Certainly, none of these issues are new but there is even more awareness of their relevance. More importantly, solutions to these old issues demand innovative thinking, and out-of-the-box ideas, that can only be achieved when you have diverse teams addressing them.

Are there any best practice examples or companies that are driving progress in this space?

The transformation from fully in-person models to hybrid and work-from-home is probably one of the most relevant “new” practices, as well as the focus on well-being as a top priority. The companies that have first understood the new preferences and new balances needed have been successful in retaining their workforce, and in recruiting after the wave of layoffs, resignations, and retirements during 2020 and 2021.

I have also seen companies implementing structural changes internally in areas such as equal pay, and policies that allow their employees to more equally distribute non-paid work within their families, which as we know was one of the most unjust bills that women paid during the pandemic.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry in the next five years?

Securing the industry’s sustainability in all fronts: reducing environmental footprint, attracting and retaining the right talent, boosting innovation, keeping healthy balance sheets. The more diverse and inclusive our teams are, the better prepared we are to face those challenges.



CARRIE MCEWAN TEAGUE

Carrie McEwan, Senior Human Factors Specialist at Teague is an experienced Human Factors Engineer and Specialist. She has worked with leaders in aerospace and technology, infusing a human-centred perspective to the design of product systems. The first of our 2023 Women in Aviation participants, she talks about her passion for aviation, and dreams of NASA mission control.

Carrie, how long have you worked in the aviation industry?

I have been working in aviation since 2005.

How did you get into the industry?

It started back when I was a kid. I had this crazy dream that I would go into aerospace and work at NASA mission control, and I would push the button that made the space shuttle go into the air.

I later realised there's not one big button that does that, so I had to adjust that dream a little bit, but I still really loved aerospace and aviation. So, I studied Human Factors Engineering and Ergonomics which is where I really learned a lot about how people interact with products and systems and experiences.

Through that training, I learned that one of my favourite things was being an advocate for humans within product and experience design. My very first job was at United Airlines, and I was in the cabin interior group where I immersed myself in all things aviation. I worked on interiors, retrofits, developing policies, product integration, working with flight attendant groups, etc.

From there, I was really drawn to Teague because I really wanted to be on the front end of those designs.



When you're in cabin interiors, you are presented with things and have to choose A, B, C, or D, whereas I wanted to be on the other side of the fence where I was getting to help design and influence what A, B, C, and D were. I've now been at Teague for nearly 12 years.

What is it about working in the aviation industry that appeals to you?

I just love the complexity of it. I find it super fascinating. There are always interesting and new problems to solve and new experiences to create. In my current role, I get to spend a lot of time on a variety of projects, from small things like where water splash goes in an airplane laboratory, all the way up to seat comfort and interior lighting. We are problem-solvers and it's very people-centred; the passengers, the flight attendants, the maintenance workers, all of these people that touch the aircraft and the journey.

As a woman, how do you find working in such a male-dominated industry?

I think I've been lucky to have had a lot of fantastic female mentors through my career, and I do think there's been a shift in women taking on more leadership roles compared to when I started nearly 20 years ago. There's still a way to go, but I'm excited to see that we're continuing to increase the role that women will play within the industry in all levels.

Have you encountered any gender discrimination in your career?

Mostly in the early stages of my career. At that young age, I didn't necessarily feel empowered to stand up to it. But over the years, I've really learnt from those instances and experiences, learning about the importance of self-advocacy and using that to propel my career.

As a female senior leader, why do you think it's important for companies to address diversity?

Increasing diversity, including opinions, insights, and inputs only helps expand and move the dialogue forward. I ensure I do this when I work with design teams – I do a lot of research and make sure we include a wide range of users' perspectives, from passengers to flight attendants, and maintenance crews, all from different backgrounds and cultures. It's bringing that together to make things more pleasant and usable for everyone.



"Increasing diversity, including opinions, insights, and inputs only helps expand and move the dialogue forward."

What do you believe has been the key to your success?

I've always tried to stay really open to other people and opportunities, and just being generally curious and asking lots of questions. I tend to have a 'yes' mentality, to build on what other people are contributing, always asking how I can help and get involved.

What characteristics do you believe are needed to survive in the aviation industry?

I think being patient and persistent is always good to have. In aviation, the timelines can be super long compared to other industries like tech where lots of updates come out regularly. So, to make that truly impactful progress, we have to be really patient and persistent to see those projects through because everything worth doing takes time.

In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to women succeeding in the workplace?

Most workplaces aren't set up to support women. Anything from access to childcare and flexibility, to leadership opportunities and equal pay, are barriers that are going to slow us down. But this isn't specific to aviation – many industries can have a lot of cultural barriers and it will take time to combat them.

What key change do you envision happening to the industry in the next 10 years?

I am really excited to see the momentum on improving accessibility in aviation. This is having a huge moment right now, so I really hope we can capitalise on it and start to improve the journey for people with disabilities, from the moment they start planning a trip to until they reach their final destination, supported through airport navigation.

Things like security screenings that maintain their dignity, enabling wheelchairs on the airplane, and making lavatories accessible that work for all disabilities. There's a lot of work to do here, but I'm excited to see this momentum move forward.

What would you say has been your biggest career highlight to date?

I've just had a lot of cool moments. I feel like this industry is unlike any other one – I've got to travel to interesting places and be on-site for airplane retrofits. Seeing an airplane stripped down to its guts and then built back up is fascinating. I've also had opportunities to speak at some fantastic design conferences about aviation. So, I'm not sure if I have just one highlight, but more many different ones, and more to come!

What would be the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

I've been given lots of great advice, but I think as a woman it's important to build a network of advocates, whether they're female or male, and having a good support system and advocacy group.

In turn, it's good to ensure you have time to give back to other people, helping build other people up too.

What advice would you give to female professionals interested in a career in aviation?

It would be to make sure to reach out to other women, see what they're all doing, and learn from one another. There are a lot of places to network and build up a community and culture of women so I would encourage getting involved in those conversations.



What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry right now?

The last couple of years have been really rough on the aviation industry through the pandemic and lots of general turmoil. So, I don't think there's one big challenge, but we are at an inflection point in the industry where we can take the opportunity to respond and move forward on a number of important topics such as sustainability, diversity, accessibility, and equity. Now is the time to pick these themes up and let them expand and explode across the industry.

If you could change one thing in the aviation industry, what would it be?

I'm really passionate about accessibility, so I wish that regulations were updated to reflect our current needs, cultures, and ultimately, passenger expectations. It's been a while since regulations in the US have been updated, but it's promising to know that there's some momentum happening on that front.

JO ROWAN PRIESTMANGOODE

Jo Rowan, Associate Director - Strategy, PriestmanGoode doesn't think it's necessary to call out the gender bias, instead maintaining a focus on knowledge, and being good at what you do. Here, she speaks about the varied and multi-disciplinary nature of the aviation industry, and the desire to push boundaries and break the mould.

Jo, how long have you worked in the aviation industry?

I have worked at PriestmanGoode for 20 years this year!

How did you get into the industry?

My degree was in Product and Furniture Design at Nottingham Trent University, and my first professional experience was in branding. I initially joined PriestmanGoode as an Industrial Designer which is where I learnt the aviation nuances, thinking of cabins and seats as large products. Ultimately, the design process is the same.

What is it about working in the aviation industry that appeals to you?

Whilst it seems niche, aviation design is actually very varied and multi-disciplinary: from cabins and seats to digital experiences and service items. The expertise, knowledge, insights, and experience from stakeholders involved in bringing a concept into production is impressive, and inspiring to be part of.

Every challenge is unique for various reasons, such as the individual requirements of an airline; the cultural differences in regions of the world; the partners you're working with; the size of the budget and visions of success - each are different on every project.



It is also a fast-moving industry that has really evolved over the last 20 years. For example, some of the design services that we are leading on today such as CX (Customer Experience) design and CMF (Colour, Material and Finish) are specialisms that didn't exist when I started.

As a woman, how do you find working in such a male-dominated industry?

I don't feel it necessary to call out the gender bias, as I've come to find it's about being knowledgeable and good at what you do, striving for the best possible solution, using the best possible process and team. Design is about problem solving; there are the more technical aspects and the more empathetic and emotional aspects.

Women may see things differently, they may approach challenges differently, but it isn't about being male or female. It is about having the right skills for the project and matching skillsets to the task needed.

It's all about confidence in well thought-through concepts, which are well justified. That being said, I have definitely noticed surprise when I've stood up to give some presentations!

Have you encountered any gender discrimination in your career?

PriestmanGoode is a very inclusive company. We are an Employee Owned so we ensure that everyone's voice is heard. Our Managing Director is female, and although I'd be lying if I said every day of my career has been easy, I feel fortunate to be part of an organisation that gets it right!

As a female senior leader, why do you think it's important for companies to address diversity?

Speaking specifically about being part of a design company: I believe design is about making things better for everyone. Designing for a diverse range of customers requires diverse teams. What better way of doing this effectively than to have the right mix of gender, race, age, etc.?

More generally speaking, from a lifestyle logistics perspective, women can become primary carers if they have children. It doesn't make you any less passionate, driven or ambitious at work, it just makes you a little less available for meetings at school pick up time. I will always be a huge advocate for working parents and the flexibility that needs.



What do you believe has been the key to your success?

Building an understanding of the bigger picture, at a macro trend level. Having an interest across other industries. Thinking big and reframing problems as opportunities. And, not worrying about gender!

What characteristics do you believe are needed to survive in the aviation industry?

A desire to push boundaries and break the mold.

In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to women succeeding in the workplace?

The confidence gap. Having strong opinions – which I've noticed some people feel threatened by – but feeling the need to justify them is a hurdle to progress and success.



But barriers for women as parents have definitely shifted. If one good lesson was learnt from the pandemic, it was that flexible working works. It has become acceptable to make hours work around childcare arrangements, which is a game-changer.

What key change do you envision happening to the industry in the next 10 years?

If we are going to get to net zero by 2050, we need to start seeing a much bigger change in approach across aviation.

What would you say has been your career highlight to date?

The sustainable economy meal tray that we developed in the studio to question single use plastics in meal services was the result of an insight on a family holiday. To then see the idea gain such traction, feature in exhibitions and validate the thought process was really powerful.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Do the things that scare you. For example: entering new fields, such as sustainability or working on a project in a new industry. You don't need to know the industry inside out as it's an advantage to bring something different and a fresh perspective.

**"Do the things that scare you.
For example: entering new
fields, such as sustainability or
working on a project in a new
industry."**

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry?

Net Zero.

If you could change one thing in the aviation industry, what would it be?

I would like to see it leading trends, not waiting for them to be easy and 'aviation ready'. It would be great to see the latest technology onboard sooner and not spend years rethinking the ways that things have always been done in other industries!

KATHRYN DOYLE COLLINS AEROSPACE

With more than 15 years at British Airways before moving to Collins Aerospace, Kathryn Doyle, Associate Director Product Development Marketing talks about the magic of flying and why being ready to pivot and adapt is critical to succeed in such a dynamic sector.

Kathryn, how long have you worked in the aviation industry?

I have worked in the aviation industry for over 18 years. I grew up in an aerospace family where both of my parents worked for airlines, so not only was it a natural path but it has also been a life-long passion for me.

How did you get into the industry?

I was very fortunate to grow up in an aerospace household where we frequently jetted off across the world. This taught me the invaluable life-skills of navigating airports and international travel. I joined British Airways in 2005 and it immediately felt like home.

What is it about working in the aviation industry that appeals to you?

I'll never tire of the magic of flying, how it connects people and brings them together. Being a part of that is hugely important to me so I feel immensely privileged to be able to make people's travel experiences better. But aside from that, I thrive on how the industry is so dynamic. No two days are ever the same as it's constantly striving for ways to innovate and better itself.



As a woman, how do you find working in such a male-dominated industry?

I enjoy the diversity within the aerospace industry, and feel I've always had access to the same opportunities as my male counterparts. I've had a number of strong role models and mentors in leadership positions, both male and female, and have benefited greatly from their support and advice over the years.

Have you encountered any gender discrimination in your career?

Not personally, but at the beginning of my career I observed peers and leaders not treating women with the same respect as their male counterparts. Thankfully, this appears to be far rarer now.

As a female senior leader, why do you think it's important for companies to address diversity?

I think it is primarily about achieving a balance of leaders who bring a diverse set of views to the table. This facilitates more inclusive decision making, helps to eliminate unconscious biases, and ultimately helps drive the company forward in a way which more broadly represents their staff and customer bases.

What do you believe has been the key to your success?

Confidence, authenticity, an openness to learn, and a genuine passion for the industry tends to help you shine through. I've never tried to be anything other than myself, and I strongly believe that being genuine is critical to developing positive relationships and establishing yourself as a leader.

What characteristics do you believe are needed to survive in the aviation industry?

Flexibility, humility, a sense of humour, and resilience. Because every day is different, you must be ready to pivot and adapt.

In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to women succeeding in the workplace?

Not necessarily specific to aviation, but many other industries, I would say the gender pay gap remains an issue. Also, any historical notions that women will take time out to start a family and not be as effective or committed when they return to work are false and damaging. Hopefully, aviation is well on its way to resolving some of these. For me, 'parity' is the key word.



What key change do you envision happening to the industry in the next 10 years?

The introduction of legislation regarding accessibility in the cabin, whether seating or the provision of larger washrooms, on new build aircrafts. There is growing momentum in this space already, with some airlines publicly setting targets of being 100% accessible in the next few years. At Collins, we are already building this into our new product development process, including undertaking accessibility evaluations for both hidden and visible disabilities of new seating concepts.

What would you say has been your career highlight to date?

I don't have one specific highlight, but I look back at my time with the British Airways Cabin Interiors team and our various wider business stakeholders with great pride and joy. Our work elevated the onboard product offering and the wonderful feedback we received from customers showed we positively impacted their travel experience.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

When life gives you lemons, use them to make a Gin & Tonic!



What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry?

Resources, specifically retaining and attracting talent within the industry. I think COVID-19 impacted peoples' working behaviours, so the perceived industry instability and associated job security are both big hurdles that we need to overcome.

If you could change one thing in the aviation industry, what would it be?

Speed of change. Our industry needs to use a sort of 'restart button' post-COVID to review processes, behaviours and improve agility going forward.

VIVIAN LO CATHAY PACIFIC

Vivian Lo, GM Customer Experience and Design, Cathay Pacific, believes that being the unique one out sometimes has its cons, but it also has its pros. She recognises that if you are willing to look at people's talent and what they can offer, its a direct route to diversity and real empowerment.

Vivian, how did you get into the industry?

It initially started because I love to travel. At the time, I thought it would be a good path to a prime MBA programme in the States. But interestingly, by the time I got into my third and fourth years, I kept coming across some amazing opportunities and postings that I thought, 'Maybe I should do this first and learn more before I go to grad school, because I can always go next year...'

I was very lucky that in my first 10 years I had nine very exciting postings. In the end, I never went to grad school. But the company did send me to multiple executive management programmes in INSEAD including a 5-week Advanced Management Programme that was like a mini MBA. I also went to Stanford for Customer Focused Innovation and Design Thinking had become my passion and purpose, and a genuine "calling"... So, in the end, it really came down to how fascinated I was with aviation, and CATHAY PACIFIC.

As a woman, how do you find working in such a male-dominated industry?

When I started, I didn't think much about it. I think when we're young, we're a bit more defiant and fearless, and we just do whatever we think is right.



In my generation, those few years were the years that ladies probably studied better from O-level – lot of females get into good university, and if you studied business or social sciences, half of the class would have been female. Even in Cathay's Management Trainee intake of my year, half were female. So, I didn't really think much about it.

I remember when I was 25, I went to Vietnam as the Head of Cathay Pacific in Hanoi (and I looked like 18), and all my counterparts from foreign airlines were male and up to 20 years older than me. Initially I even bought non-graded glasses to make me look more gravitated.... in the end I only wore them for two days.... I realised I proud to be who I am, and I don't have to worry at all.

As you work more and more, you realise that despite the industry being male dominated at the time, sometimes being the unique one out has cons, but also s pros. Once you get past the initial barriers, you become more noticed because you're the only one in your category. Being the minority allows me to be more outspoken, and respected for what I say.

Have you encountered any gender discrimination in your career?

Not in a big way, but I do remember in that posting in Hanoi I had an interesting comment from a "friendly competitor" (it was one of most respected airlines in Southeast Asia).

The manager said, 'Oh... Cathay Pacific has a female Port Manager? Never for us (XX airline)! A girl can be an airport manager, but never a Port or Country Manager!' I looked at him and laughed because it shows that he was quite backwards. In those days, there wasn't much discussion about diversity.

If you look at the Japanese word of crisis, the first part means danger, the last part means opportunity. So with any danger or crisis comes opportunity. I think I was lucky with my education and how my parents brought me up to be fearless and not spend too much time overthinking difficulties.

As a female senior leader, why do you think it's important for companies to address diversity?

Addressing diversity is important. Not just because it's the right thing to do, but because it's good for you as a person. If you look at a lot of the companies or parts of society that have better gender or racial balance, they tend to do a lot better because they bring in different opinions. They allow for a much better assessment of each kind of issue.



Different people have different natural orientations: some are impatient, some are much more analytical, some better with bigger picture, some more patient, some are better at communications or people skills.

What would you say has been the key to your success?

I think passion, positivity, and my love for people. I think it's really important for people to be happy and optimistic in life.

You need to be curious and passionate about what you do, and be willing to try new things, and that's part of my role. It meant I was able to venture into lots of new things, taking a deep dive into design thinking, customer focus, and innovation, which have opened paths for me.

I think of myself less an aviation expert than a customer centricity expert.

What characteristics do you believe are needed to survive in the aviation industry?

On top of the things I just said, I think you need a sense of humour, and resilience. In my time of aviation, we are never in short of crisis. There's always something. I had 9/11, then SARS, then the financial crisis, then COVID-19. Every few years there's going to be a major crisis in the world and it almost always impacted the airlines. So, we need to be not just more positive, but resilient. And then find creative ways to help solve things.

In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to women succeeding in the workplace?

In the early days you would hear some of remarks such as that a female cannot be an airline CEO. And then on the flip side, people would sometimes overprotect a female by saying she can only do certain things. Stigmas and limitations like these aren't good, so the biggest obstacle is if women get too fixated on what they're told. If that was the case, I wouldn't have been able to get into the airline industry. I wouldn't go abroad, I wouldn't do lots of the things I've done in the last 20 years!

What key change do you envision happening to the industry in the next 10 years?

The barriers and boundaries across airlines and many other sectors are becoming less and less. For example, airlines are no longer just transportation companies. We are now also a digital company. We compete in digital experience and customer experience, winning the hearts of customers because we are part of a very important area that helps people move forward in life, to cultivate experience. My focus is customer experience, so I think one of the challenges is to not only think of ourselves as an airline.

What would you say has been your career highlight to date?

It would be in 2017 when Cathay asked me to start a department that I am running called Customer Experience and Design.

Prior to that, I spent a time at Stanford on Customer Focussed Innovation and became a huge advocate for design thinking. So, when I was asked to really transform the company to focus on customer centricity, and use customer experience as the main tool.



The company has decided to put design of all customer experience under one roof, and it was the biggest privilege for them to ask to set up this department and look after the whole portfolio, from check-in, to lounges, food and beverage, cabin product, inflight entertainment, connectivity... to digital experience.

That was an enormous amount of trust put in me. But that was just the beginning of my highlights. I have had many amazing postings, but having this job is a dream come true. I'm able to use my passion to help a lot more people and help the company grow more in this area.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

It's from my parents who said, 'Don't let anyone tell you what you cannot do.'

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry?

For the aviation industry, it is that it is inherently cyclical. So everything from a bug, a technology change, an accident – anything can happen and the airline industry is always hugely impacted by any seemingly unrelated crises.



This means we are fundamentally subject to major changes, so we need to be constantly reinventing ourselves.

If you could change one thing in the aviation industry, what would it be?

I'd like to find a way to make it less impacted by world events, and maybe that's done by really staying true to customer needs. If you follow that centricity, then you will always find a solution.

"If you look at the Japanese word of crisis, the first part means danger, the last part means opportunity. So with any danger or crisis comes opportunity."

ANITA GRADWOHL F/LIST

Anita Gradwohl, Group Director for Customer Relations & Sales within the New Business Unit for Aviation at F/LIST believes that when you work within a good team, there is little to no attention paid to gender. That being said, she advocates for diversity and diversity in thought - making the most of what all team members have to offer.

How long have you worked in the aviation industry?

My aviation career started 18 years ago in 2005, as a dispatcher for Diamond Aircraft, an Austrian general aviation aircraft manufacturer.

In 2006, I was promoted to Area Sales Manager for EMEA, Asia Pacific, overseeing fleet customers and Diamond dealers in the Asia Pacific Region. In 2011 F/LIST employed me to develop their aviation sector. Over the last 12 years, I have supported their growing success in the aviation industry and was consequently promoted to the position of Group Director of Customer Relations & Sales within the New Business Unit focusing on Aviation.

How did you get into the industry?

It's actually a very simple story! In 2005, a very close cousin of mine called me to say that there was a position open at Diamond Aircraft that he thought I might find interesting. At the time, I had not really considered aviation as a career possibility, but I thought to myself, 'Why not? Sounds interesting.' Almost 18 years later, I'm still in the industry!

What is it about working in the aviation industry that appeals to you?

I had always dreamed of a job that allowed me to see the world, to travel, and to meet new and exciting people.



And fortunately for me, the aviation industry has given me the opportunity to live that dream and to love what I do! I would say that's the most appealing part.

As a woman, how do you find working in such a male-dominated industry?

In my personal experience, when you work with a good team, there is little to no attention paid to gender. I have been fortunate to be surrounded by fantastic team members and have not faced problems working in a male-dominated industry. That being said, I will always advocate for diversity- I always cheer internally when I meet a woman working in aviation, and always love to connect with like-minded colleagues.

Have you encountered any gender discrimination in your career?

I am fortunate enough not to have experienced any obvious gender-based discrimination in my aviation career.

As a female senior leader, why do you think it's important for companies to address the gender gap?

It's paramount for companies to address the gender gap because diversity is the key to success. Studies have shown that mixed management teams operate more efficiently than the ones that are comprised of a gender majority. I firmly believe in the importance of diversity of thought – making the most of all team members have to offer.

What do you believe has been the key to your success?

My strong character has been key. I define myself as a very committed, disciplined, persistent, and tenacious person, and believe that pursuing what you believe is right, regardless of the difficulties you might encounter, will lead to achievement. Until now, my character has proven invaluable in paving the road to success in my aviation career.

What characteristics do you believe women need to survive in the aviation industry?

In line with my previous answer, as a woman, it's very important to have a strong character to thrive in such an industry.

Fight for what you believe is right - in a professional and assertive manner - but have a good sense of humour to help smooth the way.



In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to women succeeding in the workplace?

I can only speak about the situation in Austria, but prejudice is often the greatest obstacle preventing women from succeeding in the workplace. Unfortunately, traditional gender roles are still dominant, and some employers can view aspiring female candidates and employees as being a "pregnancy and family risk". This creates a discrepancy in the gender mix in the workplace.

A step in the right direction would be making working hours and locations more flexible to help mothers to stay in the workforce. When companies refuse to accommodate, they often tend to go part-time, which can limit future management and leadership opportunities.

What would you say has been your career highlight to date?

Wow, that's a tough question! Honestly, it is hard to think of one in particular. My aviation career has been a highlight itself. I am truly grateful for all the incredible experiences and opportunities I have had, the places I have visited on this incredible planet, and the phenomenal people I have met along the way!

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Be yourself.

Work hard and play hard.

Always be kind and respectful.

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry?

There are obviously several major challenges currently impacting the aviation industry, such as the shortage of professional personnel, global supply chain issues, cyberattacks, and of course, the topic of sustainability. When discussing sustainability, the industry is often in the spotlight, so all of us in the sector need to join forces in order to create a more sustainable future for aviation.

What do you believe has been the biggest development in air travel over the past 25 years?

Global accessibility is, in my opinion, the greatest development in aviation. Flying is no longer a privilege reserved for the elite but is accessible to many. Simultaneously, this contemporary age of aviation has ushered in a new era of travel connecting communities from across the globe. Looking to the future, we must find ways to do this more sustainably.

If you could change one thing in the aviation industry, what would it be?

I want to be able to travel faster from one place to another, not to have to spend hours upon hours sat in an aircraft on a long-haul flight. If there are no alternatives, I want to be able to do so in the utmost comfort, surrounded by the latest innovations. Unfortunately, due to stringent regulations and the high costs involved in certification, our industry tends to fall behind other sectors in these aspects.

These are the types of challenges F/LIST is currently addressing as we strive to deliver aircraft cabins equipped with the latest innovations. F/LIST has chosen to redefine and evolve never before seen options; we are not changing the game; we are creating a whole new one. We are passionate, determined, and driven by the desire to always lead the industry and evolve its future.



Who has been your biggest advocate/mentor in the workplace, and why?

My bosses have always been my greatest advocates and mentors. If they had not recognised my drive, my dedication, and my willingness to continuously improve myself, and given me the resources to do so, I would not be where I am today. They are, in large part, responsible for my career evolution. I thank them and hope I can replicate this support to others in the future.

ELINA KOPOLA

GREEN CABIN ALLIANCE

Elina Kopola, Founder / Director of TrendsWorks and Green Cabin Alliance feels strongly that women are aware of the opportunities within the aviation industry, but acknowledges this doesn't mean they should be treated differently. She believes its the industry's responsibility to create an industry that people want to join.

How long have you worked in the aviation industry?

I have been in the industry for a little more than 30 years. I first started as a textile designer, working with clients who were the mills that supplied the textiles to the aviation industry. We designed carpets, curtains, upholstery fabrics, and then little by little, airlines would approach us and say, 'Because you've designed the fabrics, could you also design the plastics and other elements in the cabin?'

And that's how I ended up working in the aviation industry!

During my career I've worked as an independent textile designer, a colour and trim designer, and a colour, materials, and finish (CMF) designer, before founding my own company.

I suppose being a female, independent business leader in aviation is quite unusual and makes me quite different, but in a way, not different at all, because it's the expertise and size of my business that is unusual, not that I am a woman.

That's what I want to emphasize: I don't think I've had a lucky break or a hard time because I'm a woman. I put it down to the scale of the company and that I am a one-woman-band.



What would you say has been your career highlight to date?

Without a doubt, my proudest moment has been the support I have got from my colleagues and the industry for Green Cabin Alliance. Not in the form of a pat on the back, but in how they want to join. That's what makes me feel honoured. I'm hugely proud of founding the Green Cabin Alliance.

Taking sustainability into the aviation industry, and creating an alliance where people really start talking about it and sharing knowledge about how we could transition into a sustainable process, has been my strength. Most recently, the Boeing Group has become a member, and it all started as a one-man band. I'm hugely proud of that.

Have you encountered any gender discrimination in your career?

I have had occasions when I arrive at meetings and people would look over my shoulder and they say, 'Well, where's your boss?' It's those split seconds where someone is talking very honestly and candidly, and if they'd just taken the time to think before speaking, they wouldn't have asked that. It also depends on where you are in the world.

As a female senior leader, why do you think it's important for companies to address diversity?

I feel strongly that it's up to us to make sure that women consider this industry, but I don't think we need to treat them in any different way than we would a young male professional.

It's simply about creating an industry that people want to join. In a way, sustainability is a part of that. It's creating a sustainable industry that the people of today are interested in.

What characteristics do you believe are needed to survive in the aviation industry?

Adaptability, which is something that I've had to learn. In fact, I think we've all had to learn that quite rapidly in the last few years. It's important that we do morph with the times, more so now than ever.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

When I was quite young working in a consultancy, we had a business development consultant arrive for a meeting, and his advice was, 'Join anything that moves.' Since then, I've always done that. I've tried to join into anything. You will always learn something new.



What advice would I give to young female professionals?

I'd like to turn the tables on that. What advice should we be giving to the industry to attract young female professionals?

The three big trends being seen globally are sustainability, skills shortages, and data. The aviation industry needs to attract the brightest minds, both male and female. It's our responsibility to get young, talented women to come and join us, not the other way round.

We need to be telling them that this is an industry that is worth thinking about, and that is going to transition to a greener economy, because some people say, 'Why would I go and work in a carbon-emitting industry when I could go and work for an EV company?' We need to acknowledge that we have competition, and address them.

CIARA CORDASCO

JETBLUE

Ciara Cordasco, Manager Product Design, JetBlue admits that there have been moments where she is the only woman in the room, but that more and more she is witnessing seeing increased gender representation. She believes that by encouraging new perspectives and voices, we can only improve our collective experiences.

How long have you worked in the aviation industry?

I have been at JetBlue for 10 years this July! I started as a designer on the Creative team working on customer-facing brand assets. My role naturally evolved into onboard projects and then aircraft interiors. Currently, I support the Product Development team in shaping the customer experience onboard and on the ground.

How did you get into the industry?

By networking. I was looking for an opportunity in New York or in the travel industry and a friend of mine was a copywriter at JetBlue. I actually applied for two positions before getting an interview for a design role.

What is it about working in the aviation industry that appeals to you?

I absolutely love traveling and seeing the world from different perspectives. Working in the aviation industry not only gives you an inside look at how it functions, but also offers opportunities to improve the experience.

As a woman, how do you find working in such a male-dominated industry?

There are certainly times where I am the only woman in the room, but more and more I'm seeing increased gender representation. Overall, I feel welcomed and have the space to speak up and ask questions.



Have you encountered any gender discrimination in your career?

Not that I know of. If anything, I'm grateful for the people who gave me the opportunity to get involved in aircraft interiors, who saw that I had transferable skills, regardless of gender.

As a female senior leader, why do you think it's important for companies to address diversity?

So much of the world around us was designed for a specific audience, when there are far more use-cases in the real world. Encouraging new perspectives and voices will only improve our collective experiences.

What do you believe has been the key to your success?

Empathy and experiments. You must try to understand a challenge from multiple angles and test possible solutions to improve. If something doesn't work out, that's fine, keep going.

What characteristics do you believe are needed to survive in the aviation industry?

Imagination, empathy, agility, and perseverance.

In your opinion, what is the biggest obstacle to women succeeding in the workplace?

Opportunity and visibility. Heading into my design career, I had no idea I would be working for an airline—I had no idea designers even worked at airlines. Seeing other women succeeding in this space has been so motivating.

What key change do you envision happening to the aviation industry in the next 10 years?

Accessibility. We need to continue making our airports and cabins accessible to all levels of abilities.

What would you say has been your career highlight to date?

I'll leave this list: Mint cabin and soft product refresh development, Blueprint livery design, and meeting Fabio at the airport after an inaugural flight.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

More of a challenge than advice: "That's good, can you make it great?"

What do you believe is the biggest challenge facing the aviation industry?

Sustainability and accessibility.



If you could change one thing in the aviation industry, what would it be?

Appetite for innovation. Let's continue to push boundaries on improving the experience for customers and crewmembers!

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Women In Aviation

What advice would you give to women interested in a career in aviation?



Carrie McEwan, Teague

"Reach out to other women, see what they're all doing, and learn from one another. There are a lot of places to network and build up a community and culture of women. Get involved in those conversations. ."



Jo Rowan, PriestmanGoode

"Women don't want to be doing something because they are a woman, but because they're the best person for the job. It's simply about being knowledgeable, good at what you do, and looking for solutions."



Kathryn Doyle, Collins Aerospace

"Go for it! It is the most fulfilling, exhilarating, and dynamic place to work, with a role to suit everyone. We need more women in the industry to help develop new products and services which meet the needs of the female flying public."



Vivian Lo, Cathay Pacific

"Don't let anyone tell you what you cannot do."

