

The Role of Women Business Leaders in Creating a Healthy and Sustainable Economy

Chris Fox
March 25, 2021



In recognition of Women's History Month, this event on "The Role of Women Business Leaders in Creating a Healthy and Sustainable Economy" was conceived and planned as a collaboration between the [International Association for Peace and Economic Development \(IAED\)](#) and the [Women's Federation for World Peace USA](#). The power of women gathering for a cause was evident as the moderator began the conference with nearly 80 participants online on March 25, 2021. The event was live-streamed on Facebook to the IAED, UPF and [WFWP Facebook](#) pages tripling that number.

Mr. Alan Jessen, Coordinator of IAED North America, gave opening comments and welcomed the panelists. The power of the moderator, Mrs. Audra Hajj, kept the flow of the conference tight and upbeat throughout the roughly 90 minute program. Ms. Hajj is the CEO of Angel Investors Network. Her company has helped nearly 3,000 businesses launch, grow and scale for success. She expressed that her passion and energy was conceived from her early childhood to make humanity better. She encouraged the audience that success in making money is a byproduct when you work to do "good" for others.

Mr. Tom McDevitt, President of Magnolia USA Foundation, was introduced as the Global Chairman of IAED to offer his encouragement. He reminded the panelists that one year ago, the IAED was inaugurated at the UPF World Summit in Seoul, Korea as the newest pillar Association within the UPF. He commended UPF for its "grand strategy" to make a difference in the world all the way from the local to the global level by bringing together leaders in the business, government, academic, inter-religious and media sectors of society. His final key point: the world is in a fragile state and it is vital for women to step forward into leadership roles.

Ms. Angelika Selle, President of WFWP in America also spoke briefly and expressed her appreciation for the collaboration, saying that it is so much better for women to be invited by men into these opportunities. She told of a story at the UN where one delegate – recognizing that the resolution to an issue was stuck – suggested that women and youth was an untapped resource and that by getting them involved would surely help them get somewhere! Why? Because women have a different way of looking at things that comes from the heart using their intuitive nature and life experiences. Sometimes women offer out-of-the-box recommendations to solve world problems like economic crises. She stated Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the Mother of Peace, is the inspiration for WFWP and that the vision is not for men and women to compete with each other but to complete each other. Both are needed. The participation from both organizations during this event mirrored this idea of collaboration, creating a beautiful synergy and greater impact.

The first panelist was Dr. Purnima Voria, the Founder and CEO of NUICC, the National US and India Chamber of Commerce. Born in India, she grew her successes in America. She shared her early struggles as a woman, single mother and rising above the challenges to become recognized world-wide as a model for successful leadership in developing bilateral trade between the United States and India. Through a lifetime of challenges, she developed her own power and purpose by applying principles and values

inherited from her father, a successful businessman in India. When she recognized the fears that many in the U.S. had with doing business with India, she saw an opportunity and founded NUICC. She has continued to expand these opportunities and has worked successfully with many U.S. administrations and other nations with the goal of improving international relations as a contribution to world peace. One can imagine after observing her that her poise, grace, bright and warm smile gave plenty of leverage in opening many doors in her lifetime. At the QandA portion of the conference Dr. Voria echoed the sentiments of Audra Hajj that passion is the key to your success.

Rakhi Voria was introduced as the daughter of Dr. Purnima Voria. Ms. Voria is the Director of IBM Global Digital Sales Development. Previously, she was VP for Worldwide Sales at Microsoft. Rakhi paid tribute to her mother for her influences throughout her life and it is easy to see that her mother's strength was an obvious component to Rakhi and her progress in the world of business. Rakhi's underlying passion is for advancing women in business. She stated that women are underrepresented in every profession, but especially in technology. As a woman, millennial, and non-white, her obstacles were multiplied. Her belief is that a first step to attracting and keeping more women is to recreate recruiting and job descriptions to better reflect women's values (even word choice, for example). Re-creating work environments is another area for improvement. Women can be as assertive and competitive as men however they often bring a consultative approach toward leadership which runs counter to the male-dominated norm.

Dr. Ann Peterson is the President and Managing Director of the New Yorker Hotel in New York City. The hotel boasts 1,050 beds and is prominently located in prime Manhattan real estate near Madison Square Garden, Penn Station and adjacent tourist areas. Ann is a no-nonsense leader but gracefully adept with superior people skills, as observed by her peers. After hotel consultants tried to influence a pyramid management style, Ann soon returned back to a more collaborative style, which has been the more effective recipe for success and her most comfortable formula. She has a team of "leaders" out of her 300 employees and 23 different cultures. During the COVID pandemic, the hotel went from 93% occupancy to zero. However, her team made the decision to house 900 nurses and the hotel to date has survived well. Other major hotels in Manhattan are closed still to this date. Ann stated that women have different skill sets at managing and tend to be more open and flexible than men – which is especially valuable during times of crisis.

The final panelist was the lovely professional Jeanne Jenkins. Jeanne is the Vice President for the Mid-Atlantic region of Wells Fargo's Commercial Bank. As a young professional, she enjoyed the interaction with the other panelists in preparation for the actual webinar, giving opportunities to develop these relationships. She is very passionate about increasing women's presence on boards of companies. Although she herself serves on different boards in the commercial banking world, she remarked that boards are predominantly all men, especially privately held boards. Jeanne wants to increase the representation of women in small and medium-sized business boards. She said that women who are true to themselves are successful in knowing who they are – and bring a special value in the right opportunity. As an example of the different focus that men and women in business have, she presented a matrix called PIE - Performance, Image and Exposure. While women spend 80% of their focus on performance, men spend 80% of their time and focus on image and exposure. For women to advance they need to be stronger advocates for themselves, increasing exposure while remaining true to their core values.

Audra Hajj's coaching skills wrapped up the entire program skillfully reminding everyone to avoid the "imposter syndrome" that prevails in society today. People prefer authenticity. She encouraged growth by talking amongst ourselves. Every "why" needs work. There is a new economy now as businesses re-emerge. She feels consumers have chosen for a different model she called transactional to heart-centric. In the transformation to a collaborative world ahead, women leadership is essential.

To watch a recording of the event click on the link:

www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=1140901446382444&ref=watch_permalink