



Season 7: Navigating a Global Career Amidst Emerging Technologies Episode 8

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Stacie Berdan:

Welcome to the global careers podcast sponsored by GW-CIBER – THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world. Whether or not you've considered moving abroad or taking on an international role, globalization will impact your career. So join us for a lively discussion as we explore what an international career really means. My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and I'll be your host!

In season seven, we focus on the intersection of technology and globalization across all types of industries and functions. What aspects of tech do we all need to understand to adapt and thrive in the workplace? What types of global tech jobs are out there? And what skills are needed to compete? Join us as we hear from seasoned executives who will help us navigate global careers and emerging technologies around the world. I'm excited to interview today's guest Melissa Schoeb, Chief Corporate Affairs Officer for Nokia, where she oversees communications, government relations, brand and sustainability. Based in London, Melissa leads a global team of 125 people, with responsibility to advance and protect Nokia's reputation. She has extensive international business experience working across several industries, including telecommunications, energy, and venture capital firms. And she's lived and worked in North and South America, Europe, and Africa. In addition to her native English, Melissa speaks Spanish and Italian fluently. Welcome, Melissa, it's wonderful to have you with us today.

Melissa Schoeb:

Hi, thank you so much. I'm delighted to be here.

Stacie Berdan:

Great. So, you know, one of our objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of careers to listeners. So, you have an outstanding international experience working all over the world, and I want you to talk to us about your career and your role now at Nokia.

Melissa Schoeb:

Sure. As you mentioned at the outset, my responsibility at Nokia includes government affairs, communications, global communications, the brand and sustainability. We as Nokia operate in 130 countries around the world, so I have that responsibility, but absolutely in a global scale – with all of the implications, challenges, and opportunities that it brings along with it. I think it might be helpful, perhaps, to just give you a little bit of my background, however, before Nokia. My father was a diplomat, and so I was raised in many different countries around the world, and didn't actually move to the US until I was 16, for high school. So I think that also had a big, big role in shaping my interests. And what I was intent on focusing in my career.



Stacie Berdan:

Most definitely! So you've worked all over the world, I love the fact that you were brought up... I'm gonna ask you a couple more questions about that...But what do you do, what do you and your team do? As an example of the types of careers that are out there...

Melissa Schoeb:

Sure. So, I would say, about 40%, maybe 35%, of my day is planned, with, you know, the things that I need to advance for the company, the proactive initiatives that I have in place. And then, a lot of my days reacting to things that are happening around the world. And I think it's having that balance of reacting well, but also making sure you're moving the agenda forward. So, specifically to your question, it could be, for example, somebody on my sustainability team could be working on reporting (there's just gobs of reporting that we need to do), so that would be part of their day. And then at the same time, for example, we're working aggressively to execute against our net zero plan. So it would be a combination of things that they need to do, plus what do we need to, you know, to move forward, and how do we advance the company and its business goals. And I think that's the most, one of the most important things, or, I would say, the guiding principle for the work that we do as a team – always making sure that what we focus on is adding strategic value to the company.

Stacie Berdan:

Nokia is a tech company and technology plays a role in all kinds of industries and fields... But as a as a person inside the industry, what kind of trends do you see in tech that affect all types of jobs and careers out there today?

Melissa Schoeb:

I guess I'll start with, in some ways, the hot topic, which is AI. I don't think there's hardly a conversation that goes on now, that doesn't cover the topic of AI. So, as a technology company, as you said, you know, looking at how we apply AI, not only from a business standpoint or from a technology standpoint... For example, we have a large patent business, which requires lots of time and effort in filing patents, so we're looking at using AI on that front. And then, also, for what we do as corporate affairs, how do we use that technology to help advance, streamline, and focus the work that we're doing? So that's one element, which, again, I think, for a technology company is particularly relevant. But then of course, I also have responsibility for government affairs. And I think you are probably aware, and perhaps many of your readers, but for the first time ever, more than half of the world's population can vote this year, if they choose to. That has never happened before. So there is a significant change from a political or geopolitical standpoint around the world, and the implications of the outcome of those elections will be significant. So we spend a lot of time looking at essentially scenario planning of what that could look like. And again, back to my earlier point, what the strategic repercussions would be for our company.

Stacie Berdan:

Does that mean, from a regulatory standpoint? Or do you mean, like cybersecurity? Or both? Or safety in elections? Or... what do you mean, specifically? Because it is amazing that so many elections are taking place this year, and so much can affect global politics that we will then see next year. How are you looking at it?

Melissa Schoeb:

From a little bit of all of the above. So, we are a European company, we're headquartered in Finland. Our largest operations and market growth opportunity is in the US. So we are constantly balancing, you know, those two markets. And then of course, everything that's happening outside of that. Finland recently joined NATO, which expanded the border, the NATO border... with Finland joining too, you know, more than doubled the border. So, there's a lot happening geopolitically that we need to keep our eye on, and also have a point of view on what we think may transpire.



Stacie Berdan:

Yes. And going back to a point you made earlier, regarding growing up around the world – it seems like you're a natural for this role – paying attention to what is going on... Tell us about that, you know, take us back to what it was like. I mean, spending most of your formative years outside the US? Growing up... where were you, for how long? Talk to us about that.

Melissa Schoeb:

Yeah, thanks. So, I'm one of six kids. So there were a bunch of us, so I think that certainly made it easier. But we moved, on average, every three years and were in different countries with different cultures, different languages. And it really instilled in me, not only the need and understanding of where people come from, but also the opportunity to, I'd say sit in people's shoes, right? Take a minute to reflect on what experiences people have had, and therefore what they're bringing to the situation from a business standpoint.

Stacie Berdan:

As I mentioned in your in the intro, you speak Spanish and Italian fluently. Were you in Spain, Italy, were you in South America? Where were you?

Melissa Schoeb:

Yes, all of those places. So, Spain, Italy, Costa Rica, Peru, Panama, Colombia...

Stacie Berdan:

And so clearly, that translates into your ability to, as you put it, stand in somebody else's shoes and see the other perspective – critical to understanding any other culture, but also to being successful in international business. What other things do you think it takes to be successful in a global career?

Melissa Schoeb:

So, I think that's an excellent question. First of all, for your students and others, I would never try not working for a global company. I think the challenges, and, again, the opportunities, and just the experiences are incredible. I think it affords all of us an opportunity to continuously learn, which I really appreciate. So I think nothing beats – I hate to sound simplistic – but I think nothing beats experience. So, I think, you know, digging in, if you ever have an opportunity to do an expat assignment or, you know, try something else, I would say, absolutely do it. For example, for me, right after university, I won a Fellowship for Young Political Leaders, which is what I thought I wanted to do at the time, I was into politics. And I could go to Rome, Geneva or Paris, so I chose to go to Rome and work for the Christian Democratic Party there. And it wasn't what I ultimately wanted to do, but the experience was kind of irreplaceable. So that's what I would say is, you know, opportunities like this, they may seem daunting, but they afford you a lot of different experience, which is required.

Stacie Berdan:

And how about language? I mean, I admire you, I only speak English. And so many of our listeners say really, is it really important? What would you say about the ability to speak other languages and global career?

Melissa Schoeb:

So, I would say that it is irreplaceable. From my standpoint, having an opportunity to be able to communicate with somebody in their own language, is invaluable. It just puts your relationship at a whole different level. Again, it goes back to a point I made earlier, you know, you are working to meet people at where they're coming from. And there's nothing quite like language that does that. Right. You're attempting to speak something that isn't your mother tongue. And I have always experienced... I also speak some French, it's not fluent but it's passable... And



I've never had an experience where people weren't, unbelievably, not only appreciative, but gracious if your language wasn't perfect. So I'm a huge advocate. The other thing I would just add is it is absolutely a different side of your brain. It's a different skill set. It's like music, having an appreciation for music. So I think it's always good to learn and develop. But yes, I would highly recommend it.

Stacie Berdan:

What are some of the greatest challenges that you faced working internationally?

Melissa Schoeb:

There are day-to-day challenges, there are personal challenges. So, for me, you know, I moved recently, with this new role at Nokia, I moved my family from Texas to Finland. We were there one year, unfortunately, the school situation was not great... So we moved again, you know, I now have been in London for two years. So, in some ways, there's multicultural challenges, there's challenges of just getting to know people and situations and where they come from. And then of course, like any situation, there's personal challenges and I think, for any of us, whether it's siblings, parents, pets – you know, making sure that things are set on the personal side is really, really critical. So that is also another big component of making it work. But as with any challenge, if you can push through it, I think that it's always a good learning opportunity and developmental opportunity for all involved.

Stacie Berdan:

How about professionally? What kind of professional challenges, and you could just pick one and maybe even give it as an example or share a story....

Melissa Schoeb:

As a female, I've worked in a lot of male dominated sectors, essentially my whole career, whether it's technology or the energy sector. And so, I think it's always about leaning into your strengths and having an awareness of people's, perhaps, preconceptions or ideas, and working through it. I am not trying to evade the question, but I don't think I have a specific example. Because I feel as if, you know, for what I do and how I do it, there's little challenges almost every day. I guess the best answer to your question is there isn't a huge challenge that I feel that I haven't been able to overcome. They're just a lot of different flavors of it.

Stacie Berdan:

Well, you gave great advice, leaning into it, understanding the awareness of the people with whom you're working, particularly the male dominated... it could be that, it could be cultural differences, there could be all kinds... But knowing what your strengths are and how to kind of embrace those while appreciating and understanding, and even standing in the others' shoes, makes a big difference.

Melissa Schoeb:

Yeah. And I would also add, you know, being true to who you are. And whether it's your personal style, or your presentation style, we can all improve and tweak. But at the end of the day, it's about being authentic, on who you are and what you believe. And I think, regardless of where you are, and where you're living, or interfacing, or people you're meeting, I think that it's always good to be true to yourself. But I also think people can pick up on that and appreciate that.

Stacie Berdan:

How about the balance of global and local? I mean, there are big strategic initiatives, and alignment, and all of that on a global level. But at the end of the day, products are sold locally, we have local customers, how do you balance that kind of dynamic tension in a role like yours?



Melissa Schoeb:

Yeah, absolutely. And that is where, for me, you know, I rely on my team. Because I do have global responsibility and I rely on my team locally, to make sure, just as you said, that it's being executed well, locally. And again, back to the point where, you know, for what we do, we need to be fully aligned on delivering business value to the company and that includes that exact topic, right, a global company that does well locally. So I think it's a team effort, it's being open and listening, and shifting. And certainly, absolutely no one size fits all. Mentality doesn't work... And then, I think, importantly, it's being flexible, you know, to shift, because even local teams may think something will or won't work, and then having that ability to be nimble, and tweak as you go if needed, is really important.

Stacie Berdan:

Melissa, you work at the, kind of like, the crossroads of globalization and technology where you are – what do you see on the horizon that, you know, our listeners who are entering the workforce in the next year or so they need to be prepared for, they need to be aware of? What do you see?

Melissa Schoeb:

Yeah, so, obviously, there's the AI topic that we talked about before. But this is an underlying topic, which is almost at the opposite end of that spectrum, and that is entering the workforce and building relationships from, you know, from where you work. And I think, post COVID... So, for example, I started this role at Nokia during COVID. It was extremely difficult. You know, I picked up and moved without my family, and I was in an apartment in Helsinki, and I couldn't go to an office. And I had a pretty big role – I was working, and still am working for the CEO of the company. It was really challenging – new company, new person, Finland, Finland headquarters... But also, I think, in retrospect, the biggest challenge was not having that time to build a personal connection because it was COVID. And so, I think, with so much focus on remote work and, you know, some of the benefits from having, hopefully a bit more work-life balance... It is really, really difficult to – especially entering the workforce or starting a new job, regardless of where you want your career – to do that without having an opportunity to build that personal connection with people that you work with. And even our conversation today, it's a podcast, you know, I'm not seeing you, I'm not seeing the audience... Hopefully, you know, the listeners are getting a feel of who I am... But it's a step removed. And so, I think, that's hard. And I would just strongly urge that consideration of spending the time to build those relationships when you're starting out anew, because that's where you also form, you know, the mentors and the people who will help you throughout your career. Which is the people I still call on, you know, 25 years later. It's the people I met early in my career. And it's not to suggest I don't have mentors as I go along. But it's incredibly difficult to replicate that personal connection.

Stacie Berdan:

How do you do it? I mean, how do you do it? If you have responsibility over the world... And yes, we all have ours, and I still have my mentors from the very beginning too, you're right. I mean, there's something very special about that, you know, having people go with us through our journeys... But what kind of tips can you give, besides just clearly take the time to go into the office? But how do you build networks and relationships on a global scale, when you can't see people every day all the time?

Melissa Schoeb:

It's always been surprising to me, but ask for help. Ask for guidance, ask for input, listen. I have never had a situation once where somebody who hasn't asked me to give them feedback, or could I spend some time with them, or could I share just like what we're doing today... So I wouldn't be shy or think, oh, I shouldn't ask. I think people generally feel grateful, just as you said, you know, you feel grateful for how people leaned in to help you. And I feel exactly the same. So, I think, don't feel that you shouldn't ask. And I think some people may say no, but I think



one would be pleasantly surprised to see how many people say yes. Because, at the end of the day, it's difficult for all of us to navigate, you know, this situation; especially as you said, working in a global environment where it's hard, right. It's hard to meet people, it's hard to new learn new languages, it's hard to make sure that you're not stepping into or doing something that is not going to be received well. So, I think, asking is really important and I think largely really would be appreciated.

Stacie Berdan:

I'm glad you said that. Because I think so many of our listeners think, Oh, I can't reach out to that person. It's like, well, they can only say no, they can only not respond. I mean, I was just encouraged and see what you think about this... I mean, just don't go right in there and, of course, ask for a job! You just want some, as you said, some inputs and feedback, you want to ask some questions, maybe an information interview, that kind of a thing really can go a long way. And I found that people who work internationally are really interested in talking to other people who have a global perspective, who actually want a global career, who want to know what it's like to live and work in so many different places and the challenges. Particularly here in the US not everybody wants a job like this. And so I've always found global thinkers to be even more open to people who are interested in that kind of a career.

Melissa Schoeb:

I fully agree. And, again, I think that everybody, as you just said, especially people who do take on a global career, you know, we've all had help and assistance along the way. And it feels good. I mean, for me, you know, one of the favorite things in my job is the opportunity to mentor and develop talent you know, seeing really great talent and going wow, you know, how can I help this person achieve more – if they want it, which is a big question, of course. Like, what does one want from their career? But there are a few things, at least for me, that are more fulfilling than helping people take on new challenges and achieve great things with their careers. I think it's very, very fulfilling. And it's great to have the opportunity to play a role in people's development.

Stacie Berdan:

Shifting just a little bit. This is a question I am asked regularly, and you actually mentioned a little bit about it... Being a woman, and you've moved your family, and you moved your family during a time when... you moved alone at first, right, during the pandemic... How do you manage your professional and personal lives? I mean, I don't really want to use the word balance, because, you know, it's not really about balance, is it... But, um, you have a really big job, and you have a family – how do you manage it all? Personal and professional?

Melissa Schoeb:

Day by day. It's always an ongoing journey. Sometimes things go well, sometimes, you know, things go less well. But for me, if my family is in a good place... I have one son who's 13, you know, if things are going well for him at school and what he needs, then I feel like, okay, then I can, you know, focus and do whatever I need to do to be successful. But it's certainly not easy. I am on the road quite a bit. And so I'm constantly, you know, trying to manage time with my family and make sure that there's enough balance. But I wouldn't say, you know, it's perfect, or that there's a secret sauce, it just takes work. And it takes some... every day just trying to do the right thing. But that's always the most important, for me at least, that my family's in a good place. That's my grounding piece. And if they're in a good place, then on what I need to achieve for work I feel in a much better position. But that is absolutely my core and my foundation.

Stacie Berdan:

That's important, thanks for sharing that, really important. Is there a piece of advice you'd like to go back and give your younger self?



Melissa Schoeb:

I would say, I'm the type of person – and perhaps because I've moved so much throughout my life – that I was always "yes, yes, yes, of course, of course, no problem!". And so, perhaps to this earlier question about, you know, personal and family, I might have been, perhaps, as a younger person, too quick to say, yes, I'll do it. So, on the one hand, I think it's incredibly important to be open, and on the other hand, I think, as with any opportunity, especially for your students, you know, being really strategic about what you take on. So will this role, you know, develop you in this area? Or will this give you another opportunity that could lead to X? And so, I think just stepping back, and being a bit more long-term focused – which is hard, by the way, it's very hard, because you're still figuring out what you want to do, so it's not easy – but I feel as if I spent a lot of time just in the moment. Yes, yes, yes, yes... I don't regret those decisions, because I think the position that I'm in now and what I've been able to achieve, I'm really proud of. But that might be something I would advise – open up to opportunities but be clear about what it's actually going to give you from a career standpoint.

Stacie Berdan:

This has been wonderful conversation, Melissa. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you want to add, maybe a tip or anything to share with our listeners?

Melissa Schoeb:

No, I wanted to just thank you. I know you and I have been trying to have this conversation for some time. I do make it to DC on a regular basis, so I would just welcome the opportunity to meet some of some of your amazing students in person, perhaps on one of my next trips. I think in person would be super and if it would be helpful to anybody, I'm always available to dig deeper on a topic or issue or an interest. But I really appreciate the opportunity, and I hope it's helpful. I feel very grateful to the people who've helped me. So I am hoping this is a small opportunity to do the same perhaps for some folks. Thank you.

Stacie Berdan:

Oh, absolutely, you are welcome! Thank you so much for taking the time and for offering that. We would love to have you on campus, whether it's an event or even maybe just a small coffee or a little brown-bag lunch with students... That would be great, we really appreciate that offer. We'll stay in touch. Thanks so much, Melissa, this has been great.

[Music]

Stacie Berdan:

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!