



Season 3, Episode 4 – Harnessing the Positive Power of Business

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Stacie Berdan:

Welcome to the global careers podcast sponsored by GW-CIBER – THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world. Whether or not you've considered moving abroad or taking on an international role, globalization will impact your career. So join us for a lively discussion as we explore what an international career really means. My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and I'll be your host! In season three, we explore the rising trend of ESG and how it is shifting the talent landscape on a global scale. Come with us as we share with you how responsible active engagement is changing the face of the global workforce today. Today, I have the pleasure of interviewing Perry Yeatman, Head of Corporate for *Save the Children*, a board director and a seasoned career coach. She's a dynamic international executive with a proven track record of taking on challenging assignments and delivering. Perry has an impressive breadth of experience working for some of the biggest brands out there – Unilever, Kraft, WPP, and the Kellogg School of Management. Perry has lived and worked in Singapore, Russia, the UK and the US. And she and I first worked together at Unilever, and then went on to co-author our first book – the award winning *Get Ahead by Going Abroad: A Woman's guide to Fast Track Career Success*. One of the things that I love most about Perry is that she's a straight shooter, fast talker and full of substance. Welcome, Perry, it is terrific to have you with us.

Perry Yeatman:

Oh, Stacie, I'm so glad to be here.

Stacie Berdan:

Okay... So, one of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there, more than just titles. What is it that you do?

Perry Yeatman:

Well, you know, it has, I think it's really never been a better time to be a professional, and to be entering your career, because it really doesn't matter what it... what jobs are out there right now. What's been so amazing about my career is that each job I've done is... it's like the first time it's been done, right. So the thing that I learned is, if you have a base of skills and experiences that can be valuable, you can put them together in a way that combines your personal passion and your career mission. And you can create a job, a role, an opportunity. And so, what I would say is, it's less about what I have done and what careers are out there. It's more about defining your own path. And it has really never been more possible for you to, or for individuals entering the workforce or a few years into, to say, here's what I'm passionate about. Here's what I like to do. Here's my skills, here's my strengths. Here's my superpower, how can I use that? And then to actually forge an opportunity or role, even if it's never existed... But as long as you keep in mind: how do you combine what you do with what value the organization is going to get from that – I think you can actually just set your own career, create your own role.

Stacie Berdan:

And that's what you've done. So tell us about it. What if, what have you done? How have you done that?



Perry Yeatman:

Well, so, you're right, it's interesting, because I didn't see the path, or the kind of commonality when I started out, right? Because you just keep doing things. And then I looked back and I thought, wow, if there is something that is consistent to my career, it is people hired me because they wanted something to change, something important to change compared to what was there, right? I'm not the person you would hire if you wanted a caretaker... what I used to call a caretaker leader – somebody who needs to just be a steady hand on the steering wheel, right? That's not me. Not that I'm not steady. But that's not me. I am, as you said, you know, dynamic high energy. I'm the person you bring in if you want something to be different than the way it is today, and often significantly different. So I started that because I went to Asia, I wanted to live overseas, as you know. And Asia was the single best opportunity at the time in 1990, when I was trying to get overseas. So I went to Singapore sight unseen, had never been there, didn't even like hot weather. I was like, stood out so much like a five foot eight redhead in Singapore, it's crazy. But, the thing was, what we ended up doing there was the first ever pan-regional corporate positioning campaign. And we did it for Citibank, right? They hadn't thought about doing corporate positioning and then corporate positioning across 26 countries, Japan to Australia and the Middle East. They didn't really think that was possible. And yet we did it. And then the next assignment after that became Russia, private... You know, I was running a massive government program on behalf of the US government supporting the number two in the Russian government on privatization, economic reform, right, public education. At that point it had never been done, right, trying to teach Russians, Russian professionals how to do public education instead of propaganda – that was a first, right. So the first two moves were very clear, never been done. Then I went to England, I went to London – that was my choice and loved it. And that was a more traditional role that was really about being the Global Client Lead for Unilever, as it turned out. But then, when I came to the States with Unilever, I think I was the first woman on the North American Management Board as a head of corporate affairs. And I was the first corporate affairs position on the North American Management Board. Each one of these has been a new, has been a new adventure, and it built on what I learned in the last one. But each one was really, really different. And that I won't even talk about how, well I'll talk later, but how I got into education. And then I also ended up now running corporate at Save the Children.

Stacie Berdan:

It's amazing, you know, we've known each other for decades, decades, yes. And it never ceases to amaze me to have you kind of repeat and relive kind of the highlights of your career. Truly astounding and stellar, and I think – very motivational for our listeners. With all that you've accomplished, is there something that you're most proud of?

Perry Yeatman:

You know, Stacie, it's a great question. And I'm, I'm privileged to be able to say that I'm actually proud of all of the work that I have done. Okay, that doesn't mean I didn't make any mistakes. There were big mistakes. But I'm actually proud of all of the major assignments I took on, I'm proud of every institution that I actually worked for. And that is not something everybody can say. So I feel really, really great about that. But I think the most important thing that I am proud of is, and again, it's different today. But remember, guys, I'm over 50, right. So if you look back, it wasn't the case that every particular woman got to put together a career and a life, right. That I actually had an amazing career that accomplished what I wanted in each of the phases that I wanted it – so if it was money, it was money, if it was power, if it was prestige – whatever I was going after, at that time, I was able to deliver that. But in the broad scheme of my career, I've also been able to have a family and to give back to my community. And you know, so I'm like leading the Girl Scout troop and negotiating, you know, a billion dollar deal, right? It's, that is probably what I'm most proud of is that I have lived my life, to the best of my ability with integrity, authenticity, and that I have combined the career that I wanted with a personal life that has had a lot of... not without challenges, not without challenges... but it has had a lot of meaning.

Stacie Berdan:

Amen, and you did it, and you did it yourself. That's terrific. I know that one of your passions is harnessing the positive power of business. Tell me about it.



Perry Yeatman:

God, this is like one of my favorite topics. I'm so glad you asked about it. So for decades, I really believed that business was the single greatest lever that we could pull in terms of delivering positive social value, and just value in the broadest sense, right, to humanity. And whether that was creating life-saving drugs, or whether that was, you know, creating jobs and tax revenue and opportunities for people to advance, making it more convenient to cook, or eat, or whatever – whatever it was, I just believe in the positive power of business. But what I think is really happening now that's so great is that everybody's recognized... because there is no company that doesn't have a downside, right? I don't care... I don't care, what company, what industry, what geography – every major business also has challenges, right? It's either how you source your materials, or how you produce or the fact that what you produce now is understood to be not so good for either the environment or the people or whatever. So, there is always good and bad in every company. There's also good, you know, it's like if you took a company of 100,000 people – tons of them are going to be wonderful human beings, working hard, doing the right thing; you can always have a bad actor, right? You can't screen out every bad actor of every company. But the most important thing about businesses is when you can have the conversation at the top that talks about how they can do what they uniquely do. Both what they deliver to their customer or their consumer. So what is the product? What is the process, how they employ people, the way they treat those people, how they engage in the communities where they live and work – all of that – when they can leverage all of those points and they focus on doing more good and less harm, the impact is astounding. And that's really what I've been doing, and I did it first on the corporate side by being the President of Kraft Foods Foundation and by trying to get Kraft Foods and Unilever to do that. But now, what I realized is companies are moving. But NGOs weren't moving as fast as companies. And so now I'm actually getting to do it on the NGO side, where I'm actually looking at bringing our mission into companies and to drive strategic alliances, not traditional philanthropy, where it's "please, here's our mission, give us money to support the mission", it's how are we going to work together to deliver positive social impact, significant positive social impact for kids, the world's most marginalized kids, and at the same time, deliver true business value to you. And that's what I get to spend my days doing now. And it is fabulous. It's so exciting.

Stacie Berdan:

That's great. So you've been way ahead of the game for years. As you've described, this is one of your own personal values that you've been able to bring to the workplace and brings up the terms such as CSR, ESG, sustainability... How do you view the evolution, this terminology...? Why does it matter?

Perry Yeatman:

It's so funny you asked that. Yeah, I guess, again, when you look back, yes, I've probably carried the responsibility for all of those terms at different points in my career through different companies. You know, the thing is, I don't think the words matter. I think what's really interesting about the evolution is that when it was... when it was first it was community, or it was, you know, like kind of be a good corporate citizen. And that usually got funneled, it was really stuck in the foundation, or stuck in that corporate affairs function or whatever. Right. So it was compartmentalized. It got talked about the board, maybe once a year, let's just make sure we got something going on that we can point to that shows we're doing some good, whatever, right? Of course, I'm, I'm using a little hyperbole here, but just go with me. So it's, it was really truncated, it was small, right? So that was kind of corporate citizen for a lot of companies, then it became CSR. Now it's a bigger conversation. Okay. So what does Corporate Responsibility mean, how does that work, whatever. But it was still, it was now hitting the C suite, but it was not central to the way the business was operating. Then it evolved to ESG. Again, I don't think the words or the terms matter, what mattered is the fact that ESG – because it became an investor-oriented concept, because investors were now evaluating companies on whether or not they were carrying extra liabilities and whether their externalities were actually going to hit the books inside the company and create issues for their performance – now, suddenly, you had the Board, you had the CEO, you had the whole C suite. So what's great about what's happened, and what matters about ESG is the fact that you now have this as being baked into core business strategy, processes and policies. And that's where you're going to get to see meaningful change. So that's where I think it really matters and why it matters.



Stacie Berdan:

That's great. So, let's go with that term, ESG, because that's the focus of this season's podcast. For those who are looking to work internationally, which you have tremendous experience doing, what do you think they need to know about it? ESG and the role it plays in organizations around the world?

Perry Yeatman:

Yep. So, first of all, I think you can, in terms of individual organizations, I think you should do your due diligence and really look at whether or not the organization is getting to the heart of the business with their ESG agenda, or if they are really kind of using the words and trying to tick the boxes, but not actually deeply living the values. And I think that really matters. And it certainly matters to the young people that I work with. And I say that, you know, when I'm talking about those who are, you know, kind of anywhere 20 years or less in their careers. It matters, right? You want to work for an organization that you can feel proud of that you think is actually doing the right things by and large. Again, as I said, no company is perfect, but doing the right things by and large. So, I think it's really do your due diligence to figure out whether they're on a true journey, or whether they're really doing what I call kind of greenwashing, right, trying to appear to be doing the right thing, but at base having not really changed. So that's the first thing I would say. The second thing I would say is ESG goals at this point tend to be global. So you might say we want to reach 10 million farmers or we want to deliver 100 million vaccines or we want to change the way people get to work or we want to... whatever it might be, right... these goals tend to be big and they tend to be global. So if you want to work internationally, that's great. Because what it means is the same framework for what is the company stand for across the world is going to be there, but you cannot be successful thinking about that. Unless you also understand the culture and the context of the country or the market where that work is to take place. So not everywhere in the world to... even if you have a global goal of we want to feed, you know, we want to deliver or we want to, we want to end hunger for 10 million kids... If you don't uniformly apply that, you don't take 10 million and just divide by, well, there's this many kids in the world, and they live in these countries and so here you go... you need to understand the local context. So I'll give you a very clear example on hunger. So in Denmark, as well as most of the northern European countries, they have amazing social safety nets. So there's not a lot of kids that are hungry in Denmark, because somebody, the state will feed them and feed them well. If you're not able to be fed at home, right, you'll get fed at school, you'll get fed through all sorts of other programs. That's not true in America! One of the biggest programs that Save the Children does is in rural America, where kids are going hungry every day, where they're not even getting close to three meals a day, right. So you need to know the context of that ambition, and you need to be able to bring it down to... I know we need to feed or we want to end hunger for 10 million kids... But how and where you do that, that's what you need to understand, because you can't be... it's not... we used to call it mindlessly global; it's great to have global targets, that's really important to line up the whole corporation, but you can't be mindlessly global, to the point that you think you can just apply the same intervention in every market and it's going to work. Because it's just not accurate.

Stacie Berdan:

That's a really important point. So having a global mindset is necessary to working internationally in the ESG space. But as you pointed out, ESG is now becoming part of everyone's job. So, for our listeners, entering the workforce, or maybe just changing jobs, what do you see on the horizon for them?

Perry Yeatman:

Well, I think there are two really important points that you need to keep in mind as you... as you embark on your career. And I'm sorry, guys, these may not be exactly what you want to hear, but I got to be real. And this is the same advice I give to my kids to be clear, right, one of which is 32 and one of which is 18. So, you are the CEO of your career and life, nobody else is going to know better than you what you need, what you want, at what point what makes sense for you, and nobody else has as much to gain or lose by doing that job well, right. So job one, you are the CEO of your career, and your life. And I put those two together, because sometimes your life is going to drive your career and sometimes your career is going to drive your life and that is okay. In fact, that's great. It is about actually being clear at what point is each of those happening and why. And then to make sure you're lining up



your action to match your ambition or your intention. Okay? The second thing that I would say to you, as you think about embarking, is that work is not school. You know, up until this point – and it goes with being the CEO of your own career and life when you graduate, right – up until this point, you've had somebody else who was directly responsible for you, or, like your parents, or you go to school, and somebody is paying for you to have teachers and others support you in your learning journey. That stops when you get out of school, because it's called work for a reason. And they pay you for a reason. And the reason is, because for most of us, if we're lucky, 70% of the time, we are doing something we love, we believe in, we enjoy working with the people, we feel like we're adding value, it has meaning to us personally, that's... that is great. If you get that 70% of the time you are doing really, really well, particularly when you start out, because, I'll be honest, when you start out there's a lot more repetition and kind of, there's more grunt work, right, there just is, right. So it's really hard to necessarily find your purpose, your personal purpose, and mission, and meaning when you start out, and it's also because you may be still trying to find what your personal passion and mission and meaning are. But, it's also true that the job of the company, yes, they need to treat you well and they need to educate you or they need to continue your learning etc. And honestly, I think companies are doing better than they ever have. The war on talent right now is putting you in a phenomenal position to be well treated by your employer, which is great. I think we're this is way overdue, and this is great. But you can never forget that they are paying you – because even in that 30% that you may not like, that you may not be good at that, that you may not enjoy, you may not even believe in it – you still have to do that part, right? That's why it's work. And I think that's really important because I do see some young people coming into the workplace and they are very idealistic, and I don't want you to lose the idealism, but I need it to be a little bit more blended with pragmatism and, and reality of the difference between school and your personal life and fun and your relationships and your work.

Stacie Berdan:

Very real and important advice for our listeners, thank you for that. On the topic of advice, is there a piece that you wish you could go back and give your younger self?

Perry Yeatman:

You know, it's such a, it's such a great question. And I do believe that periods of reflection of your life and yourself and your career are really important. Take the time... I try to do it annually at the end of each year, over that kind of holiday break, I try to just step back and reflect for a little bit on questions like this. If I'm honest, what I would say is, I had an incredible... it was exciting, it was successful, it was financially beneficial. You know, I just had an amazing career, right? I went for it, I went for it 130%, right, 150%. Name your percent – I was all in in my career. But what I have to say is that, while it delivered, everything I wanted in a professional space, I was not kind or compassionate enough with myself, I had very little time where I really could say that I was content, that I stopped and smelled the roses, or that I was actually happy. And it's interesting, because I recently listened to a podcast that I thought was excellent on the Calm app. And I think the guy's name is Shawn Achor, A-C-H-O-R, anyway... It was about either finding happiness, or discovering happiness. And he started by redefining what happiness is, right. And it's not like this kind of state of bliss, you know, where you're, you're done. And now it's all bliss, right? Whether you landed the perfect job, or you met the perfect mate, or whatever. He talked about it as a journey, and, and how you can create that attitude of gratitude and that sense of success in a very different way. And what I realized is, I really wish that I had thought more about, stop and reflect on this moment, stop and enjoy this moment, be kind to yourself, acknowledge what you've accomplished. Don't just think about the next thing every five seconds. And don't dwell on every single thing that you did wrong. Because none of us are perfect. I am so far from perfect. And I think it's important to acknowledge when we mess up, and to learn from it. But then you really do have to put it behind you and say, you know, something, nobody's perfect. I'm doing my best. And I'm going to not make that mistake twice, hopefully, and then you keep moving on.

Stacie Berdan:

Thank you for that. Thanks for your honesty. I think it really matters to hear someone who's had such a stellar career as you, achieved so many things, still be able to step back and said, look, it wasn't all perfect for these



reasons... and to share that with our listeners. So, thanks, I really, I really do appreciate that. And I also appreciate the work that you're doing now at Save the Children, an amazing organization, why don't you tell us about it?

Perry Yeatman:

Yeah, you know, I feel so lucky to have this job at this time. It's very interesting... You know, Save the Children is the name of the organization. But I'm really proud to say it's not what we do anymore in the strictest sense. And let me explain that: our mission is to support the world's most marginalized kids, right? It's about education, protection, and health for the millions and millions of children around the world who do not have that today, right. But what we've learned is that it's not about us saving them because they're not capable, or because they're not smart, or because they're not, you know, trying to do it and hardworking and everything. It's because they've been thrust into contexts beyond their control, where they CANNOT do it alone, right, where what they need is a helping hand to then let them lead their lives. So when you think about, you know, whether we're in the refugee camps in Syria, or whether we're on the border right now in in Ukraine, or whether we are talking about a natural disaster that's happened in the US – any of these, these kids, these families, they didn't ask for this. None of us... you know, I look at everything and I say there but for the grace of God go I, right, go my daughter, go my son – because none of us asked for this. And in that moment, in that context, it's not about us, saving them as much as us enabling them to save themselves. And I think that that's... we are one of the leading, we are the leading NGO for children's rights around the world, but what's really important to me is that the way we're now doing it is to fully recognize that these people can do it for themselves, if we... our job now is really just to give them that chance to do it for themselves. And I feel really strongly about that work. And we do it both in a development setting. So long term, we're the first one there, and the last one to leave. But we also do it in the, in the disaster, so COVID, conflict, climate – these are all creating unprecedented disasters for kids and families, and we are there around the world.

Stacie Berdan:

That is beautiful. That is beautiful. Thanks for explaining that. And you're right. And the whole human dignity component was critically important. I could talk to you all day. But we're... it's about time for us to start wrapping up. Before we do, is there anything else you'd like to add?

Perry Yeatman:

So, I think what's really important is that you have to recognize your career and your life is in chapters. And they're going to be good and bad chapters, they're going to be easy and hard chapters. And I think the single most important thing that I have learned is that if you do your best every day, to be a good person to deliver to make a difference to help others, what you're going to find is your career can be built, it's kind of like serendipity, right? You put it out in the world, and it comes back to you. Almost every job I've ever had was a personal recommendation from somebody else who knew me, or worked with me, or heard about me. Likewise, almost every client I've ever had came from personal referral. That's why I think it matters how you show up every day, all the time. But the other thing I really want you to know is: in this career of chapters good and bad, when times are their toughest... And I have faced some really tough ones. I remember voting to exit Unilever when I was eight months pregnant, right, and... with my daughter... and thinking my career is over – like who's going to hire me after this, right? I felt good. I'd done a lot. But I thought, okay, my career was over. And lo and behold, you know, I got to work with Stacie, you know, we wrote our first book, you know, I taught at a university, I opened my first business. And then, 18 months later, I actually got an opportunity at Kraft that turned out to be even bigger and better than what I was doing at Unilever. So it was like, wow, okay. And then, personal circumstances changed again, and I felt the need to step down from Kraft. So I stepped down from Kraft, I moved back to the East Coast. And I thought, Oh, my God, okay, my career is over, I'm not going to ever do anything more exciting. You know, I was, and I opened my own company, and I worked on my second book and whatever. But lo and behold, another chapter opened. The next thing. And this one is where I'm currently at, right? Less than two years ago, my daughter, we went from national dance competitions to wheelchair shopping in 18 months, and I now know she will be permanently disabled to a degree for the rest of her life. And it completely blew up my whole life, it blew up, everything could blow up, it ended up blowing up, you know, my marriage, my, my housing, my career, everything



blew up. And I thought, I don't know how I'm going to come back from this. I don't know how I'm going to manage this. And the truth is that then this opportunity to save the children came, and then... and I redefined my whole life again. And I will tell you, I have found more contentment, I have found more... I have finally learned to find joy in those moments, I have found happiness in difficult times. COVID, all of these things happened, and yet, I feel better about my work than I have in decades, right. So every time you hit a really hard patch, I just want you to know, you're not alone, you would be amazed at how many CEOs I have interviewed who have had a patch like this. And if you keep going and doing the right things, and being kind to yourself, and recognizing you don't have to be perfect, but you still have value. You will find the silver lining, you will find the next great chapter, as I have.

Stacie Berdan:

Wow. Thank you, Perry. I have loved catching up with you, hearing your stories. You know, my, my heart goes out to you as a friend and a colleague for so many years. And I'm grateful that you've actually been able to take the time to be with us today because I know you're a very busy woman. So thank you for that. And I really do appreciate you. Thank you.

Perry Yeatman:

Thank you, Stacie. It was it was wonderful to get to be here.

[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!