**Episode 2 – The Aerospace Industry**

**Colleen Pritchett, President - Americas Aerospace & Global Fibers at Hexcel Corporation**

**Ms. Stacie Berdan, International Careers Expert (Podcast Host)**

[Music]

**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 about what it’s like to work globally. If you love adventure and thrive on taking risks and operating outside your comfort zone, join us as we explore the ins and outs of pursuing an international career! My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, and I’ll be your host! Our First Season dives into what it’s like **Working Globally Through the Pandemic** – and the outlook for global careers in a post-COVID-19 world.

There is no doubt the pandemic has turned our lives upside down and inside out roiling our daily life patterns and presumptions. This is especially true for the aerospace industry, which has been hit hard by the pandemic. But today’s guest is optimistic about the future of the industry. Colleen Pritchett is President of Hexcel Corporation – Americas Aerospace & Global Fibers Business. She has led a $1.5bln global business and is renowned for leading turnarounds, improving profitability, championing the customers’ needs, and motivating teams to deliver significant results.

It’s abundantly clear that Colleen is well prepared to lead a global team through the pandemic turbulence because of the skills she honed during her time abroad. What are those skills? What does it take to lead a multi-billion-dollar global industry through a pandemic? Have a listen as Colleen shares her positive outlook on the benefits of a remote global workforce for job seekers, dishes out excellent guidance for students on how they can own their careers from the get-go, and how focusing on the customer or client is a winning strategy no matter what – and she just might have saved the best piece of advice for last!

Welcome Colleen! It is a pleasure to have you with us, to talk about global careers and working through the pandemic.

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Thank you, Stacie, it’s great to be with you.

**Stacie Berdan:**

One of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there, to go beyond the titles. So, I’d like to begin by asking you to share with us: What is it that you do, Colleen? Give us your elevator pitch, if you will, a tool that students can relate to and learn from!

**Colleen Pritchett:**

I would describe it as: I’m a growth-focused, global business leader who leads teams to deliver advanced material science solutions (so think polymer, composite type materials to customers in aerospace, defense, electronics, industrial type markets. That’s what I’ve been doing my whole career!

**Stacie Berdan:**

You are a chemical engineer by training Colleen, later enhanced with an MBA. You have risen to the role of President – wow, such an impressive achievement. Do all employees of Hexcel have to be engineers or have a science background?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

It’s a great question. So, yes, we hire many engineers, many scientists, but we also hire many finance executives, HR, sales, international relations, government relations, you name it, we have opportunities for folks across many functions. We’re a whole cross-functional team, and so I think there’s tremendous opportunity at Hexcel for many different disciplines.

**Stacie Berdan:**

So, that means you have to work with a variety of people with different backgrounds both in the US and around the world. What is it that you enjoy most about your job?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

So, what I enjoy best is spending time with our customers, learning about the challenges they face, what material science solution they need, and then working with our internal team, our cross-functional team, made up of folks from sales, marketing, product management, operations, you name it, to deliver solutions that meet our customer needs. For me that’s a lot of fun, you know, how can we help both of us grow and win.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Well, it sounds to me as if you are a real problem-solver. And that’s what it’s all about, isn’t it, Colleen – delivering results for clients and customers by leading and inspiring a cross-functional team, and that isn’t always easy to do, especially on a global scale.

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Exactly. And from a global aspect, you know, I really enjoy working with teams around the world to make this happen, so not just here in the US or in Americas but we truly work as one team around the world with serving our customers, helping them grow and win, that are in different countries and/or cultures, in which their needs may be different, and many of our customers are global.

**Stacie Berdan:**

But since the pandemic hit, business isn’t quite the same these days, is it? Especially for an industry like aerospace… My Gosh, how’s it going?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Many companies and organizations have seen impacts from the pandemic, some more than others. One key market we serve is commercial aerospace, which I’m sure you’ve seen has been hit hard during this global pandemic. When we look to the future, commercial aerospace will come back. It may take a while, but it’ll come back and our growth potential in that market remains very strong…Hexcel’s a great company to consider for a global career.

**Stacie Berdan:**

And I suppose that working with global clients has been trickier, right, since the pandemic hit. How has your work changed as a result?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

My own work, my personal business travel, I used to travel quite a bit, that’s down significantly – both domestically and internationally – it’s been reduced quite a bit. Also, many of our teams, Stacie, are working much more remotely out of their homes. We have a lot of folks that are in our plant sites and our labs working on site, many of our team, let’s say, commercial team, or those in the administration group are working more remotely out of their homes, and that’s a change for many people. Most of our sales team is used to that but not a lot of others were, so it was a real adjustment for people getting set up at home, working from home, and trying to manage work-life, you know, balance, if you will, and separation. And so, I think we’ve all learned a lot… and using much more video conference to connect… So, it has definitely changed my work and our team and the way we work.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Do you see any of the new COVID inspired work practices continuing on after the pandemic ends? How so?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

I think, for some, it could change the way companies view working remotely. And may be the flexibility on that and what’s possible with a global workforce as we look, you know, at talent and where that talent is located. And I do think face-to-face is important, it will come back; but, I think, we’ll be able to connect more frequently, faster, with one another internally and externally with our customers and industry partners and so forth.

**Stacie Berdan:**

It’s really interesting, isn’t it, to see how quickly organizations have adapted, you know. And I agree with you – that there is a tremendous amount of good work practices that will remain. The spread of COVID-19 has shown us, yet again, how interconnected we are. Globalization is here. We can’t argue with that. What do you see, though, as a long-term impact of COVID on globalization?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

I think generally it will accelerate globalization. Just the virtual connections – the speed and responsiveness as teams learn faster ways to work and connect. Again internally, externally. You know, I think about how we connect with customers, suppliers, industry partners, industry conferences. We can just do all of that faster and more of it.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Students have been affected by the pandemic as well. You know, they’ve had to leave campus, most of them are doing online learning… How can they keep developing their global mindset in the current environment?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Yes, it’s a good question. So, I think it’s critical for students to continue to be aware, to advance that global mindset by learning different languages, learning about different cultures, needs and challenges and not assuming they’re all the same. Learning about different businesses that serve customers globally. Speaking directly with different leaders who lead global teams – from different industries because you’ll gain different perspectives and learn from their experience, you know, gain their advice to help them as students prepare their development plan, prepare their career plan. I think it’s good to talk to a diverse group of folks.

**Stacie Berdan:**

That’s really good guidance, Colleen, thank you for that! You know, I’ve noticed that leaders of so many organizations – such as yourself – are taking the time to give back even more, and I hope that students are aware of these opportunities and can benefit. Do you see COVID-19 affecting work opportunities for students who want to pursue a global career in the coming years? What do you see?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Yeah. So, I think it depends on the industry and the impact covid has had, because some industries will be hiring and sending people on international assignments in the near term, as an example. While others – it might take a few years before they’re in that position again to send folks on an international assignment. So, I think just being aware of the impact that the pandemic has had on the area that they’re interested in will be important, and to help frame for context what to expect, and what that business and what that industry is going through, because timing does matter, business conditions do matter as to how they’re deploying expats or not.

**Stacie Berdan:**

You were deployed overseas. What inspired you to pursue that global assignment in Asia so many years ago?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Ever since I can remember, I’ve had a passion for traveling, exploring, first throughout the US, then, as I got into college, and kind of early career days, I had a passion for travelling the world. It’s really a life goal to be a world traveler and to teach my daughters that as well. My passion for being a global business leader really strengthened following my MBA. I thought the ultimate challenge at that point would be to lead a team and business while living internationally. Somewhere different from where I grew up in the US.

So, I shared with my boss, with HR, that getting an international assignment was something I really wanted, I thought that it would be a great development opportunity for me. And from the time I communicated my interest in doing that it took, Stacie, about 10 years before it actually was the right time, the right opportunity for me to go and work internationally. So, it took a while, because it was dependent on business conditions, or – was the opportunity the right opportunity available? And personal life happened – I got married to my husband, we had two daughters… And so, we ultimately got the opportunity to go abroad to Asia when the girls were 2 and 4 years old. We packed our things and moved to Shanghai, China as our first expat assignment.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Wow, your story illustrates such an important point - every situation is different, and conditions must be right for all involved, as you point out – yourself, your husband, your kids, the business. In fact, patience – combined with persistence – emerged from the original research I did years ago on the skills necessary to having a successful global career. What other skills or traits do you attribute to your success working internationally?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Yes, so, I would say listening is really critical – in leadership and as a key skill, especially when you live in a new culture. You need to be able to observe and learn how other countries and teams in those countries do business. Because it was different from the US and I really had to listen a lot. I didn’t want to appear unprepared or rude, or assume what the team needed or what the customers needed or wanted, so listening was very critical. I would also say as a key skill – being customer focused, being a learner and curious to learn new things; and, being flexible, because you will have to adapt to many changing dynamics, which really helped me and my family succeed - both living and working internationally.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Solid advice that is just as current, just as relevant today. Yet, still I suspect you have faced many challenges not only while living and working in Asia but beyond, to your current role leading a global team. Can you share some of the ones you’ve faced?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

You know, one challenge is having the patience, you know, and realizing it takes time for a lot of things – to earn the respect of a new team, especially in a new culture that might be different than the one you grew up in. It takes time to learn a new business, to learn the team; and it takes time to gain alignment and make change happen. It takes time, as you mentioned, to get international assignments. Ten years - I learned to be patient, you know, to communicate what I was looking for. But realized I needed certain development, it wasn’t the right time; and ultimately it happened, but, you know, that patience – it was good – it’s part of developing and growing as a leader, that things don’t happen instantaneously, and it’s important to have the patience.

Another challenge, I would say, Stacie, is communications. I love communications, but communicating is difficult, it takes a lot of practice, especially when it’s in a different language, or a different style than what you’ve grown up in. Different cultures have different ways of communicating – whether some face-to-face is more important, some virtually is OK. A lot can get lost in translation; and so, what I found, especially living in Asia, (but this is true globally) when you are communicating on any team, you know, to document the plan, to document the objectives, next steps, whatever it is – share that with the team, make sure it’s clear. Follow up with people, make sure everybody is aligned, because silence on a phone call does not mean you have their alignment. And I experienced a lot of that on global calls, or when leading the team, you know, whether in Asia and in the US…. So, I find communicating is a really critical skill and a challenge for many.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Well, it strikes me , Colleen, that all of those skills are not only critical to working globally, but also to working through the pandemic – that’s really interesting. And clearly ones that have made you a great leader.I know I’ve asked a lot of you and you’ve offered so much great advice so far, but do you have any more tips for global job seekers as we work through the pandemic?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Yes, I would say important skills such as the ability to adapt and be flexible to change. That’s all, many of us have seen in significant ways this year, right; just lots of adapting to new environments, new online learning – you know, for workers and the families, right. So being flexible to change is something that’s needed as a global job seeker, the ability to learn new skills, new industries… and businesses, well, you know, help make them be competitive. What skills, industries are needed to win and be competitive in that space. Topics to think about, think about the industries, companies, and opportunities, and what they offer globally – do they offer global assignments, do they offer expat assignments? Some companies do, some may not – they don’t have the size or that’s not part of their strategic plan.

I would say, it’s important for new global job seekers to also talk to people who have lived and worked internationally, to learn about their experiences, both good and bad, get advice from them so that you, as a student, can make an informed decision whether it’s the right choice for you or your family to take an international assignment, to take a global role. It is a big life decision, and wonderful on many fronts (it was wonderful for my family and I to live internationally), and at the same time it’s not always easy, it has a lot of challenges like language communication challenge, living in a different culture, surviving in that different culture and that country, learning about their rules; being away from family and friends; work life challenges – you may be traveling a lot more or you may be on calls every evening depending where headquarters, you know, where your team is based. There’s travel challenges, going from one country to the next….It’s good to get informed and to talk with many people about their experience, both the good and bad, to get that advice before taking an international assignment or taking a global job, because there’s a lot of requirements that come with that.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Very well said. That’s great. So many people think that the global lifestyle is so glamorous – and certainly there are many elements that are exciting and filled with adventure – but it’s also a LOT of hard work. And the pandemic has made global travel, as you point out, and perhaps even global assignments much less common for the time being. But as we wrap up, I’d like you to reflect on a few things as they relate to your entire career – and guidance that students can learn from. First, what advice do you wish you had been given – and at what point – in your career?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

So, I would say, one thing is own your career. Don’t simply wait on others to tell you what to do or to offer you that next assignment. Take a real proactive role in drafting your development and your career plan and get input from others – from your boss, from HR, from other leaders – and really listen their ideas and their input as to different ways to develop yourself, different assignments to try, to help strengthen you plan. And what you are doing is, one, you’re socializing your plan in a way that’s meant in the spirit of development and gaining their input, and you’re also gaining their buy-in into your plan and making people aware of what you know and what you are looking for, which, in my perspective is all a good thing - to help actually make your plan happen. I think getting this advice very early on in your career is helpful, so that you can excel, and you can jumpstart and know that hey, you got to own your career; and you are responsible for your development and career plan, and getting help from others along the way.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Own your career! Yes. That is a great piece of advice, Colleen. You have had so many global experiences, that’s great. Tell me, do you have a favorite global experience that you’d like to share? It could be personal or professional – whatever, just to bring a taste to our listeners.

**Colleen Pritchett:**

I do, Stacie. So, when I think of that question, one special memory comes to mind that happened when my family and I – we were traveling on holiday while we were living in Asia, we were in Thailand, and our family had just sat down for breakfast in a restaurant. And my oldest daughter looked at my husband and I, and she asked “Mom and Dad, how do I say ‘Good morning’ in their language?” And my husband and I, we just looked at each other and we were shocked she asked that, and we just beamed, because we thought “How wonderful!” You know, this is part of the international assignment, we’re trying to teach our girls about learning and being sensitive to other cultures and realizing not everybody speaks the same language as we do, or has the same beliefs. And it was just such a great learning moment and reflection, and one of the key benefits (again, we are trying to teach our girls) in becoming a global citizen. And we felt like “Hey, we’ve succeeded!” You know, with that simple question – she gets it – not everybody speaks English, you know, or whatever language you grew up in, so… anyway, that’s one that comes to mind.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Wow, I love that story! Yes, and congratulations! You know, helping our children develop into global citizens and broadening our own global mindset by living in another culture. That is a beautiful example, because you know, it’s not just about the work, it’s about the lessons we’ve learned as well as the ones we actually share with our kids, that translate beyond that one experience to really understanding and appreciating that people are different. And being curious is a really good thing—two excellent traits to have, no matter where you live or what you do, or what age you are.

Now, before we wrap up, do you have anything else you’d like to add?

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Maybe just one other piece of advice I think about as part of career development is don’t be afraid to take a risk. Like when taking on a new assignment and opportunity, don’t feel like or expect yourself that you need to be 100% ready for the job day one. Because, while it’s important to be prepared and developed as much as possible, it’s likely you’ll never be 100% ready for the new role or opportunity, just try it. Know you’ll learn from it, it’s part of continuous improvement. Every day I learn something, every day. So, don’t overthink it. If you get a great opportunity, don’t talk yourself out of it, just try it, you’re ready.

**Stacie Berdan:**

Thank you, Colleen. I really, really appreciate the time that you’ve taken to share your experience with our listeners. It’s been fantastic. And it’s been a real treat for me to catch up with you after a few years. Thanks again.

**Colleen Pritchett:**

Oh, thank you, Stacie. Great talking with you again and I really enjoyed it.

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**Stacie Berdan:**

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast “Working Globally Through the Pandemic” and the outlook for global careers in a post COVID-19 world. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!