



## International Womans Day 2021

### Barrier Breaking – History Making

SITE Florida Caribbean invited a panel of two female trailblazers in the cruise industry, who not only shattered the glass ceiling but also provided an abundance of motivation and inspiration to the discussion that took place on March 8 virtually.

**Lisa Lutoff-Perlo (LLP)**, the first female president and CEO of Celebrity Cruises and **Kate McCue (McCue)**, the first American captain of a mega cruise liner were open to questions from our SITE members, presented by our moderators Lisa Vogt, AVP Corporate Incentives & Charter Sales of Celebrity Cruises and Todd Mickey, President of SITE FLC.

A year ago, for IWD 2020, Celebrity Cruises had for the first time in history, a bridge full of women and leadership team – 26 of them to be precise! It was an epic moment, because traditionally women were missing on the top level, but with a culture of inclusion, encouragement and embracing diversity, Celebrity Cruises achieved what for decades was a male dominated domain. **It was barrier-breaking, history making and a day of pride.** With a well-spoken, competent, and graceful Kate McCue as the first captain of a mega cruise ship at the helm, it was a celebration of gender equality, that should have deserved front page coverage in all the media outlets. But in case you missed it, these two ladies gave us a very personal perspective through a live Q&A session on what it is about to be a top female leader in the hospitality industry, on gender equality in the workplace, on obstacles, life-balance and advice to anyone who wants to realize their dreams. The below is an excerpt of the conversation and a recap of their inspirational responses.

#### **On how to get to the top in your career:**

McCue: The peers and mentors that I have had the privilege to work for and with, helped to push me. Start with a dream and follow it. And help others to achieve their dreams when it is your turn.

LLP: I agree that mentors are important, I have had valuable advocates who helped me. Let them inspire you and push you out of your comfort zone. And when you have the chance, pay it forward. Take pride in making others successful.

### **What challenges did you have to overcome?**

McCue: I don't have horror stories to tell. I look at my crew, which is made of 65 different nationalities. We are all minorities in some ways, we don't pick on the differences, but we celebrate them. I didn't feel a lack of acceptance because my company has a culture that cultivates this kind of environment. There is a lot of respect.

LLP: I never felt gender imbalance in my sales position, but when I moved to operations, I realized that I am different. I had to be my genuine best self and be authentic to my values in order to succeed. There may be no equality yet, but acceptance amongst your colleagues is maybe more important than looking for the perfect percentage.

### **Would you want an all-women bridge all the time?**

McCue: I think we would be missing out on diversity for a wonderful balance. It was an epic scenario on IWD, but for a healthy environment, you want a diversified playing field. Women bring such empathy and compassion to the work place, but overall you want an inclusive atmosphere of men and women. Each brings something valuable to the table.

### **What motivates you?**

LLP: I come from a place of motivation and optimism. Just waking up being grateful for the great industry I work in and the wonderful people I work with every day, motivates me. Walk the talk and make it happen.

MC: Every single day brings a little win, something that gets me excited. Celebrate those wins no matter how big or small!

### **How to juggle a heavy workload**

LLP: Keep perspective to help you prioritize. Perspective keeps your life in balance, an act that changes every day. You may not manage the perfect balance every single day, but try to shuffle your priorities. And don't take anything too serious; not yourself or what you do for a living, because in any given minute, this might disappear.

### **How to juggle family and a job that is demanding and requires extensive travelling?**

LLP: My hat goes off to every woman who juggles children and career. Again, it comes to keeping perspective and building a great support system within your family.

McCue: My husband encourages me to take the next step. Technology makes life much easier to stay connected. Although I do not have children, I consider my crew and passengers my kids. They are my responsibility, they take quite a bit of my energy and they are worth it.

### **What would you say to your younger self?**

LLP: Stay humble. Use your success to pay it forward to anyone who is motivated to achieve their dreams.

McCue: Be your authentic self. When I was evaluated, I was told I smile too much, and that people might not take me serious enough given the responsibility I have. After 2 weeks of trying to smile less, it didn't feel right, so I smiled again when I felt like it and continued to be my authentic self. It has been smooth sailing ever since!

This was a highly motivational panel discussion of the kind that money can't buy. As an audience member, I sensed that a drive for success and gratefulness is what amps up these two power women and makes them accomplished. Looking at your own blessings will give you strength, a positive outlook and perspective to take on challenges. This comes from a place of respect and humbleness, character trades one finds amongst great empathetic leaders and a lesson to be remastered every single day. To further underline their compassion, we should note that the speakers did not charge a fee, but instead asked our chapter to make a donation to the Seafarers House in Fort Lauderdale providing visiting mariners with practical care and spiritual support (<https://seafarershouse.org>).

If you like to see the video on the historic IWD all female bridge event, find it on youtube at [https://youtu.be/hxsG\\_rDjNKQ](https://youtu.be/hxsG_rDjNKQ)

Written by Steffi Kordy, VP of Sustainability SITE Florida/ Caribbean

