

BBDO KNOWS

**GET DIVERSITY
SMART**

*International Women's
Day 2022*

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Every year on International Women's Day we are spoilt with choice on the variety of events and talks that are held around the Omnicom network. This year seemed to bring the best: we had talks from political professor Dr. Ella Roininen, pioneering female CEO Indra Nooyi, bestselling author Candice Brathwaite and a panel of CMOs hosted by Margaret Molley, Global CMO of Sigel and Gale, that included Samantha Maltin from Sesame Workshop, Lorraine Barber-Miller from Phillips, Maya Watson from Clubhouse, Dana Khouri from Majid Al Futtaim Retail, Maggie Lower from Hootsuite and Christine Anderston from Blackstone.

Our conclusion? Female voices are diverse, empowering and vital. This day is about lifting women up; bringing all individuals together to recognise the power of different voices and experiences, and looking at how, when we all work together, we make every team and organisation stronger.

BREAK THE BIAS & SMASHING INTERNAL BIAS

This year's global theme for IWD was #breakthebias. Bias can be defined in many ways and is extremely personal. Professor Dr. Ella Roininen defined it as 'the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.' Life coach consultant Roxanne Hobbs, raised a similar sentiment during her talk on Smashing Internal biases, stating that 'universally you cannot be human and not make stereotypes.' But the real issue is when 'we start to believe the stereotypes and judgements that society and culture think about us' - this is what internal bias is - and it becomes extremely detrimental to our self-worth. For women, this can be something as simple as believing, 'someone *like me* could never be a business owner,' or even worse, bias manifests itself as internalised misogyny, to which Hobbs gave the examples, "Oh she keeps going on about menopause, she needs to shut up," rather than giving another woman the space to feel or speak her truth.

Hobbs said that as women, if we really want to grow, we need to expose ourselves to the opposite of what we see through allies, mentors, groups of underrepresented people and through personal projects - 'you can't be what you can't see'. As Ingi Settecasi, Head of Guest Services at AMV BBDO, says, 'advocating for one gender, does not have to mean alienating another. The two key words to take away from these discussions are respect and empathy.'

THE FEMALE SUPERPOWER

Listening, empathy, curiosity - how can female leaders use their superpowers in a professional context? Samantha Maltin of Sesame Workshop emphasised that curiosity is key; to be curious about your team makes you a better, more understanding, leader. To be

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curious of your consumer, in a non-judgmental manner, leads to better work and better results. Maggie Lower spoke eloquently on leaving no one behind; especially in the fight for trans rights - "intersectionality creates power". Dana Khouri spoke of the empathy she cultivated as VP Brand Communication & Marketing at Majid Al Futtaim Retail - as a brand spanning countries and cultures she has learnt to empathise with not only her employees but her consumers too.

Indra Nooyi led proudly with compassion when she was CEO of Pepsico, a position she held between 2006 - 2018. There were no other women in CEO positions leading Fortune 500 companies, and she was honest about the fact that, along with the weight of responsibility for representing both women and people of colour, there were times when "it can be extremely lonely at the top". She became known for her compassionate leadership; she wrote personal letters to the parents and families of her employees, thanking them for giving their child's/parent time to Pepsico. Company loyalty soared.

THE FAMILY FOCUS

Indra Nooyi understands the sacrifices, both at home and at work, that working mothers need to make, and the impact that can have on company culture and progression. She feels strongly that the big problem facing organisations is building the pipeline. If we want women to have families and keep working, it's critically important to offer paid leave, flexible working hours and childcare. 'Let's put family first in the future of work and recognise that it's a human issue, not a political issue: look at families as wonderful building blocks of humanity.'

Candice Brathwaite talked about the power of perseverance - her bestselling book *I Am Not Your Baby Mother* was her 9th book proposal - and the necessity to give all women, of all colours, a voice. In the age of social media, she encouraged perspective, 'people will love you; people will hate you, and it will have nothing to do with you'. *I Am Not Your Baby Mother* is now an essential on the UK midwife curriculum, a nationally recognised masterpiece each midwife is required to engage with before taking up the practice.

I am proud of taking a leap of faith and being the first in a place where there was seemingly no way. There have been challenges in being first.

- Candice Brathwaite

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THE EMPLOYER ADVANTAGE

Christine Anderson of Blackstone spoke to how she has advocated for an inclusive workspace in an industry that many still imagine being stuck in the 1980s; “we need to be very upfront, make women comfortable enough to talk about their personal life and challenges. Then we are flexible as possible around these issues”.

Indra Nooyi reiterates that HR departments needs to stand up to the conviction that equal work require equal pay. She asks, how can HR departments allow pay disparity? This is echoed at the top: boards need to spend sessions talking diversity and inclusion within the company, especially focusing on the middle management moving progressing upwards.

“There’s a different standard that women are held to, which gives an increased drive for perfection. We feel that we should do more. Managers have to find the right balance between the practical and the perfect. Women have to come to terms with the fact that it’s not possible to be perfect at everything. At any point in time, what do you want to do right at that moment. Just keep going. Life has got so many trade offs, that you can’t be perfect at everything.”

- Indra Nooyi

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR BRANDS

The sessions touched upon the frustrations of still needing to have these conversations, but the wider message was one of hope and optimism. As creatives, we have a responsibility to make sure that there is equal representation both in front and behind the camera. As the team at AMV BBDO behind Essity’s award winning Blood Normal campaign encourage us, ‘we need to push ourselves outside our comfort zones and normalise issues in a creative way.’ Find the client that is brave enough and start small, building up to larger impact. We will always need to do the work to break our biases - but we’ve already come so far and we are optimistic about what we might still do.

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ABOUT BBDO KNOWS

BBDO KNOWS is a planning resource for the BBDO network.

BBDO KNOWS offers thinking, strategy, insights and inspiration on key categories, key themes and consumer segments.

If you are interested in learning more about the way BBDO thinks please contact **BBDO Knows** bbdo@bbdoknows.com

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