

## WIL #203 - Highlights for April 24, 2020

**“Agents of Change for Women’s Advancement and Leadership” featuring Elba Pareja-Gallagher, Director of Finance, UPS and Founder / President of ShowMe50.org and Robbin Jorgensen, Founder & CEO, Women Igniting Change**



**Summary:** In TLG’s second WIL webinar provided in a Zoom videoconference, we had two incredibly inspiring and engaging speakers. Both Elba and Robbin are catalysts and “status quo disruptors” on behalf of gender equality.

Elba is a servant leader in all that she does and has become a major influencer in the Latino community. Throughout her 20+ year career, she’s made significant contributions in multiple business roles as well as chairing the UPS Hispanic BRG. In addition, she followed her passion by founding and leading a nonprofit organization and a Lean In Circle. Despite the potential for risk to her career, Elba remains fearless in her advocacy for women with the goal of seeing women achieve parity or 50% in senior management positions in the U.S. Current projections: it will take 208 more years to reach that goal - which is why more ACTION is needed.

Robbin is equally committed to making a lasting and impactful difference for women’s equality, leadership, and economic empowerment. Following a successful 25+ year sales and marketing career in large for profit and also nonprofit organizations, she took a courageous leap of faith 9 years ago to start her own global, purpose driven strategic consulting firm. In addition to U.S. based companies, Robbin has worked with organizations in 14 countries on 6 continents, including numerous initiatives with women in Rwanda and other developing countries. She’s especially proud to be recognized as a Human Right Champion in ATL and in the world.

During the almost 2 hours of dialogue and Q & A, Elba and Robbin shared their work and their hearts with a very engaged virtual audience (approx. 80 participants including a college students; from GA as well as NY, IL and ME). The speakers definitely “inspired, informed and invigorated” everyone and set a very high standard for virtual participation. Below is more of the valuable content shared by these two exceptional leaders -- [change agents extraordinaire](#).

**Lessons Shared / Take-aways:**

**Elba: On the topic of speaking up for gender equality in her corporate career: - -**

...“Very hard, challenging, took grit and support from others; looked inside myself and knew it was the right thing to do; didn’t listen to naysayers.”

,,, Quote from Martin Luther King: “*The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.*”

**Robbin: On leaving the corporate world and starting her own company:**

...Took courage; had everything going for her but came to realize an inner calling; engaged an executive coach for herself which helped her get ready to make the leap; also went on a coach training / leadership retreat in N.C. which was a gift to herself, and ultimately, the impetus for her transition.

**Elba: On her work with Lean In Circles started by Sheryl Sandberg:**

...In keeping with the principles in Sandberg’s first book, over 40,000 Lean In Circles have been created around the world, including the one that Elba leads locally (she’s also a regional Lean In leader). It’s all about behavior change and helping women and men become educated on actions that need to be taken. Elba shared several photos taken at an inspiring gathering last year at Sheryl Sandberg’s home in CA.

...Data says that for every \$9.27 donors give to higher education, only \$1 is given for women’s issues. Despite the underfunding of women’s issues, there is good news from Melinda Gates. She committed \$1B to fund 3 top priorities for women’s equality around the world!

...**Elba & Robbin** then recommended Melinda Gates’ new book, *Moment of Lift*. They then challenged everyone to make TODAY our “moment of lift” – do more; don’t be afraid.

**Robbin: On the work she’s doing in developing countries like Rwanda, and how this global perspective adds value to her work with companies in the U.S.**

...It’s all about shared experiences and realizing that women everywhere face the same issues – i.e., confidence, funding their small businesses, juggling work and home responsibilities, unconscious biases, etc. Our challenges are universal.

**Elba: On simple, small steps you can take to speak up for gender equality if you don’t feel too brave**

...Meet people where they are; you can do small things like reading articles, educating yourself, “liking” a post or blog on Linked In; share it with friends, maybe male colleagues; attend an ERG or ShowMe50 meeting.

**Elba & Robbin:** It’s important to invite men into the conversation; their support matters! Gender equality is not JUST a women’s issue. Robbin also conducts focus groups with men and women; helps to engage everyone. Elba also mentioned a great resource – small kit of flash cards -- *50 Ways to Fight Bias* – fun and informative

**Elba:** Shared data re top 3 companies - Deloitte, Medtronic, & Unilever -- 2019 winners honored by the Catalyst organization for having reached gender balance across all their management groups globally. Unilever even achieved this result ahead of their own target date.

...There’s also a Unilever video available at this link:

<https://youtu.be/P4KFT9V8Zfo>

**Robbin: On key strategies she's implementing in her leadership development and economic empowerment work in Rwanda and other countries**

...It starts with relationships, and builds from there. Shared photos and stories with a very special group of widows of the genocide (AVEGA – members of Agahozo) and another group of women at the TUK Coffee Cooperative (learned about the 10 month process to produce coffee we drink).

...Also works with other organizations re small business loans, financial literacy, and the Economic Empowerment Center

**Questions from Participants:**

**For Elba:** On different perspectives of men and women when you have 10% women (1 of 10) in senior leadership roles (data showed that 45% men & 28% women thought that meant women were “well represented”

... Elba points out that there is a perception gap and we need to work to raise awareness, take action

**For Robbin:** On what's the difference in the “corporate Robbin” and the “new Robbin”

...No mask; she's herself, 100% authentic; some may not like it but she's herself. At the retreat she attended in Asheville, her mask started to come off. No longer checks the “needs to be seen as” box. Believes you're most successful when you're authentic.

...In her workshops, she has clients write 25 “I AM” statements and tells them to practice them daily.

...Elba added that since she's still in her corporate job, she must balance corporate culture and being true to herself. But she did take off her mask when she began speaking on gender equality at work. She's also created some self-affirming “Mirror Stickers” - and will roll this out at ShowMe50.org.

**Elba & Robbin: On bringing men into the conversation re gender equality**

...Treat them as allies. Ask for their support in meetings (possibly before the meeting.) In the hiring process, Elba and her team first discuss and agree on qualifications. Then ignore gender on applications and stick to qualifications! One practical way to overcome unconscious bias.

**Elba: On how she uses the term transparency.**

...Uses it a lot because in earlier career she was effected by negative transparency. Tries to influence others now by talking about and showing transparency. Leaders should communicate even before they have all the facts.

...Robbin added that typically larger organizations are less transparent but when they are, it can help with buy-in. From an innovation stand point the more you share the more diverse teams will respond.

**Elba & Robbin & Susan:** On 3 biggest fears in our careers and how we overcome them

**Robbin:** Fear of being myself – Fear that we won't have the capabilities to realize the global vision

**Elba:** Impact on her career (on focusing on gender equality); Fear of being penalized in her career, fired (You have to see it through a long lens.)

**Susan:** Early career, fear of being the first or only woman and representing ALL women. Fear of leading in a technical, male dominated environment (as a psych major) and surrounded by engineers. Fear of what my career focus was taking away from my family life – had a great partner/spouse who supported me and accepted I am not the perfect wife or mother.

**Elba: On one particular issue re the status of women of color in top leadership roles**

...Overall a very significant concern. Data from OnBoard's annual study re women on GA public company boards and in the executive suites: WOC represent only 3.4% of all board positions (best results to date but definitely not good)

**Other comments:**

...SEE SOMETHING. SAY SOMETHING.

...Keep cultivating your EQ

...Building confidence: know your stuff, listen, get to know your people, care about your people