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CHANGEMAKER INTERVIEW: LISA LUTOFF-PERLO, CEO CELEBRITY CRUISES



By [David Hessekiel](#), Contributor
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Since Lisa Lutoff-Perlo became Celebrity Cruise’s first female CEO she has made it a priority to increase the ranks of female leaders on the bridges of its ships. As she likes to say: “We need to care less about fitting into the glass slipper and more about shattering the glass ceiling.” Such change doesn’t just happen. It requires serious planning to create a pipeline of qualified candidates and create a company culture that welcomes such diversity.

David Hessekiel: Why have you made it a priority to dramatically increase female representation on the bridges of your ships? What are some of the benefits you have seen from strongly emphasizing diversity at Celebrity?

Lisa Lutoff-Perlo: When I became the first woman president and CEO at Celebrity Cruises in 2014, I quickly realized I had a unique opportunity to improve gender equality across our operation, given that it has been a male dominated industry for decades.



Lisa Lutoff-Perlo, president and CEO, Celebrity Cruises

My first appointment was Captain Kate McCue – the first, and still only American female captain of a mega cruise ship. And that was just the beginning. Today, we have increased the percentage of women on the bridges of our ships from 3% to 32%, in an industry that averages 2%; and, we also now have 15 women engineers across our fleet vs 1 in 2020. And we continue to advance qualified women across our entire operation in both Marine and Hotel.

Additionally, we have crew from more than 60 different countries on every ship. They become a family at sea, sharing their cultures with each other and our guests. Given we are in the travel industry, we open up the world to our crew and our guests and being able to celebrate different backgrounds, ethnicities, upbringings and points of view makes what we do extremely rewarding, and Celebrity Cruises so special. Our brand is not only successful because of our relaxed luxury ships and experiences; but, because we have a strong, inclusive team of people who are the backbone of our brand. Without them, we wouldn't be who we are today. We often say that if the world operated like one of our ships, it would be a wonderfully peaceful and harmonious place.

David Hessekiel: The maritime industry has a long tradition of being male dominated — to the point where some “old salts” would argue that having women on the bridge brings bad luck. What are some of the steps you've taken to change the culture to create a welcoming environment in which women can succeed?

Lisa Lutoff-Perlo: Thank goodness none of those “old salts” works at Celebrity! Creating a welcoming environment for our guests and crew has long been a part of Celebrity's DNA. To increase representation of women on the bridge, we had to be very intentional and purposeful in our approach to recruiting. Bringing on Captain Kate was a big step forward in telling this story. She has redefined who a modern captain can be, how they behave and most importantly how they treat others; and she continues to attract more women to the industry and to our brand. The incredible male allies we have at Celebrity who are equally committed to – and passionate about – the Celebrity culture have also been a crucial element. All our leaders are on the same journey.

David Hessekiel: There is not a deep bench of women with the training necessary to assume leadership roles on the bridge. What have you done to create a larger pipeline of qualified candidates?

Lisa Lutoff-Perlo: A lot. I'm a passionate believer in 'seeing is believing.' My focus has been to show women that working in maritime can be a viable career where they can thrive. When women see other women in positions of authority, they can more easily envision themselves there. So, we share stories of our female officers and crew in traditional media and across our social media channels. We also celebrate our women on our ships every year in a big way for International Women's Day.



I also fought for industry accreditation for the Ghana Maritime Academy and then hired the first West African woman to work on the bridge. We also support employees in getting the licensing they need to advance in their careers. I'm so proud that one of our female officers, Elizabeth Marami, just became the first Kenyan woman to receive the licensing required to become a Master Captain. There are so many incredible stories – I could go on and on! I'm in constant awe of these women and their achievements.

And, lastly, we heavily recruit at the maritime academies across the world to feed our pipeline. Many women join our bridges as cadets and have the opportunity to work their way up through the ranks as they continue to get the experiences and licenses they need to assume higher ranking roles on our bridges and in our engine rooms.

David Hessekiel: You run a large and complex company. What are some of the other goals you have for Celebrity to make a positive impact on the world in 2023 and beyond?

Lisa Lutoff-Perlo: We have big goals for 2023 and beyond! Ultimately, we want to continue to increase the percentage of women on our bridges and in our engine rooms. That will take more time and a continued commitment from our entire Celebrity team. Continuing to be good environmental stewards is also part of our ongoing goal to create positive impact in the world. We are working to achieve zero waste across our fleet and are working to ensure each new Celebrity ship that is launched, like *Celebrity Ascent* launching in 2023, is equipped with shore power; and we're working on major engine innovations to allow us to increasingly use more sustainable fuels. Our environmental stewardship extends beyond our operations to encompass the destinations we visit and we continue to roll out 'positive impact' shore excursions. We are also opening up new places and experiences to our guests. We will be embarking on our most ambitious season of sailing for the 2024-2025 season, touching every continent with 500 different itineraries. We want to deliver a complete journey – literally and figuratively – to the world's best places on the world's best places.

Ready to book your Celebrity cruise? Contact your favorite travel advisor at:



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