
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

NOVEMBER 2020

LEADERS IN ACTION

Melissa Blohm
Partner, Blitz Solutions



CREATING SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS IN A BLITZ

Melissa Blohm is a partner at Blitz Solutions, a boutique consultancy based in New York. Melissa decided to join the consultancy as a Managing Partner when Marc and Bobby, her two business partners, approached her about collaborating. The team worked together in the past and realized their different skills and life experiences would allow them to create a firm where they could do fulfilling work with people they care about.

Together the three partners formed Blitz Solutions and the name is a tenet of the company:

"The name is inspired by the concept of a sports Blitz - an energetic and concentrated effort to achieve something. Our objective is to understand what our clients are trying to achieve and lead a Blitz to achieve it, we strive for sustainable results that don't require consultants to be there for long periods."

Melissa believes embracing change and being open to different life experiences has been key to her success. But it was only after becoming a parent that she realized she was going to have to radically alter her expectations of herself and others. She used to love working long days and putting her full attention into projects, and admits she got a rush out of working long hours. Raising a family and running a company forced Melissa to re-evaluate how she defines success.

"I could not continue to be the same working professional that I was and simultaneously be the kind of mother that I wanted to be. It was very difficult. It was a painful realization."

She recalled that, in the early days of trying to maintain the same intensity of work while raising children: "I used to commute back and forth from New York City – I pumped breastmilk on the rush hour train, one time even standing in the middle of the aisle because nobody would give me their seat. It was a painfully confronting yet powerful experience."

Melissa was born and raised in Venezuela and moved with her family to the United States when she was a teenager. She said: "In Venezuelan culture, men stereotypically hold the dominant role in society. At least that is often the perception."

"I had incredibly powerful and independent women in my life – particularly my mother and the woman who was head of Human Resources for my father's business. In the forefront, it may have seemed like they operated in a secondary role. But the truth was that they had a subtle but intense way of calling the shots."

Melissa obtained her undergraduate degree from Carnegie Mellon, and initially intended on becoming a biomedical engineer but quickly realized that she had a stronger passion for the complexities of business and its people.

"I realized I enjoyed the interplay between human behaviour and business processes more than the discipline of lab work and research."

Finding a path through human connections

With college graduation nearing, Melissa was unsure how to translate her interests into a specific career path. She had a tight-knit group of friends – classmates who were incredibly smart and high achieving. "Carnegie Mellon is historically not many women and only a small Latin community – I gravitated towards this group of international guys who became some of my closest friends. They approached life with an attitude that they could achieve absolutely anything they wanted. I found the concept radical and motivating."

Melissa realized she had to acknowledge some of her own unconscious bias about being a woman and the limitations she had unknowingly put on herself. Her friends helped her realize she would need to push herself outside of her comfort zone to figure out what she wanted from a career.

It was through her friends that she learned about the world of business consulting; she felt it was the perfect career path for her but was concerned at the stiff competition she would face to get a job offer. Although she studied harder than anybody she knew, she was never at the top of the class. Melissa was hesitant to believe that she was skilled enough to get a job with a top consulting firm, but that did not stop her from trying.

Melissa decided on the consulting company she wanted to work for, and attended every single career event it was involved in. For months, she showed up early and was the last one to leave. Her persistence on engaging with campus recruiters paid off – she was invited to apply for a position as consultant.

"My grade point average would have put me on the 'no' pile, but the recruiters had gotten to know me, so they accepted my application. It was a whirlwind of two days of interviews and case studies. I remember calling my mother after the final event and telling her how everyone there was absolutely brilliant and there was no way that they were going to offer me a job. Much to my surprise, they did."

Melissa spent the next two years working for a major consulting firm in New York City. It was when she was offered a position at the same company in Australia that she was introduced to broader perspectives of doing global business – and it challenged the way she thought about work-life balance. Melissa quickly learned that the cultural working styles in Australia were far different from the hustle of New York.

“(My habits of) late night emails and weekend work were not appropriate. I remember being confused and frustrated. These things that I’d assumed were requirements to being successful – were different there.”

“Moving to Australia opened my eyes to many assumptions I had made about life, people and business. Completely understanding a culture, gender, or life experience different to yours is not possible. It is important to recognize that there are some things you just do not know. You should absolutely try to understand – but you will never fully understand. You must ask questions, you must engage in the conversation, and you must realize that we all have unique experiences that must be appreciated.”

With this new framework and understanding, Melissa returned, after four years, to the United States to pursue an MBA at the Wharton School, and to study for a Master of Arts in International Studies from the Lauder Institute.

She said: “(At business school), I realized I was looking to create a business where I could facilitate better, more open, more effective decision-making. I loved the work I was already doing [in consulting] – but I wanted to create a business that would operate based on what I had learned about diversity of thought and work-life balance.”

Forming an inclusive company

After graduation, Melissa set up her own business and, after three years, she was approached by her current partners, Marc and Bobby, to form Blitz Solutions. Marc and Melissa worked together at a previous consulting firm, he remained a key contact and mentor during the early years of her first business. Knowing Melissa’s background, professional experience, and work ethic, Marc and Bobby approached Melissa about collaborating.

As partners for Blitz Solutions, Melissa, Marc and Bobby have very different perspectives, but together they hold the same philosophy on family and people as a priority. With a team of seven, Blitz Solutions offers flexible work arrangements (schedule and location), unlimited vacation time and family leave plans. As long as an employee delivers top-notch results to the client, they can do so in whatever way best fits their personal needs.

As for diversity and inclusion, Blitz Solutions takes an intersectional approach beyond gender identity.

When asked about her co-partners’ interest in forming a company with her, Melissa said:

“My co-partners have a very deep understanding of the importance of diversity in culture, gender identity and life experience. As a Latin woman I was able to bring a different frame to the table; the more unique perspectives we have, the better job we can do for our clients. We believe diversity is fundamental to success.”

Embracing motherhood and work

Melissa shared the importance of surrounding herself by good partners to succeed in business and be an attentive parent – both her husband and her two business partners have been fundamental to this.

“I could not have done this without my husband – he is a true partner at home. He takes on 50 per cent (at least) of the household and family responsibilities. In the late stages of my pregnancy and early years of my kids, my work partners took on the heavy lifting for the business and my clients. These support systems are what allowed me to be a parent, wife, business partner and consultant.”

After shifting her working style and expectations of parenthood, Melissa has found she is still able to deliver exceptional results for her clients. While her initial definition of success might have been attributed heavily to long hours in the office, now she has realized that pursuing work-life balance, leaning on others, and balancing personal needs with business requirements has become a more meaningful and equally effective approach to success.

This lesson has encouraged Melissa to continue to confront unconscious biases and to embrace the unknown, just as she has always done.

Blitz Solutions became a WEPs Signatory in September 2020 with the commitment to embrace diversity and inclusion and to follow the principles as they grow the company.

Women's Empowerment Principles



High-level corporate leadership



Workplace HR



Employee well-being and safety



Education and training for women




Supplier diversity & marketing practices




Community engagement



Measurement and reporting

 weps.org

 weps@unwomen.org

 [@WEPrinciples](https://twitter.com/WEPrinciples)

 [@Empower_Women](https://twitter.com/Empower_Women)

Funded by:



European Union

Produced by:



In support of:

**WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT
PRINCIPLES**

Established by UN Women and the
UN Global Compact Office

DISCLAIMER: The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the European Union, UN Women, International Labour Organization or the United Nations and their Member States.