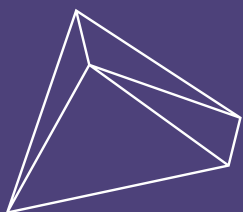


Chapman Taylor Talks:

Embrace Equity



CHAPMAN TAYLOR



International
Women's Day

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The theme of International Women’s Day 2023 is ‘embrace equity’ - an invitation to acknowledge that we don’t all start from the same place and to recognise the need to adjust. We invited Georgie Manly, retail customer propositions director at Landsec in the UK, to chair a roundtable discussion with women who work throughout our global network of studios, to listen, and to generate future discussions with regard to culture and embedding equity into the fabric of what we do at Chapman Taylor.*



Georgie Manly
Landsec

Georgie kicked off the discussion by emphasising how important it is to continue to collaborate with our partners and to be really transparent about the challenges that we all face and what we are trying to do to make change. In her words, “We know this isn’t a quick fix, but we need to continue to learn and work from one another and share experiences as well.”

The group started by discussing some of the positives that women can bring to architecture and interior design. Some of the points raised by the attendees included:

“Everyone has a different perspective and different life experiences. And I think in the built environment, it’s really important if you want to build inclusive places, that you have different backgrounds contributing to them.”

“If we look at modern design, everyone is designing for the proportions of a Caucasian, 180-centimetre-tall man. When women come into the design profession, I think it brings a different perspective.”

“I read a research article about how to design for teenage girls, how do teenage girls like to hang out with their friends? How do we make them feel safe in a public space, and maybe find a corner that they feel that they could belong to? Those are interesting things that we can explore in our design.”

“In my experience, women are more complex whereas men are more direct and more linear in their way of thinking. Having both ways of thinking can be really rich for the whole design experience.”

“Probably women are better listeners, they have less ego, they let people flourish and create better designs.”

This then led to a debate around stereotypes:

“I agree that good leadership is about listening, but I wouldn’t pass judgement about whether that’s a gendered quality.”

“I don’t think that the differences between men and women should come into the discussion! In work, there are good leaders, bad leaders, good listeners and bad listeners. I’d like the discussion to be more around how can we encourage women to be more forward. Women underrate themselves quite regularly.”

“I never have to think about what I can do and what I cannot do, because I’m a woman. I just act as I think I should, like being empathetic with colleagues, members of the team and clients.”

“The notion that women are softer than men, is probably inbuilt into us. In childhood, if a girl is not like that, she’s a tomboy. And when you are three or four years old, it’s more of a joke. But maybe this feeling perpetuates: part of the problem is that the industry is very men-focused and it takes a lot as a woman to stand up and be confident in a room full of men.”

“When you start talking about how men and women are different, there’s a tendency to maybe fall into looking at gender stereotypes. I’m desperately trying to move away from stereotypes and to be treated as equal to everyone else. Gender shouldn’t matter but it’s instilled. How do we get everybody in the building or construction industry to stop seeing men and women?”

“It might be more constructive to think about how we break those stereotypes. Traditionally, Asian women are known for being soft and obedient with responsibilities that are more bound to the family. In Japan, many women become housewives after they have children, but in China, we are still expected to work outside of the home. Despite this, there is still a conscious and unconscious bias towards women. I think what is causing the stereotypes are the things that women have to do, but men don’t. We’re saying that we don’t want to be seen as different

genders, we want to be seen as professionals in the industry, but in reality, women have to take maternity leave (there isn’t the same paternity leave option that there now is in the UK), plus there’s the gender pay gap in many professions and in many companies.

Historically, the role of women and the role of men were defined by men. Women are supposed to take care of the family more, in Asian countries, it’s almost like a curse. We need to rethink or restructure, starting with the family. And then gradually, we can impact wider society and the profession.”

Pregnancy, motherhood and career breaks:

“Pregnancy is seen, I think, still as a kind of distraction to the business of work. Women are not being supported, especially new mothers. Because you have to actually feed your child at night. There is no appreciation of that when it comes to deadlines, for example.”

“Even if you’re, say, a single mum, you should be able to do the work which you can; the quality is important, not the quantity. So, even if a woman may only be able to do the prescribed 35 hours a week or whatever, but who works with good effort and great focus, is just as good and a valuable member of staff.”

“The thing is that women sometimes do need to choose whether to start a family or proceed with their careers.”

“I’ve recently returned from maternity leave. Although there is now shared parental leave, my husband doesn’t feel the same pressure to have to demonstrate his commitment to achieving in work. He doesn’t feel under pressure in the same way that I do.”

“I think getting more women and people from diverse backgrounds into management positions will help everyone”

“Motherhood has refined how I manage my time and my tasks. I worked part-time when my kids were small, which helped me to remain in the profession, but also not to deprive my family. Many colleagues go on maternity leave and don’t come back, which is a shame. The path is quite long, but we should believe in ourselves; in our strength and skills, and values.”

“I still hear comments, such as, oh, you’re working, where’s your child? Men would never hear that comment. There are other things, too, in the family that can have an impact on your work life, such as caring for elderly parents, where the responsibility still falls primarily to women. I think getting more women and people from diverse backgrounds into management positions will help everyone in this regard - to develop their professional life, independently of their personal life.”

“I think everyone’s aware of the challenges women do face when they come back from career breaks. But maybe there’s a lack of willingness to try and address those issues. I think there’s almost an acceptance, that that is just the way things are.”

“23% of the registered architects in China are women. But in architecture schools, we see more girls than boys. We’re losing almost 30% of women each year - they’re not choosing to become registered architects. Architecture is a

“I think we need to have men in the room to talk with them about how to find solutions together.”

very demanding profession. So how we make them determined to stay or continue to pursue this career is very tricky. In order to retain talent, if, for example, we offer flexible working hours to women to allow them to be closer to their families, then this can itself create bias against women, so we need to make sure that these benefits are offered to, and taken up by, men as well.”

“Of all the notions around women, there is currently an attitude of “well, it is the way it is,” and we’re expected to navigate around that. I think we need to have men in the room to talk with them about how to find solutions together.”

The importance of women in leadership positions:

“Men see a lot of men who have similar backgrounds, who are like them in a senior position and will automatically think, well, of course, I can do that. A woman not seeing that representation automatically thinks well, I’m not going to be able to do that myself or starts doubting.”

“I think I had to fight with my imposter syndrome! It’s important to break the barriers.”

“I do agree more women in leadership would be good, because in my mind it’s about role models and showing that there’s equal opportunity in the business.”

“I think there’s generally a lack of role models, where we have reached is still perceived as the glass ceiling.”

“I’m living in the Middle East now, and it’s completely different from my culture. Here it is more like a man’s world, to be honest. But, slowly we’re moving forward in society and showing what we can do.”

“The majority of companies in this sector have a male management board. 40 years ago, not as many women as today graduated with degrees. New generations have more working women. So that should be reflected little by little, and I hope it is. I like to think that I’m widening the path for those women who come after me.”

“I truly believe that if we had more women in management, we would not feel undermined. I think it’s a big power to be a woman, to be honest with you.”

“I like to think that I’m widening the path for those women who come after me.”

The discussion wrapped up with some of the advice that they would give their younger selves:

“For me, it’s a matter of communication, if you demonstrate and work hard for something then you will become noticed and your superiors will know a little bit of what you can do.”

“Understand there is a difference between work and personal life - don’t take things so personally at work. Have more courage to speak up and to share your ideas, and take responsibility also for what you’re doing.”

“It is so important to be confident. And your opinion - it’s important.”

“Identify your strengths and your interests and be brave - meet more people, be more assertive, and stand for your decisions. And of course, work hard!”

“At the end of the day, all we need to do is to produce great work. And there’s nothing that connects people better than collaboration and working together. Just focus on work, stay yourself, stay positive.”

“What takes you here, won’t take you there. You need to keep learning. That’s really helped me a lot because technology and everything around us is changing so fast. We need to make sure our techniques are cutting-edge and that everyone on the team keeps learning to make sure we are always the best.”

“I would probably tell myself to be patient about how I grow because nobody grows in a straight line. I set myself goals about what I should achieve by a certain age. I would tell myself to be easier on myself. And allow time and trial and error to allow me to grow in different directions.”

Georgie concluded by saying that it’s important for us to acknowledge the various cultural stereotypes that exist - we have to continue to break those stereotypes to truly achieve real balance and equality. We must continue to pave the way for more women to step into leadership positions. It’s also important to have these open conversations about family responsibilities and maternal leave. The conversations need to continue.

Tim Partington, group board director at Chapman Taylor, agrees. He says, “At Chapman Taylor, we are determined to keep listening to women’s voices in our business, this International Women’s Day and beyond. This roundtable has highlighted the importance of inclusive policies and encouraging more women into management positions. This is absolutely something we are committed to, to reflect the female talent we have in the business.”

Since the roundtable, a global Chapman Taylor women’s network has been proposed, to continue to champion women’s voices and drive an inclusive agenda.

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