

Carolyn McCall: The Chief Executive

Dame Carolyn McCall was the latest Women's Business Club's guest, where she reflected on her career and how to succeed as a CEO

The luxurious surroundings of Home House private members club hosted the latest Women's Business Club on 18 October.

The event's chair, Estelle Brachlianoff, Senior Executive Vice-President UK & Ireland, Veolia and President of the French Chamber of Great Britain, introduced guest speaker Dame Carolyn McCall DBE.

Brachlianoff highlighted McCall's successes as CEO of easyJet. In the role, McCall was heavily involved in the French market – easyJet is the country's second largest airline. In 2016, McCall was given France's highest merit – the Légion d'Honneur – for delivering economic and industrial benefits to France and the UK.

In her short speech, McCall said she considered herself 'very lucky' in her career. After joining The Guardian in 1986, she rose to the position of chief executive of the media group. She joined easyJet in 2010, where she transformed the airline with a new customer-oriented approach.

She is optimistic about more women being promoted into top jobs, but also cautions that underlying inequalities still persist. 'Even today, I get asked "how I do it,"' she said. 'Have you recently asked Jean-Marc Janailac [CEO of Air France] that same question?'

The solution? Focus on the bigger picture. 'Lots of women share lots of common threads and it's important to talk about them,' she says. '[However] women who only talk about women's issues get very pigeonholed. Actually, we're just in business.'

What makes a good CEO

McCall discussed other aspects of her experience in business, from her early mentors who advised her to 'expand her horizons,' to the challenges she has faced as one of the UK's



Dame Carolyn McCall DBE and Estelle Brachlianoff surrounded by fellow high-profile representatives of the Women's Business Club

top business leaders.

She has held two positions as chief executive in two very different fields: media and airlines. She has recently returned to the media world, as the newly appointed CEO of ITV.

According to McCall, regardless of the industry, a CEO has to establish strategies, handle teams and crisis, and be open to new technologies. 'As a CEO, the skills are transferable, as long as you are a fast learner,' she explained.

Experience in non-executive positions helped her understand how to deal with a board, which contributed to her confidence as a CEO.

A good CEO also knows when it is the right time to go. 'It is good to go when they want you to stay,' she explained. Successful CEOs often overstay their welcome – they have achieved a lot but cannot see the limitations of their abilities at the company.

She reminded the assembled guests that the strength of any business is in the teamwork and camaraderie of the staff. 'I always believed that teams are much greater than any individual could ever be.'

Wise words for anyone with ambitions of a high-flying role.

The Chamber wishes to thank Guerlain for sponsoring the lunch, Hello Day for their gifts, and Home House for hosting the event. Dame Carolyn McCall DBE was appointed CEO of ITV in July 2017. ■ SA

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