

## Women in shipping – Inna Kuznetsova, president and COO, INTTRA



Inna Kuznetsova. Credit: INTTRA

Having spent most of her career in IT and logistics, Inna Kuznetsova is the first to admit that neither sector has a good history when it comes to diversity, and the president and chief operating officer (COO) of software as a service portal INTTRA is no stranger to the challenges that being the sole woman in a boardroom can present.

Sometimes when in a meeting where attendees think that she is merely present in a support role, she will be ignored at the start of proceedings. “They assume I am unimportant. Then they find out who I am and why I am there and they spend the rest of meeting trying to make up for their oversight,” Kuznetsova told *Fairplay*.

Then there are minor frustrations that “you just have to laugh off”, such as male meeting hosts not knowing the directions to the ladies’ washroom, she added.

More serious is that women often have to fight for recognition and reassert their abilities. Constantly having to prove oneself can be discouraging but worse still is being pulled aside for patronising explanations because it is assumed that a topic goes beyond one’s understanding. For example, Kuznetsova, who spent 19 years in senior roles at IBM, was once told by an IT vendor that he “would explain in simple language so that you can understand”.

She also recognised that it is much easier for men in shipping to network. Men can agree to meet for a drink or meal on the sidelines of an event, whereas a woman approaching a male peer or vice versa for a similar catch-up can have their motives misinterpreted and some women can be uncomfortable with building business relationships in this way.

Kuznetsova believes that most of us learn leadership skills through observation, but as there are fewer females in top positions, there are fewer role models to offer support to women working their way up the ranks.

“It’s the small things, like knowing how to open and run a meeting, as well as ensuring that you are credited with the ideas that you present, that can be most difficult to navigate,” she told *Fairplay*. Being in command of these aspects creates comfort and builds confidence, and most of us learn this from watching others, she said.

There are many challenges to navigate when it comes to securing equality in the workplace, Kuznetsova said, but drawing attention to them and seeking company-wide suggestions to resolve them, as well as ensuring that fledgling leaders – male and female – have access to mentoring, is essential.

Kuznetsova, who has a PhD in mathematics from Moscow State University and an MBA from Columbia Business School, has spent 28 years building her career and is aware of how intimidating it can be to assert oneself. The author of two bestselling career advice books, she believes that it is a shared responsibility to support women in the workplace.

“All of us females in the industry must pay it forward, as some of us have been luckier than others and we all need to work together to make it easier for those who follow,” she told *Fairplay*.

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