

WOMEN IN EVENTS

Our annual roundtable convenes to talk 2026 forecasting, multigenerational superpowers and strategic career moves

By Rachel Boucher

BOZOMA SAINT JOHN, one of the most influential chief marketers in recent history, might have lent her vast expertise to the contestants on NBC's series "On Brand with Jimmy Fallon," but her presence in prime time is yet another reminder of the disruption the marketing industry sorely needs as women continue to chip away at the glass ceiling.

If you're new here, you might be thinking: Event Marketer editors, my entire *team* is made up of rockstar women. I see women as strategic thinkers, balancing budgets, owning logistics, collaborating across orgs. I see *more* women taking the stage at industry awards shows than ever before...

...But the fact is, in the nearly 20 years since we published our first Women in Events Special Report, the ratio of male to female executives (where the buck often stops) hasn't changed much. IBTM's "Event Management Gender Equality Report" from 2022 found that women make up 77 percent of the event workforce, yet only 16 percent hold leadership roles. In our own "Women in Events Career Progression and Satisfaction Report" last year, 62.5 percent of the women respondents said they report to a woman, but only 26 percent said their ceo is one.

The challenges for women continue to be unique. Our 2024 report explored the invisible work most often shouldered by women, from team building to training, to managing personalities. And this year, women in events say they are standing at the precipice of a new era of innovation. Artificial intelligence is accelerating aspects of producing events, but it's also requiring women to accelerate *their* exploration and growth of these skills while delivering on the demand for more human-centric moments.

Professional development is critical, but there is also a perception challenge to tackle in the coming years. Elevate Global's "ElevateHER" report found that 92 percent of men believe women have equal access to training and development in the industry, compared to 62 percent of women. Interestingly enough, our 2013 "Career Progression and Satisfaction Report" highlighted this disparity, with respondents identifying workloads and the availability of job training and education as the areas of most dissatisfaction.

The good news is that women are recognizing the roles of mentorship and sponsorship in career progression, and they're going all in. According to the "ElevateHER" data, nearly 39 percent of women in the industry report they don't have access to strong mentorship opportunities. And yet, they attend networking events 30 percent more often than men, which is where Event Marketer's Women in Events program comes in.

Indeed, for nearly two decades, we've convened women for the annual Women in Events roundtable and meetups—opportunities to tackle challenges, share strategic thinking, discuss the secret sauce that women bring to the industry and explore research. This year, we wanted to see where women in events see the industry heading, and spoiler alert, mentorship is critical.



KERI IBBITSON

Director-Scientific Engagements and Events
Danaher

The one thing you look for at any event you attend.

A friendly face—i.e., community!

If you could change something about the industry, what would it be?

Normalize self-care. Managing events can be high pressure and high stress. It's important to find a balance that serves you.

The most important skill an event marketer should have today.

Being native with multiple technologies. Whether it's AI, understanding CRMs or the newest project management tools, knowing how to use these things efficiently will save you time.

Something you'd tell your younger self at the start of your career.

Feedback doesn't have to be scary. It's a gift; embrace it, reflect and keep moving.

Best way to boost confidence before a meeting or event.

A good hype song in the morning while sipping a coffee can do wonders.

Your favorite female role model and why.

My mom. She did it all. Worked as a nurse while being a wife, mother, sister and daughter.

Must-have item in your carry-on bag only an event marketer would appreciate.

A battery pack that can charge three devices at once to full capacity.

Complete this sentence: Artificial intelligence in events is...

...already here.

Plants, pets or kids?

All three.

If not home or traveling, where would we find you?

Probably on a beach walking my dogs.



MEREDITH DIEHN

SVP-Marketing
Goodwipes

The one thing you look for at any event you attend.

I always look for posters of the map and lineup or schedule so I can take a picture of them on my phone for easy reference. Ever since *working* events, I also look for the medical tent... never can be too safe!

If you could change something about the industry, what would it be?

Honestly, the pop-up event culture is already feeling stale and repetitive. I'd love to see more activations that bring communities together to offer more than branded merch and free product samples.

The most important skill an event marketer should have today.

Agility. No matter how much you plan, make a detailed run-of-show and try to think of potential hiccups. Unique challenges are bound to happen. It's your ability to keep calm under pressure and adapt to roadblocks that helps build resilience.

Something you'd tell your younger self at the start of your career.

No one expects you to do everything on your own. Your ability to ask questions, connect dots and collaborate with others is far more indicative of your long-term impact and growth potential.

Best way to boost confidence before a meeting or event.

Most of my meetings are virtual, so I close down any apps or tabs that might serve as a distraction. I also physically write down with old-school pen and paper the major points I hope to communicate in a meeting.

Complete this sentence: Artificial intelligence in events is...

...a huge enabler! So many aspects of event planning can now be streamlined with AI. We've just skimmed the surface by using it to help research local areas, plan run-of-show and visualize layouts.

Plants, pets or kids?

Technically I have all three, but do a much better job of taking care of the latter two! My heart truly lives outside my body with my kids, and I believe in showing up 100 percent at events so I can show up 100 percent at home with them (and my pets, of course).



SHANISE ANDERSON

Director-Global Equity and Brand Experience
Neutrogena

If you could change something about the industry, what would it be?

I'd love to see the industry strike a better balance between flash and function. At Coachella, for example, our large Neutrogena-branded sunscreen towers weren't just eye-catching, they also met a real need by giving festivalgoers a chance to pause and protect themselves from the harsh desert sun. When experiences deliver both excitement and utility, we move the industry forward.

The most important skill an event marketer should have today.

Adaptability is essential in this industry as plans can shift overnight, from compliance updates and weather changes to unforeseen challenges on the ground. The best event marketers pivot quickly, protect the experience and keep the brand story intact through it all.

Something you'd tell your younger self at the start of your career.

I'd tell my younger self to have confidence in her ideas—they deserve to be heard. When grounded in strategy and purpose, even the boldest of ideas can make a real impact.

Best way to boost confidence before a meeting or event.

I remind myself of the hours my team has put into every detail, which reassures me that we're set up for success. Then, I shift my focus to the people I'm serving. That's what gives me purpose and pride. And finally, a great pre-event playlist always helps!

Your favorite female role model and why.

My mother. She is my blueprint for leadership under pressure—resilient, composed and resourceful—the same qualities I lean on most during events.

Complete this sentence: Artificial intelligence in events is...

...an accelerator of creativity—efficient, but never a substitute for human empathy and authentic connection.

Plants, pets or kids?

Kids! My two little ones embody curiosity and authentic joy in ways that inspire me daily.



ASHLEY JEX WAGNER

Head of Live Experiences
Supercell

The one thing you look for at any event you attend.

How organizers are engaging with their audience and if the experience is connecting with them.

If you could change something about the industry, what would it be?

More women in leadership roles/in rooms where strategic decisions are made.

The most important skill an event marketer should have today.

The ability to turn off completely from work to recover and avoid burnout.

Something you'd tell your younger self at the start of your career.

You are deserving of success from your hard work. Anyone who makes you feel like you shouldn't be is not worthy of your energy.

Best way to boost confidence before a meeting or event.

Take a walk and say kind words to yourself out loud.

Your favorite female role model and why.

Taylor Swift, for teaching an entire generation of future leaders that boundaries are important. You can be an artist *and* have a mind for the business side.

Must-have item in your carry-on bag only an event marketer would appreciate.

Double-stick tape and Sharpies.

Complete this sentence: Artificial intelligence in events is...

...a tool to power human creativity—not a replacement.

Plants, pets or kids?

All three!

If not home or traveling, where would we find you?

The spa, sitting in a sauna.

BECKY KATZ DAVIS

Head of Consumer Communications and Events
Uber

The one thing you look for at any event you attend.

I'm hyperaware of how people move and flow in any space. It's easy for guests to bottleneck, and nothing can bring down the vibe quicker than a poorly designed space. Flow is everything!

If you could change something about the industry, what would it be?

Attrition remains my biggest question mark. After all these years, it's still difficult to gauge the sweet spot.

The most important skill an event marketer should have today.

Never underestimate a great multitasker.

Something you'd tell your younger self at the start of your career.

It's still just as fun and only gets better!

Best way to boost confidence before a meeting or event.

Before doors open, take a peek at the line forming outside. It's such a rush.

Must-have item in your carry-on bag only an event marketer would appreciate.

Safety pins always come in handy.

Complete this sentence: Artificial intelligence in events is...

...only getting started.

If not home or traveling, where would we find you?

Somewhere between the office, my kids' activities and a Pilates reformer.

JENN CAMMAROTA

Associate Director-Partnership Activation
Verizon

The one thing you look for at any event you attend.

I'm always looking at how well brands are integrated. The best partnerships feel like a natural fit. They're clever, seamless and additive to the fan's experience.

If you could change something about the industry, what would it be?

I'd love to see more emphasis on building long-term, scalable platforms rather than one-off activations. The most impactful work I've been part of has come from programs that evolve year after year, building brand equity and audience loyalty. Big ideas gain real traction when they're nurtured, not when they disappear after a single moment.

Something you'd tell your younger self at the start of your career.

To trust my instincts. Early in my career, I often second-guessed myself and held back from sharing ideas, thinking I was too new or too inexperienced. However, I've learned that a fresh perspective is often what unlocks creative ideas and the right leaders value that.

Best way to boost confidence before a meeting or event.

Know your stuff. Preparation is the best confidence booster. If you know the material, the strategy, and the plan inside and out, nothing can shake you. Being grounded in the details gives me space to read the room and adapt in real time.

Plants, pets or kids?

Pets, dogs to be specific. I'm a firm believer in "adopt, don't shop."

If not home or traveling, where would we find you?

Either tucked away with a good book or at a Broadway show. One of the best parts of living in New York is being able to see theater anytime, and I take advantage of it as often as I can. It's one of my favorite ways to recharge and stay inspired. There's something about the energy of live theater that always fuels my creativity.

THE ROUNDTABLE



Women at Work (clockwise): Courtesy of Ashley Jex Wagner, Shanise Anderson and Jenn Cammarota



THE PARTICIPANTS:

- **Keri Ibbitson**, Director-Scientific Engagements and Events, Danaher
- **Meredith Diehn**, SVP-Marketing, Goodwipes
- **Shanise Anderson**, Director-Global Equity and Brand Experience, Neutrogena
- **Ashley Jex Wagner**, Head of Live Experiences, Supercell
- **Becky Katz Davis**, Head of Consumer Communications and Events, Uber
- **Jenn Cammarota**, Associate Director-Partnership Activation, Verizon

WHAT AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY ARE BIGGEST FOR EVENT MARKETERS RIGHT NOW?

SHANISE ANDERSON: Creating experiences that are just as useful as they are inspiring to attend. So, it's not just about how the brand shows up in the experience, it's about how it adds real value in ways that feel personal and lasting, as that's what makes the experience truly memorable. For me, it's activations like hydration stations at outdoor festivals or giving away scrubs at the American Academy of Dermatology annual conference. When giveaways evolve from throwaways into items people can actually use every day, it creates a moment of surprise, delight and impact.

KERI IBBITSON: To build off that, you have to

be doing something that gives [the attendee], at least in our space, a return on time. We engage health care professionals, and for them especially, time is such a valuable commodity. It's typical in events for us in the corporate space to look at what the commercial impact is, but some of our events are built around developing thought leadership in scientific spaces. When we look back at an event, it comes back to did our attendees feel like they walked away with actionable insights and did they feel like this was a really good use of their time?

People are limited to travel to certain activities now, too, and so they really can only pick a couple of things a year where they might be able to go and learn. While you're setting your own objectives, you

have to really be thinking about your audience and whether you're delivering something that helps lift your voice above all the other noise.

ASHLEY JEX WAGNER: I agree. How we measure return on impact, on our experiences, is an area that can grow. There are a lot of new frameworks and new methods that can help to tie shorter-term business goals—more visibility, awareness, brand lift to long-term strategic goals, things like brand loyalty, brand equity over time. And it's been very difficult to measure. There are a lot of tools and tricks, but they don't always align. Sometimes what you need is dwell time. You need time and space. And so, I think that's an opportunity across the industry: how we get tighter and crisper about connecting those two sides of it. You think about experiential as the pipeline at the top that can lead toward long-term fandom and brand loyalty. How do you track and measure that across it with quantitative *and* qualitative metrics?

JENN CAMMAROTA: Events are no longer just about presence; they're about creating connection at scale. The biggest opportunity I see is integrating brand storytelling seamlessly into cultural touchpoints, from live music and sports to fashion and entertainment. Leveraging partnerships and technology, events can move from one-off activations to ongoing ecosystems that build loyalty. At the Super Bowl this year, we created House of Verizon which combined football, music and fashion under one umbrella, and was something we had not done before. It was this connection point around our message that we power and empower people to live, work and play, and it drove home that, ultimately, we are a lifestyle brand because we allow and enable people to do the things that they love. It's possible to make connections across all these passion points, and create this incredible through line, with experiential.

BECKY KATZ DAVIS: The most memorable events are the ones that resonate deeply with guests, whether it's a well-timed nod to a cultural moment, a special connection to the host city, or an unexpected performance. We have to always strive to deliver those money-can't-buy experiences that leave an indelible mark on our Uber One members and guests.

MEREDITH DIEHN: I might be biased working



Women at Work: Courtesy of Meredith Diehn

"Events are no longer just about presence; they're about creating connection at scale. The biggest opportunity I see is integrating brand storytelling seamlessly into cultural touchpoints..."

*Jenn Cammarota, Associate Director-
Partnership Activation, Verizon*

for a personal hygiene company. But bathrooms at events are generally an underwhelming, if not unpleasant, experience. It's been really fulfilling to activate for Goodwipes, where we focus on elevating the bathroom experience for guests, to solve a real pain point for consumers.

SO, WHAT'S KEEPING YOU UP AT NIGHT?

ASHLEY JEX WAGNER: For me, doing fan experiences, it's the demand of people's

attention and time. How do you stand out? How do you make things that are truly interesting and unexpected that people will see and talk about? And it's difficult right now. There's so much content out there in the space. We're not even competing with other events; we're competing with games, with media, with TV shows and movies, and films and sports. So, it becomes a challenge in how you cut through. The solution stems from deeply understanding your audience, knowing what their

motivations are, knowing how they want to engage with a brand, and then finding those fun ways to connect.

KERI IBBITSON: Where we want to spend our dollars and where we want to spend them smartly. And yes, forever defining how we measure success, and when that pipeline isn't linear, how do we do that in a way that is compelling to justify what it takes to do events? Events, especially in person, are expensive and always going to be expensive, and it's easy to look at a number on a spreadsheet and say, "Oh, we have to cut 10 percent off of that," and that 10 percent can be debilitating sometimes, right? Or it can be the difference in an experience and the level of quality. And so being able to justify every dollar and have a really strong plan of how we're going to define and mark success against that spend is a constantly evolving conversation.

SHANISE ANDERSON: Expectations are rising, but budgets, teams and attention spans are shrinking. It really comes down to prioritizing what matters most and keeping the consumer at the center of everything you do to help you make the right choices on what will drive impact. Experiences are not just about creativity or flawless execution, it's about how we use our time, talent and investment to drive real results, while ensuring people feel genuinely connected to the brand.

JENN CAMMAROTA: The challenge is balancing creativity with measurement. Brands want breakthrough, buzzworthy moments, but they also want proof those experiences drive business results. Finding ways to translate emotional connection into hard ROI is an ongoing hurdle for marketers. We've shifted toward measuring brand love and earned media, the positive or neutral sentiments we're getting. A big ask that we have made with our partners, like the NHL and the NBA, is around leveraging their channels to reach our fan bases. That engagement that we can get with customers by reaching them organically through the leagues and teams they love is huge.

BECKY KATZ DAVIS: I think the key indicator of a great event is the way that it makes a guest feel—this goes well beyond guest response and attendee metrics. The atmosphere, design, f&b, programming—every element contributes to an energy that simply can't be translated into a hard metric because, ultimately, events are an art and not a science.



Women at Work: Courtesy of Shanise Anderson

ASHLEY, WHAT'S WORKING WELL FOR YOU AS FAR AS PRESENTING SUCCESS?

ASHLEY JEX WAGNER: We set ambitious goals grounded in data and insights. We use data to build our hypothesis for what success should be and set clear goals to measure the outcome. We also draw on benchmarks and past experiences, giving us both targets and room to evolve. Did we hit our goals, as well as achieve what we hoped to learn from the experience? Knowing that everything we do in events is an evolution, we're constantly learning from our audiences, changing and adapting. Audiences expect us to adapt and evolve, as well. And so, if you're not constantly coming into it with that approach, how can you really know when you need to change?

PERSONALIZATION, IMMERSIVE ENTERTAINMENT, AI... ARE YOU TACKLING ONE OR ALL, OR THINKING ABOUT HOW THEY APPLY TO YOUR SPACE?

JENN CAMMAROTA: For us, AI is starting to play a role in personalizing customer journeys, whether that's smarter ticketing, tailored content or predictive insights on what fans want most. Immersive experiences come to life when brands lean into culture and design moments people want to share—and AI and personalization can certainly make those moments feel uniquely theirs.

BECKY KATZ DAVIS: We ground our events in the overall experience, and we design them to be as immersive and personal as possible. Everyone's time is precious, so when a guest

chooses to spend their time at our event, we take that seriously and aim to exceed their expectations.

MEREDITH DIEHN: Our Goodwipes Porta Palace is as immersive as it gets. Strategically, we want to ensure that our brand events operate as a memorable and valuable brand experience beyond product sampling. We bring a fully customized mobile restroom trailer to many of our events. Not only can attendees get a chance to use our products, but the inside of each bathroom stall is like being immersed into the Goodwipes brand world.

SHANISE ANDERSON: At Neutrogena, we have been blending personalization, immersive entertainment and AI together to create meaningful brand moments. Immersive experiences are most powerful when people feel part of the environment—fully engaged and connected. Influencers help personalize that experience by speaking directly to their communities in ways that feel real and relatable, often telling the brand story more authentically than we could ourselves. Last but not least, AI is a powerful accelerator. It helps us plan, optimize and spark creativity behind the scenes, but it never replaces empathy or consumer insight, as that human

connection must stay at the heart of everything we do.

ASHLEY JEX WAGNER: We're employing strategies across all three. I prefer to use the term "world-building" because we have these beautifully rich worlds of games that are already created, and players already inherently engage with them in certain ways.

So, for us, we think about every experience that we build as an opportunity to realize that world in the real world. And then we use those touchpoints of engagement to pull people deeper into a story. It's mission-critical for us because that's what players expect, that's what fans expect, and if we can create that translation in a way that's meaningful to them, it creates connection to our IP, but it also can create shared connections to each other. It's really about how we center around this idea that immersive and world-building can help to further that connection. It changes the entire approach to how we even think about brand activations.

KERI, THE HEALTH CARE SPACE INHERENTLY HOLDS A LOT OF RED TAPE. HOW DO YOU NAVIGATE THAT WHILE INNOVATING?

KERI IBBITSON: It's one of the reasons we've

stood up one of our own proprietary events, trying to personalize the story a little bit, meet them where their challenges are. Bringing them together with other leaders who are experiencing the same challenges that they are, which feels like influencer marketing on a different level. There's nothing like getting in a room with somebody who's having the same challenges day to day that you are. Women in Events here is an example. We're all in completely different industries, but the foundation of some of what we go through is all the same. And the reason we participate is for the validation, the idea-sharing and the networking that comes from getting to spend time and ideate over topics with other people in your space.

And that's the same thing we're trying to do, is bring these people together to overcome common goals in really complex spaces with complex needs and never losing sight of the patient in front of us and what that impact is. It's a different type of immersive experience. Not necessarily brand or consumer, but still telling these impactful stories and allowing health care professionals to place themselves in the center and understand where *their* impact is and what that ripple effect can be. And creating that environment for them to do so in a way that allows them to walk away feeling like we've helped them do something that's actionable, or connected them to somebody that's going to help them partner to do something life-changing in the development of a drug or a disease state. It's huge, and it's not quite like brand activations I'd done back in the day, but it's still a really exciting thing to do.

MOVING ON TO THE WORKPLACE ITSELF. THERE ARE FOUR GENERATIONS NOW AT WORK AND AT YOUR EVENTS, IN SOME CASES. WHAT SUPERPOWERS ARE YOU SEEING THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS BRING TO EVENTS?

ASHLEY JEX WAGNER: I'd say for Gen Z, our primary audience, and Gen Alpha as well, I've always been so impressed with how they're disrupting our ways of working and challenging the norms of how we show up. You think about how Gen Z has really become champions of causes like mental health and how we approach that not only inside the workplace, but how we approach it with experiences.

JENN CAMMAROTA: Gen Z brings a demand for authenticity and purpose; millennials push for balance and innovation; Gen



Women at Work: Courtesy of Becky Katz Davis

"You think about experiential as the pipeline at the top that can lead toward long-term fandom and brand loyalty. How do you track and measure that across it with quantitative and qualitative metrics?"

Ashley Jex Wagner, Head of Live Experiences, Supercell

X often bridges strategy with execution; boomers contribute deep institutional knowledge and relationship building. At the best events, these "superpowers" blend—innovation with wisdom, strategy with creativity. House of Verizon was an example of this, with ideas and conversations shared and had among different experiences across our team, and the result was awesome.

KERI IBBITSON: We've heard a lot about reverse mentoring recently. We were actually just at an event for immunologists, and the demographic there was very young. A lot of them were students in the latter part of their education, getting ready for their turn to be in health care, and it was lovely to see there's a different hunger, a different excitement that they bring to the table at events. This desire for learning. Ashley said it really well, there's a disruption that they bring that I think is really refreshing and was exciting to see at this particular event.

LET'S DIG MORE INTO REVERSE MENTORSHIP.

KERI IBBITSON: There was a lot of focus on reverse mentoring in this event, especially because a lot of students have been born with tools and technology that some of the previous generations, as much experiences as they have, are just not as familiar with and are not native to those tools. And so, there's just as much that they can learn from each other. That's something new we're seeing where the traditional mentor-mentee status looks a little bit different. And now there's this real openness to see if we can bring everybody's superpowers together, both the expertise, but the native technology use and that open-mindedness. I think we're in a really beautiful moment where those two places are going to be able to come together better than before, and we're really going to see some tremendous impact and changes in the workplace and events because of it.

SHANISE ANDERSON: I think one of the

strengths of this industry is how naturally it brings together multiple generations to contribute, collaborate and shape the final outcome. Younger voices bring bold creativity and digital-native instincts. Their superpower is pushing us to think differently and embrace new platforms and formats. At the same time, more seasoned professionals offer a depth of experience and perspective that helps us stay grounded and connect the dots between what's worked before and what's possible now. That blend of innovation and wisdom is what makes our industry so dynamic. It's not just about generational diversity, it's about how we harness those different superpowers to build something better, together.

ASHLEY JEX WAGNER: I think it's important, too, to recognize the superpowers of millennials and Gen X, as well. We're kind of in the middle of these new ways of thinking, with institutional knowledge, but we can serve as that bridge. We remember time before the internet, we know how to translate, and how to connect different audiences and how to create that bridge across all four quadrants. Gen X are pragmatic stabilizers, really there to kind of help nurture, teach, coach and train these younger generations and how we should show up with what professionalism looks like, but also just be great at understanding where all of the different opportunities lie across all the different generations.

THE EVENT MARKETING PROFESSION HAS UNIQUE CHALLENGES, AND SOMETIMES, THERE'S NO CLEAR TRAJECTORY BEYOND AN EVENT ROLE. WHAT HAS WORKED FOR YOU AS FAR AS GROWING YOUR CAREER?

MEREDITH DIEHN: Support networks with other fellow marketers have been a true lifeline through my career. I'm lucky to be part of a few great Slack groups that serve as great resources to bounce ideas, get feedback and share resources among other

female marketers in the CPG industry.

KERI IBBITSON: When I meet people who are stepping into events or are thinking about where their next best step is, I remind them that the beauty of being in events is we get the chance to wear so many hats. We see an entire marketing lifecycle through an event. We're working cross-functionally. We get to see all these different facets of the organization at work. I've known plenty of people who have moved into product marketing roles, and they have really thrived getting to know a certain segment that they've been supporting in events. And then I've known people who are lifelong event people thriving in logistics and being that magician.

But then, it's figuring out what that leadership role looks like. Every organization looks different depending on where you sit, whether you're in a brand function, a comms function, a marketing function. But it opens the doors to a lot of things for you to explore what really speaks to you in your skill set.

SHANISE ANDERSON: Women in events, whether they've been in the industry for one year or 10, are driving impact from end to end, touching every part of the experience. We're shaping strategy, building partnerships, managing budgets, making decisions and bringing it all to life.

But when it comes to long-term career growth, it's not just about recognizing that contribution, it's about making sure women are being sponsored and advocated for, especially in rooms where they're not yet present. I've seen how that kind of support can open doors and completely shift someone's career path.

That's been true in my own journey. A few years ago, a senior leader who was serving as a segment president at the time and had been a sponsor of mine was in a meeting where they were discussing a new global role to lead brand experiences at Neutrogena. It was a position that had never existed before. I wasn't in the room,

but she spoke up and recommended me based on my extensive marketing background and ability to collaborate effectively across teams. That moment changed everything—all because advocacy and opportunity came together.

It also speaks to the importance of creating visible pathways for advancement. Regardless of what department the event role sits in, it shouldn't be seen as a stepping stone, but instead as a destination for leadership.

ASHLEY JEX WAGNER: You read reports like the “ElevateHER” report, which found that women hold a majority of roles across events, but we only hold 16 percent of the leadership positions. And so it's not always easy to see what's my path, what's my personal journey toward my long-term goal. And I think where we could redefine expectations is how we are teaching, coaching and training people to find their own personal path, whether that is down a path of more events and logistics or going into more of a compliance role.

Keri, what you said really resonated with me because everyone's journey is different. My journey was definitely in different iterations. I've also been made redundant multiple times and had to pivot and change things. And I think sometimes when you're in the event industry you get a little bit siloed into this event scope, or always the planner, always the doer, never a strategic mind, never a voice that could help to have impact across the entire marketing funnel. And so, I think if we had more resources where we could help women really define the path that they want to go, and they see themselves represented in roles where they can make an impact, I think we're going to actually see a little bit more change.

CLEARLY, MENTORSHIP IS SO CRITICAL TO A FULFILLING AND SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN EVENTS. WHAT BEST PRACTICES CAN EVENT MARKETERS LEAN ON TO BE A BETTER MENTOR?

SHANISE ANDERSON: As a best practice, mentorship should go beyond advice. It should include sponsorship and advocacy. At every stage of my journey, I've had mentors who gave me the confidence to stand by my ideas and made sure my name was part of the conversation, even when I wasn't in the room. That kind of support opens doors and can completely shift someone's career path. Having experienced that first-



Women at Work: Courtesy of Keri Ibbitson

hand, I'm focused on paying it forward. I spend most of my time making sure other women who are just as brilliant get into the room, onto the right projects and in front of the right leaders as that visibility can accelerate their career.

KERI IBBITSON: Shanise, you nailed it on the sponsorship side. I recall a big event I delivered, and my cmo introduced me to our ceo and said, “Hey, Keri helped deliver this for us.” And that light moment of recognition, the way it still sits with me 10 years later, is crazy. But it was big. And again, there have been those who have spoken my name in rooms that I haven't been in, and now I try to do the same knowing what those little moments of recognition can mean to somebody.

ASHLEY JEX WAGNER: I very much feel the same way. I will say I have seen the biggest growth in my career when I've had someone who's championing me along the way, advocating for me, clearing a way where I could do my best work, but then also being willing to have the tough conversation, giving me the feedback that I need to hear in the moment so I can grow. I've really valued that sense of stewardship, that you want to pay it forward. Somebody created this opportunity for me, they opened their hearts and were kind to me, and saw something in me that I didn't even see in myself. And so, you feel a certain amount of responsibility to do that for the next generation. And I think as women, the more we can do to support each other and advocate for each other, it makes it easier for us to advocate for ourselves.

BECKY KATZ DAVIS: I've been fortunate to have always worked with strong, smart and fun women from the very beginning of my career. Some paved the way and opened doors, while others were (and still are!) in the trenches with me. In this industry, relationships are everything, and if you're lucky enough to work with people you love to be around, the work doesn't feel like a job at all.

JENN CAMMAROTA: Mentorship has been a constant in my career—having trusted advisors to challenge me, guide decisions and open doors. Sponsorship, though, has been critical: leaders willing to put my name forward for opportunities or trust me with marquee projects. These moments helped build confidence and created career-defining growth. We all need that someone who is our cheerleader. We all have days where we think, “I got this.” And then we have days where we ask, “Do I?” And you need someone who has been in the same position before saying, “No, you do!”

My mentor Kat had faith in me—someone who didn't have a sports background at the time, suddenly working in sports sponsorships—and she always said, “You'll get it. You know how to run projects, and that's what I need.” These moments of growth that some people allow you to have help make you a strategic thinker and, ultimately, a strong leader down the road when it's your turn to believe in somebody and what they bring to the table. And then that creates an even stronger organization. 🍷