

## WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

### 10 Questions - Mary Klida

By Amber Johnson

Senior Marketing and Communications Manager Mary Klida comes to the Cobo Center from Smart City Networks, where she served as marketing manager for the event center technology supplier. During her tenure at Smart City, she implemented their branding campaign in media, marketing and public relations, oversaw all content creation and message strategy and wrote and published technology news campaigns.

Mrs. Klida is responsible for developing the Cobo Center brand, overseeing digital asset optimization, including digital signage operations, developing partnership opportunities, social media marketing development, newsletter development and Cobo's public relations messaging and marketing campaigns. She designed a Special Major while at Southern Illinois University in the College of Liberal Arts, and has certifications from the Stephen Covey Leadership Institute and Illinois Prevention Resource Center in leadership, community organization and staff management.



**What has it meant or what does it mean, if you still perceive it to be so, to be a woman in a male dominated industry?**

I think every industry and many groups have people who mistake kindness for weakness and feel compelled to dominate others. This facet of human nature creates different social structures within different cultural norms. My mother was a lieutenant in the army during World War II and her job was to fix electrical systems on aircraft. After the war, she enrolled in Iowa State University to pursue an engineering degree and was quickly told that women were not allowed to do so. She received her degree in Household Engineering. Two decades later, she was one of

the first women in the US to get a credit card under her own name and had to hire an attorney to do so.

Racial and gender equality are complex issues being resolved differently today in various countries and cultures. I have been the only woman in the boardroom, and did my time researching and learning the fine arts of communication and argument out of necessity. I've also had several key men and women in my professional career that were kind enough to give me opportunities that proved beneficial for everyone. I can't say that I have ever been denied anything based on my gender, just treated differently by individuals who didn't seem to

know any better. I never take it personally.

I once had a Chief of Police ask me why I wasn't home baking cookies. I told him that he may be encouraged to know I did just that last Saturday with my children, and offered to send some to his office. (My Snickerdoodles have always been the best.) Then we got on with business.

I think the most important thing that we can do for ourselves is choose our professional opportunities wisely, making sure we are surrounding ourselves with others capable of compassion, kindness, integrity, vision and passion. If we can do that, the rest becomes small stuff to deal with graciously in the moment and move on.

**Have opportunities increased, decreased, or stayed the same, as the longtime "old boys club" have begun to retire?**

I've followed the careers of industry greats (women and men) like Carol Wallace, Jan Addison, Kerry Painter, Thom Connors and Larry Perkins with a great deal of awe and respect for all they have achieved. I'm encouraged to see the number of women on executive teams increasing and, at the same time, am grateful to the men and women who, along the way in my professional career, took the time to encourage and give me a boost, while providing the archetypical profiles in leadership that I carry with me. It is extremely important that we continue to do that for promising women

who are up and coming in the industry. It makes the industry stronger for everyone.

**What challenges do women face in the trade show industry?**

Work/life balance seems to be to be the biggest challenge in the event industry, especially for women with children still at home and, often at the same time, parents at home. Travel schedules dictate out of the box communication methods, not only with children, but schools, doctors, coaches, and caretakers, when challenges arise at home in our absence. The rhythm of marriages changes too, with double income couples trying to find work schedules that complement each other and enhance the relationship. The show must go on and priorities can be difficult to juggle.

**Is there a particular challenge that you had to deal with, not necessarily gender related, and how did you overcome it?**

I had a stretch of six years when my children were attending universities in two different states and my travel schedule for work was somewhere around half the time. I learned to fall asleep as soon as I was comfortably seated on an airplane, and wake up when the door opened for disembarking. I learned to do whatever it took to always be there for my children in the most important moments of their lives. I learned how to include my family in my work life as much as possible, sharing success and providing the model pathway for work ethic and professional growth. I learned that introducing my children to my colleagues and

providing them opportunities to develop relationships with the people that I considered to be real leaders, taught them much more than I could have taught them alone.

**What advice would you care to give to women who enter this field in the future?**

Be adventurous, be smart, be open, be flexible, seize the opportunities, and help others along the way.

**Are there any benefits to being a female in the industry?**

I think every aspect of life holds unique advantages for women. Our job is to uncover them, make the most of them, share them and enjoy them.

**Is there still a wage gap as in so many other fields, or has that been bridged?**

Pay inequity is no joke, and I admire women like Robin Wright Penn who are in a position to have a global audience to take a stand for equal rights. I think one of the smartest professional moves that anyone can make is to take a stand for professional equality no matter what the issue: race; gender; age; pay. This kind of action lifts everyone up.

I've been fortunate enough in my professional life to have the opportunity to negotiate job offers based on talent and pay based on experience and work/life balance. Time for family has always been top priority for me, and that balance is a challenge we all face. All of my jobs were custom packaged for me, so I've never had the luxury of being able to compare my salary with any kind of range. But I find pay

negotiation to be critical professionally, and think it should never be entered into lightly.

**What do you foresee and also hope to see for female trade-show professionals in the future?**

Convention centers are the heartbeat of each city, an economic engine that generates jobs and stimulates the economy. The way we deliver services will certainly change with advances in transportation, technology, and sustainability. Our rapidly changing methods of communication affect our professional relations and personal lives. They are also changing the way we relate and deliver services to customers. My hope is that everyone can jump the curve quickly and efficiently. The changes are inevitable and also wonderful, so let's enjoy them. Don't let gender, culture, age or anything else be a limitation standing in the way.

**What exciting project or projects are you working on at the Cobo Center that you'd like to talk about?**

This year, Cobo Center is sweeping up the dust from its five-year, \$279 million renovation with fresh architecture, technology, sustainability and leadership. During that time, the City of Detroit emerged from bankruptcy with an unrivaled resilience. Businesses and area attractions are springing up all over. The energy is exciting and palpable. It is an extraordinary experience to be a small part of the transformation and see the creative culture emerge and thrive. Every day in Cobo, customers are marveling at the change

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and discovering the advantages of this site to their events. You have to see it to believe it, and I highly recommend it.

**When you are not helping to break the glass ceiling, what do you do for fun & relaxation? Hobbies?**

I am a writer, currently working on a few different projects, and my volunteer hours for the past several years have been directed solely to helping other people write and publish. I'm occasionally invited to book clubs where members have read my work and would like to discuss it with me, either locally or by Skype. Connecting directly with my readers is always a unique and wonderful experience. I have an amazing husband, two great kids, grandchildren, a big garden and a great life, no complaints. I'm deeply grateful for opportunities like the one you've given me in this interview. Thanks very much. ☺