NEWS RELEASE

Amelia Anderson: Forging new paths for women in aviation

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“In just about every business, women are underrepresented in senior positions,” begins Amelia Anderson, managing director and assistant treasurer of the American Airlines Treasury team, as she describes a problem all too common in most fields. “I found it to be especially true in aviation finance,” she says. So she decided to do something about it. Behind the scenes, Amelia has been working to break down barriers for women, and as a result, she was recently named Airfinance Journal’s Aviation Woman of the Year.

First, Amelia started digging around for the root cause of this issue, and found it. As she traveled the globe and talked with industry leaders, she consistently heard the same story: “There just aren’t enough women in the talent pipeline.” So, in 2015, Amelia cofounded the Advancing Women in Aviation Roundtable (AWAR) as a forum to engage and educate leaders on this issue and to seek solutions.

“With AWAR, we’ve done symposiums to talk about the challenges of attracting, retaining and advancing women in our industry,” says Amelia. “Our goal is to help people in the corner offices find usable strategies to change their organizations.” That means getting out there and talking to women about the types of skills and experiences most likely to lead to the C-suite and discussing strategies to break that glass ceiling.

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Not only are people talking, they’re listening — around the world. “In January, our third annual symposium in Dublin drew 130 people, including many CEOs and other senior executives of airlines, aircraft manufacturers, leasing companies and others,” Amelia says. AWAR has held similar symposiums in Hong Kong and Tokyo and a number of smaller events at banks and law firms in New York.

“To really move the dial on advancing women, we have to look at the entire talent pipeline. If you talk to educators, they’ll tell you that many women are reluctant to pursue degrees in aeronautics or even finance because they aren’t confident enough in their math skills. So, it really starts in middle school, where girls are not being encouraged enough to pursue science, technology, engineering and math studies,” Amelia says.

She believes we need to begin early, encouraging girls to develop the skills and the confidence that will provide opportunities later in life. “And in the airline business, we’ve got to make sure we are opening those doors,” she says. “Here at American, I think we’ve done a fantastic job of promoting women. Our CEO, Doug Parker, has several women on his team, and that speaks volumes.”

As the mother of two teenage girls, Amelia wants to do all she can to level the playing field, but says there are things everyone can do to help. “Encourage girls to study science, technology, engineering and math,” she says. “Encourage young women to take risks with their careers. Mentor and develop high-potential women in the same pathways that you would think of for similarly situated men — with an eye toward someday running the airline.”