

DfBB Women in Transport Podcast: Sharon Kindleysides

Sharon Kindleysides, Chief Executive Officer of CILT(UK)

Anne-Marie:

Welcome to the Driving for Better Business podcast celebrating women working in transport, fleet management, and road safety. The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport was first established in 1919. Their vision is “a transport, logistics, operations and supply chain profession, recognised and celebrated for its quality, expertise, and value”, and I’m delighted to welcome their Chief Executive, Sharon Kindleysides.

Sharon, welcome to the Driving for Better Business podcast. Can you tell me more about the purpose of the Institute?

Sharon:

Yes, hello Anne-Marie, thanks for inviting me. I think the institute is the home of the profession – so people who are working in the industry of transport and logistics and supply chains at any level have got somewhere they can come to be part of the community. We are a chartered body so people that wish to go that way we can support them through their career development. We also offer training for individuals and organisations, and advice. We like to think that anyone can come to us and ask us any question, and we’ll give them good, neutral advice based on the facts. We have an amazing learning centres so if anyone’s doing any research they’re welcome to come and see that too.

Anne-Marie:

Fantastic. How big is the institute, how many members do you have?

Sharon:

Well, we’ve got roughly 13,000 members in the UK and we’ve got about 170 corporate members, where we work closely with them - but we mainly hear from the individuals. And they range from people at the start of their career right to the top fellows who’ve been doing great service. And I wrote a letter last week to somebody who has been a member for over 50 years.

Anne-Marie:

Wow, so there’s a real depth and breadth to the membership then.

Sharon:

Absolutely, and it’s just so valuable, particularly for our younger members. If they’ve ever got a question, there’s bound to be someone in the organisation who is senior and can offer advice. And I

think that's what's really good when we go to places like a conference. People learn from each other.

Anne-Marie:

Brilliant. Now, your appointment as CEO of CILT is quite recent and you've had over 19 years leadership experience in the sector. What do you see as the priorities for the sector at this point?

Sharon:

Yes, as you said I have been in the industry for some time now. I took over the job roughly three months ago. I think it's quite a key time for the profession. I've noticed it's pretty much every morning there's a news article that's something to do with the supply chain or transport or driving or the fuel crisis – various things along those lines. So at the moment we've really got a stage to talk about ourselves. The key priority for me is making more people aware of the profession. Approximately 4% of all jobs in the UK are in logistics. We've got young people who just got exam results and are wondering what to do with their careers. My priority is to say look – this is an amazing, vibrant, passionate industry with jobs in all manner of things you've maybe never heard of, so come and find out what we do. So I want to make the profession, or the sector, attractive and appealing – so that when somebody is thinking about what job to do, they don't turn their nose up and say "oh, I don't want to do that". I want them to think "wow, that's truly amazing, I can go and be part of something massive". And without our industry and things being transported, there'd be nothing in the shops. We'd pretty much be sitting here naked. So it's so intrinsic to everything we do in the country – so I want everyone to feel as excited about it as I am really.

Anne-Marie:

That's really interesting – I didn't realise just how much of our daily life involves someone working in transport and the logistics sector. We need, now more than ever, to grow this sector. How is Generation Logistics encouraging people into the sector?

Sharon:

We're doing a lot of things. We offer a mentoring scheme. We've actually got a couple of organisations we support who encourage people right at the start of their career, who might not be able to pay their own way through a qualification, to actually go to university or do a more practical course. So we're really trying to get in at the start of these things. We've got an organisation called Think Logistics who help support schools. So we're trying to make people aware of the whole industry and the scope. So when they become a student, or when they're an apprentice, we offer them training and professional development. We just offer them a place where they can come and find out more, and choose their own career path. They know we're going to support them all the way through. And, we offer mentoring. So if anyone comes to us and wants to mentor or be a mentoree, we try to link them up.

Anne-Marie:

That sounds excellent. It's a good thing to support young people. I'm glad I'm not young anymore because I'm not sure which way I'd go to get a job! But this sounds like a brilliant scheme to encourage more people into the sector itself. You mentioned technology – it's advancing considerably, and we've seen significant developments in autonomous vehicles. What are the challenges this brings, and how far away are we from truly, fully autonomous vehicles?

Sharon:

I mean, there are fully autonomous vehicles in trials around the world. The technology itself is very well developed. One of the views I have of it is that it's a bit like a fashion show. People go to Paris and see the most amazing outfits, and then possibly a colour, or a design, or a belt they've seen makes its way into the supermarket or a high street store. And then with autonomous vehicles, every new version of a car that comes out has learnt something from autonomous vehicles – from headlines that dip and raise themselves, to sensors that tell you if you're about to leave the lane. So I think we're seeing cars get a lot more intelligent. There's certainly a number of applications that I think will be really beneficial. Somebody once said that the first time you get in an autonomous vehicle, it's not going to be 5 o'clock going around the M25. It's going to be in a constrained environment. I think what's going to be really valuable is things like out-of-hours and remote public transport – for example, to help shift workers get to and from work – maybe there's an autonomous vehicle that takes you to an out-of-town car park, where you could park your car to avoid congestion. Maybe it's around a hospital or a university campus. I think the first place we'll really see autonomous vehicles in full blown running and being useful is going to be in these limited environments. I think we'll also see them in agriculture, and even maritime, where there is again this constrained environment – there's nothing to stop, say, a completely autonomous combine harvester harvesting a field. Or in a shunting yard of hauliers, just moving trailer units made for B to C. That could be fully autonomous. It's going to be a long time before we see them in the city centre. But what they can bring is this technology, particularly the safety features, into normal cars. So that the cars that are on the normal road at the moment have got these safety features built in. That's always been one of the key selling points of autonomous vehicles – the number of accidents due to human error – because if you can reduce the human interaction, then you can also reduce the number of accidents. I think it will be slow progress, but there'll be certainly applications where we'll see fully autonomous vehicles a lot quicker than in other areas.

Anne-Marie:

Thanks Sharon. That's actually really useful, you've mentioned quite a few things there that I hadn't considered. Especially the agricultural and maritime perspective. There are huge applications now. That's fascinating. Moving on, there is also much discussion as well about Intelligent Transport Systems. Can you explain what is meant by that and what are the benefits and downsides for road users?

Sharon:

I've always thought there's a slightly bad choice of words there, because it suggests there are non-intelligent transport systems as well. Which we don't mean at all. But for me, it's applying data, and the use of data and technology, to the normal transport systems that we use day-in, day-out. And the most basic application that nobody really thinks about is that we've got traffic lights that change, we've got a vehicle waiting and a vehicle queue. So that is an intelligent transport system, it's using a sensor, it's taking information, it's changing the traffic lights. And as technology progresses and we get a lot more data from ANPR cameras, numberplate cameras, from people just having mobile phones in their car... everyone's heard of Google Maps. We're getting such a vast amount of data, that intelligent transport systems can take and use. [...] We certainly saw during the first lockdown of the pandemic that we were getting daily updates about traffic figures and they were coming from this data and these figures. But it also gives planners to react in real time, if congestion starts building up, and they can possibly divert people to route B. So, at the highest level, it just gives us a better way of managing the road network. You can set targets to manage the road network to reduce congestion, improve journey times, improve air quality... there's a raft of things to use it for.

And you can also make sure that enforcement can be cleverer. For example, there have been systems around schools and in 20mph zones, where the speed limit is only there during school hours, so by using the intelligent transport system connected to the cameras, and effectively a clock, you can make sure that people are only penalised because they actually did break the rule at say 3pm at school picking up time. So you can be clever and selective. And I think that makes these enforcement measures a lot more palatable to drivers because you know it was fair – you were caught doing something you shouldn't have, not when the school wasn't there. So I think there are many applications, and we've all seen journey time systems on the motorway telling us how long until the next junction. That helps. There's nothing worse than being in a traffic jam not knowing how long it's going to take you to get home. So I think that reduces some of the stress of driving. For downsides, older vehicles may not have all of the technology and information that can tell you how to get to the next traffic light on green, and things like that. So perhaps older vehicles won't have that. We don't want to distract drivers, you know, there's cars now that look like space shuttles with so many warnings and alerts and you really don't want to distract the driver. So some of it is that you don't want to deskill the driver. We want them to still be driving the vehicle and paying attention. So there's got to be a balance there between how you use the technology. And I've noticed myself, I've got lane-keeping assist on my car, but I live relatively rurally. And we have a lot of marks on the road that aren't white lines, and the car does sometimes try and persuade me to drive along something that isn't a white line. So we have to be careful about the application, and make sure when new drivers are starting to learn and get this technology in the car, they're prepared for how it's going to change their driving style, and what they're going to have to do to drive these more intelligent vehicles.

Anne-Marie:

Thanks Sharon, I think that's a really important consideration – that when technology advances, especially in vehicles, that we have to bear in mind is that sometimes there's a trade-off, and so safety must be paramount. We can have as many technological advances as we like, but if safety is worse, then we've got a problem. So I think there are many opportunities to collaborate cross-sector, between vehicle manufacturers, road users, highway authorities... There's a really good future for improving travel, and how we travel under less-stress on our roads.

When I was back in school, I took motor mechanics, wood and metal work, and technical drawing instead of sewing and cooking. It did raise a few eyebrows as girls generally didn't take those subjects! Transport and logistics have been quite male dominated in the past but there are many more women now in the sector. How is the CILT supporting them?

Sharon:

I've got a similar story. When I was choosing my A-Levels, a friend and I decided that we were both going to be engineers, and we both decided to ask our schools could we please do technical drawing. And my school was very kind and progressive and modern and said "yes, of course you can". So they were deeply supportive, and think without that support at the time there was no way I would have become an engineer. Nobody told me I can't do it. I think today, we have to make the industry seem attractive, and really make people aware of the opportunities. I think a lot of transport-related jobs are not necessarily strict 9-to-5s. So they do fit in well to other responsibilities – it's not just women who have caring responsibilities. Anyone can have caring responsibilities. So I think the industry itself is really geared up for that flexible work environment. But again, we're not very good at talking about it. As I mentioned, we have the CILT mentoring programme, but we also have a Women in Logistics forum, which is an amazing forum where women and gentlemen and non-binary people can come together to talk about transport issues, in a safe environment. But you know, we're always

thinking about what's in it for women, but also promoting our younger ladies as they come through and giving them a good platform where they can learn to speak in a professional environment where it's friendly and supportive. And we've actually got our Annual Conference on the 13th October, so I would encourage anybody to come along and attend, and I'm really keen that if you have a young colleague who might want to come, bring them along, or if you know a younger person who wants to come, get in touch with us so we can be welcoming when they get there so they're not walking into a room of strangers. Because that's intimidating however old you are. And sometimes it's nice to have somebody looking out for you and being aware of you. And at our Annual Conference that was held earlier this year, we took a younger member of the organisation, a lady called Rebecca Hicks, and invited her to chair the entire conference. And we supported her through that. But it was just to really make people aware that we've got this younger generation coming out, these really amazing women who are coming through. And if you can't see it, you can't be it. So we're really keen to get out there and show who we are and what we stand for. And as a lady myself I'm really keen that everyone sees me and realises they can do pretty much whatever they want. I'm the first female Chief Executive of the CILT and I hope there are many more to come. I'm absolutely passionate that we make the Institute welcoming and supportive for everyone – and in that way make it good for women and make it good for everybody. So, that's something I'm very keen about and I would encourage anybody to come along to our Women in Logistics group or even just join the forum online and see what we're about.

Anne-Marie:

I love that comment, that if we make it good for women we can make it good for everybody. I think that's brilliant. It is about that level playing field, that everybody can be part of something. Looking back at your 18-year-old self, what one thing would you like to say to her?

Sharon:

Well I would have liked to have said you should buy Bitcoin! But failing that I was thinking about this question, and I think something I thought about relatively recently is to be confident, and bring your authentic self to work. I do remember when I was in my late 20s I had a child, a relatively young baby. I didn't tell the company I went to work for that I had a child, because I thought in some way that they'd feel less of me, or wouldn't trust me, or wouldn't give me a job. And also I think I have some neurodiverse issues and to be honest and open about that and open about mental health – it's really hard. And it's only something that I've become comfortable with in the last few years. And I thank a lot of younger people who have helped with that, they're on social media, they're talking about their own challenges. And it's taken a lot for me and my generation to come out and say things. I have mental health problems, it's ok. It's ok not to be ok. And that's something I'm really grateful to the younger generations for. So to my 15 year old self I'd say be confident being your authentic self at work.

Anne-Marie:

Thank you, Sharon it's been brilliant talking, to you and getting information on the CILT.

For those of you who want to know more about Driving for Better Business and the benefits to managing and reducing your road risk take a look at the website at <https://www.drivingforbetterbusiness.com>