



In Conversation with the president of Women's International Shipping and Trade Association

Despina Panayiotou Theodosiou, CEO of Tototheo Maritime and the president of Women's International Shipping and Trade Association (WISTA) describes how the maritime industry is moving towards the future with an increased push for diversity, the expansion of digitalisation, and a focus on sustainability.

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1. What initially drew you to the maritime industry, and why have you stayed?

I come from Cyprus, and we are a country with a long history of sea travel and maritime trade. I am a captain's daughter, so I was very familiar with the maritime industry, although at the start of my career I wanted to do something entirely different. In the end, I joined the industry because it was a natural fit. The industry has a tradition of exploration and change, of facing adversity and prevailing. It is an industry that is challenging but rewarding at the same time. What is not to love about that part of shipping?

2. Why do you think women currently make up only a small percentage of the world's maritime workforce? What could be done to change that?

One reason there are not as many women in the maritime industry is that the industry has been mainly male-dominated and based on a set of traditions that are no longer valid today. Another reason had to do with women not wanting to come into an industry that felt unrewarding and negative, but there has been a lot of effort from the industry to change this perception and I believe we are turning things around. The Fourth Industrial Revolution – and the technological one we see in the shipping industry in particular – is an opportunity to start looking at a diverse set of skills that will be much needed in shipping.

3. What do you think could be done to get more women into the maritime sector?

We have to ensure girls and young women are supported in – and are aware of – the opportunities offered. And the industry needs to make sure that once we have encouraged young girls from all cultures to pursue these careers, that the doors to schools and jobs are open.

Things are changing, and we see more women seeking careers in the various sectors that form the shipping industry. But there are two things here we need to make sure continue to be addressed. One is that training and opportunities need to be available for women and secondly that the workplaces are fit for female workers. An easy example of that is making sure that vessels have the right facilities for female crew and officers. By encouraging all members of society of working age to consider careers in maritime, we increase our potential talent pool.

4. What kind of role is digitalisation playing in the maritime industry?

Digitalisation is opening up so many new opportunities for the industry and the many sectors and companies in it. Ships remain one of the largest, regularly made constructions by people. They are complex, and digitalisation will not take away the nature of such heavy engineering. Instead, what digitalisation is doing is making the operation and management of these assets so much better.

Furthermore, the digitalisation of shipping and the increased focus on digital technology and cleantech solutions will help us in achieving the goal of recruiting and retaining talented young leaders, women and men. We need people with new thinking, that can look outside the box for the new answers that are being sought. In the digital world, where start-ups and new ideas abound, many women are taking a leap of faith in their ability to seize the disruptive opportunities.

I also do not think it a coincidence that digitalisation and the sudden push for sustainable and environmental businesses are happening at the same time. Without digitalisation and the ability to make so many improvements and to assess so much data, we would not have the right tools to address many of our social and environmental issues.

5. Tototheo Maritime is committed to a more sustainable future for the maritime industry; can you talk about what that means to you? Why is sustainability important, particularly in the maritime?

We live on a planet with limited resources and have a growing population that strives to raise wealth and income. Apart from the challenge of meeting the requirements of both of those points – we live in a world where communication and information flow very quickly. We will need to send cargoes around the world in ever more complex trade patterns as developing and underdeveloped countries grow in prosperity. We need a fit for purpose and efficient ocean supply chain, and we need

ships that are part of a modern connected transport chain. For Tototheo Maritime, that means being able to offer the companies, that operate these assets, the right tools to achieve their goals.

If we do not do this, we will not have any long-term value, and as a family-powered company, we look ahead for our future generations and want to understand that we are doing the best we can for them.