

# The power of diverse speaker line ups at events

## **Intro** 00:00

Welcome to the superstar communicator podcast. Our aim is to ensure you speak and communicate with confidence, clarity, credibility, and impact so that you present the best version of yourself in all business conversations. Welcome to our host, Susan Heaton-Wright.

## **Susan Heaton-Wright** 00:19

Hello, everybody, we are in for an absolute treat. We've been having a warm up here prior to broadcasting, and I'm absolutely delighted to have Mette Johansson, who is here from Singapore, here on your screen. So thank you so much for coming on, which I know is your evening. Mette is the founder of keynote women speakers. And that is how i No matter because I'm one of the speakers in the European branch, and I'm truly honoured to be part of this incredible group. But she is also the the owner and the founder of Metamind training, which is a training consultancy specialising in leadership skills. And her background is in marketing and advertising and communications. So she is very, very well placed to talk about the power of diverse speakers and diverse boards. So welcome Mette.

## **Mette Johansson** 01:31

Thank you very much, Susan. It's an absolute pleasure being here with you today.

## **Susan Heaton-Wright** 01:36

All thank you so much. You're a role model that I really look up to. And talking about role models as women, the previous generation that the generation above us, they didn't have role models. So how is it for us moving up to senior roles?

## **Mette Johansson** 01:56

It is a challenge because when we can see it, it's easier to be it. So role models are important. Now luckily, there are a few more role models out there than they used to be. There are some women in leadership roles whether it's Jane Fraser from Citibank, the first a woman who is leading a Wall Street bank, right. There was Indra Nooyi from PepsiCo was now stepped down, but it's on a lot of different boards, General Motors, YouTube, there are quite a few women who are leading the way out there. So luckily, we have a few more role models. But yes, as you mentioned, when we grew up, we did not have those role models to live up to or to look up to.

## **Susan Heaton-Wright** 02:46

Oh, definitely. I mean, we've before we came on, we were talking about Margaret Thatcher. And this was at a time when women had only just started broadcasting certainly on the BBC. You didn't hear women newscasters, they might be the weather girls. So things have really changed.

**Mette Johansson 03:12**

Absolutely. I believe it was in the 70s, where the BBC still said that, yeah, women's voices are not suitable to be broadcast, right? I mean, this is quite shocking that this is half a century ago, where women were not deemed suitable to go on radio and TV. Shocking, absolutely shocking.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 03:31**

And given that in the Second World War, women were the ones that were sending information via radio, because their voices were more audible, being higher pitched, suddenly is forgotten.

**Mette Johansson 03:45**

And regarding Margaret Thatcher what you just said, yeah, when we grew up the female leaders that you and I could look up to Susan, they were the ones like Margaret tension, and we didn't really wants to be like Margaret. So it was difficult finding out who am I as a leader, what's, how am I going to develop myself into leadership or a visible personality in one way or the other?

**Susan Heaton-Wright 04:11**

And, you know, thinking about education, certainly it was 1987, so that was at a time when I was still studying in one of the Cambridge colleges, I never would know if it's maudlin or maddlin college. They said they were going to accept women. And there were male students that were going around the streets of Cambridge with you know, protesting against that, and the same with St. John's College, I can't remember when they took him women, but there are still there is still paint on some of the doors where people protested because they felt that women should not be in those colleges should not have parity. with male students.

**Mette Johansson 05:03**

I just want to say that, that it's a man's world out there that women don't really fit into the corporate life out there. Well, of course, we don't fit in if so recently, men were the ones who were deciding what was going to happen. It was designed to the world was designed by men for men, and in fact, that is one of the things I like to stress whenever I do leadership courses in diversity, of course, that the business world is still designed by men, for men. It has not been designed to include women. And if you don't believe me, look at the books that are taught in business schools. Now I did an MBA, and the books that were taught there were the authors. It's the white streets, at least acting Street, able bodied American man. So of course, if that's such a small demography of people are writing the books that are taught in the top business schools around the world. Of course, there's a lot of situations where women feel that this world am I really suited for this?

**Susan Heaton-Wright 06:12**

That's a really, really good point. And certainly in the last couple of weeks, I've been doing lots of talks about break the bias for International Women's Day, and one question that I had from a chap was that he was very aware in his organisation, the board was recruit recruiting, he calls it a token woman. And he was very concerned that she would not be up to the job. What is your what is your opinion on that?

**Mette Johansson 06:45**

I can talk a long time about tokenism and token women. And one assumption was also from a guy in a very large Whatsapp group that I'm in where the comment was, "Oh, I'm sure she doesn't want to be a token woman". And I said, "Hey, take me as a token woman, I'll take the job give me a board director role as a token woman, and I will prove to you that I am worth it". So never make assumptions. Now token women? Yes, of course, if you're making the assumption that she's not good, because she's a token women, there's a big flaw in the system. Who are you recruiting? Who are you promoting? Who are you selecting? It is a very complex system. If you want to avoid tokenism, it is making sure that you are recruiting, selecting the right people attracting them, making sure that your employer branding is already showing that you're open to diverse candidates. Otherwise diverse candidates are about diverse candidates a silly word, right. But let's stick with it for now that people don't fit your white, male demographic profile, they will not be applying. And then when you have decided upon this woman, she has the leadership skills, I want to promote her that we also give what she needs to succeed. This is what the concept of equity is about. We very often talk about equality, giving everybody the same thing what they need to succeed. How about we look at it from an equity point of view, giving what individuals need to be successful. And maybe that token woman, the woman who's being promoted into leadership role, that she needs a little bit of support, maybe a coach for the first 100 days, or a senior male leader or even female leaders if they are around which is token woman, probably not. So a male leader who is opening the doors, who is making sure that the system is not excluding her, for instance, not inviting her out for drinks, because it's a boy who's going to the pub. So it's important to make sure that we are supporting this woman so that she can succeed and that's not necessarily giving her the same as you're giving everybody else.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 08:57**

And do you think that because not all males for the same either, we sometimes think of leadership role in a particular way. Certainly in the in in the United Kingdom in Europe, there is political unrest. And we are seeing leadership styles that to be honest or are very old fashioned, very traditional. And yet not all men fall into that that those values and leadership styles, what is your opinion about that?

**Mette Johansson 09:37**

I love the question. We have in the past very much looked at what a female characteristics but a male characteristics. And often women feel more comfortable with the female so called characteristics such as compassion, care, teamwork, and men have been more comfortable with being assertive. They've been okay with being assertive, strategic, and going out for winning. Now, I'd like the whole world to make a shift from it not being male or female characteristics that everybody, whatever gender you have, that you can lead with who you are as a leader, that you can lead with compassion and care if you care about people. And I know of a lot of men who feel that they cannot show up with empathy, because they are being seen as a world repeat those words, your life, there is being seen as, let's just call it diplomatically weak, if they are leading with empathy and compassion. So if we can go away from this gender split, and this is how women lead this is how men lead and rather talk about, who are you authentically as a leader? And how can you lead like that, I love how the wording is also changing from female characteristics to more collaborative leadership style. And instead of male characteristics it's more of the competitive characteristics or traits or leadership styles. And that is important that we go away from this is how women lead. And this is how men lead, but allow everybody to lead with their authentic selves, and bring in more compassion and empathy also, to a lot of companies that don't

have it today, because I can tell you from a lot of the men that we work with, there is sometimes a lack of, yeah, this culture that allows you to lead with empathy and compassion.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 11:34

That's so interesting. And this takes me very, very quickly on to the idea of stereotypes, and bias, because of course, it's been International Women's Day, for the month people are talking about unconscious bias and breaking the bias. Do you think that women are still being held back by stereotyping?

**Mette Johansson** 12:00

Absolutely, and I do it myself as well, sometimes necessary to have some stereotypes simply to explain that this is the problem we're having right now, we're seeing these issues. And I often really, I put a small disclaimer here, it's right there on the screen, can you see it? Whenever I say men do or women do, I mean that sometimes men tend to and women might be doing this more than men. Disclaimer down there. I do not want to put people in boxes, and of course, it's more than just two genders as well. It is to illustrate to highlight some of the challenges that we have out there. And of course, there are so many different stereotypes, isn't in London, where you have this wonderful campaign that is, oh, she's a nurse, or he's a CEO. It's questioning when you're thinking of a CEO, do you think of a man when you think of a nurse? Do you think of a woman? There are lots of stereotypes? And it does mean that if we're looking for a CEO, we might automatically be looking for a man? So yes, absolutely. The stereotypes hurt women, and I'm writing a book that's a little bit so on the same topic. It's called narratives, the stories that hold women back at work. And it is highlighting the some of the stories that we say all the time, the do hold women back.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 13:25

are brilliant. I can't wait to find out more about that book, and I've already asked you if you'd like to come back when it's published, because I'm sure other people would like to know about that. I've got a question from somebody "Hello, Mehta and Susan, great discussion, authentic leaders versus gender exclusive leadership competencies". Is that a question? What are your thoughts?

**Mette Johansson** 14:03

I see that as a statement in terms of "let's be ourselves", yes. "Let's not focus so much on what is the gender but rather, how do we become efficient leaders"? I speak a lot about authentic leadership, and I am so convinced that we are much better leaders, when we have that self awareness about "what do I stand for what is important to me, what drives me? What is the change I want to make in the world", when you have that awareness about yourself, and you lead with your values, that's when you become an authentic leader, and you're so much more powerful if you dare to lead it because one thing is being authentic, another thing is really daring to lead with what you stand for. And I am so convinced that this will play a big role also in gender balance in future.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 14:55

That's so interesting. Now one of the reasons why we originally met was because you found it keynote women speakers. And I'm I'm very honoured to be one of the speakers that is on there. Tell me something about a became keynote women speakers why you founded it.

**Mette Johansson 15:30**

It is a nonprofit organisation, and we are on a mission to bring more diversity to speaking stages, because that is still so much needed. Now, of course, for the past week, or 10 days, loads of women have been speaking, because it was International Women's Day, we want women to be speaking all year round. And we don't want women to be paid nothing or peanuts around international women's day to be empowering women, and then for the rest of the years, less rest of the year for men than to go out and be paid 15 or \$25,000 to speak. We want women to go out there and speak on an equal footing to men because there are loads of inspirational thought leaders who happen to be not male as well out there. So we want to bring that diversity to speak in stages.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 16:24**

That's so interesting, because obviously, I've been quite busy in the last few weeks. With speaking for International Women's Day, I got paid well for a number of engagements. However, there have been one or two organisations some household names that have not had a budget, and I go no further with those conversations. But what are your thoughts about that? Or is that a pattern you see?

**Mette Johansson 16:56**

A lot of companies still have no budget for diversity and inclusion. That means that around International Women's Day, companies are inviting women to speak to empower women, and they are disempowering the women that they're inviting to speak. And that just isn't right to me, that just isn't right. So I also sometimes politely decline, but usually educate. Usually, when I'm in one of my foul moods, and slightly less diplomatic about, like, for instance, one company that invited me to speak for free. I and they were saying, "oh, yeah, loads of benefits and, you know", exploitative clients and all of this, and I just responded, listen, I've just googled your profit from last quarter. And it was this much, now the speaking industry has been in a big crisis for the past couple of years, and my profit was this much. If I'm delivering benefits to you to your clients, then I believe that you might also want to pay me and I never heard from them again.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 18:04**

Of course. Yeah, I've had one or two inquiries and they offer and I say, Yeah, happy to have a chat. And we can discuss discuss the budget, nothing else.

**Mette Johansson 18:17**

Now, we need to change to make sure that there's not only women voices on stages that are heard that women get an opportunity to amplify the voices to be heard to share the message for a better world, but also that there is some equal pay and speaking and I'm very convinced, although there's no research on this, I'm very convinced that this the pay gap is speaking is immense between the ages between if you divide things up into genders.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 18:45**

Yes, I'm in fact, there is a member of the PSA in the UK who regularly does research on that. I will contact him to see if he's got any recent research is going to be difficult in the last couple of years. But prior to the pandemic, if he's got some that he's happy to share with you, I will send it on to you. Yeah,

it would be very useful. So let's get back to keynote speaker women's speakers because we went off on a tangent. Why did you decide to build this up? Because you've been doing this for four years now.

**Mette Johansson 19:34**

It started with a funny story. I was asked by a women's organisation here in Singapore where I'm based to collect some names of women who speak in that organisation because the president sometimes got speaking inquiries, and if she couldn't do it, then we could pass them on. Now, I was there together with a friend caviar and we Googled a bit and we saw, "hey, there's no such thing as a women's Speaker bureau in in Asia, and there's not much in the world" so why do we keep this list to ourselves internally, let's just make a speaker's directory. That's how it all started. Of course, it was also because I had been to conferences where there were not many female speakers, I had pitched for speaking at an a very big conference, where in the end, there were out of 28 speakers, there were two women, and they were on the small stage. And my topic was also rejected because it was less focused on money, and more on doing good. And that's a very interesting point. That's also where I see the need for keynote women's speakers. Now, again, I don't want to stereotype, I do see that there's a tendency for women to sometimes be reluctant speakers, they see that "this needs to be changed, and I need to if I don't speak up about it, nothing's going to happen. So let me speak up about it", reluctant speakers. I hear that about women, while women saying this about themselves very often. And what I've also noticed with keynote, women's speakers is that there are so many women, if you train them, if you mentor them, and it's a bit, they become so authentic, they're much more willing to be a little bit vulnerable on stage, that vulnerability that saying, "hey, it wasn't all golden shiny all the time for me". Now, when men speak about that is often this rags to riches story, right? I used to sleep on my friend's couch, I had no money, and now I am a multimillionaire, whereas women often talk about the struggles they go through, and not because they're multimillionaires today and want you to be multimillionaires. No, because they want you to be happier, more fulfilled, and the world a better place. So I do see a tendency for women to be more authentic in their speaking to make themselves more vulnerable, and to be focusing much more on purpose for the greater good. And that is needed in the world.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 22:07**

There's nothing more you can add to that really is there particularly in the world that we're in at the moment. But why is there value in being having more female speakers on panels, and at conferences?

**Mette Johansson 22:22**

Very good question. We're not doing this simply to make women happier. Of course, we also want women to be fulfilled and reach their full potential. That's a big part of it. It's also because group diversity. So diversity increases group intelligence, diversity increases group intelligence, if we have more diversity, we all benefit, because more diversity means bringing different perspective to the table. And that means that we're more creative, we're more innovative, and we can build on each other's ideas. And we will have superior solutions in the end. So it's not just about doing women of faith or so that's not why we do everything in diversity and inclusion. It is because we all stand to benefit. When companies do diversity and inclusion, they will benefit when governments focus on diversity and inclusion, a country will also benefit so it's not just for the speakers of pleasing women that they could go on stage. No, we all stand to benefit.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 23:25**

It's so interesting, isn't it? Now, Julian Sinclair has said "I agree leading with your values, and actually understanding the importance of equity are key to how we show up how we collaborate and demonstrates what we expect". I love that Matter superior solutions in the end, I need to introduce you both to each other, I'm sure you're going to be the best pals.

**Mette Johansson 24:01**

Looking forward to meet you Julian was a question in that as well. Or was it more of a statement which I'm also very happy with? Of course, yes.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 24:11**

I'm not sure of Julian, if you want to add a question, please do. And then I've got somebody else another LinkedIn user who says, "What do you know now about women keynoters that you may not have realised when you first started the organisation". Wow.

**Mette Johansson 24:32**

It's exactly what I just shared. When I started the organisation, it was really about okay, we want to have more diversity on speaking stages. And that's when we started recruiting more speakers and when we started training more speakers, we notice that "hey, women have sometimes a different style of speaking". Now I went to one of the speaker conventions and that was right after I had started keynote women's speakers. And there was this one guy he was doing, I don't know, he was doing handstand on the podium, and he was juggling swords. And I don't know had fire on stage and what have you. And at some point of time, he stopped talking to the audience went over the camera, "hang on, can you please shift the camera a little bit?" Right? You're going to a group of people here. Why are you focusing on that camera? I mean, that is such and the room was with 400. And something people in there, you can not stop. Because you want a recording of yourself when you are in a room of 400, and a few speakers. No, it's just a no go. So there was a lot of focus on the person. And to be honest, I don't even remember what his key message was. And another speaker who was talking about a humble brag here and a humble brag there, I'm thinking, "come on. I mean, you cannot be bragging and excusing, tucking it away by calling it a humble brag". So I was, I was making this checkmark of where I thought, there's a lot of ego onstage. And I didn't feel that that happened when women were on stage. So that is one thing that there is probably some testosterone that helps women have a little bit more of it, where it helps you go on stage. And yeah, you like your ego boosted, where there is there are more women who go out there and make themselves vulnerable and become inspirational because of it.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 26:37**

And that is beautiful to see, isn't it? And people listening, I'm sure you've experienced that too. But before we finish, can you let us know a little bit more about keynote women speakers. I know there are a couple of people on here who might be interested in finding out more about the training or to be considered to go on the platform.

**Mette Johansson 27:01**

Absolutely, [www.keynotewomen.com](http://www.keynotewomen.com), there is an application forum to join us. And we will of course, make sure that the speakers on a platform that they're inspirational, that they have a good topic of that is asked for by clients, we want to make sure that people have that experience of being in front of large audiences. It doesn't have to be, we're not only looking for top speakers, we're simply looking for inspirational experts in one field or the other. And it doesn't matter what field, we need speakers. We Need Diverse speakers in any topic area, even education, where you go to education conferences, they still a very big number of men, I wouldn't say majority, it was about to say majorities. That's why I stumbled, there's still a very large number of men who are speaking in comparison, if you see how many educators there are, which is I don't know, vast majority. That's not reflected on the conferences. So yes, we need speakers in leadership in well being in education, in adventure, in AI, in what have you all the topics out there for sure. So apply with us if you want to be listed. We're not that difficult. We're a nonprofit organisation. And we simply want to empower all women have make sure that women have voices that are heard, so join us. We're a nice group of people, right, Susan?

**Susan Heaton-Wright 28:29**

Lately, I'm in the EMEA branch. And we've got a lovely little community, there was one lady who was up to be a be the Lord Mayor of the local city, and she was messaging us via WhatsApp during the vote. She didn't get it but you know, she was she was there. She was on the ballot. They and it was very exciting and to see other people grow and to share their successes has been a really inspirational part of my journey.

**Mette Johansson 29:04**

I also want to make the plug of course for the training programme, we do have any programmes, we want to make more virtual training programmes as well. In Singapore, we run them very, very regularly in person, and going forward we will have more virtual as well training. So for those of you who aspire to become motivational public speakers or simply parents speaking at the office, do also follow us on our social media, on LinkedIn keynote women speakers will announce any new intakes for our training programmes. And of course, if you are in a company that has speaking events, that is hiring speakers, please also do keep us in mind. I'm sure we can deliver on whatever topic it is that your company is speaking about. We will have the right inspirational thought leader to rock your events.

**Susan Heaton-Wright 29:58**

Absolutely brilliant. Are there any other questions from people watching? So Julian says, "Great discussion. Susan. The Met is so exciting and encouraging for future inspirational speakers". Thank you so much. You've we've had some lovely comments today. And if anybody has got a question, after the broadcast has ended, please message me and I'll make sure that Mette gets the question, and we can easily continue the discussion. But I would like to thank you Mette because this is evening for you. And you've taken time out of your personal life to come and join us today. I am so grateful. I'm so inspired. Thank you.

**Mette Johansson 30:50**

I am thankful. Likewise, Susan, for you to have me here on your show. And thank you for all of those listening to us for having stayed tuned in.

**Susan Heaton-Wright** 31:04

Take care everybody. Bye bye.

**Intro** 31:08

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