

The co-founder and former CEO of Zipcar and co-founder and Executive Chairperson of Veniam, Robin Chase is the author of *Peers Inc: How People and Platforms are Inventing the Collaborative Economy and Reinventing Capitalism*. She has served on the board for countless NGO and government organizations and is also a prolific speaker in the field of transportation and innovation.

Robin Chase

CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS,
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“You have no idea that what you are about to do will change the direction of the rest of your life.” This is what Robin Chase would tell her 40-year-old self as she embarks on a career in transportation. Reflecting on the time now, she realizes she didn’t fully appreciate how the transportation sector would spark a professional love that would become her universe. But she has revelled in every moment since realizing through her work that the way we move and the tools that enable mobility are so central to everything in our daily lives.

“Transportation is the gateway to opportunity, education, fulfillment, health, recreation, income. Looking at climate change, it is the single largest growing sector we need to address. And when I think about equity, the difference between the people who have and have not is largely due to lack of mobility and the ability to get to places of health, education, jobs.”

Robin recognizes transportation is a complex issue. She believes, however, that in examining what a feminist transport system looks like, it is one that works effectively for both men and women, across all life stages and ages, and not just commuting men. Systemically, governments approach transportation as a means to move goods and people – all for the economy, and primarily for white men. It excludes other lifestyles, life phases, and ages, leaving out a lot of people. The impact this has on women in particular is continually overlooked by those planning transportation systems.

“Every woman from an early age is taught to be thoughtful about personal security when traveling early or late in the day or in less populated spaces. It is a constant background worry. Additionally, women do the bulk of childrearing and caregiving, traveling more often than men with another human who is less mobile, which complexifies all parts of the journey,” she says.

Robin feels a responsibility to use her profile and role to represent women. When attending a conference early in her career, she took note of the then-Governor of Texas who told the room that as leaders, women should never turn down a speaking opportunity because so few women get that platform. Taking it to heart, she got busier and busier, delivering upwards of 250 talks per year.

“I wanted to represent my gender by example, not just by word. Providing an example of an honest, empathetic, influential woman has been my way to inspire others.”

She notes that while at one time she would be the only woman in the room, she is positively moved by how much that is changing. Robin has been struck in the past few years by how so many young women are entering this space, and emphasizes how important this is to the future shifts towards more gender-equitable transportation.





“It is the power of our diversity that enables us to answer a whole suite of different problems. The dominant male culture is what got us here. The future needs to have new life experiences and approaches to correct those mistakes and provide solutions. When I look out at the world at this stage in my life, I am impressed by current young practitioners. They give me enormous hope and inspiration and their voices inspire me.”

As a final reflection, Robin challenges people to be aware of our comfort zones and be willing to look outside them. It was not something she thought about until she witnessed the ease with which male colleagues can bond so quickly. In the transition from her role at CEO of ZipCar to her male successor, she was shocked by how easily he fell into rapport with existing male investors and important connections to the company. Relationships she had spent years establishing were instantly created, and while at first it was frustrating, Robin realized she has the same experience with women, immediately having a tighter bond than with male colleagues.

“It was in this moment that I appreciated how we as humans create faster bonds to people who look like us. I can appreciate this in a positive way, but with a note of caution. We need to recognize and work harder to acknowledge the extra but important effort needed to connect with people who are not like us because our work can be more enriched for it.”