

Zipcar founder: Entrepreneurs say 'I can do that'

By Susan Gonsalves CORRESPONDENT



Robin Chase, car-sharing innovator.
(T&G Staff/STEVE LANAVA)

Robin Chase

Age: 56

Resident: Cambridge, Mass

Family: Spouse, Roy Russell; three children

Education:

Wellesley College

MIT Sloan School of Management

Loeb Fellowship at the Harvard
Graduate School of Design

WORCESTER — Robin Chase, best known as the founder and former CEO of Zipcar, the largest car-sharing network in the world, urges individuals, companies and governments to look for "excess capacity," use their assets more efficiently and find ways to find value in the resources they have.

Ms. Chase was the guest presenter at The Worcester Economic Club's Speakers Series meeting at College of the Holy Cross on Wednesday evening. Her topic was "Sharing: A Simple Approach for Maximizing ROI" — return on investment.

In addition to establishing Zipcar 15 years ago, Ms. Chase is the co-founder and board member of BuzzCar, a peer-to-peer car service based in France and Veniam 'Works, a vehicle network communications company that turns cars into mobile Wi-Fi hot spots.

Ms. Chase said in an interview before her speech that the world is moving into an age in which every sector of the economy can get the most out of its assets by sharing and seeking innovation. The key to successful ventures is collaboration and building "platforms for participation."

As an example, she cited a stretch of 130 miles of roadway in Bogotá, Colombia, that shuts down to vehicle traffic from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. and opens it up for bicycling, exercising, sunbathing, dancing and more by 2 million people.

When asked how she came to be involved in the car-sharing realm, Ms. Chase replied, "Transportation fascinates me. It is the center of the universe." She said that people rely on transportation for every facet of their lives — education, work, entertainment — and yet still undervalue its importance.

Pointing out that individuals typically spend \$9,000 annually or 18 percent of their income on their cars, Ms. Chase said that figure could be cut down to 10 percent if car sharing alternatives were adopted to get to and from work. The saved money can "stay local," she said.

"There are a spectrum of opportunities to use your car when you need to, but save enough money otherwise to lead a happy life and do things like go out to eat," Ms. Chase said.

"Urbanization is increasing and cities cannot accommodate cars as the only method. There are faster, cheaper, better and smarter ways of doing things."

James J. Paugh III, president of the Worcester Economic Club and WorkersComp Analytics LLC, described Ms. Chase as "the brains behind the world's foremost car sharing company," adding, "Robin truly captures today's green entrepreneurial spirit."

The quality an entrepreneur needs, she said, is the ability to look at a problem and think, "I'd like to try to fix that."

"Entrepreneurs see problems as opportunities and personally want to give it a shot," she said. "... It is really about being a maker versus a buyer. If you say, 'I can do that,' then you are an entrepreneur."

She is the recipient of many awards in innovation, design and environment and was featured in Time's 100 Most Influential People, Fast Company Fast 50 Innovators and Business Week Top 10 designers.

A graduate of Wellesley College and the MIT School of Management, Ms. Chase was a Loeb Fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. She is also founder and former chief executive officer of GoLoco, an online ride-sharing community.

Ms. Chase said she hopes the audience takes away the message, "Climate change will kill us all and it's time to get with the program."

Companies need to evolve and organize so that they are delivering more quickly but at a lower cost, she said.

The event was co-presented by the Young Professional Women's Association and sponsored by the College of the Holy Cross and Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Source: Telegram.com