

her story of rising

An interview with Melissa Mattedi

General Manager, BorgWarner Brazil



I'm Kristin Kolesar, Mentor Coach for the Women Rising® program and today I'm sitting down with Melissa Mattedi, General Manager at BorgWarner Brazil. Melissa is an alumni of the Women Rising® program. This is her story of rising.

Kristin Kolesar: Welcome Melissa. You are serving as General Manager at BorgWarner Brazil correct?

Melissa Mattedi: Yes, since January 2024.

KK: When did you go through the **Women Rising®** program?

MM: We started in February 2020, with the founders of BenchStrength Coaching meeting us in Detroit for the first workshop. And then, when I came back in the middle of March, COVID-19 exploded around the globe. So, it was right in the beginning of the pandemic crisis.

KK: Wow, I'm sure things probably did not feel very stable then, in the middle of a pandemic.

MM: No! All my coaching sessions with my coach, Sheila, were done from my home office because our offices were closed. Having those coaching sessions saved me because I was anxious with my job, with everything. And then being coached by someone like Sheila helped me a lot and saved me from my anxiety.

KK: Yeah, the pandemic was a crazy thing to live through, and to have a coach coming alongside you during that point in time [sounds incredibly valuable]. One of the cool things about the program is that you get to partner with a coach.

MM: [Being in the **Women Rising®** program] helped me go through this period of the pandemic. I had enough time to read the *How Women Rise* book and discuss it with my coach who was supporting me. That was great.

KK: When you went through the program, were you in a general manager role?

MM: No, I was a finance supervisor for a very small business inside BorgWarner Brazil. I had only one direct report. I worked for a very small division and I worked with six branches such as Operations, Quality, Engineering, HR, and Purchasing. They were my partners.

KK: Going through the program was an opportunity for you to work on skills and maybe move to the next level, so **did you move from there to general manager after the program ended?**



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MM: Yes. Before joining BorgWarner, I was the finance controller manager at another company where I had a bigger role, taking care of 13 people – the whole finance department. But I decided to leave that company because of another manager who did not respect me. That's when I moved to BorgWarner into a smaller role. It was a step back from what I had already achieved.

I was suffering a lot because I was telling myself "I'm not so good, so this guy is better than me. If I want to sit in the other chair, or have a different role, I need to be like him. I need to follow him, observe his behavior because he is good, and I am not." So, from my viewpoint I needed to act like him if I wanted to advance in BorgWarner.

The **Women Rising®** program helped me to discover my strengths, to truly believe they are unique to me, and to use them to my advantage when I communicate and in my work. The program opened my eyes and helped me realize that I don't need to change. I'll always be myself, and I need to respect the person I am.

I need to use my talents not only to promote myself, but to get things done, to be seen, and to be valued. Then others will see the authenticity in my personality, in my day-by-day activities, or in my behaviors. And [authenticity] will be my powerful strength. So that, for me, was disruptive. I had a lot of colleagues from the past that were fearful of me because I applied pressure and expected high performance. I was always thinking, "Oh, I need to change that, because the other guy, he was so kind and friendly, and I am not sweet." I can be friendly, I can be nice, but I am not like that. If I needed to move away from being me, it would not feel authentic. Once I discovered my unique strengths, I realized I could use them to improve as a leader and move to the next level.

KK: That's great. It was almost an awakening for you of what *is* it to be a leader that leads authentically. To be true to yourself and *that* really is your superpower as a leader.

MM: Yes.

KK: It's understanding what you bring to the table and leaning into that. That's wonderful. I love that.

MM: I finished the program in May and then, with the situation with COVID, I was promoted to the main role over all of the plants in June 2020.

KK: That went pretty quickly!

MM: Yeah, the pandemic helped [my promotion] to move quickly. My coach and I did some exercises together from the book where I had to list what I wanted to do in the world, my contribution, etc. There was a chapter that talked about choices and decisions. With my coach's help, I wrote out four options for my career: to pursue something inside BorgWarner, to pursue the chair position (my boss's position at that time), to pursue another position in another BorgWarner globally, and the fourth was to look for something in the market and move to another company. With her help I wrote out these four plans. And then my boss ended up leaving the company for pandemic-related reasons. I applied for his role, went through all the interviews, and landed the position.



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KK: Since the program you've obviously grown into a more authentic leader and you have moved into a higher role as a general manager. **What are you most proud of? What are you celebrating about your own personal growth?**

MM: I can always celebrate [laughs]. I assumed the role as plant manager in January 2024, so I was in the finance role for 3.5 years. Even in the finance role, it went beyond finance for me. I know that if I combine finance and operations, I can be a better finance controller, so I never work towards being excellent in finance alone. I always work with the team, and then work toward excellence with the plants, looking forward and considering what is good for the business.

The program and the book helped me take ownership of my achievements and make my contributions more visible, not only to my local team, but to others in BorgWarner. I was proud to be recognized in the controller's role for being a very good partner to the general manager and for administrating the business. When they decided to put me in this chair [General Manager of BorgWarner Brazil], it was because of my honesty and the way that I run things, how I value transparency down to every single paper I sign. That's one of the things that I am proud of.

And the other thing is that I think I matured a lot, because I used to have this way of getting straight to the point or being "tough." But now as a manager of managers, if someone comes to me and I know that I need to be tough, I now also know that I need to step back, reflect, look at the situation from the perspective of others, and change the way that I am speaking to them.

I can still support them and get straight to the point, but I can demonstrate and show things in a different way. That mindset helps me a lot. When I do that and I see the effects, I am proud of that. I compare and ask myself, "How was I reacting before and how am I approaching it today?" I see that I get very good results with the new mindset. Being the same, being straight to the point, but changing the way that I am executing.

KK: That's great. I love those reflections, and just that noticing about yourself. **When you think about all the different parts of the program, was there any part that you found to be most valuable?**

MM: Learning about our strengths and discussing those with all the other women. A lot of us were dealing with the same situations and had the same questions. The strengths were so well linked with our habits. It was important for me to learn what strengths I have and to look at how I can use them to break some of my habits. I am always sharing my story with other women going through the program to try and help them use the program in the best way they can, leveraging the coaching aspect, and learning how the strengths and habits are connected.

KK: **What advice would you give other women considering going through the program? Or what advice would you even give yourself, if you could go back in time?**



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MM: Try to execute differently, try to speak differently, and then see if you see the results you are looking for. Observe the results that you achieve with that. I can only change my approach. I can't change others. I can only make observations of what is working and what isn't working that might lead to change in others.

My second piece of advice is you don't need to change who you are. You need to be you. Just learning who you are as a leader and leaning into those strengths, and being able to look at your habits, allows you to be an authentic leader.

KK: Is there anything else you'd like to share?

MM: **Women Rising®** is a wonderful program, and I hope to see more women continuing to rise with the help of the program. If anyone needs support in that, I am here to help.

KK: Thank you so much for taking the time to share your story with us. It was lovely to hear about your experience going through the program. It sounds like you benefitted from it, and I wish you continued success as you move forward and continue to rise. Thank you.

MM: Thank you, Kristin.

