

INTERRUPT

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INTERRUPTING
NARRATIVES TO
INSPIRE
DIVERSITY
IN MALE
DOMINATED
JOB POSITIONS
AND INDUSTRIES

editor's notes



It's hard to believe that conversations around breaking barriers and overcoming equality are still to be had. However, Interrupt invites you to listen, learn from and celebrate the women of Leeds who are contributing to the dismantling of negative stereotypes that exist around women in the workplace. This campaign aims to create a space for audiences to feel inspired and empowered when entering their workplace through exhibiting those defying glass ceilings day to day. Study after study concludes the benefits of a diverse and equal workplace (duh), so why are we still fighting for it? It all starts by challenging implicit bias'. so I invite you to read, engage and unite with a movement that elevates success stories and encourages diversity in your city.

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TO

SUBJECT

Dear Sir/Madam,

~~Sorry to bother you but...~~

~~Sorry to ask~~

~~Apologies for the inconvenience~~

SEND

RY

WHY YOU SHOULD STOP OVER APOLOGISING:

It can invalidate your position:

The word subconsciously places you secondary to who you're communicating with, putting them in control of the situation.

Deteriorates confidence:

Don't let it trick you into thinking you're not as powerful or good as others. Normal life is riddled with small mistakes, it does not change your success.

Weakens your authority:

The more you apologise, the more you feed the narrative that you cannot defend yourself.

HOW TO STOP OVER APOLOGISING

Be aware of the habit and limit the phrase to when it is really necessary. Reflecting more on situations may also help clarify your position in the situation and regain your autonomy.

Rephrase:

Try replacing "I'm sorry" with "excuse me" or "thank you". Assertiveness can get you places.

While saying sorry is a norm instilled in human behaviour since we were children, the expectation bears heavier on women to remain 'lady-like' into their adult life. Count how many times you say sorry for something you shouldn't be saying sorry for in a week - you will surprise yourself. How many times have you accidentally apologised to an object, apologised when someone has bumped into you or when someone else is upset.

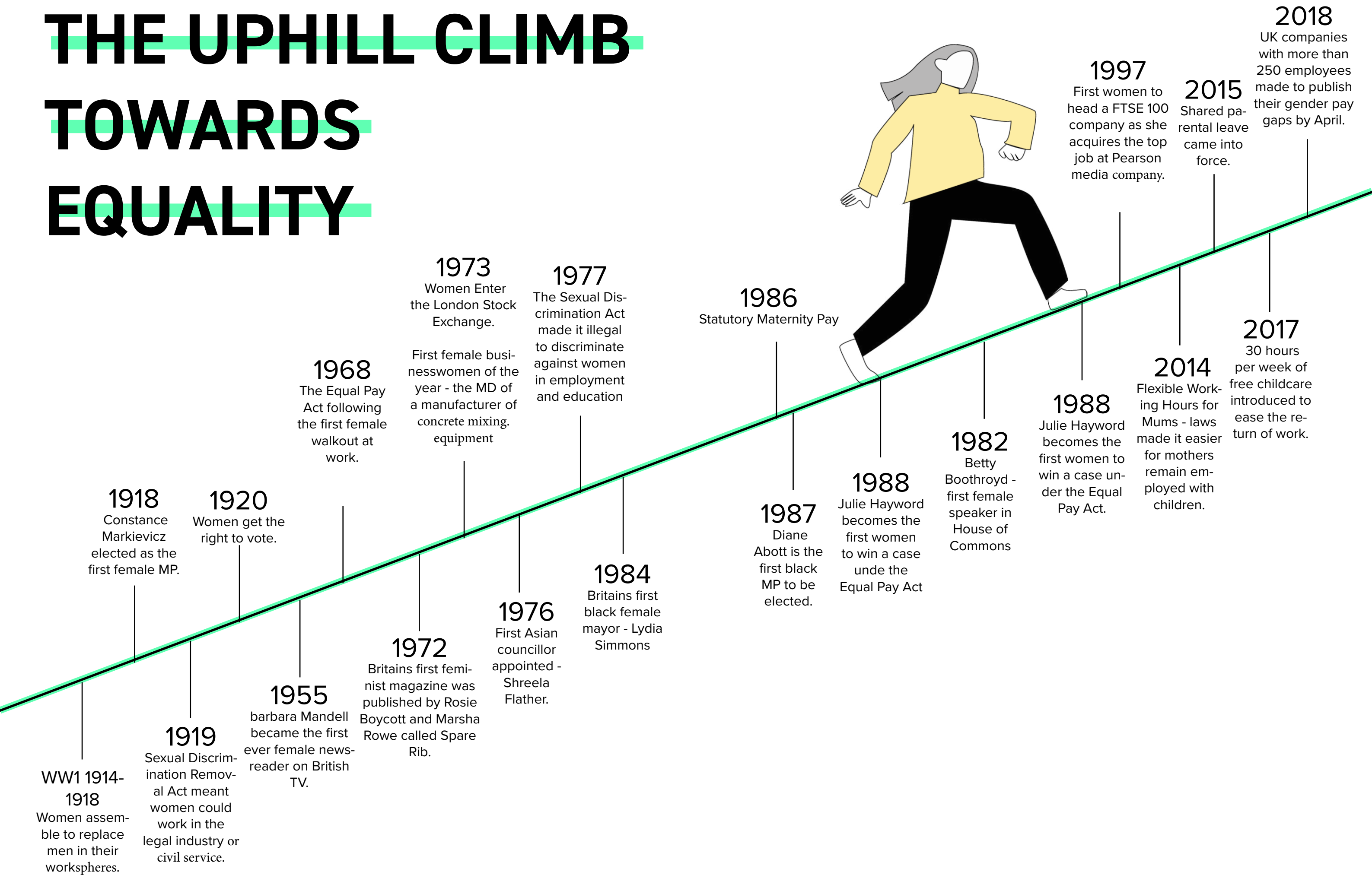
Obviously don't be a d*ck but at the same time don't let the ingrained people pleasing persona

women are too often expected to fulfill, invalidate your ability to be unapologetically confident and secure.

Clinical Psychologist Susan Heitler in her New York Times op-ed article about the topic wrote:

"It's a Trojan horse for genuine annoyance, a tactic left over from centuries of having to couch basic demands in palatable packages to get what we want. All that exhausting maneuvering is the etiquette equivalent of a vestigial tail"

THE UPHILL CLIMB TOWARDS EQUALITY



LOCAL INSPIRATIONS TO REMEMBER



Formed the Leeds Women's Suffrage Society in 1890.

ISABELLA
FORD

Founding member of the Leeds branch of the National Union of Teachers.

In 1906 she demonstrated at the Houses of Parliament and was consequently jailed. She continued her campaign in the USA in the 1920s.



MARY
GATHORPE



LEONARA
COHEN

She smashed the glass case which held the crown jewels in 1913. She also went on hunger strike in prison. Went on to be Emmeline Pankhursts body-guard

A few of the many empowered women of Leeds in recent history who have defied the inequality that faced them. While there are so many before and after them these are some Yorkshire lasses to remember.



Met Christabel Pankhurst and Isabella Ford at Owen College and became a suffragette.

Sacrificed her job as headmistress to campaign and spent 2 months in prison.

DORA
MARS DEN



FLORENCE BELL

Graduated from The University of Cambridge and secured a PhD from Leeds in 1938. Florence ended up making huge advances in the field of molecular biology and DNA.



IVY BENSON

Saw fame in the 1940s in her all-female swing band. She advocated for equality with male musicians. In 1943 her band became BBC's registered band which recieved a backlash of complaints. However, it was concluded her band was still worthy of the spot.

DORIS
STOREY

An olympic swimmer in 1938. Doris set the world record for the 200m breast-stroke - this remained unbroken for over 20 years.



ALICE
BACON



Yorkshires first MP in 1945. While Westminster was dominated by men, Alice interrupted the normative boundaries and continued to be a spokesperson for Leeds for many years.

PENNY SUCHARITKUL



“I’M FIESTY, I’M FEROCIOUS, I LIKE TO STAND UP FOR MYSELF AND I THINK THAT SERVES ME WELL IN MARTIAL ARTS AND IN MY CAREER IN THE FUTURE AS A SURGEON”

“Hello my name is Penny Sucharitkul and I’m a part time kickboxing instructor at the University of Leeds and I study Medicine full time. This is my sixth year in the Leeds University kickboxing club now. I really enjoy it and wanted to get back into teaching so I started getting involved in the assistant instructor course. I enjoy helping people into the club, helping people integrate into University and now this year I am a fully qualified kickboxing instructor for the University of Leeds and it is the best part time job ever.”

What inspired you to get into kickboxing?

“As you can see, I am quite a small woman. I am like 5 feet, so I wanted to do something out of the box, not just ballet. My Dad forced me to do Ballet for 9 years, and I hated every moment of it, so I rebelled against my Dad and did Karate, Kickboxing and cool sports that completely break stereotypes. It keeps me fully fit; it keeps me mentally disciplined, and it really helps me alongside my studies as well. Doing kickboxing has massively helped me find my voice.”

How do you think martial arts can empower women?

“Running kickboxing classes in front of 100 students from the University of Leeds, I’m able to give a speech and project my voice so that everyone can listen to me and hear what I’m saying, despite being a 5 foot, very small looking young woman.

It’s definitely given me a lot of confidence and I would advise any woman no matter what age, size, ability you are to do some kind of martial arts.”

Have you ever felt intimidated in this sporting field? If so, how have you combatted this?

“I would say times when I’m sparring someone larger than me, sometimes I do get a bit anxious about how much power they’re using on me, but I think it’s important to communicate with your partner and in our club we’re quite friendly about that. If someone’s hitting too hard or doing something you don’t want to do, it’s important to use your voice and martial arts helps you to find your voice and say you know, “that not ok/can you hit me a bit lighter/I’m not here to train like that today. I think that’s something I’ve definitely taken away from martial arts.”

Is there a female figure you have found inspiring in your life?

“I actually follow a lot of the Karate Olympians, especially the gold medalists there’s a Spanish Olympian female (Sandra Sanchez). She’s 40 years old and took a gold away from the last Olympics and that really inspired me to keep going even into older age. I think it’s so inspiring to have these female role models in martial arts which don’t usually get talked about, but I’ve been talking about them and training from their videos.”



Hiya Niamh, introduce yourself!

“I’m Niamh I’m 20 years old. I’m from the North-East originally but I’m based in Leeds. I’m in my final year for Digital Media and I do a lot of freelance work for electronic music. So, I do freelance journalism, I’m Mixmags weekend editor, I do a bit of DJ’ing, freelance writing more generally for other publications and artists and DJs. I have a podcast called Belta which shares people in electronic music from the north, but I like to get people on from the North-East because it’s very underrepresented. I don’t know where I want to go with it all; I’m just doing things I enjoy at the minute. I started writing for a little uni magazine called Lippy Magazine and it kind of all snowballed from there, I found out more about freelancing, pitching etc.”

Traditionally, electronic music is viewed as a very male dominated industry. How would you like to see this change and how are you contributing to this change?

“Electronic music is a very male dominated industry, straight white male. There are things changing, were getting more women, women from marginalised communities involved, more nonbinary, transgender people. However, there is definitely still a bit of a stigma I’d say. I’ve been asked multiple times, you know, who have you slept with to get into this industry, that kind of thing, and thats very problematic, even if just said as a joke.

It is great to see that there are more women being put into roles, we definitely need a bit more equality in terms of line ups on festival and event bills. It’s great to see, especially in Leeds locally, that there are places that are making more of an effort to do that. In less of a tokenistic way as well, because there’s always having a token women involved and then actually wanting women involved, because there’s so many talented women and people that need to be showcased but aren’t.

I think personally, I really want to contribute to that through my work. When I do my Mixmag work, I’ll prioritise stories that are from women, transgender, non-binary people. That’s a very small thing, but when it’s going out on a massive wide-world publication...And then as well, even with Belta, I try to get women on, whether that is women working at the forefront as a DJ or performer, or in the background.”



What is your proudest achievement so far within the freelance work you’ve been doing?

“I’d say for sure that my biggest achievement so far is being sent abroad to cover festivals. It’s so surreal when you’re having your festival ticket paid for, your travel paid for, your hotel paid for or your camping... and you’re in glamping. And then as well recently I got asked to go down to the BBC to work with BBC Radio 1 dance for the future dance show. That was actually asked of me because the producers listened to my podcast and found my podcast. So that kind of does show, these things that you do, even if it’s a lot of effort, they pay off.”

How did you feel when you first started performing/spoeaking in your podcasts?

“When I first started, whether that’s publishing my first feature, doing my podcast, publishing that first episode, or even playing out a show in mixes, it was a big step for me. I feel like even though I’m all right at speaking outwardly, I am the most self-conscious person in the world. You know, overthinker, anxious, all that good stuff. So, it was definitely a big hurdle to get over that, especially as a woman, it’s getting over all the judgement. And even now, I’m still very early on in my career and any time a new podcast episode goes out, I’m internally so anxious about what’s going to be said, how’s it gonna go down. Even if a festival review piece goes out, what are people gonna think of my thoughts, am I valid enough to give these judgements in a global publication? Youve got to have a thick skin in that sense.”

NIAMH



INGRA

How welcoming have you found the electronic music scene to women in Leeds? Are there spaces exclusively for non-male producers in the local community that are creating change? Is there still room for improvement?

“There’s definitely a lot of really great spaces that are popping up for women, non-binary, queer folk. There’s a great club night called Aurora Sound. They do a great job spotlighting these people... these communities that otherwise wouldn’t get potential to. Even in BPM ourselves, we deliberately try to put on events that are specifically for those communities in a safer feeling space. So we’ve done mixing workshops for women, non-binary, queer people. It’s rare to have a set up for them to do things like vinyl mixing which is associated with ‘old-school, purist’ associations.

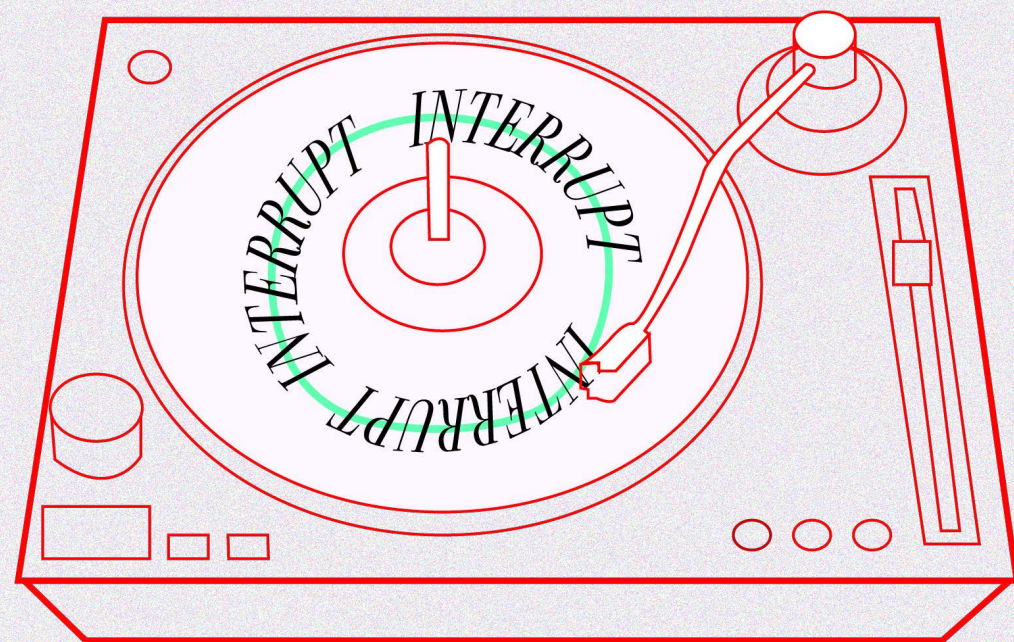
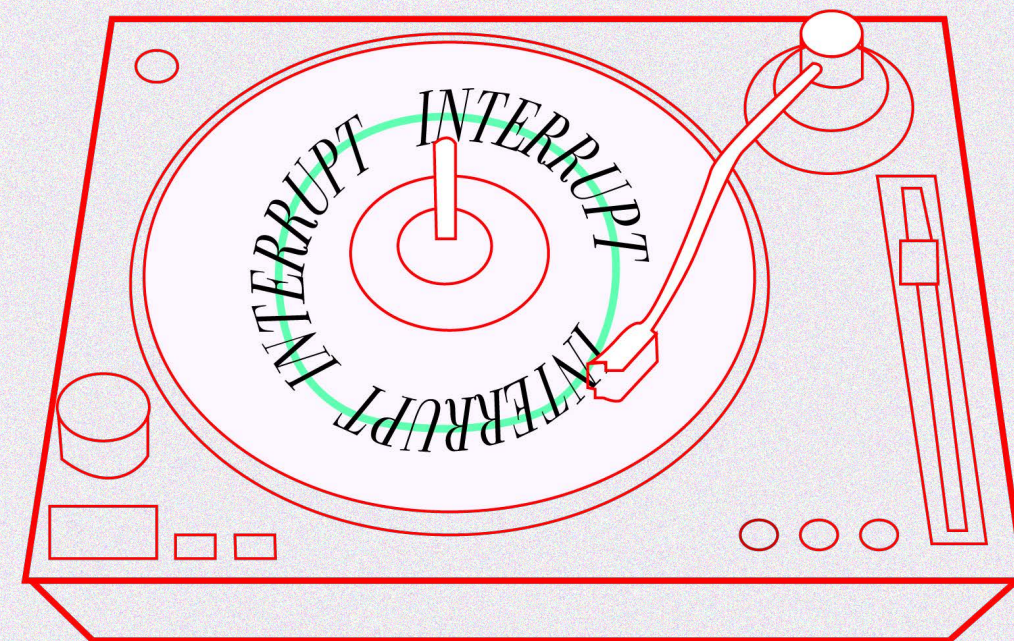
There’s always room for improvement, there’s always events that you see where it’s like c’mon you’ve got like 8 straight white guys playing, Leeds is way more diverse than that, reflect it.”

Who is your favourite female producer at the moment?

“I could probably say different person every time, but right now my favourite female producer is a girl called YTSS, she’s great, she’s polish, she’s coming to play Wire next week at Leeds and I’m so excited. But then I love Ellen Allien, she’s an icon, she’s a pioneer for the sound of women in techno, she’s brilliant.”

How would you describe yourself in a couple of words?

“I’d go with energetic and considerate, because in the work that I do I like to ensure that everyone is satisfied and happy. Whether that’s the audience and readers listening to myself, or the people that are involved. At the end of the day if I’m interviewing someone, I wanna make it feel like we’re just having a chat, a conversation, not some weird interviewee vs journalist power dynamic. So yeah, I’d say considerate.”





Introduce yourself! What are your roles in tech and how did you get to where you are now?

"I'm Lianne potter, I'm head of security operations here at asda, im also a cyber anthropologist fo the AnthroSecurist, I've been in cybersecurity now for six years and I'm based in Leeds. I haven't always wanted to be in cybersecurity, I haven't always wanted to be in tech. It wasn't my oiriginal career path. I wanted actually to be an astronaut, I remember telling my teacher that in primary school and she just said, 'girls aren't really good at math maybe pick something else.' I became a wedding photographer for 10 years after university. While I was doing that I also started working on my masters as an anthropologist, so studying cultures. But what I was really interested in was digital cultures and I managed to find a role where I could be a project manager at a charity and the aim of that charity was to 'solve destitution in Leeds,' so we were given this big pot and money and told to go off and do it. I was noticing was that people's barriers to getting

out of destitution what the fact that they couldnt access these online resources. So, I became fascinated with what is known as the 'digital divide' which suggests that if you do not have access to the internet or being able to access online services, you are socially disadvantaged in some sort of way. I loved using my anthropology and digital anthropology in that way for that role, but unfortunately that project ended so I had to find another job. I developed a real passion for digital and technology and thought how am I gonna use this to really help the people I was seeing coming into my services, so I decided to teach myself how to code. To me if seemed like the easiest way to do it was to become a software developer, so I spent every evening and weekend, using free online resources how to code. Within about 5 months I was job ready, so I applied for a job and started becoming a software developer at NHS Digital. Typically, in an organisation, particularly a tech organisation, not everyone wants to do cybersecurity, its often seen a blocker, but I just fell head over heels in love with it and haven't look back since."

Did you face any adversity/imposter syndrome along the way? If so, what were your methods of dealing with this?

"I was really excited about getting into tech, and I remember my first day at my job I was really, really excited. My team hadn't arrived yet because I was early, and I heard someone say "you know why they've hired a load of women recently don't you - to improve diversity numbers." It was like a gut punch. I'd done all this effort, I'd done the interview process, just like anyone else had done and just to hear that, luckily not from one of my team, but just to know that that kind of attitude was proliferating absolutely devastated me. I think if I were a little bit younger at the time, (I was an older career retainer), I probably wouldn't have said anything, but when my manager asked how is things are, I responded 'not good actually, can I have a word' and spoke to him about things. But what was even more annoying was when they approached the person who said it, they responded saying "I'm sorry what i said made you feel that way" rather than I'm sorry for what I said. That made me annoyed, but it inspired me actually. I thought to myself I'm never gonna let anyone else feel like this again, so I went out there and did, and have been doing, a lot of talks about how to get into tech from different backgrounds, about the importance of diversity in tech and diversity of thought and opinions and experiences to improve tech. So, in a way I sort of thank that person, but it was really tough at the time.

Imposter syndrome is something that I think everyone in tech has, I don't think it ever really goes away. It's really something that you just have to learn to live with, rather than hope that you'll live without, because you're never gonna know everything and there's always gonna be someone smarter than you, but its' understanding your capacity to be interested, to be curious about things will always win out. When it comes to imposter syndrome, ill know ill never get over it, I'll always feel like the most fraudulent person in the room. But there must be a reason why im there and i have to keep reminding myself that."

From my understanding you are an advocate in the local community for diversity, accessibility and equality in tech. How do you go about advocating for this?

"I think it's really important to be a visual representation of what can be and to share your story.

So, I go out and do a lot of work with the community enterprise group. I'm on the board of Women in Leeds Digital and their aim is to ensure that we don't have a brain drain when it comes to technology, but it's also having real advocates of what can be achieved in tech and ive achieved a lot in a really short space of time and i think tech enables people to do that. You can have such an amazing career in tech that you can't really have in many other industries because it's just so fluid and there's so many areas you can go to."



What is something you're proud of in your career?

"I'm really proud of is my involvement with InnovateHer which is another community enterprise aimed at making sure girls want to carry on and take computer science and stem subjects from primary school onto university, because studies have shown girls are very interested in that subject, until puberty hits and they start becoming aware more of gender differences in general and then it kind of just drops like a stone. So, it's really important to make sure that we enable girls by saying you can really carry on with this, it's not a 'boys subject'."

How has your experience been as a female business owner?

"I've found being a female business owner has unusual challenges, for most part I think if you've got a good thing to sell, it's been relatively OK. But, I remember talking to different types of investors and it hasn't been unusual to be asked - 'business partner, is that a man?' - kinda that reinforcement of that you couldn't possibly do this on your own.

particularly when I had a female business partner for a menopause app that I did, double whammy you know, two female business leaders and also a product about female health. But, when you spoke to other women, that kind of fed your enthusiasm for why you're doing these things, it kind of spurred you on. Without that female support, it would have been very difficult."

What advice would you give to women, non-binary and transgender people considering a career in tech?

"We really need to be mindful of the absolute richness of bringing all different kinds of backgrounds into technology. When it comes to the things we're creating, the products, the services that we're building for others, we need to be really mindful of how all our customers have different backgrounds and we need to in some way replicate that. If we just hire all the same people - skin colour, sexuality, gender, age etc, we are

just gonna get this wash of one experience and it's never going to be for everyone when tech really should be because it's one of the great democratisers. We really need to ensure that we have that human element, and that comes from diverse backgrounds."

Is there anything you wish people knew more about the tech and digital sector? Any misconceptions to clear?

"It's a lot easier to learn than I think than a lot of technologists make out. I think there has been quite a lot of stakes in making out like it's really difficult and that's helped salaries, promotions and bamboozling some business' but I have to say that tech really can be taught. As soon as people realise it's just like learning any other skill, it's only the same as that, just a different version of it. So, I think what I'd say is when it comes to technology, you just need to pull that curtain and see that it's just people behind there."

How would you describe yourself in a couple of words?

"I would describe myself as ambitious, passionate and really eager to learn all the time. That's what I love about tech - I don't need to be a master of one subject, I could learn about everything there is to know about it because, especially in cyber security, it's all very applicable. I love learning, that's my main drive."



REMINDER OF
THE DAY

IT'S REALLY
IMPORTANT TO
BE A
VISUAL
REPRESENTATION
OF WHAT CAN BE
AND TO SHARE
YOUR STORY

-LIANNE POTTER

NICOLA SIMPSON

Introduce yourself!

"I'm Nicola Simpson and I've worked at west Yorkshire fire and rescue service for 13 years. The last 3 years as a crew commander but prior to that a firefighter."

Did you always know you wanted to be a firefighter?

"No, I don't think so but I'm 45 now and when I were at school you weren't encouraged to do jobs that were seen as boy jobs. I think if anyone had come and sat and spoke to me, it would've been one of the options. So, I didn't know, but I did always think in the back of my mind, I'd like to do that."

Only 6% of firefighters in West Yorkshire are women. What has your experience been like in such a male dominated industry?

"When I joined, there were a 10-year gap before there were any recruitment, so within this last 3 or 4 years, we've recruited a different type of person, they're a bit more open minded and lived in the real world. I think in all, my experience has been quite positive. I'm not intimidated neither by a group. I've done a lot of sport and have done male dominated sport, like when I came to this job, I'd just spent 4 months in Thailand training in muay thai gym and you know, that's male dominated in itself."

So, I were kind of used to proving myself, putting myself out there. But my experience has been good. I think all in all, people have been welcoming, you don't have to be this 'fit strong male' to do this job.

What more needs to be done to close the gendergap in this industry?

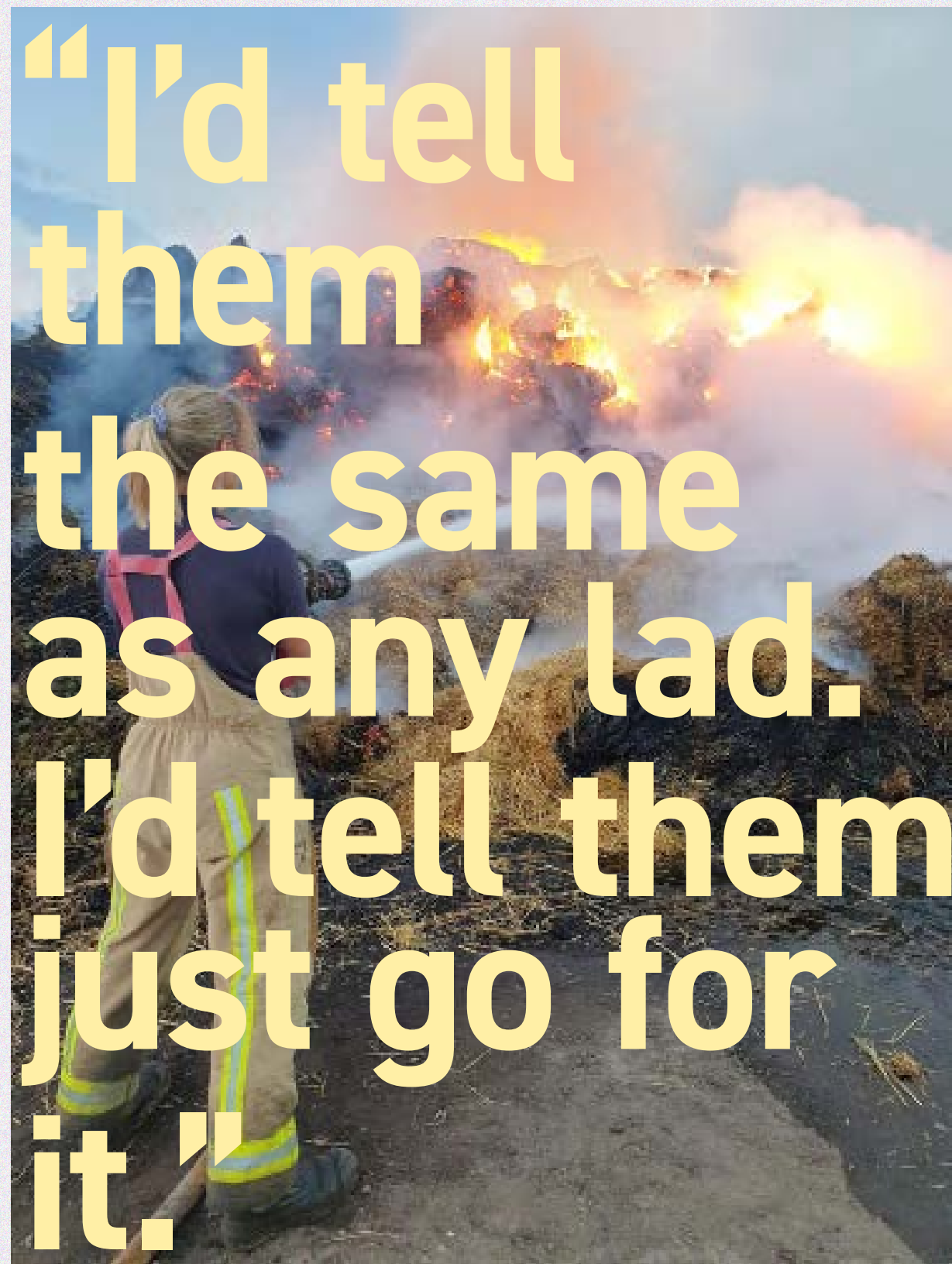
We've got a positive actions officer and every trainee course now has a handful of women on. I think my course even had 3 women on which was unusual for 10 years ago but that's not unusual anymore, that's the norm. I suppose what would close the gap a little bit more would be to just keep raising that awareness. I think one of our focus' now from the positive actions angle is for women from ethnic minority groups, I think once you get a couple of faces people can relate to, the ball starts rolling. I think to close to gaps we need to turn to ethnic minority women and say work with us!"

Is there anything you wish people knew?

"It is a team so you don't all have to be big and be able to shift 200 kilos in weight, because you work together, and everyone good at different aspects of the job. You put them all together and thats how you get a team. So you don't have to be the biggest and the strongest, you have to have a reasonable amount of strength and you have to be able to assist but you're never on your own, you're always with other people."



"I'd tell them the same as any lad. I'd tell them just go for it."



HANNAH NATALIE-HOSANEE

Introduce yourself!

"So, my name is Hannah Natalie-Hosanee, I'm based out of Manchester, but I have been running a comms brand agency, Consume Comms, for the last 7 years across Yorkshire and the North, working in industries across financial services, engineering, tech and also events as well."

What are some of your biggest achievements so far?

"I think probably one of the achievements I have is running a community event. So, I launched Glug Leeds, I ran it for 6 years and it was one of the longest standing Glugs around the world. So, Glug was a Global Community of Creatives, so its 33 chapters worldwide; we had our little stake in Leeds and ran it every other month for 6 years and had about 100 people turn up each month."



"If we don't allow everyone into the conversation, we'll never see change happen."

That was one of my biggest achievements, to keep that going with my co-hosts and to build a strong community. The people who came to that still say that's where they found their opportunities. And then personally, when I got voted on the Northern Power Women's Future List, it was very unexpected, I didn't think anyone knew who I was [...] It was nice to get on that list amongst other people in the North."

Conventionally the sectors you work can be male dominated, how have you navigated this?

"Working across male dominated industries, I suppose it happened by default, I didn't really pick it that way, I kind of went into financial services and then into engineering and I don't think I ever felt intimidated, but obviously I was aware that I was in the minority. So, I think that being said, this side, maturing into my career and working with empowering women, I realised that its more about ensuring that we have those kind of role models that we can look to, whether that be gender specific, or whether they be about being diverse in having a good range of people that you can look for. That needs to happen organically."

I don't think I ever felt intimidated; I actually felt very nurtured in those careers. I always found it easier working under male managers, because unfortunately I had a situation when I was going through my career, we kind of refer it to pulling the ladder up, where I was working with female managers and they kind of didn't want to support your progress which is really sad. So that's something you have to be aware of as well."

What advice would you give as a women in a leadership role?

"I would definitely say that if you want to give back and be in a position where you're nurturing junior people through, then it's a great thing to put yourself out there and be visible. Mentorship is a great thing to do. But what I've realised over the years is sometimes you need a bit of support, so go and seek that training. There's loads of free courses, go through mentorship yourself because sometimes you can be super well intentioned to want to help somebody, or even when you're managing your own team, but then you don't have the structure or you don't know how to it to the best of your ability."

What do you enjoy most about your job?

"I like the people side, I really enjoy sitting down with people, listening to them, finding out what their stories are and helping them tell that, but also helping them realise what the best bits of themselves or their brand is. Sometimes when you ask people what their unique selling points are, they don't really have an answer, so I really enjoy helping them realise the value of themselves as well. I guess it's that empowerment when you speak to somebody and the light bulb happens, they realise that they are worth more than what they think, and they go off with a little bit more of a spring in their step."



How do you hope to empower women to diversify the tech sector?

"Empowering Women with Tech [a social enterprise showcasing female role models in tech]. was founded by Natasha Zelem who is an absolute powerhouse force to work with, Nat is the most vivacious person and I'm the most practical person, so I think together we made quite a good team. Working on Empowering Women and being exposed to so many females across Science, Tech and Digital, really showed me the breadth of what can be achieved from just mindset. We worked with Helen Sharman, who is the first British astronaut, she never felt like the only women in the room, she was an astronaut, it was her skillset and career first that she focused on. She didn't focus on the fact that she was the only female there. She focused on what she was good at, and I think a lot of the women that we spoke to, they never focused on their gender, they focused on their skills."

How would you describe yourself in a couple of words?

"I would say that I am a little bit chaotic because I don't ever think about things. I always dive into things. I always think it's better to just begin and then see how things go and then you can always change it later. So, I think my friends would say that I am quite loud, and confident and chaotic, which is probably the public version that people see. But I think, to keep going and be in business, you just have to have a little bit of energy and faith in yourself."

“Try not to blame yourself. It’s so easy, especially with the attitudes from non-disabled people saying ‘ah well, it’s just the way it is’, but now I’m like well change it! Why is it like that?! So now I would tell myself, don’t let other people let you think that you’re the problem, when you’re not.”

- GEM TURER

“So, I’m a content manager for an app called sociability which is basically finding accessible places for disabled people, so working in the tech area as a woman is pretty cool. Also, I blog about my daily life as a disabled person as well, especially as a wheelchair user, I think there are barriers out there that people just don’t realise. So, I’ve kind of curated this brand where I talk about my life, just simple things like everyday life and its built a little community now.”

What are some of your biggest achievements?

“I suppose there’s been a few achievements, one being that I won an award pretty early on as Blogger of The Year and the Diversity In Media Awards. I think as an overarching thing, all the goals that I’ve achieved in my life are all the little things that people might not realise, so for me, just going to university was a massive thing. Knowing if things would be accessible or not was always a worry, but I kind of just carried on and did it, I didn’t let that stop me. And then more recently, I started to drive, so I’ve got my own car with hand controls, and I passed my test first time yay. So, it’s just stuff like that where as a disabled person you’re not really expected to do much with your life. I’m really trying to show that I’ve got dreams, I’ve got goals, but also the little things matter as well.”

What inspired you to get into this field of work?

“I think for me, it’s the realisation that things aren’t going to change if you don’t get involved, so I’m trying to tackle both being productive and finding solutions, which is where the app comes in. But then, sharing stories is kind of a wider advocacy sort of thing. I’m having these conversations every day and it’s actually working – I get messages saying ‘I read your blog then I put a ramp in and work’.

I think it was the attitudes that I experienced when I was younger, even from a kid getting pats on the head at an age where you really shouldn’t be getting pats on the head, and I got that as work as well as my personal life. I’d go into a meeting and all my colleagues would shake people’s hands, then they’d get to me and wouldn’t. It slowly eats your self-esteem because you just think well no one else sees me as equal, so I’m gonna have to do something about it and tell them you need to change it up. Yeah so, I guess that gave me a fire to actually do something about it. I can’t just sit at home and not do anything.”

GEM TURNER



Is there any advice you would give your younger self?

“Try not to blame yourself. It’s so easy, especially with the attitudes from non-disabled people saying ‘ah well, it’s just the way it is’ but now I’m like well change it! Why is it like that?! So now I would tell myself don’t let other people let you think that you’re the problem, when you’re not. I would also say like I do start speaking up when I get older – do that earlier. You should start that at school.”

How do you tackle barriers faced in the workplace and daily life?

“Gaining respect and being seen as an equal, first of all, is literally being able to get to the place that I need to. Can I get there? Can I get on public transport? The whole of society needs to change in order to even get to work to be respected. There’s a lot to be done, you know, only a 1/3 of tube stations in London that are step free. So, its stuff like that where we’re expected to take that on in terms of finding other ways. But in terms of at work, there’s all sorts I experienced in terms of ableism, so colleagues being patronising, thinking I don’t know what I’m talking about when I absolutely do. It’s hard to know what is ableism and what isn’t because I’ve experienced it all my life.”



What do you enjoy most about your job?

“I would say I enjoy the creation side, I’m a really creative person. I like to work out what problems there are out there and create content to kind of bust those myths so to speak. So, in my day to day job I talk about disability, share content around us as a team, but also show the barriers that are out there as well. And then also on the side, I talk to companies about consulting around disability, so I’ve worked with people like ITV and Sky. So that’s cool, to be able to go to organisations and teach them about disability. I’ll do sessions about journalism and how to be a good journalist with disabled people in the community. I did a session and I say “who thinks they should stand up when they’re interviewing a disabled person, who thinks they should sit down?” and the room was just like *mind blown*, and the answer is people are people – ask them. There’s no one answer fits all, but the fact that they didn’t even think that that’s something to think about...that’s a problem.”

What advice would you give as citizens of an ableist society?

“In terms of advising other disabled people, like processing ablism is hard, so I would say talk to your disabled friends, connect with the disabled community that’s another key thing – Instagram has been great for me. Just so that you can feel you can talk about ablism, ableism isn’t a dirty word. Its something that’s real, its something that needs to be talked about, so yeah having that space first, I think. And then, test it out, talk to non-disabled people who you trust and just say I’ve experienced this thing...what do you think about it? and bring people in. We need help, we can’t do it on our own and you shouldn’t have to do it on your own. blown*, and the answer is people are people – ask them. There’s no one answer fits all, but the fact that they didn’t even think that that’s something to think about...that’s a problem.”

REMINDER OF
THE DAY

**“DON’T LET
OTHER PEOPLE
LET YOU
THINK
THAT YOU’RE
THE PROBLEM”**

-GEM TURNER

MINOTI PARIKH

“I’m Minoti Parikh, I’m the founder of TPL Experiences im also a speaker, and in my past life ive been a television sports presenter and a master of ceremonies. In my day job we help clients with their health and wellbeing strategies, we help clients to build more inclusive and sustainable cultures, work places.”

TPL have worked with some big name companies and with heavily male dominated industries, what has your experience been like doing this? What advice would you give to remain assertive in these situations?

“I think the experience has been mixed to be completely honest. I’ve had a lot of pushback. You’re sort of in the minority from the word go, you don’t have many people who look like you, even within India, there were not too many women who did what I did, but I think equally, I would say you do find people who champion good talent, and as long as you are committed to your craft, as long as you’re passionate about what you do, I think you’ll always find people who support you in that journey. Working with big organisations gives you a perspective that actually helps you grow because you’re looking at it from a very global point of view.”

What has your experience been like as a female business founder?

“Firstly, I’m very proud to be the Founder of a business that is growing and that has built a brand for itself, so my first thought is – I’m proud. To be very honest I think it’s been overall a very positive experience. I think Leeds as a city has incredible opportunity for people to thrive, you know no matter what background you come from, and I think that’s been very refreshing to see. From somebody who moved from India and relocated to Leeds and for somebody to start their own business without knowing anybody, like forget business contacts without even having any friends, was a tough ask to begin with. I think that people in Leeds and Yorkshire are very warm. There’s so many platforms, so many groups, so many organisations doing so much to champion the cause of female entrepreneurs and to get us out there – which is incredible. But equally, I think we have a long way to go to build an equitable space for all of us to thrive in.”

Can you talk about your experience as a Master of Ceremonies? How did you get into this? How do you handle any nerves you might feel before taking the stage?

“Believe it or not I had actually had massive issues with social anxiety as a child, even my own mum I used to write to her to communicate. But I would say it’s not an overnight thing, its not like one fine day I got up and had the confidence to speak in front of hundreds of people. During university I actually pushed myself a lot out of my comfort zone, to participate in debate competitions etc. I was absolutely horrible in most of them. I froze most of the time, I was very committed to getting over this fear. I had no clue back then that there’s a career called Master of Ceremonies. But again, it’s a very male dominated industry, it’s a very ‘do it this way’ sort of industry, tough to break through, to find your own niche. But, like I always say, if you’re committed to something and you’re ready to learn, ready to listen then you can grow, you can succeed. Equally, its helped us talk about professions that are not your mainstream. At least back in India, you either become a doctor, an accountant, an engineer and that is your good life, that is success. Again it was that thing of creating a path for yourself, but also creating a path for others to follow.”

What was life like as a TV presenter? It’s so important to have female voices in the media, did you feel this was well reflected during your time in the industry?

“I think there’s so much we can do to bring the female perspective into the mix. I struggled so much to get my voice in, purely because I was the first female presenter of that sports show I was presenting which was the motorbike racing and car rally championships in India. It was fully male dominated, there were no females. In a production team of 12 people, I was the only female. You’re constantly breaking barriers, you’re constantly changing people’s mindset. There was this constant challenge for me around not being accepted as a valid voice. Forget female, male, just a valid voice. I genuinely mentally struggled with that phase where you’re just not accepted. You know when you reach this junction in your life if you just say no, my life will be so much easier. But if I say yes, what I may be doing in the interim is changing the mindsets of people around me, and maybe that could have a ripple effect I’m not aware of. And I took up that challenge and of course and went on to do it for 7 seasons. I look at it more as a journey of personal growth and changing mindsets, rather than the fame attached to being a Television Presenter.”



Have there been any periods during your career where you faced adversity in the workplace, if so how did you overcome this?

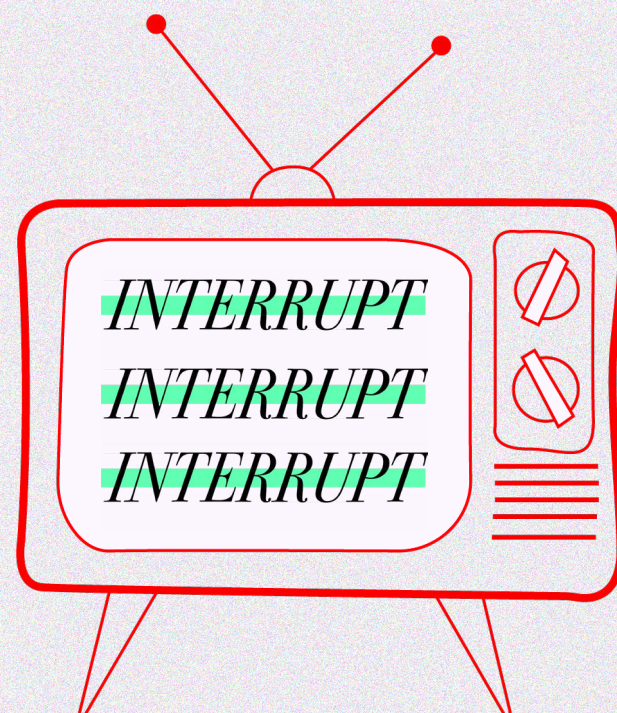
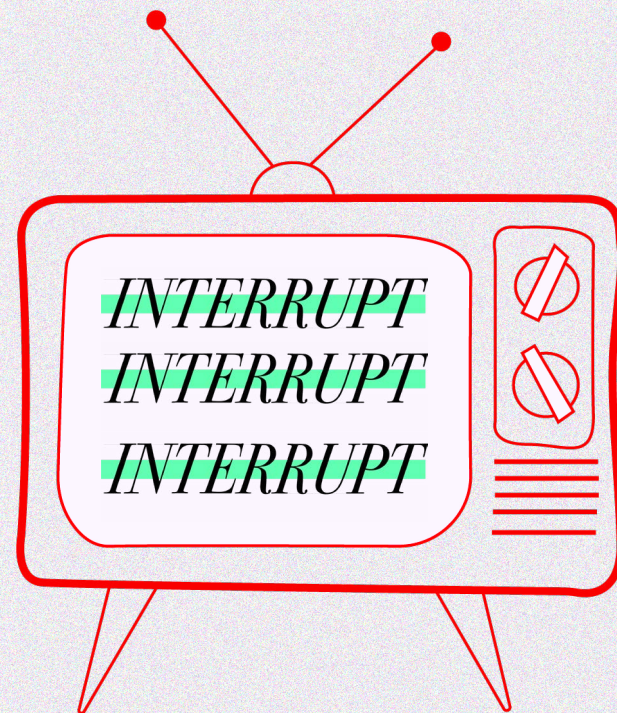
"I think overall there have been adversities that I have faced. And the funny thing is there's always some bias that will be attached to you at any given time. So first it would you're too young, then you're a female, you're a women, what would you know? And then when I moved here there was this whole thing of well, you're not from this country, your accent is different, you look different, your work experience is from a different country so it's not really valid here. But my personal approach has been your validation, what you bring to the table, who you are as a person, needs to come from within. The moment you give other people to validate you, you're giving away your power to them. The personal approach that I have learned over the years of my experience has been that self awareness, what do I bring to the table, what is my strength? What's the value I can bring?"

What are your proudest achievements thus far in your career? Do you have any advice as a female founder?

"I'm definitely proud of setting up shop here, setting up TPL Experiences, starting from 0 and starting a business in an absolutely new culture, new country. Of course, winning all the awards and recognition has been great, but another thing I'm very proud of which happened in the last few years has been the community engagement work we have been doing, working on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable communities in Leeds and embedding that into our business model. I think we need to step back and look at the big picture and really understand who am I as a person, what is the value to me? What brings me joy? Be consistent, be focused and working hard towards it, you might not see the bigger picture to begin with, you might not become the CEO of an organisation in a few years, it's a long game, but stay committed to that path. For example, if you're setting up a business as a female founder, the thing that I found of most value is to ask for help, get a mentor – mentoring has been an amazing thing that I've tapped. Also, I think stay flexible, stay agile but don't get lost."

How would you describe yourself in a few words?

"I would say passionate, hardworking, always up for the challenge, fun.. I think? You should probably ask my friends that. Someone who's hard and mind are filled with gratitude. And to a great extent ambitious, ambitious about everything - about my personal space, my professional space."



BRONTE



"So, my name is Bronte Plenderleith, and I am studying level 2 in site carpentry and joinery. It's really interesting because it's something I've never done before, so to start from scratch with no experience and it's to learn things – I love it. It's really exciting to be given a piece of timber and then to learn the process, work from the doing the joints and the smaller bits, to then fixing it all together and seeing like wow I made that. It's a really nice feeling."

I'm interviewing you today at a WOW barn training session, for those who don't know this is training for a 24 hour barn build by 300 women and non-binary people. The barn will host a festival of skills workshops, inspiring talks, food, music etc. What inspired you to get involved today Bronte?

>>>

PLENDE RLEITH

“My tutor this year, she’s a woman, so she’s always passionate about getting us involved in projects outside of college that introduce women into construction. She was the one who first got us in touch with the WOW barn and basically said do you want to come along because you might be a good intermediary, so they’re not intimidated, these women and non-binary people, coming into this very male ran enterprise. We’re basically just coming along giving little tips, tricks, things that I know I found useful that work for me, maybe as being a women in a women’s body. Any opportunity to broaden my network of women in construction, have similar interests, can potentially learn things from, I’m always open to wanting to meet other people.”

What influenced your decision to get into this sector?

“After living abroad, I came back and saw a lot of my friends who’d bought houses, moved in with their partners and thought...what the hell am I gonna do with my life? I noticed a gap in the market with a lot of my single, millennial friends who’s bought houses – women in particular – who’d had trouble with trades people not turning up on time, overcharging, being really uncommunicative. So, I kind of saw a gap in the market for a female tradesperson/joiner who could kind of tick all of the boxes in terms of being good at their trade but also all the other things that annoy people about tradespeople.

I’ve had so many female friends of mine saying that they’ve felt disrespected in their own house, I think that can range from women my age who are first time buyers, but also my grandma who is by herself she would feel more comfortable, or like working with women’s refuges. Its surprised me up until this point that there’s not more women in the trades, bringing in the skills that we have, then also bringing in the joinery I just think to me, it’s like a no-brainer. I’ve always liked doing creative stuff, I think you don’t tend to think of joinery as being in the creative industries, but I don’t see why it couldn’t be. Carpentry and joinery are such a massive trade, there’s so many aspects of it, but I like the idea of bringing in some of my creativity, some of the practicality and hopefully just making good work regardless of my gender.”

Are there any times when you felt discouraged/ an imposter entering this industry? If so, how did you overcome this?

“I think I’ve not necessarily felt like that in college, but I’ve had already a lot of friends and friends of friends who have said to me I’ve got XYZ job that I want you to do in my house, let me know when you’re free to come and I definitely do still feel *fearful* about the idea of charging someone to do my work. I’ve been doing free bits and bobs but its that balance of trusting my abilities and also not selling myself short and being confident. It is difficult, I think again when you start something new, you sometimes do have to throw yourself in at the deep end. I think women often take on unpaid work in society, in their homes, so I think really, I do want to push myself to start charging people and not being afraid to say look I have the skills, a man would be charging you 500 quid. I really do need to start believing in myself. So, I think that is something I need to work on and hopefully in the next couple of months I can kind of get out there.”

What do you enjoy most about this course?

“I just really like the challenge. I’m one of these people who loves to learn. Coming in and being told ok we’re going to be making staircases. If you asked me to build a staircase, I wouldn’t even begin to think of how to make one, all of the mathematics that go in behind it. So, coming in everyday and learning something new and it being a challenge, and then overcoming the challenge, I love that.”

How would you describe yourself in a few words?

“I think I’m always up for a challenge and I think I do like being thrown in at the deep end, I think that’s a big part of my personality just being like I’m not sure how its gonna turn out, lets go for it. And I’m quite good at believing in my own ability to problem solve.”

Thank
you for
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