



Jacqueline De Rojas

Interviewed by

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It's 20th of June 2017, and we're at the BCS in London. I'm Kerri Mansfield, Head of Capability at Digi2al, coach and business consultant. And today I'll be talking to Jacqueline de Rojas, who has held executive positions at Citrix, CA Technologies, Sage, McAfee, and is currently President of techUK. Jacqueline is well-known for her support of diversity in the workplace.

Welcome. Thank you for joining us today.

Thank you. Pleasure to be here.

[00:33]

Your public bio rather glosses through your early life, and moves swiftly to all your achievements. Can we take a step back and talk about the early years?

Yes. So, I'm half Chinese, born in Folkestone in Kent, so my mother is English and my father was Chinese. And, I would say we had a really challenged childhood, my brother and I. My brother's eighteen months older. My Chinese father was, a wife-batterer, an alcoholic, tax-evader, bigamist, where does that list ever end?

Wow.

And my mother had a black eye every week. So, if something went wrong in the restaurant, then, she would feel the, the back end of that. So, I spent my childhood trying to be invisible. And actually, brought up as a Catholic, I also felt very guilty that I couldn't protect my mother.

Yes.

So, we ran away after eight years to Swindon, which is where my mother lived with her parents, and she remarried, and we started to live, a reasonably normal life. My stepfather was, is, a Yorkshireman with, a bit of a chip of his shoulder shall we say. He was a carpenter. Cross that I was smart at school. I found solace at school actually, I loved the structure.

Yes.

Home life was more up and down. And I remember coming home at age sixteen with my O Level results, GCSE now, and, I had the envelope in my hand, and he said, 'What's in there?' And I said, 'That's my O Level results.' And he said, 'What did you get?' And he ripped open the envelope, and said, 'Mm. Nine As and a B,' or something like that. And, he said, 'What are you trying to do? Are you trying to show me up?' And so, at that point, I think you could have laughed or cried at that juncture, but it was a definite fork in the road for me, and it was a time where I decided, OK, I can continue to spend the rest of my life in the shadows, or, I could spend my life showing him how amazing I could be. And honestly, this is why I think you can be a role model whether you're good or bad, because, that spurred me on to just do the best that I could.

To say, yes, in fact I am going to show you up.

Absolutely right. And, and I have. And, luckily, we are now reconciled, and, I don't know if I ever forgive but I certainly do forget, you know, all the things that happened to me then. And actually I, I honour it as a way, perhaps I reframe it as an opportunity to be the best version of myself.

[03:33]

Absolutely. What a good way to do it. You've got a joint degree from two universities. How did that come about?

Yes. Well, so when you've been to Catholic school, and people who are listening might identify with this, it's quite strict and structured, and I was looking for some freedom. So I went to the careers library, and the careers teacher, Mr Ryan at that point, and found a degree course as far away as I could imagine. And from Swindon to, to Germany or France were the options. And I really wanted to go to the champagne region of France, because that sounded really elegant, and Audrey Hepburn was my absolute glamour focus at that young age.

Yeah.

And, and I thought... And I ticked that box. But they said, 'If you didn't get the French option, would you at all be prepared to go to Germany?' So I ticked that option, and I suspect everyone who did get sent there. And actually, I have to say, the structure, the opportunity to be with 60 other students, 20 from Germany, 20 from France, 20 from the UK, was a fantastic lesson in cultural and, and tolerance, and just a really, really fabulous way to open my eyes to, to possibility.

So lots of things other than, lots of learnings other than just the degree.

Well the big learning was... I wasn't expecting every lecture to be in German. Of course it would, but, I signed up for a European business degree in German, but I thought it was German in, you know...

Somehow in English

...as a language.

Yes.

And so, there I was. But after about four weeks I was completely fluent, so, that, that somehow didn't matter. And it was a good test.

[laughs] That's a good challenge isn't it.

Yes. Yeah, it was a great challenge.

[05:20]

So what set you on the technology path?

Sorry. What...?

What set you on the path of technology?

Yes. So technology. I always wanted to be a newscaster on the BBC. That was my big thing.

I think you would have been very good.

Oh, thank you. I think I'm a little, a little past it now. I'm 54, and, I think... So then, I went into a job that was offered to me on a plate by my brother-in-law. And he ran a technology recruitment company. So I was selling people to tech firms in the AS/400 market, which I'm sure no one remembers now, but we didn't have mobile phones in those days, it hadn't been invented. I don't know if anyone remembers the Rabbit phone where you can stand by a mast, and you could only make outgoing calls to anyone who had...

Another one. [both laugh]

Yes. It was very weird. So, anyway, I, after two years I decided that, it was quite hard to sell a product, like people, that talks and has a mind of its own, and it would be easier to sell software. So I went to work for my largest client, which was called Synon, a British-based tech firm, ultimately bought by Sterling Software. So, that's how I got into tech. And the reason they wanted me was because they had a German distributor, and they had no clue what they were talking about, and they wanted someone to manage the partner network.

Wow.

Yes. That was me.

So that was perfect, wasn't it?

Yes. And I haven't looked back ever since. And I've been a troubleshooter in the technology industry ever since.

[07:01]

Yes. So, there must have been some very tough times. You've mentioned some in your youth, but there must have been some in your career as well that have been tough. What values and behaviour and knowledge did you draw on in order to get through those?

I like to think that it's important not to leave dead bodies around you. And by that I mean, it's very tempting in a tech environment which is male-dominated to become alpha male in your behaviour. But for me, it wasn't the smartest route to success.

No.

And, whilst I might have employed some of those traits or characteristics in the early days, I certainly realised quickly that shouting as loudly as my counterparts was not going to help me. So I decided to find a different way, and that was through diplomacy, through smarter, creating teams that could collaborate, creating teams that would consultatively listen to the customer, rather than show up and throw up about the tech. And it worked really well. Suddenly I was... You know, I remember going to a company that I worked for and they said to me, 'We simply don't have women on the leadership team.' And, actually, I did, I... Did I throw my toys out of the pram? I didn't then. I reframed it as, at least they told me, and I wasn't going to bang my head against the glass ceiling for five years. But it was also the company where I took a team of customers to a hospitality event, it happened to be the Grand Prix at Silverstone, and we flew our customers in with a helicopter to avoid the traffic. And one of my salespeople said to his client, 'Would you like to meet the managing director?' And the client said, 'Oh I'd love to.' And he turned round and he said, 'Oh my God, you're a woman.' And I said, 'Oh my God, I didn't realise I needed a penis to make a decision. But, let's discuss it over lunch.'

Yes.

And actually, we have had a fabulous relationship for 20 years. And I think what I learnt from that is actually, to be direct but not rude, to be firm, and to, to hold your space, is really important.

Yes.

And that's what worked for me.

And is that some of the advice you might give to other women coming into a predominantly male industry?

It worked for me. And I think you have to choose your situation.

Yes.

Because, every situation is different, and, I'm not sure I would have reacted like that to every scenario where that was said to me.

No, exactly.

But I do...

You need to find your own way of doing it.

To find... Yes. But certainly to stand your ground, and certainly to be, to deserve the space that you command, and, that's important. To be present in the room.

[10:06]

Yes. Definitely I would agree. How much difference has having good mentors made to your career?

I've had... I'm not sure we called them mentors.

No.

I did have people who really, really cared about what happened to me and my career. And I think what I learnt really early on with people like that was, it's a two-way street. If, if you are a person that just takes, takes, takes, and, and that's OK, but,

sometimes that runs dry quite fast. So when I have people who care about me, or give me something, I always offer them something back, even if it's just feedback about how that introduction went, or, you know, what could I do for them to support them on their journey?

Yes.

And I know that sounds a bit strange when maybe you've got someone who's extremely senior to you when you're starting out on your journey, but actually, feedback is a good way of giving back.

Yes, absolutely.

And I think that's really important in mentorship. And that's how I've created relationships out of those people versus just interactions.

Yes. Yes, well I think that's a very sensible thing to do.

And that's how, that's what worked for me.

Yes.

Yes.

[11:18]

There must have been some obstacles in your careers. Can you think of any that you've overcome and how you overcame them?

Yeah. I think, the one, the one obstacle where I was up against a man for a UK country position, I had tons of experience, I had looked after 300 people with, you know, \$300 million of revenue, and I was up against someone who had, you know, ten people reporting to them and, \$10 million of revenue. And he got the job. And, that was when they said to me, 'You know, we, we simply don't have women on the leadership team.' And that was quite hard to hear.

Mm.

But I was delighted in one way, because it meant that that door was clearly and firmly shut. I didn't have to try there any more. And I went and found my own journey, and became managing director of another company, which, I very joyously unleashed myself on the market. So, you know, I, I do think, you will experience, whether you're male or female, you will experience imbalance and unfairness. I'm not sure anyone told us it was always going to be fair by the way, so...

No. No I don't think... Anyone who's been brought up in a family knows it's never going to be fair.

Yes. And we have to fight. And, and what we fight for makes us more grateful for it, and, I would very strongly advocate, though, that, a person who goes to war in any sense with a company, with themselves and with other people, it never really ends in a satisfying way. So, I wouldn't say I was a warring feminist. What I would say is, I, I like to think I stood up for myself, for my, for the people around me, and that I like to create the opportunity for other people going forward to be the best that they can be.

[13:26]

That's cool. That's very cool. And as well as challenges, there must have been some really exciting moments. Can you share any of those with us?

The technology industry moves at enormous, lightning pace, and, I think in, for anyone in tech, it moves so fast that it's both really exciting and exhilarating, and also very scary. So we're flying by the seat of our pants most of the time. I think the scariest moment for me in technology was, not necessarily about tech but on my journey, was when I got my first role as managing director. Because I sat in this oak-lined room that had a bar in it and an oak table, and it had, I had my own Money Penny outside. [KM laughs] I had someone outside who was looking after me. I thought, what on earth, what on earth does a managing director do?

Yes.

And I'm hoping people who are listening really align with that, because, there is this saying that, that you fake it till you make it. And, we all, certainly I have felt the imposter syndrome of, am I going to be good enough? Am I going to be found out? And I really thought I was going to be found out then. [both laugh] And what I decided to do, because I knew nothing about being a managing director, that I was going to just say no to every second request. [both laugh] And so, with that, I earned this reputation of, gosh, she, she eats razorblades for breakfast, that one. She doesn't say yes to anything. And actually, what it did was, it forced me into a world where questioning became my biggest weapon. So... And when I say that, I mean, I asked questions about everything, and stopped trying to know things.

Yes.

And that's when I, I really felt very free and very competent.

Mm.

Because people, even now, will look at anybody in the room who's asking a question, and, we all make a judgement and think, wow, that person's really smart. Or even, if you think about it, when we're at a party, and you get the Mr T character coming up with his Ferrari outside, his gold medallion, and says, 'I I I,' you think, oh my God, you're dull. But then you get, with the guy that says, or the girl that says, 'Tell me about yourself, you know, what are you like and what are you interested in?' And you always think, God, they were so interesting. And they've told you nothing.

[laughs] Yes.

So, learning that, that ability to question as a way of coping with, you know, maybe your own fears of inadequacy, makes you interested versus interesting. And that has been a big lightbulb moment for me.

That's a very interesting observation. Yes, I like that. I shall have to think about that one. Yes. As you can tell, I'm a big questioner myself. [laughs]

Yes you are.

[16:15]

Yes I am. [both laugh] You... Obviously I've done a little bit of background reading about you. There's a lot of stuff out there, and we can talk about your career from start to finish if you like, but that's already out there, and, I feel that people can read. So, one of the things that I picked up about you is, you are said to embody the traits of a modern leader. What qualities of leadership do you see in yourself?

Gosh, that's lovely isn't it.

Mm.

I like the modern bit. [laughs]

Yes.

I, I feel very strongly that, and we've talked about the pace of technology and innovation, in a world which is moving this fast, I believe that collaboration is going to be at a premium. So, in order to be, in order to be able to take advantage of all of these innovations and progress, we will have to work together. I strongly believe that one plus one equals five in our industry. So, collaboration is the big, big, big one for me. Even if you're talking to, you know, I don't know, I've had groups of apprentices round a table, and I'm talking about how we communicate, and, I'll, you know, I'll finish with something like, 'I'll send an email out to everyone.' And the apprentices will say, 'Mm, why are you doing it like that. We don't read email.' You think, wow, that is so smart. [both laugh] Of course you don't. But collaboration enables that progress. And that's where, you need constituents from all of the markets and audiences that you're going to touch. And so community is at the heart of everything that I do, and, and I believe that's where we need to go as an industry, and as society, to stay connected.

[18:00]

Yes. That sounds good to me. Another thing I read about you is, you have a manifesto to increase diversity of skills and talent in the tech industry. How did that come about and what does it mean?

Oh this is really interesting. Because I, I turned up at my first board, which was techUK, and I was asked to join the board. I didn't really know what a board did, and... And for those of you out there, actually, a board is all about being a critical friend. So offering advice and guidance in a practical way. And, so when I joined this board, you know, we, we turned up, we debated some things, we voted and we left. And I thought, actually, I'd like to be a board member that made a difference.

Mhm.

And so, I decided, after talking to the CEO at techUK, that I would like to be the champion for diversity, starting with women. And so, when I looked out at the market, there is a ton of stuff that goes on to promote diversity, but it's all very disjointed.

Yes.

So, my thought was, if we can become an umbrella group which brings all of that together, and stand up for four things, that would help us navigate and make a really impactful difference.

Yes.

So, I created a manifesto, with the team at techUK, and, four things. The first one is, how do we get young girls interested in STEM or STEAM subjects, including the arts now?

Yes, it's throwing the arts in isn't it.

Yes, exactly. So there's that question. How do we challenge business to do more? So for example, how do we get big and small businesses to really put diversity at the

heart of their recruitment and their retention strategies? How we create policies and poke Government in the eye about diversity and diverse conditions for change. And then, how do we get more women into leadership positions both executive and non-executive?

OK.

So those four things. It's massive by the way.

Yes it is, yes.

Big agenda.

[20:10]

And how's it going?

Good. I have recruited other board members to help me on my journey, and we've now got some fantastic ambassadors who go out there and wake up and worry about this every single day, alongside their day job. And we've now created, for example, a returners' hub, so women returners, actually parents, returning parents, can use the techUK website and they can see all the companies across the country who have returner programmes

Oh cool.

So, it's all in one place.

Yes.

And, that kind of thing makes a difference. Are we making a difference to the paltry sixteen per cent of women in tech? Not quickly. We will have to do something much more scalable to make it happen. And that really is getting the kids when they're really young.

Really young, yes.

As, as young as one.

Mhm.

We programme them off this subject pretty quickly.

Yes.

So, [laughs] we had to find ways. So we're looking at storytelling through books, looking at role models through Founders4Schools, into schools and nurseries. So we've got to bring some fairy dust and some magic into the youth side of it. I'm also encouraging the Girlguiding association to create a STEM/STEAM badge, and maybe creating some role models into the Brownies and Girlguiding association as well. And Scouts is already a little bit underway. So, we've got to get into communities, rather than just saying, we've got a badge. So...

Yes. Yes, exactly, it's got to become part of the mindset.

Exactly.

Yeah.

Yeah.

[21:52]

And how about schools? Are they on board with this?

They are on board. We face a few, a few challenges. One is that, the curriculum needs to keep pace with technology, and that's really hard. You and I both know we've got to skill up kids for jobs that don't yet exist. So, we really need to be on our game when we're in the classroom. And I feel sorry for teachers, because the kids are really savvy, they teach themselves through YouTube anyway, and their classroom kit

is probably worse than their home kit, in terms of, you know, iPads and what have you.

Yes.

So, it's a hard dynamic to sell. We are working with Government to make that, those changes happen. But we're also working, as I said, with Founders4Schools, which is a big organisation, to put role models into the classroom, so that, you know, female role models, less abled role models, diversity in all its form, and male role models, go into the classroom and say, 'You can build an app, you can start your own business.' You know, why do we just think about getting a job when we could also think about creating a job? And that's StartUp Britain right there.

Yes, absolutely.

So that's exciting.

[23:01]

And you mentioned StartUp Britain. There are, I think when I last heard, 42 tech hubs in London. And it's interesting that they're tech hubs, they're not manufacturing hubs. Is there an end to that, will that keep growing? Where do you see that moving in the industry?

I think it'll morph, because, digital is at the heart of every industry and business, and without a digital heartbeat it's going to be hard for anybody to survive in the future of work. That's not to say that we don't need our artisans and craftspeople.

Yes. Yes.

Of course we completely honour that. But, you know, we've got spaces that are opening up in London, and across the country. You know, I'm a big believer in #notjustlondon.

Yes.

And there are 33 tech clusters across the country, including Manchester and Newcastle and, and Reading, and, and it's really great to see all those. You know, we're seeing, we've got chief digital officers in Bristol and in Edinburgh, there is one being, a job being advertised for chief digital officer in London. So we will see lots more happening. And I believe that every industry will have clusters of tech talent needed in...

[24:20]

So a CDO is becoming a new role out there.

It's important.

Yes.

We need someone who focuses on how we can harness these innovations. Why? Mainly because, things are created when times are tough, and austerity means that we have to harness tech in a way that works for everybody. Which is, which also plays fabulously to the inclusion of gender.

Mhm.

So, CDO, big role, big expectations though as well.

Yes, it's interesting. I've not thought about that as a role before so that's interesting that that's coming along

Yes. Well, and think about... I was talking to the chief ex at Barclays last week at London Tech Week, and, I asked him what was the most important innovation he had seen in recent times, and he said, 'It's not necessarily about the innovation, but innovation has its time.' And he gave me an example of the tap and go card reader, which, when you go into a coffee shop these days, if anyone gets cash out, people in the queue are tapping their feet, or tutting, and saying, 'Really?' And we're a nation of queuers, so we're used to that.

Yes. [laughs]

And if someone inserts their card into the card reader, you're thinking, my God, you're kidding me. But two years ago, you know, anyone paid for cash – paid for coffee with, with anything other than cash, you'd get surcharged on your credit card.

Yes.

So, it just wasn't in our national psyche. Until, TFL, Transport For London, put it on the Underground, and suddenly, you don't need a ticket, you just need a card, a credit card. So you can tap and go. And that's what changed tap and go in retail.

Yes.

Right there. It was the ability to remove friction and make it... I suppose convenience overtakes risk. Because people were worried about cards being cloned if you wave them in the air and all of that.

Yes. Yes.

So, that's gone. Now we're saying, 'Thirty quid? Is that all we can pay?' [KM laughs] You know, it's... And it's gone up from ten, 20, 30.

Yes.

So, you know, we'll see that explosion. So, innovation has its time, and when it, when it starts to solve a real life problem that affects a community, that's when it takes off.

Yes.

And that's what's really exciting I think.

Exactly. And then another one comes along.

Yes.

And you think, how did we live without that one?

Exactly.

[26:43]

It's amazing. You've also had lots of awards, for all sorts of things. And you were named as the most influential woman in tech by Computer Weekly. How did it feel to get that award?

Honestly? I feel dreadfully embarrassed when I'm given anything publicly, and my, my family will tell you this. At Christmas I spend my whole time giving out presents. When it's time to open mine, it's just, it's excruciatingly painful. And I think that, honestly, it's, it's my issue with low self-worth. And I, I'm guessing I'm not alone in that. It doesn't mean it goes away ever. However, do I encourage and applaud award-giving? Absolutely. And the reason I do is because, shining a light on achievements and diversity, and just people who have worked hard and made a difference, it's important for, for them, acknowledgement is right at the top of our tree in terms of what we need as humans.

Yes. Yes.

And also it encourages people to join the technology industry, because it's fun.

And you're a judge, aren't you, on the women in technology awards. What do you look for in a candidate?

Yeah, in, in the Everywoman Awards. Yes. So, what I look for is the humanity piece, but also, in tech we're looking for, innovation, collaboration, also generosity I would say. I really love it when I meet someone who has that generosity gene and plays the generosity game, because, it's not been easy to get here, but, it shouldn't be

this hard for everyone else. And I think leaning out and, and handing out the hand of generosity is a really big deal. And it's an easy thing to do.

[28:42]

Yes. No, that's a nice thing to look for. And, there's something else you're involved in that interests me, is the Prince's Trust committee. One of the recent people who I was interviewing for the IT Archives was Duane Jackson. So, I think you probably have met each other through that if not other connections. How important is it to you?

So, I... Yes, so it was on the Prince's Trust committee for, I think nearly eight years. Recently I stepped off that to do other things. For me, when you get to an age where you're in the workforce, and, suddenly you fall off it, and when I looked at the Prince's Trust and, these kids could have had a disagreement with parents, and then start sofa-surfing, and suddenly, really quickly, find themselves homeless, it's a tragedy that, if they don't get off it really quickly, and get up and out of that really fast, there's only one way.

Mhm.

And so, what we did in tech was that, we realised that we were a wealthy sector of industry; we felt we could tap into the generosity gene that plays into technology leaders. And so we spent a huge amount of time fundraising, to give these young kids the time mentoring and funding to start their own business, or to get back into the world of work, and that might mean with a suit, or interview coaching, or it might mean just confidence, and mentoring. And that's very joyful in terms of the reward you get back. I, I genuinely believe that mentoring, you get more out of it by giving it than receiving it.

Yes.

Which is fantastic. And that was what the Prince's Trust was all about for me. It does such great work.

[30:37]

Yes. What it is that you look for in projects that you give your time to? Is it that, is it the giving back aspect, or...?

Yeah. I mean it is, it is the giving back piece. It's also about, does it make a difference? And, I think we all like to think we're going to leave a footprint of some kind. In fact I think I heard, you know, I'd rather leave fingerprints than footprints, because it's, it's much more elegant perhaps, but, I, I feel very strongly that I would like... I've come a long way in my career, and I would like to make it easier for other people to get there.

[31:20]

I like that. Now, one thing I found out, you're a member, or have been involved with something called the 30% Club.

Yes.

What's that?

30% Club is, is a really cool thing. It's about getting 30 per cent of women into the boardroom...

OK.

...and into executive positions. And the reason it's important is because, fish rot from the head down. So...

Right. [laughs] Talk me through that.

What I mean by that is, if we just have pale, white men of a certain age at the top of, top of business, then that's what you will get as you go down through the organisation.

Yes.

Because, you, it's human nature to just, you know, recruit people like you.

Yes. Yes.

So, the 30% Club aims and has got very close to getting 30 per cent of women into tech and into leadership positions. And, we are really committed to making that happen. There's nothing wrong, by the way, with white men, nothing wrong with that.

No, of course not. Yes.

But, it is proven that diverse teams are simply more productive.

Mm.

You know, one woman on the board of a business can reduce the risk of bankruptcy by 20 per cent. And that percentage increases the more diverse a board you have. So we start with women, but I'm a big advocate of diversity in all its forms.

Yes.

You know, I really love... We're tapping into ex-military at the moment, who are maybe war wounded, and they're great. Why are they great? Because they turn up on time, they're great at embracing a mission. They are very structured. And they always deliver. So, you know... The same with autism and as Asperger's. So the neurodiversity scale. That spectrum is great in cyber. And, you know, we really need the smartest minds to solve our cyber and security threat landscape issues.

That's true.

So, you know, we've got opportunity. Let's embrace it.

Definitely. It's... I think, a lady who I'm sure you know, Sue Unerman, said, you just start with gender, because there's 50-50, it's the easiest place to start. Everyone can see. The others are much, much smaller percentages. So, take the biggest one first.

Absolutely. And yet, you know, we've got 11.8 million people disabled or registered with a disability in this country. That's actually one in five.

Yes.

That's quite a lot. And 57 per cent of those are registered disabled because of mobility. And surely, technology can solve the, that participation in the workforce. So, I believe that work is not a place, it's where you are.

Mhm.

So, you know, if you can't be mobile, right, we'll bring the job to you.

Bring the job to you. Yes.

And that's OK.

[34:20]

Mm. That's good. There's a level of responsibility with being in these areas. How do you use that to encourage and possibly also influence the next generation that are coming through?

Yes. So, getting a 54-year-old, grey-haired woman to inspire, you know, sixteen-year-olds and younger, is, is a tricky tightrope to walk. Part of it is about engaging an alignment about possibility, and also being present. So, I engage with the younger generation through lots of judging that I do. The Girls' Day School Trust is a really good example of that. We had eleven-year-olds who were, eleven-year-old girls who were building apps, and one of them had built an app which looked at teenage pregnancy for example, and she built a game to gamify the levels of misery you get to.

Yes. [laughs]

So it was all about turning girls off pregnancy. But fascinating. Or, there's another app which the girls had built, which was, to show their parents how much time they had spent on Facebook instead of with them.

OK.

Now, isn't that interesting?

That is interesting.

Yeah. And so, I'm judging all of these things all the time. So I think engaging and being present with those, with what's going on down at grassroots, is really important. And, you know, I go and do this great thing which is the Little BIG Awards. So, young people, boys and girls...

What do they do?

They've got thousands of schools that enter a competition every year, again building apps, and you judge them, and then they, they shine a light on that, and, it's called the Little BIG Awards, which is fantastic.

Brilliant.

So there's a lot of stuff going on. And, you know, my advice to anyone listening is, get involved, because, no one's coming. The cavalry are not coming to save us on diversity or getting young people into STEM, but, you can inspire someone with a 20- or 30-second interaction.

Yes.

And, you know, spread that magic fairy dust about what's possible in tech. And make it personal.

Mhm.

That's how I get involved. And the Stemettes, another really great organisation.

Yes. Now I follow them on Twitter.

Fabulous.

But I haven't met the lady who runs them. She would be a fantastic person to meet.

Yes. Come and get her to speak, I'll introduce you. She's fantastic. And really inspires young girls into, you know, really tricky areas of tech, quite deep, coding and, but also, you know, the lighter end of it as well. Because, it's, tech is diverse. We can do lots of artful things as well as lots of mathematical and scientific things.

Yes. This is the exciting thing about tech, is, it just covers everything.

Yes.

Every industry uses it.

Yes. Exactly.

So there's, there are no closed doors any more.

No. And I was reading, you know, the other day, there's a, a foldable drone that can be created for 50 pence, which is now... You know, you can think about young minds building stuff like that. It's like origami. And, it, it can be launched into places that are difficult to reach. Africa is using a lot of this type of tech. But capturing the imagination of young people to build origami drone planes that cost 50p, fantastic, let's go for it.

[37:48]

Absolutely. Absolutely. We've talked a lot about diversity and STEM and STEAM. How effective are all these initiatives? Are the figures going up, are more girls and diverse people taking STEM subjects?

We are... So we, we are getting girls to come in to STEM, not necessarily through A Level. We've had a dreadful impact on our A Level computing, which has dropped by 70 per cent in fact. I think, ninety... 94 per cent of all kids taking computing A Level are boys. So we've got to do better there. And that's probably in the curriculum. And also, by getting the message out to parents that the average salaries in technology are 56 per cent higher than other industries.

Yes.

So, I would just say, we've got more than one avenue, and we probably need to make sure that that message is writ large.

Yes.

Is it getting better? Not fast enough. We are simply creating more jobs than we can fill, in this country. So, we've got to grow our own domestically. We also have to make sure that we can encourage talent from overseas to come in to the UK. So we are pressing the Government for the smart movement of tech talent, so that we can, not create barriers but create welcome and open...

Yes.

I mean let's face it, 50 per cent of all founders of start-ups in this country are foreign born, so, with the tech industry currently at, 12.6 per cent of GDP, gross domestic product, that could be double very quickly.

Yes. Absolutely, yes.

But only if we solve the talent crisis.

Mm.

So all of, all of my techUK team and myself and, and our membership, are pressuring the Government to put policies in place to be open versus not.

That's interesting in the current climate.

Yes. Post-Brexit.

Yes.

[39:56]

So, let's be clear. What we need is a soft landing for Brexit, which makes us reputationally open and collaborative as a country. That's the only way we will become a digital nation of significance.

Absolutely.

But in order to get a soft landing for Brexit, we need a long runway, and we need to start talking about a five-year negotiation to get what we need in a, in a rounded and thoughtful way. You can't slam it home in a year.

You can't do that in months, no.

No.

It's not going to happen, no.

No.

[40:34]

I totally agree. What brings you most joy in your life?

Oh my gosh. It has to be my family. So, joy comes from my, our three children, Jack, Max and Stephanie, and from my husband, who is a yoga teacher. He was in technology. He grew and divested four businesses. And now runs a charity delivering yoga to special needs children. So, my family. And I get my balance from... Obviously I do yoga every morning, and meditation, because that's our routine.

Yup.

And, I have found a lot of balance in that. And I, I love what my children are choosing to do in their lives, and that brings great joy too.

[41:22]

That's fabulous. Goals for the future? I'm sure you've got some.

Yeah, my goal, actually... Yes, so I'm not going to be a newscaster on the BBC, which is where we started.

No.

But, you know, I would like to do more on giving back. I like to play the generosity game every day, whether that's picking up a paper towel on the floor of a, a bathroom I go into, and making it look nice, or whether it's giving someone an introduction to someone that could help them move their, move their career forward, or just being with someone who needs to be, to be heard.

Yes.

I think we can be role models for people, and, we are a role model whether we choose to be or not, and a role model whether we're a good one or not.

That's true, yeah.

And I would, my ambition is that I am a good role model, every day.

[42:22]

*I think that's a, a much better ambition to have than a BBC newsreader. [laughs]
You've got lots, and it's difficult to pick out key achievements in your career, so I'll
just say achievements rather than key. But which ones do you feel most aligned with?
I don't want to say proudest of, but which ones resonate with you most?*

Gosh, that's a tough one. I think my role as President of techUK has really given me a platform to be able to influence what happens for most women and people that I can help in a diverse spectrum. So, that to me, that platform has really helped propel the opportunity for this country to be more inclusive.

Yes.

I also believe that, we can be very [fault in recording] impersonal, wherever we are, but that when we join together we're at our strongest.

[43:20]

How did the whole techUK thing come about?

I said I didn't want to do it. [both laugh] I was invited. And I will blame squarely Julian David, the CEO of techUK. He called me and said, would I like to join as a member, and I said, 'Absolutely not.' I didn't have any time, and I was being a very busy software exec. And then I thought, I, I caved in, and I said, 'OK, all right, I'll, I'll come and have a look.' And I came along and had a look, and I said, 'I'm definitely not joining.' Because this is not the right environment for me, I didn't think that they could do anything of note to change the things that I was passionate about. And he said, 'OK, well you could be part of that change.' And suddenly I thought, OK, here's someone holding a mirror up to say, don't expect everyone else to do it, do it yourself.

Mm. Yah.

And I did, actually. And now, as President of that organisation, and I am until 2018, July 2018, I think we together have made a big difference, and I'm grateful for the opportunity. [both laugh]

His persistence, forcing you to do it.

Yes.

[44:33]

There are all sorts of positive and negative outcomes as we go through our careers. Have there been any particularly high positive financial outcomes, or low positive financial outcomes that you can talk about?

Yes. So, I've been fortunate enough to be in the technology industry, which does pay very very well, and I've been fortunate enough to be at the top of that industry. I honestly think I've been at the top of it because I came from such austerity and bad circumstances myself. Survival was always a really big thing for me. And actually, I think they say, leaders always come from something that has created a very negative...

I think that's true. Yeah. Mm.

Yeah. So I have striven to be at the top. I've always wanted to be at the top in the UK. I have done international roles but settled here because my network is here and because, I like to go home at night.

Yes.

Financially, I've always made my money out of investing in the businesses that I've worked with. So, I've backed my own ability to turn it round. And as a troubleshooter I think you understand, you know, where the company is going. So, I put my money where my mouth is, and that's where I've made it actually. But also in property. And our properties that we own are, the ones that we rent out are all redeveloped for special needs families, widened doorways and wet rooms and all of

that. And that seems to be a place where I can combine both the money side but also doing the right thing and creating housing for...

That's a nice way to do it.

Which are accessible. Yes.

[46:17]

Yes. That's a very nice way of doing it. What were the best decisions you made in your career? And on the flip side of that, any bad decisions?

I'm going to start with personal first. So, I'm on my third marriage, and very happily. Third and final shall I say. [both laugh] I'm very happily married to Roger Andrews, my husband. Probably... I'm not going to say that those first two marriages were bad. In fact my second husband, ex-husband, is my best friend, and, the first one, I just married very young and probably shouldn't have done that. Married on the rebound to my best friend; shouldn't have done that either. But actually, are there any regrets? No. I don't regret any of them.

[46:58]

In business, on the good side, I really am grateful that I have had the opportunity to learn about branding. And when I learnt to brand myself as a troubleshooter, and used LinkedIn to describe that... I have never really looked for a job. People have come looking for me. Why? Because, when you describe the problem you're solving on your LinkedIn page, people say, 'That, I can identify with that, that's my thing. And I need her to solve my thing.'

Mm.

So, I have had a lot of people come looking for me, and that's been through building relationships, and using social media as well. So that's been great. On the bad side, have I had any bad things? Do you know what? I am a big believer in reframing anything bad that's happened to me and turn it to my advantage. So, even when I've had 'we don't have women on the leadership team' kind of comments come at me, I have always reframed those as opportunities.

[48:05]

Yes. It's the only way to deal with them, I agree with you. [laughs] What about you is least documented that you would like people to know?

I would say the thing that's least documented is my early childhood, which was really grim. You get to a certain age when it's OK to talk about it. Do you know what? My early career, I would have died to have... It would have felt shameful to come from a family which, you know, was a broken home, or, you know, mother was beaten up every week. Now, I feel very comfortable with it. Partly because, you know, my mother's got severe memory problems, dementia, Alzheimer's, and now I'm in a position where, I couldn't protect her then, but I can protect her now.

Yes.

She's not going to go in a home.

Mm.

So, you know, that to me is just such a big gift, and enables me to turn that round. I get very emotional thinking about it.

Yes, of course.

But, yeah, I think... I think life changes when you're older. You have the space to talk about it. Maybe it's the confidence. And maybe you can look at it again as a [fault in recording] building block, and not something...

[interruption]

[pause in recording]

[49:24]

And so thinking about that, maybe you can look at it as a building block, and, it becomes something positive.

Mhm.

So I'm happy to talk about my early childhood these days, and what that means to me now.

Thank you. It's been an absolute pleasure to meet you, and to have such an interesting and inspiring conversation. Thank you for being open and candid in your answers, and so, for everybody to share your knowledge and expertise. Thank you very much.

Pleasure.

Thank you.

[End of Interview]