

FEM

The word 'FEM' is written in large, bold, orange letters. To the right of the 'M', there is a graphic of three hands in blue, green, and purple, reaching upwards.

FEMINIST ENTREPRENEURS MAGAZINE #11 - JUNE 2022

**HOW HAVING
A DIVERSITY
STRATEGY WILL
INCREASE YOUR
SLICE OF THE
MARKET SHARE**

**IS YOUR
ALLYSHIP
PERFORMATIVE
OR IS IT A
PRACTICE?**

**WHAT ARE EQUAL
OPPORTUNITIES
IF NOT PIE?**

**11 WAYS TO
BE A BETTER
ALLY**

WHAT'S INSIDE



WHAT ARE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
IF NOT PIE?

02

THE SECRET TO TRUST, ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AND INCLUSION IS IN THE JOURNEY

08

HOW I OVERCAME IMPOSTER SYNDROME IN
MY CORPORATE WORKPLACE

12

11 WAYS TO BE A BETTER ALLY

18

IS YOUR ALLYSHIP PERFORMATIVE OR IS
IT A PRACTICE?

26

HOW HAVING A DIVERSITY STRATEGY
WILL INCREASE YOUR SLICE OF THE MARKET

30

WELCOME.

As I was working on this edition of FEM, the world held its breath (or at least the uterus-carrying half of the world) to find out if the US would return to the 1940s or not... Unfortunately, the Supreme Court's rejection of Roe v Wade shows us not only that time travel IS possible, but it also shows us there is still so much work to do! Equality is not something we can take for granted and we have to actively pursue it!



Photo by Evamaria Kulovits

Now is not the time to let the system divide and conquer! We are all feeling the effects of whatever our intersectional identity is, and banding together is the only way we can affect real change. It's by lifting others we rise, and all that!

It feels fortuitous that this edition of FEM has been dedicated to allyship. We talk about the importance of equality and how we as solo entrepreneurs and small business owners can create safe spaces for all to feel we belong. Diversity and inclusivity are not only good for society, they are good for business, our health and the environment. I hope this edition of FEM will leave you inspired, empowered and with a sense of belonging.

Let's go change the world together!

Mags Thomson

Editor In Chief



WHAT ARE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IF NOT PIE?

What are equal opportunities? It sounds like a pretty straightforward question. But, as it turns out the answer is not as clear-cut as we might hope and is massively impacted by our mindset and outlook in life. I found that out when I was sucked into a discussion on LinkedIn recently, after commenting on a post by The Female Lead about equal rights and pie.

By Mags Thomson

The conversation that ensued after I commented on this LinkedIn post, got me thinking about equal opportunities and whether like so many seemed to believe in the comments, they are like pie. Could we really be dealing with a finite number of opportunities that we all have to fight over? Or could that idea possibly be a result of centuries of living in a system that relies on some people having power and opportunities over other people?

But before I get too far into my thoughts, let's go back to the beginning. The Female Lead had posted a graphic with the text:

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR OTHERS DOES NOT MEAN FEWER RIGHTS FOR YOU. IT'S NOT PIE

Apparently, this was a far more controversial statement than I thought and one that seemed harder to understand than I would have thought. Firstly, a lot of people seemed to equate rights with opportunities. And so they would comment along the lines of "Well if a job that I apply for is given to a woman, then that means that job's not for me. So, it is pie and if people are giving jobs to women just because they're women,

then that means that those jobs are not available for men.” Some people made more elaborate statements, but this is what they boiled down to. A finite amount of jobs and more women in the workforce equals fewer jobs available to men, who will have to give up some of their job pie. This might be true, but it probably isn’t (more on that later).

Firstly I would like to point out that rights and opportunities are not actually the same thing. Having the right to do things or access levels of society, doesn’t necessarily also give me the opportunity to do so. In reverse order, the lack of rights may constrict me to take those opportunities. So, yes rights and opportunities are linked in certain ways, but they are not the same. Yet, it feels like the status quo is so desperate to hold on to their opportunities, that they’d rather not open up the floor to more people with equal rights to those opportunities.

This is the life of pie. Frantically trying to hold on to your piece and keeping everyone else as far away from it as possible. But this begs the question: are equal rights like pie?

What If Life IS Pie?

My comment on the original LinkedIn post was:

WHILE EVERYONE’S QUIBBLING OVER THE PIE, NOBODY REALISES WE LIVE IN THE BAKERY

Not my clever line admittedly, I stole it off [Bob the Drag Queen](#) (thanks, Bob!), but I love it and bandy it about because it’s a good quip and gets people thinking. I was not quite prepared for how controversial people felt this idea was, not just controversial but flat out wrong. And although I fully believe that life isn’t like pie, let’s do a thought experiment to consider a life of pie.

Assume that life IS one big pie and we have to make sure that we divide it amongst all the people on this earth. Would we not want to make sure that we divide it equally? Are we really such assholes, that we can only think about getting the biggest slice for ourselves? What is that all about? Even if life IS a pie, I feel that equal opportunity should be something we fight for. Well, the reason that many people do fight for their slice of the pie, is because we are living in a world of inequality. We are trained to fear losing our pie while also

consistently coveting more and more. We have been sold the lie that more pie equals safety. Whether we are winning or losing at the pie game, we are always in competition with everyone else in an endless game of pie hawking.

There is a bigger problem with this than just any potential moral conflicts we may feel. In [The Spirit Level](#), Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett explain that the root cause of illness, violence and climate change lies not with economic strength but with inequality. They argue that the stress of constantly having to fight for our piece of the pie negatively impacts our physical and mental health, causes us to be more dishonest and therewith distrustful, causes more violence and diminishes our ability to find resources and innovative solutions to the problems facing the world, such as climate change. These differences do not only impact people who are more disadvantaged they explain. Someone in middle management in a society with a lot of inequality will have worse health outcomes on average than someone in a similar position in a more equal society.

So, if we want to improve our overall societies in areas like health, crime or the environment we need to look at creating a more equal way of dividing the pie.

Life In the Bakery

What we see in the world right now is so much inequality. So many people are being sidelined in so many different ways. Women, the LGBTQAI+ community, people of colour, fat people, the list, unfortunately, goes on. To varying degrees, more than half the world’s population is being sidelined. We like to convince ourselves that hard work pays off because the uncomfortable truth is that much of our “well-earned success” is a result of the specific circumstances we were born into. That is not to say that on a personal level we may have experienced struggles, but we’ve probably also side-stepped some challenges because of the colour of our skin, the country, town or neighbourhood we were born in, or the level of education our parents were able to afford us.

So, what happens if we sit with that uncomfortable truth and really look at the consequences of our pie fever. Can we find a better way of showing up in the world? Perhaps you feel infinitely small

BEING A GOOD PERSON 100% OF THE TIME IS AN UNATTAINABLE GOAL AND UNFORTUNATELY, WE MAY LET OUR PERFECTIONISM STOP US FROM TAKING ANY ACTION AT ALL

when it comes to the magnitude of these issues, but someone has to make a move, and it might as well be you.

If we can let go of the pie and begin moving toward a more equal world, who knows what humanity will come up with. Equality allows us to solve some massive societal issues that are costing us bucket loads of funds and energy, explain Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett in [The Spirit Level](#). Imagine if we can lower violent crime and can stop building more and more prisons. Those resources can then be used in more constructive ways. Besides, since inequality affects our ability to trust and think creatively, we are robbing the world of innovations that could literally save our planet.

Who knows, maybe someone will start baking brownies and make gelato. Or simply whip some cream to go with your slice of pie.

Accept It, You Are Not a Good Person

I will not lie to you, this journey to equality isn’t going to be smooth or comfortable. Part of the problem is that we like to think of ourselves as good people, and most likely... we’re not. I am poking on purpose here, sorry if it hurts a little. Of course, we’d all like to be good people, and on the whole, we’re likely not too shabby. But I feel it’s safe to say we’re not always and certainly not in all areas of our lives. The problem is that being a good person 100% of the time is an unattainable goal* and unfortunately, we may let our perfectionism stop us from taking any action at all.

In [The Happiness Lab episode on How To Be A Better Ally](#), Dr Laurie Santos and her guests argue that perhaps we should accept that we are maybe

just good-ish people, but that our willingness to learn and improve is far more important than our current level of perfection. We’ve discussed before that [making this world a better place is a learning curve](#), and as with any learning curve, we’re going to F*CK up at some point. Making mistakes is uncomfortable and we try to avoid feeling those feelings of shame. Yet, by doing so we’re putting our world on the line. I’m sorry my dear, it’s time to get comfortable with being uncomfortable!

One of the reasons that this journey is so uncomfortable is that we have to do some real honest introspection and address how we have benefitted from inequality and how our biases have informed our behaviour in the past. Such considerations do not always paint us in the best light, and therefore we try to avoid them. But without this continuous clearing of our internal ledger, we won’t be effective in our learning.

We have to be open to people pointing out when we make mistakes and acknowledge the hurt that we will have caused. When our intentions are right and our apologies sincere, we can learn from those moments and become better people for it.

It also means we have to give other people space to make their own mistakes. We have to be willing to engage with people who are learning, and making mistakes as they do so. All while we’re doing the same. That doesn’t mean that we cannot speak up, but it means that we have to trust that our fellow humans have the capacity and willingness to do better next time and that is a lot of super complex space holding for both ourselves and the other. And as if that isn’t enough, this requires introspection and unpacking of stereotypes and biases that may have been activated in ourselves.

* If you want this point beautifully illustrated, get in your jammies and binge *The Good Place* on Netflix.



Uncovering the Hidden Bias

Every single person on this earth will have certain biases. We divide the world into boxes and predict outcomes based on our biases. This is how we navigate the world, and it's a necessary shortcut for our brain that has to process so much information every single minute of every day. The complications arise as soon as we forget that we are navigating the world on biased information. This is part of the introspection we need to do, but it's also important to realise that such biases have permeated our society in ways that we're not even considering.

Caroline Criado Perez dives into the gender bias in her book [Invisible Women](#). She explains that "the lives of men have been taken to represent those of humans overall" and this oversimplification of humankind affects us in ways that we may not ever really consider. We know that there are fewer female CEOs, we know we say "female comedian", while saying "male comedian" sounds silly and unnecessary. We know the staggering numbers of sexual assaults women seem to have to put up with, and the immense unpaid workload women are expected to take on aside from their paid jobs. At least, women are aware of these things.

If only that was the extent of it! The practical consequences of the gender data gap are endless, from being more likely to be killed in a car crash because car test dummies are based on male body averages

(even the female dummies) to being less likely to be correctly diagnosed or receive medication that actually has been tested to work for our biology. Honestly, the list of examples of how women are disadvantaged by this data bias is endless. Snow plough schedules favour the travel patterns of men, leaving women more vulnerable to injuries from slipping accidents. Had considered snow plough schedules to be sexist? Yeah, neither had I. But the biases don't stop there.

There are many systems that we use that are rooted in biased thinking. The Body Mass Index (BMI) that doctors use to determine whether someone is obese was the result of a statistical analysis of the overall relationship between height and weight in societies. Well, white society. Well, white men. It was then primarily used to make sure white women didn't become too curvy, and by that was meant to look too much like black women. There is a lot of information and nuance that I am side-stepping here because this topic is deep and complex and certainly worth more study, so please do yourself a favour and check out these podcasts to begin understanding this particular bias: [Maintenance Phase - The Body Mass Index](#) and [Getting Curious - How F\\$^#d Up Is Fatphobia?](#).

The reason why I bring up the BMI is to illustrate that we rely on systems that are steeped in prejudice and inherently biased, even though we may think of those systems as being scientific and neutral. And such biased systems are hurting people. They are preventing people from accessing more than just job opportunities. And as we rely increasingly on AI (Artificial Intelligence) system biases are becoming greater. Although you may think of AI as ultimately neutral, AI is programmed on existing data sets, data sets with inbuilt bias. The questions researchers ask and hypothesis they formulate, the test subjects they select and the way they collect and process their data are all informed by their internalised bias, and will therefore reflect that bias. Yet, when we talk about data and research and science, we often think that we are dealing with essentially neutral information. This is massively problematic because as Caroline Criado Perez explains:

"machines aren't just reflecting our biases. Sometimes they are amplifying them – and by a significant amount. In the 2017 images study, pictures of cooking were over 33% more likely to involve women than men, but algorithms trained on this dataset connected pictures of kitchens with women 68% of the time. The paper also found that the higher the original bias, the stronger the amplification effect"

Equal Opportunities Are Not Pie, They Are Medicine

When we start looking at the impact that inequality has on the world, we must realise that equal opportunities are not pie. They are the medicine that the world needs to solve real problems we are facing as a species. In [Getting Curious - Are Mushrooms Truly Magical](#), Dr Patty Kaishian points out that the way we have categorised our world in hierarchical systems, has allowed us to exploit each other and other species on our planet and as a result, we are destroying the planet, and potentially overlooking solutions.

She articulates beautifully that diversity and inclusivity aren't just about creating equal opportunities for our fellow human beings. That is just the start of undoing the injustices of the power-over world. I talk about this in ["Are Female Entrepreneurs Leading the Revolution?"](#) so I won't go into so much detail again here. What seems clear to me though is that addressing inequality will have an unbelievably profound effect on our world, and our personal discomfort or prejudice really shouldn't stand in the way of that.

The challenge then becomes inviting as many people as we can to understand that equal opportunities are not pie, but so, so much more than that! And with it comes the invitation to show up in the world with as open a mind as we can muster and a fire in our bellies to learn to be better.

THE SECRET TO TRUST, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INCLUSION IS IN THE JOURNEY

This month I had the immense pleasure to connect with Abbiola Ballah (she/her), an Inclusion Facilitator, Consultant, Speaker and Mentor. Abbiola founded her company, Phern Education Studios to be a catalyst for change in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging (DEIB) space by prioritising not just learning but taking action.

By Mags Thomson

Phern Education Studios focuses on guiding online business owners & founders through the process of building inclusive practices and taking inclusive action in their businesses, and I can't think of anyone better equipped to inspire all of us to step up our game, even when we feel we are just simple solo entrepreneurs in a world of corporate giants.

It's so good to meet you Abbiola, can you tell us a little about your background?

International is the word that I would use to describe myself. Originally from Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean, I have spent the past 20+ years living, studying and working internationally in the US, Japan and Belize. I have been an educator for more than 17 years now, holding leadership positions in educational institutions globally. Most of my past work was focused on teaching, curriculum design, programme design, programme assessment and diversity, equity, inclusion & belonging (DEIB).

As someone who has lived outside of their home country for most of their adult life, I have always had to look for spaces where I could belong and be fully myself. We are all made up of unique intersectional identities and for me, sometimes



I was very aware of many of my “differences” and I have felt excluded many times during my life. Because of this, I made it my mission that everyone who entered my classroom, work environment, workshop, programme, online space, you name it, would know that all of their identities were welcome and supported. I built inclusion into my curriculum, into the structure of my programmes and into the training that I did for other educators. It was not an easy task to do this and sometimes I fell short, but I learned that if I am committed to getting feedback, assessing and iterating my programmes - then I can continue to create inclusive spaces to the best of my current ability.

Now, through Phern Education Studios, I continue this mission by helping others to create spaces where those who enter will feel like they belong and can fully engage. I also know that what holds most people back from creating these spaces is that feeling of being overwhelmed, of getting it wrong, of not knowing where to start – that’s what I help them to break down and come up with actionable steps they can actually commit to taking.



This sounds like such impactful work, how does that tie in with your vision for the world?

With the work that I do, I think a lot about the ripple effect. When I work with clients, put out content, facilitate workshops, speak at conferences, organisations or in a community it is my hope that the knowledge I give them, the reframe they get when thinking about DEIB, the tools that they put into practice will impact their clients which, in turn, will impact their clients’ clients and so on.

That’s how I hope my work will impact the world – that there will be a lasting effect. I want it to be the gift that keeps on giving.

How do you understand leadership to impact us as people and how we can show up in the world?

One of the biggest lessons I have learned about leadership is that being a good leader starts with trust. Not just in having those you work, serve or collaborate with trust you, but having trust in yourself. I have held leadership roles in a few educational organisations and now as the leader of my own business, I need to trust my decisions.

I need to trust that I am doing what is best for me, my business and those who come into my orbit. Without that trust, things start to fall apart. Decisions don’t get made or you aren’t able to actually commit to your decisions and the ripple effect of that means progress does not happen.

It’s been a journey for me as I realised that trust takes different forms. The trust I had in myself as a leader in educational institutions is very different from the trust that I need to lead my own business.

It sounds like what you’re saying is that trust, much as life and our identity, isn’t static. What else have been big lessons you got from your entrepreneurial reinvention?

I’ve gotten a lot of advice over the years in the different iterations of my career but in this season of my career as an entrepreneur, there are two pieces of advice that I’ve gotten that have really helped me - one was from my business coach, Brooke Monaghan who encourages you to break the rules. You don’t have to do things the way everyone else does it, you can do it YOUR way. You can experiment. There is no ONE right way to be an entrepreneur.

The other piece of advice is from my friend and brilliant Strategy Execution Consultant for Founders, Monisha Bajaj. She always says that the order in which you do things matters over the time it takes to do them. So basically, stop trying to do everything at once or skipping around from one thing to the next. Take it one step at a time. Slow it down if you need to and you will see the growth in yourself and your business.

It sounds like you are creating your own personal strategy in business and life. Within that strategy, how do you define and measure success?

To me, success means growth. When I first started this entrepreneurial journey, I got sucked into the messages out there that what was in your bank account was the only way for you to show that your business was successful. I quickly realised that that way of thinking was not for me. It didn’t align with the way I wanted to run my business and the values that I have.

Of course, financial growth is important but it is not the ONLY thing that makes my business successful. My success also comes from the personal growth that I am making e.g. being confident in myself and my expertise, the trust that I have in myself and my business. It comes from the growth that I see in how I show up and what that means for my business. It comes from putting on my big girl pants and making the hard

decisions such as saying no when an opportunity does not align with my business values. It comes from finding my growth edges and moving forward into a new season of business with confidence. All of these things are how I define success!

I love how value-driven your business strategy is, not to mention the impactful output you create for your clients. How would you suggest our readers start thinking about inclusion in their businesses?

One of the most important tips that I give my clients is that they need to reframe how they think about inclusion. Inclusion is not the goal. It is a journey. The goal is actually to commit to that journey. Inclusion is not something where there is a checklist that you can just check boxes and say that you are inclusive. It is ongoing and you have to keep assessing and iterating on it.

I would also say that when you are deciding what actions you want to start taking - make sure that you are not trying to reach for the stars. Building inclusion into your business is not about grand gestures. It is about taking small steps that you can actually commit to seeing through. Those small steps add up to create the big impact that you are hoping for.

Thank you so much for your insights and inspiration Abbiola. Where can people learn more about you and the work you do?

You can find me on Instagram at [@pherneducationstudios](https://www.instagram.com/pherneducationstudios). If you would like to get actionable advice and insight on DEIB in your inbox weekly, you can sign up for my newsletter: bit.ly/tianewsletter. I also run the Taking Inclusive Action 2-Day Workshop Intensive that guides business owners through breaking down where to start with inclusion in their business and building out a strategic action plan that they can actually commit to. You can learn more about the workshop intensive here: bit.ly/TakingInclusiveAction. The next cohort is on the 21st & 22nd of July, 2022.



HOW I OVERCAME IMPOSTER SYNDROME IN MY CORPORATE WORKPLACE

A happy, outgoing and super ambitious woman are the words many people use to describe me when they first meet me.

After leaving University, I was offered three Graduate jobs in the Banking Industry. Thinking outside the box, I decided to reverse the interview process and re-interview all three managers to decide which was the most suitable position for me. In doing so, I managed to secure a 10.1% pay increase before I'd even step foot into the Corporate Banking Office.

This single act sure filled me with confidence and I was so excited to start my career path in Banking.

By Sharan Sammi

I'm also known as an extrovert, super determined and committed with great communication skills. But I recall those times very clearly in my mind when weeks into my graduate role, I started to feel a little uncomfortable.

Now don't get me wrong, the graduate role itself was amazing, I got to travel to the Head Office to attend different training courses that focused on building my managerial and leadership skills. But then, when back in the main Corporate Banking office, I felt so different, a little like a fish out of water, totally out of my depth.



I attended the Monday morning meetings where all the directors and managers (mainly white men in their 50s - and that's not a stereotype, it was the reality!) would attend to discuss the agenda for the week, client meetings and anticipated sales.

I kept hearing the words "what's in your pipeline" for the first time. It's funny thinking back but I honestly was confused, thinking "Why are these people talking about pipes linked in buildings when we are in banking?" I sat there quietly just soaking it all in.

I sure became a fast learner and it all made sense, the acronyms everyone was using in the office to the business processes. I regained my confidence and started to enjoy working life as a graduate.

Hitting the Glass Ceiling

Fast forward that year and it was time for me to consider my job role options going forward. I was working alongside many management assistants throughout that year, mainly doing the admin work, filing, faxing (yes it was all fax machines back then!), processing direct debits on the system and opening accounts.

I felt I needed to progress. After all, I had been attending management and leadership training sessions all year round. But deep down something didn't feel right, I felt I didn't quite fit in.

Many, if not all of the management assistants in the office had been in the same roles for what seemed like years. I started to talk to them about what role I should consider next, once my graduate role would come to an end after the year.

The common view amongst all the management assistants was: "You can't become a manager until you have at least 5 or 10 years of experience as an assistant." They made comments like: "You're too young to get a management role, you need to build your experience first from the bottom first!"

Others felt joy and pride by telling me they started in banking at 16 and spent years as a cashier before they made their move to the corporate business side! My mind was confused. I started to develop that notion called **Imposter Syndrome**.

Imposter Syndrome

Ever come across this term before? I started to feel deflated, even having a university degree and all that time spent on leadership training courses in my graduate role, the reality of the matter was I just felt like I was **too young**.

I didn't belong as a manager or even someone in leadership as the known status quo appeared to be: I had to be a management assistant for years first to compensate for my young age and lack of actual working experience!

"What did I go to university for?" I kept repeating in my mind. I started to doubt myself, my capabilities and even felt inadequate. YES, I suffered from Imposter Syndrome!

My ego kept shouting inside my mind: "YES, you're just not good enough, you are too young for a management role so best just stay quiet and settle!"

So I did just that, I settled but felt very lost. I felt I wasn't good enough to be a manager or director and I just felt completely out of place with the thought of becoming a management assistant.

The Turning Point

I allowed this to continue for weeks until I attended my next leadership training course at head office. This was a major turning point for me and a pivotal moment.

In the train station at WHSmiths, I always used to pick up a book so many times in the past and read a few pages each time. I mean I must have read at least half of the book by now, not thinking about actually buying the book!

This time I felt different.

I decided to buy the book and this was a complete life-changing moment for me.

It was called [The Rules of Work by Richard Templar](#) and it was a life-changer!

I read the whole book that day on the train from Birmingham to Leeds in the UK. **OH MY!** The principles and practical exercises were so simple yet mind-blowing!

I put some of the Book exercises into practice on that Monday morning. I walked into the banking office with the Financial Times newspaper under my arms (acting as if!), my hair tied up and dressed in my business suit (not casual workwear but the full works, looking professional and well formal!). I immediately felt so different.

I started reading the newspaper. Yes, a lot of the economic stuff went over my head but I continued. I also felt totally over-dressed in the office, I mean the management assistants all wore casual clothes and here I was literally suited and booted!

The management assistants in the office noticed and shouted "Sharan are you going for a job interview?" At first, I was defensive and quite

upset by their comments. Then, hearing it every day all week, I started to take note.

It was like my message from the Universe: Get an interview.

The bank managers and directors started to take notice of how I was being treated in the office, after turning up as the "new me" using the techniques from the book!

I started to feel more determined, having regained my inner confidence and I wanted to progress but still felt it wasn't the right time, unworthy and well just not good enough **yet**. As I heard so often I needed at least five years' experience!

I decided to talk to my line manager and express how I was feeling. He was super supportive and allowed me to attend client meetings with all the managers and directors in the office, shadowing at first and note-taking. Although this felt great, this didn't go down too well in the main office with the assistants. I was faced with a lot of resistance, even jealousy towards me which did start to affect me emotionally and I'd get upset.

I continued to attend the Monday weekly planning meetings and although on one hand, I felt so grateful—being in a boardroom full of around 12 banking managers and directors (yes, those white men in their 50s), a female PA and me - a young, Indian woman—Imposter Syndrome appeared again. This time my mind was telling me:

"Women can't progress - just look around you - wake up - you need to be a white man in your 50s to become a bank manager."

I became seriously confused thinking: "So, not only am I too young but now can't progress in

banking because I'm a woman?"

The inner imposter was so strong! But deep down I knew I was meant for so much more. Luckily, although there was a lot of resistance from the other assistants in the office, I allowed my determination, my self-motivation and support from my line manager as my mentor to help me progress.

How I Changed My Inner Voice

That inner voice was so strong and loud, and kept shouting in my mind:

"You're just not good enough!"

"Who do you think you are to progress and become a manager at the age of 23!"

"You're a woman in a male-dominated world - you can't progress!"

"You're Indian and way too young, just stay small and settle - just be grateful!"

I decided to face my fears.

I decided to challenge the imposter!

I TOOK ACTION!

I applied for an internal role in the Treasury Financial Markets Division of the bank. The role was based in a regional office up North. I successfully passed the interview stage, I got the job! YES - I DID IT! I was over the moon - or was I? That sheer joy was very short-lived, as Imposter Syndrome came out to play just one last time!

Upon my return back to the main office, I was faced with so much animosity from all the management assistants. There was in fact an uproar! Phone calls had been placed to head office disputing the fact that "a youngster, having left University on a one-year graduate role in banking had been given a managerial role in the Financial Markets Specialist Team without any such experience!"

That youngster was me!

I had a serious choice to make at that very moment, that was in fact going to be life-changing!

One, I could remain an imposter and surrender to

the fact that I was so out of my depth, not good enough, even though I completed university BUT with only one year of banking experience as a Graduate, and choose to remain in the same corporate office and merge straight into the expected role as a management assistant. That was the status quo after all!

OR

Two, I could take ownership of my future career path, and my direction and be proud that I took action, was successful at the interview and fully claim the managerial role in the Treasury Financial Markets Team. Oh, and enjoy the 50% pay increase that I'd negotiated during the interview too!

Which do you think I went for?

That Was the Last Time I Heard the Imposter

As a wife and mother of two beautiful Earthangels, I was in the banking world for 20 years and started my personal development journey more than 16 years ago. I trained in various healing and coaching modalities in my spare time. Since leaving banking in 2020, I became an entrepreneur and started my own training and coaching business. I'm now an Abundance Coach, Intuitive Healer and Manifesting Mentor.

I empower ambitious corporate and business women to unlock their full financial potential by energetically activating their true self worth and inner confidence so that they can start building an abundant legacy and the time and freedom to manifest a successful and fulfilling life by design.

I am the creator of the Manifesting Abundance Blueprint which is designed to activate the 9 essential keys to unlocking and attracting prosperity and wealth from within in all areas of your life. I am so passionate about the work I do and totally believe anything is possible, even overcoming Imposter Syndrome!

Feel free to connect with me through my [private Facebook group Anything is Possible](#), or reach out on Instagram ([@sharanmoneymindsetmentor](#)) or [LinkedIn](#).

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11 WAYS TO BE A BETTER ALLY

How familiar does this sound?

Hard work pays off. The harder you work, the more people will notice."

– Sydney Sweeney

Or perhaps something like:

The hard work definitely paid off and hard work always does."

– Gabby Douglas

The idea that hard work pays off is pretty deeply ingrained in our societies. It's a convenient way to make people responsible for their own level of success. If you failed, that must have meant you didn't work hard enough. Didn't get the promotion? Your colleague must have been working for it harder!

It feels like that should be how it works, but... unfortunately, it is not.

By Mags Thomson



The premise that hard work will per definition make you more successful only works on the basis of a level playing field, and that is a reality we are still pretty far from achieving. People, companies and societies are riddled with biases and inequalities that mean we cannot rely on the assumption of meritocracy.*

We all live at an intersection of different factors that either provide us with privilege or disadvantage. Our skin colour, the way our brain works, the size of our bodies or how we experience our gender are all arbitrary factors that impact our ability to succeed in society, yet have nothing to do with the hard work and effort we put in.

We have to face the facts, there isn't a level playing field. That means we have to adjust our attitude towards the hard work pays off paradigm. We have to lift people who are marginalised and disadvantaged if we are committed to creating a fairer society, and a fairer society benefits everyone (yes, that's right: EVERYONE).

But when it comes to being an ally to marginalised people, we find ourselves frozen in overwhelm. The problems feel insurmountable and the possibilities of sticking our foot in our mouths are abundant. In fear of making a fool of ourselves or by being underwhelmed by our own ability to affect change, we freeze.

Maybe we do some of the superficial support, like a few posts by activists, wave a rainbow flag in June or share a podcast episode we found inspiring. All those things are great, but the real work? The deep work? It's messy and uncomfortable and requires commitment. It also requires us to F it up, and learn as we unpack these tense and complex dynamics.

What you can do as a solo entrepreneur? How can you become a better ally? I asked some of your peers for their thoughts.



Activate Your Team for Better Results

Every business has a startup phase and it could be really difficult to pull through. With the low income and a high rate of energy invested, it was not long before I was depressed. Then my manager told me about the benefits of implementing a Diversity, Equality, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) scheme. It looked promising and as a businesswoman who loves to take risks, I delved into it. I decided to organise my company as a sort of round table platform. Through DEIA, I let my workers become actively engaged and soon, things were turning around for good; high productivity, a team to take it out there, and even higher returns. I was happy, I had my workers as reliable allies. Since then, I have broadened my view of what business could be and started collaborations with other aligned companies. We've seen increased returns at all ends. I can honestly say that DEIA was at the heart of moving me from a sad depressed business owner to one already achieving her dreams.

Emma Gordon, Founder of USSalvageYardsSite ([website](#))

*Meritocracy - a system, organization, or society in which people are chosen and moved into positions of success, power, and influence on the basis of their demonstrated abilities and merit ([merriam-webster.com](#))

Minorities Are People Too

As a member of the majority group, you have certain privileges that people in marginalised groups don't have. It's important to be aware of your privilege and use it to support those who don't have the same advantages. So, when someone from a marginalised group speaks, it's important to listen with an open mind and without judgement. Not only will this help you to better understand their experiences, but it will also show that you respect and value their opinions.

It's easy to make assumptions about people based on their appearance or the group they identify with. But it's important to remember that everyone is an individual with their own unique experiences and perspectives. Avoid making assumptions and instead, ask questions and get to know people as individuals.

If you witness someone being discriminated against, it's important to speak up. Whether it's speaking out against racist jokes or calling out discriminatory behaviour, your voice can make a difference.

Harriet Chan, Co-founder and Marketing Director at CocoFinder ([website](#) | [LinkedIn](#))



Get Comfortable With Feeling Uncomfortable

Being an ally isn't just about wearing the t-shirt or hat, it's about being in the trenches. It's about learning to sit with yourself and all of those uncomfortable realisations you have when it gets quiet. I am a white woman over the age of 40 and until we adopted our daughter (who I refer to as a charismatic, precocious, strong Black woman-in-training), I hadn't had to examine the privileges I've enjoyed in my life. I talked about injustice with my black friends, I marched, I listened to their stories, but I still didn't quite get it, not in the way I do now. Because, in a way, I'm now living it through the eyes of my child. I get to wake up every day and be accepted for exactly who I am without any reservations or explanations. My daughter doesn't have that option.

Get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Allies, first and foremost, are there to support. We aren't there to be the loudest voices. Our job is to allow those who have experienced injustice to be heard. Doing this is uncomfortable, especially when we, as white people, have been raised to speak up. But our experience is not the experience of everyone, and we need to give voice to those experiences – not our interpretations of the experiences. Connect to the humanity surrounding you. It can be your own humanity or the humanity of someone else but embrace those quirky, interesting, sometimes annoying, but always human elements of the person you are allying with. Embracing that humanity is how we help to lift those voices so that they can be heard and use our privilege to increase the privilege of those who don't have it.

Kristina Knight, Freelance Writer & Editor at Bizreport ([website](#) | [LinkedIn](#))



Be an Ally Year-Round

Rainbows, inclusive advertising, LGBT influencer highlights, or inclusive branded shoots shouldn't end on July 1st. If those things do explode and then come to a screeching halt, believe me, the LGBTQA community takes note. Be an ally year-round. Be an ally even when it stops trending. Don't make a buck off our back and then forget we exist the other 11 months of the year. It's a weird feeling, the commodification of Pride month. On one hand, I'm beyond grateful this type of visibility is even possible. On another hand, it's disheartening when the representation stops. Real allies don't stop being allies when the topic stops #trending. I can only speak for my own queer experience here, but I do know this issue is not isolated to the LGBTQA minority.

The best way to be an ally is to educate yourself, listen and uplift. Listen to black women, listen to trans voices; listen to those who don't look or live like you. Hire diversely. Create a level playing field in your corner of the business world. Then, consistently amplify minority voices and contributions.

Start small and stay authentic. Don't do things just for optics. Do things because it's the right thing to do and you genuinely want to be an ally.

Lauren Johnson, Co-founder at BerryLemon ([website](#) | [LinkedIn](#))

Friendship Goes a Long Way

That old saying about adversity building character? It's wrong. It isn't adversity that builds character, it's friendship. When I quit my job to escape a toxic work environment, my friend Cassie reached out to me and asked if I'd like to go into business with her. She wanted to build an online hub and community for bakers and cooking fanatics and wanted it to be a home for people who didn't know anything about the internet. Naturally, I said yes, and two years later, we now have an audience of more than three million people a month.

Cassie taught me that the best way to be an ally to anyone is just to reach out and give them a chance when no one else will. By offering an opportunity to those who need it, you're more likely to succeed as all that anyone wants, and needs is a chance to prove themselves. Be a better ally by being a better person and offering that hand up to anyone, and everyone who deserves it.

Christina Russo, Creative Director at The Kitchen Community ([website](#))



Create a Melting Pot

We're setting an example for other small businesses in the fashion space by operating with a diverse staff of gen Z young adults. When I first started my business in 2019, I knew that to design different products; I needed a team that could contribute varying experiences and ideas.

We don't look the same, we don't dress the same, and we don't act the same – but we all share a mutual respect for each other and passion for what we do. To be the best ally you can be, hire for skills and diverse contributions to create a melting pot of culture and ideas.

Breanne Millette, Founder & CEO at BISOULOVELY ([website](#) | [LinkedIn](#))

Leave Your Saviour Complex By the Door

Do not become an ally with the intention of saving someone. Although it may be apparent to some, this is nonetheless essential. Often, people are driven by the subconscious assumption that those who are oppressed are to blame for their own plight and that if individuals of oppressed minorities had been more astute, intelligent, or hard-working, they wouldn't even have put themselves into this precarious position in the first place.

Whenever you feel that you are somehow superior to other people, you are just contributing to the propagation of repressive ideologies.

Lily Wili, Founder and Designer of Everwallpaper ([website](#) | [LinkedIn](#))



Let Go of Perfection

Remember that being an ally is an ongoing journey - there will always be more to learn, and there is no "perfect" way to do it. The most important thing is to keep moving forward and continue striving to make the world a more inclusive place for everyone. This means having tough conversations and being willing to listen when someone tells you that you've made a mistake.

Ismail Kuden, Co-Founder at Kuden Rugs ([website](#) | [LinkedIn](#))

SHOWING THAT YOU ARE OPEN TO THE CONVERSATION AND MAKING QUESTIONS LESS AWKWARD IS SOMETHING WE CAN DO AT ALL STAGES OF YOUR BUSINESS.

Speak Up, Always

Once, I was on a business trip and I remember a few people talking about a marginalised group and no one was speaking up for them. That's when my leadership instinct kicked and I spoke up for the aforementioned group, even though no one from the community was there. It's our job to correct people if they speak injustice, whether or not they are talking about someone who is there to hear it. If we do not speak up there, we are not a true ally or are not of any help to others.

Although it was a little uncomfortable for me but marginalised people have to face worse things than this. Speaking up and calling out someone on injustice is a must no matter if they are there or not.

Robert Welch, CEO at Projector1 ([website](#))



Normalise the Questions

When I had to organise seminars and workshops as part of my office job, it was already normal to enquire about specific dietary needs or preferences. I feel we would make great strides if we make questions like “what are your pronouns” or “do you have any specific needs to access and use our venue” or “do you have any specific needs to interact with your devices that I should keep in mind?”

The more we normalise asking such questions, we don't just signal to people who need these considerations that we welcome them, we show everyone that inclusivity is important. I am by no means perfect in this area, but I often mention to people I work with to please let me know if they need anything. Of course, I also have my boundaries and limitations, but sometimes it isn't about changing your whole system, but rather about providing a work-around for people who need it.

Showing that you are open to the conversation and making such questions less awkward is something we can do at all stages of your business.

Suzy Jacobs, Author & Thought Leader ([website](#))



Be An Ally In Your Own Space

I have been thinking about this a lot, as I have been working on this issue of FEM and then I came across a quote that really sums it up quite well. On the I Weigh podcast with Jameela Jamil, episode 113 entitled Fixing The System, Not the Women, her guest Laura Bates talks about men who express a desire to be allies for women. “We often wonder how we make space for these men in our feminist spaces,” she explains before quoting Kelly Temple:

“WHAT WE REALLY NEED IS NOT TO MAKE SPACE FOR THOSE MEN IN THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT, IT FOR THOSE MEN TO TAKE THE SPACES THEY HAVE IN THE WORLD AND MAKE THEM FEMINIST”

It articulated so eloquently the thoughts that had been knocking about my own brain about being a better ally. It's not about taking up space, but rather expanding the space. For example, rather than posting rainbows to our social media and watering down the potential reach LGBTQAI activist may have, perhaps it's about engaging with content, sharing content and speaking up when we see people make derogatory or hateful remarks. Doing this consistently will help create new safe spaces for people to exist.

Mags Thomson, Self-Publishing Expert & Consultant at House of Hives ([website](#) | [LinkedIn](#))

Resources

[The Inclusion Dividend: Why Investing in Diversity & Inclusion Pays Off](#) by Mason Donovan and Mark Kaplan



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But how do you get other people to share about you?

You could play the odds and hope that you hit the algorithm jackpot and one of your posts goes viral. Or you can join forces with your fellow entrepreneurs and join FEM.

GET IN TOUCH TO CLAIM YOUR SPOT BEFORE THEY RUN OUT!

IS YOUR ALLYSHIP PERFORMATIVE OR IS IT A PRACTICE?



With all the social injustices that continue to take over the world news these days, it has become more important than ever that as entrepreneurs, we support and build spaces for our clients where they can feel that they are being seen and heard. It is also very important that this support - this allyship - is not just a performance that we put on to make ourselves feel good. It needs to be intentional. It needs to be an ongoing practice.

By [Abbiola Ballah](#)

Over the last few years, the stories of people fighting for social justice around the world have become louder and more frequent.

It probably seems that every week a new injustice has occurred and so many take to the social media streets and sometimes literal streets to protest and lift their voices in solidarity with those who have been hurt the most by the injustices. These people, the ones with privileged identities that have benefitted from the system of White Supremacy, see themselves as allies. They are there to support and stand with those with marginalised identities that have been harmed by these injustices.

Here's my burning question for you: Is this solidarity, this allyship, a performance, or a practice? What's the difference and how can we tell?

“BEING AN ALLY IS JUST THE FIRST STEP, THE SIMPLEST ONE, IT IS THE SPACE WHEREIN THE PRIVILEGED BEGAN TO ACCEPT THE FLAWED DYNAMICS THAT MAKE FOR INEQUALITY. BEING A GOOD ALLY IS NOT EASY, IT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU CAN JUMP INTO, THOUGH IT CAN FEEL LIKE YOU'RE A KNOW-IT-ALL SUPERHERO.”

— Mikki Kendall

in [Hood Feminism: Notes from the Women That a Movement Forgot](#)

Performance VS Practice

Let's start by breaking down the difference between performative allyship and putting allyship into practice.

Performative allyship comes from talking the talk without actually walking the talk. It's when you show up only on social media when something happens to give your thoughts and prayers or to share your outrage but you never talk about that outrage in any other part of your life.

It's when you just “signal” that you value equity and inclusion by sharing your pronouns or reposting content from those with marginalised identities. However, in your personal and professional life, you aren't doing anything else to make this an actual practice.

Putting allyship into practice comes from walking the talk. It's when you actively introduce and implement training, processes, and policies into your personal and professional lives that centre marginalised voices. It's when you commit to taking imperfect inclusive action and to assess and iterate upon that action as you learn and grow in your practice. It is something that you keep doing even when the cameras are off.

Practice is not easy. It can be uncomfortable. It can be inconvenient. It can be imperfect. It can be a challenge.

It can also be the thing that makes a difference in someone else's life. It can have an impact. It can bring about change.

Allyship as an Entrepreneur

As entrepreneurs, a key part of serving your clients is to ensure that when they show up in your space, they know and feel that they belong and can fully engage as their true selves.

The constant news cycle that shows the injustices of the world (and so many others that don't even make the news) can be draining and become trauma-inducing for many people.

What do you do when these traumatic images, news stories, etc. affect not just yourself but your clients?

How do you move away from performative allyship and move towards practising allyship in your business?

One of the simplest ways to start is by holding space in your programmes & communities that allows everyone to feel seen or heard.



Holding Space

Here are some key steps to take to hold space for yourself and your clients as you practice allyship and centre inclusion:

Use your discernment

Check in within yourself about what your role is in your space. Is it your role to try to fix everyone and everything? Or is your role to create a space where vulnerability and opinions are accepted, welcomed, and respected?

Show Awareness

Acknowledge that this may be a rough time for some and that others (who may not have heard the news or aren't from that country) may not know about what is happening yet. It is important not to assume that everyone would be aware of world issues and to ensure that they don't feel excluded because they are not aware.

Know Who Is In Your Space

Building on my last point above, knowing who your clients are will allow you to frame how you show awareness. If you have international clients, not everyone may be aware or know how to respond. Let them know that it's ok to not say anything at all.

Open Up Space for Conversation

Give your clients the choice as to whether they want to express anything – whatever that may be. If you have a group, ensure that they know that the space is a brave space that is non-judgmental and welcomes curiosity and opinions.

Be Clear on Boundaries

Reiterating community agreements and how you all communicate in the space can help ensure conversations don't go off the rails if there are dissenting opinions especially if you have a group. If you don't have community agreements, this would be a great time to create them for your space.

Community agreements “come from a consensus-driven process to identify what every person in the group needs from each other and commits to each other to feel safe, supported, open and trusting... they provide a common framework for how people aspire to work and be together as they take transformational action.” (From National Equity Project)

Follow Up

Check in with those who shared (or didn't share) to let them know you hear and see them, and that you are there if they need you.

Remember to take it one step at a time. You don't need to make grand gestures with your allyship to show that you value inclusion. Keep taking small action steps and those steps will keep adding up to create change!



How Having a Diversity Strategy Will Increase Your Slice of the Market Share

As part of the Inspiring Interviews Series, I had the pleasure to speak to queer, nonbinary, neurodiverse, poly business owner, and my new friend, G Sabini-Roberts.

By Mags Thomson

As a queer, nonbinary (they/them pronouns if you please) neurodiverse, poly business owner with decades of the design industry and activism experience — and zero filter — it won't come as a surprise that G had plenty to say, and that we got on like a house on fire. They don't mince words and don't hold back. This can be both entertaining and — trust me — illuminating.

G has been in branding for 25 years and running their own brand design business for the last 9 of them. Their wife joined them in the business in 2019 and they're supported by a small team now.



Last year, in response to the amount of feedback they were getting on their personal content around issues of LGBTQ+ inclusivity, particularly gender diversity, they — together with their partners — set up [The Queer Box](#) to deliver LGBTQ+ Diversity training to small business owners.

How did you get here? What inspired your business?

The branding business started because I needed to be able to work around having a young family and I had the skills. It was nothing more complex than that. However, I've grown to develop a very particular approach over the years that is intensely client-centric, collaborative and a ton of fun. And it gets brilliant results, which has helped everything grow.

But that's the bread and butter. Since making the choice to be deliberately open and vulnerable about my own experiences of being nonbinary and neurodiverse so many more opportunities have opened up. Whether it be curating spaces, creating resources or offering mentorship, supporting people who want to learn about these issues...it is allowing me to take an active role in shaping a future that I believe will be better for all of us.

How do you hope your work will impact the world?

The tide is turning. Diversity and inclusion are no longer on the outer edges of what matters in business. The evidence is there: businesses that are openly inclusive and who take a position of leadership in these issues are, year on year, increasing their slice of the market share.

As humans, we are waking up to the fact that the way things have always been done is not always the best way — or even a positive way. We can do better. We are starting to do better. We now need to keep building that momentum.



What sets you apart from other people in your field?

On the brand design side, my approach is different to most. I use my autistic powers of intense focus, attention to detail and obsessive enthusiasm for every client and we design their brand on the spot, together, usually in a day or less. Having been doing this for a long time means that it all happens very easily and efficiently – not to mention it always gets beautiful and deeply personally meaningful results.

When it comes to inclusion I have been on the outside my whole life, but I don't see that as a negative. I think it's an aspect of being autistic that causes me to simply not see the divisions that some others so easily use to separate groups. I love getting to share that in thoughtful, challenging yet non-confrontational ways that inspire deeper thought and personal reflection.

How has your (mental) health impacted your business?

I'm blessed with fairly robust mental health. However, my neurodiversity does present multiple challenges. One of the joys of entrepreneurship has been having the opportunity to build businesses that work for me, on my terms, and I encourage that in my clients too.

Reaching the point where I was able to start recruiting a team to help take on the aspects of the business that I find challenging has been revolutionary.

How do diversity and inclusivity play a part in your business?

It is my business – quite literally. It is my life. I accidentally became an activist at the age of 17 when I asked the headteacher of my 6th form if I could set up an LGBT group in the college, and I was told in no uncertain terms that I could not – thanks to Section 28.* So I trained as a volunteer at the local women's centre and set one up off campus instead.

Equality, justice and respect for every human as a complete and valid person have been drivers in pretty much all my life choices. I'm not afraid to be the one to draw a line in the sand if no-one else has stood up yet but increasingly I am one of many.

In my own lifetime, I have gone from not even having basic equal rights to being able to marry the person I love regardless of our genders, raise a legally recognised family and see my children grow up in a world that is many, many times more accepting than the one I grew up in.

FEM is the Feminist Entrepreneurs Magazine. How would you define feminism in your life and business?

I was raised by feminist parents. I remember being taken to the [Pankhurst Centre](#) in Manchester as a youngster and being told the stories of the women that fought to give women the right to vote.

My aunt was an investigative journalist who dedicated her life to exposing inequalities and fighting for justice – and as a trans woman in the 80s and 90s, that was almost unheard of.

I have many diversities as a human – as we all do. Understanding their intersections has to be at the core of where we are moving towards as a society. We certainly need to get a grip of the exclusionary, defensive reactions that some diverse groups have against others. Oppression is not a competition and there is space for all of us. Helping people to understand that – in both business and in life – is central to who I am and who I choose to be in the world.

Where can people find you?

People who would like to know more about me can check out my [personal website](#). For information about my brand design business, check out [Branding by G](#). And for those who are interested in making their business more inclusive and diverse, check out [the Queer-Friendly Business Course](#).

Of course, you can follow me on all the socials:

[Facebook](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)

**Section 28 was a law passed in 1988 by a Conservative government that stopped councils and schools "promoting the teaching of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship." The law was stopped in Scotland in 2000 and in the rest of the United Kingdom in 2003 (Source: [bbc.co.uk](#))*

This interview was previously published in FEM in April 2021

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Editor in chief: Mags Thomson

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