

# Commanding respect

How to be taken seriously – even with a babyface

Walking into a roomful of men takes courage, even for the most confident female business leader or entrepreneur. How can you make sure you're taken seriously? As part of The Fold's ([www.thefoldlondon.com](http://www.thefoldlondon.com)) recent podcast series #payitforward, Kate Bassett, journalist from Management Today, gets practical tips from Shona Baijal, Managing Director of UBS Wealth Management, and Juliette Souliman, entrepreneur and founder of CRED.

Shona Baijal joined UBS Wealth Management as a graduate and, in 2013, became the first woman to be promoted to Managing Director in the UK. She's a fierce advocate for more gender equality in the finance sector. Joining Shona is French entrepreneur, Juliette Souliman: partner and chief commercial officer of investment company, CRED. Juliette has founded two start-ups, been name-checked as a trailblazer by Business Insider and Innovate Finance – and she's still just 25.

## **How did you get started in your career – and what's been your proudest moment so far?**

Shona: "I got into finance through an internship at university. I hated exams. So I thought, what can I do that won't involve doing any more exams? So I did an internship at UBS and I'm still there to this day. My proudest moment was probably getting the Managing Director promotion. I want to leverage my position to help other women advance in their careers. I'm really pleased to see a much broader and diverse range of female talent at UBS now."

Juliette: "I started out as an entrepreneur, cofounding two start-ups when I was at university. I started my official career as a venture capitalist, and specialized little by little in financial technology, insuretech and blockchain, which I completely fell in love with. I know that sounds really geeky – but I promise you, I do have friends! Two years later, I decided to launch my own fund, CRED Investments."

## **How do you prioritize and balance your responsibilities?**

Shona: "You don't feel the hours or realize you're working hard when you're doing something you love. And when starting out, you don't necessarily have as many responsibilities outside business. So I say, go for it. Follow your passion, and do what invigorates and motivates you every day. There may be compromises and responsibilities later that you need to try and balance. For example, I still work the

same hours I did when I started. But the combination and composition of those hours looks very different.

As I've climbed the ladder, I've found you can and should delegate certain elements. Women often try to retain too much control of things. So it's about learning how to delegate.

I'm also pleased that the nine-to-five presenteeism culture is disappearing in banking. It's not about compromising on your work. But you might still want to get home in the evening, so you can do homework with your kids. If I'm in London, I want to be there between 6pm and 7pm every day, and work again after they go to bed. Or I'll work weekends. There have been times in my career where people have forced me to do those kinds of hours. But when you're in control and doing things on your terms, the rest falls naturally into place."

## **What challenges have you faced being a young woman in business?**

Juliette: "I'm always very conscious of building credibility. When you're facing a client or potential partner, or trying to raise a lot of money, you need to build credibility. But I'm often the only woman in the room. And I'm young with a babyface. So it's definitely a challenge and I'd appreciate tips on this."

Shona: "First, I wouldn't apologize. You are who you are. You're clearly very good at what you do. I think that apologizing for who you are will diminish the confidence you bring to the table. For really big meetings, I sometimes neutralize what I'm wearing, for example, by wearing a suit. A jacket makes me feel more business-like. It's just about confidence. I don't really mind how people perceive me anymore. It's more about how I feel and making sure I'm bringing my best game.

I also think that the people we're talking to are changing. Increasingly, clients don't just want to deal with middle-aged men. They want to interact with a diverse group of people working in a firm. Because that reflects who they are."

### **What keeps you awake at night?**

Juliette: "I love my job and feel very privileged to be in a position where I don't need to count my hours. But I definitely wonder sometimes, am I prioritizing the right things, and will I regret my choices later?"

Shona: "I know this is a nice problem to have, but I've achieved quite a lot in a short space of time. I'm in my early forties thinking about another 20 or 25 years of working life. I want to come to work, be challenged and make sure I'm learning. The higher you go, the more limited the roles become. So it's about how you evolve and develop your career while there's still a large part of it left to go."

### **How do you support other women?**

Shona: "My big effort involves thinking about how we can hire more women, and develop and retain the women we have. I'm very proud of our mentorship scheme where we partner senior and junior women. The senior women help the younger women navigate the organization. But there's a lot to be learned from the younger cohorts too. So we also have reverse mentoring, where the senior women listen to and leverage the younger women's insights. I think that can be incredibly helpful and powerful."

The face of wealth is changing at a phenomenal pace. The amount of wealth that's now being created in female hands globally is growing. At UBS, we have to think about how we're going to appeal to female clients. We've spoken to a lot of women and know there's much to be done. We need to be aware of the nuances. There are some facts, such as women outlive men, tend to be more risk-averse, and are sometimes not prepared for big life events. We have to acknowledge those facts when communicating with women."

Juliette: "I'm a massive advocate for more balanced access to business funding. I find the data shocking and appalling. Last year in the UK, for every pound of venture capital invested in start-ups, less than one pence went to female-fronted companies. It's just crazy. Venture capital is about investing in the start-ups of today so that they become the companies of tomorrow. We're creating the white-male companies of tomorrow. That's scary – and boring. I want my friends and family to be able to work for diverse and inclusive companies."

I also work a lot in educating women on how to raise venture capital, because it's a very shadowy and opaque world. There's no phone number or book on the subject. If you think about financial empowerment and inclusiveness, it's super-important to build a fairer society."

### **How do you unwind?**

Shona: "I spend time with my kids. As much as I love my husband and what I do, everything comes down to those two little boys. They know mum's got a job, puts on her suits, goes to work and sometimes comes home a bit stressed. They're the perfect antidote, because they just force you to switch off."

Juliette: "I switch off by not having my phone with me for two days. Which, by the way, my business partner hates me for! For me, it's about being completely away from technology. I do long-distance trekking with a backpack, map and no phone. I switch off from the world."

Shona: "I choose to stay connected. I have an amazing team around me. So it's not stressful staying in touch with work. I'm trying to do a digital detox, one Friday evening a week. And it's kind of not working!"

### **Who do you turn to for support and advice?**

Shona: "I've had different mentors as my career has developed. I'm a big believer in getting men on board. Until we get those men engaged – not just talking the talk, but walking it – I don't think we'll make progress. Who you surround yourself with isn't necessarily about people helping you advance. It's more about who you really want around to consult with and lean on when you're having a bad day or need some advice."

At home – and I know it's a cliché and cheesy – I turn to my husband. We've grown up together. I don't think there's anyone who understands me the way he does. There will definitely be moments in all the obstacles I face when I'll turn to him and just ask for advice. I may not follow it, but I'll listen."

### **Who or what influenced you most in your early years?**

Juliette: "My parents were both entrepreneurs with a small boutique fashion shop. I've always seen them work so hard, sometimes enjoying the fruits of their labour and sometimes not. Their independence fascinated me – they own their success and failure. I think it's thrilling. So I live for risk. I love it."

Shona: "I lost my father when I was 16. My mother was a qualified accountant and widowed at 43. That was a life-changing event. The bit that hit home for me was, here's a very highly educated and capable woman who's giving up her career to raise her family. Completely out of the blue, my father was gone. It left my mother lost and bewildered. I found my life partner at a young age. But I've always maintained my independence and made sure I can stand on my own two feet."

## What advice would you give other women to help them in their careers?

Juliette: "Seek discomfort. I see the outcome of every decision I make in a very pragmatic way. If you want abnormal returns, you have to be abnormal in your choices and way of living, and take risks."

Shona: "Be authentic. I've probably learned that the hard way at times in my career. And there have definitely been moments where I've felt slightly out of place. So I would just say, use that to your advantage. Use that to build your confidence. Be who you are. The more comfortable I've felt in my own skin, the more successful and credible I've become. Don't think about what you don't have or who you're not – acknowledge who you are and play to those strengths."

## Five big takeaways

1. Don't apologize for who you are. Be confident and play to your strengths. Cherish what makes you unique. The more authentic you are, the more successful you'll be.
2. Get out of your comfort zone. If you want abnormally successful results, you need to make abnormal decisions.
3. Build your inner circle. Connect with people you can turn to for advice or just a friendly ear when you're having a bad day.
4. Get men on board. Work with men as male allies. Business will only become more diverse when everyone is engaged with equality.
5. Find time to unwind. Relax with your family, pursue other interests and, if you can, switch off your devices when you're not working.

Listen in – download the [podcast](#)

### What do you think?

Do you worry about how others perceive you? What tips would you give on being taken seriously? We'd love to [hear](#) from you!

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