

Entrepreneurial Women in Renewable Energy



My story...

Liz Dunn

Partner, Burges Salmon

An inspirational woman who's not afraid of challenges, Liz Dunn, chose law as a second career. She shared with us the story of her successes and the challenges she has faced.

Liz originally trained and worked as a theatre designer, but decided it was time for a change when her children were young as she felt it was time to get a "proper job and a pension". Liz then embarked on a journey into the career of law. She completed her law conversion part-time and distance learning, enabling her to juggle family and studying. "With two small children I relished studying and having the opportunity to embark on a new challenge. During that time I met many amazing people who were also looking for a career in law. A lot of them were women with families and some even had full time jobs as well. They were very inspirational".

Liz went on to secure her training contract with Burges Salmon where she qualified in 2004 and then became a partner in the planning and compulsory acquisition team in 2012. Liz's success is an inspiration to all and she described how proud she is of her achievements, "For me, as an ex-theatre designer with two small children who didn't own a suit and had never worked in an office before, my biggest career break was securing my training contract at Burges Salmon and then qualifying and becoming a partner in a nationally recognised planning team."

"I used to think I had been very lucky in my career, which is something many women say about their success. As I am more involved in developing junior colleagues, I remind them that we recognise and make our own luck, and that we have control over our careers."

Since then, most of Liz's work has been focused around renewable energy projects, particularly onshore and offshore wind, solar and biomass. Liz was involved in a major onshore wind project in Devon whilst training as a solicitor, which led her into the renewables sector. She was involved in all aspects of the project, from reviewing the environmental impact assessment work to supporting at the public inquiry, including delivering an innovative community benefit scheme. She has also recently led the consenting of major offshore wind farm schemes. Liz understands that throughout your career you are faced with both success and failure and shares her methods of coping with them, "As a planning lawyer you are often in a 'win or lose' position – there is no runner-up if you are trying to secure consent for a project. However, it's important to remember that some of the most successful people have had significant challenges from which they have learned a huge amount."

Liz mentioned that the renewables industry is constantly changing, and is therefore a very exciting place to work, despite its volatile nature. Increasing female participation and engagement in the industry is important to Liz; and although the renewables sector is attracting an increasing number of young people and more specifically young women she thinks more can be done to encourage girls into STEM subjects. Liz emphasised this, "I think it is critical we engage girls in technology and energy at school, showing them the opportunities that are available and what they can achieve. Science and technology are 'sexy' subjects and we need to communicate that better through both teaching and industry engagement."

Liz is clearly passionate about her role and stated it is both a challenge and a privilege to use her expertise to help deliver projects to meet the country's need for clean electricity. When asking her what advice she would give others, Liz went on to openly share with us the lessons she has learned along the way, "Be yourself – it's a bit corny, but if you try to succeed by being someone else, it's destined not to work. Also, don't be afraid to step forward for things – if you don't show others you are interested, they will never know. And develop your internal resilience – which could be through securing a strong and supportive team around you, not taking things too personally or your home life. You'll need this for both your own well-being and those around you."