

Entrepreneurial Women in Renewable Energy



My story...

Maria Connolly

Partner, TLT

An extremely successful woman who has been motivated by renewable energy since day one, Maria Connolly has now established herself in a senior role as a partner for TLT.

After studying law, Maria chose to specialise in the renewable energy sector when she qualified as a solicitor with the UK law firm TLT in 1999 and was then appointed a partner in 2007. Maria now successfully runs a team of 45 lawyers spread across six offices, and has played a key role in the growth of the firm's energy and renewables sector to be amongst one of the leading legal teams in the UK.

TLT has helped deliver some of the country's most important energy projects and Maria's team has been involved in approximately one third of all UK solar projects either in the pipeline, contracted or built.

Maria explained her passion for renewables stems from its association with the surrounding world and loves the fact she can see the physical results of her work. She went on to explain that although the sector is an exciting place to work, she does face intense challenges - including trying to second-guess tariff regimes and keep abreast of the political issues in an ever-evolving sector.

"I think that as a gender we can sometimes be too reticent and lacking that inner-boldness. It's excellent that initiatives like EWiRE are helping boost that confidence but, we need to find that within ourselves too".

Maria explained that the volatile nature of the renewable industry suits her personality, “You have to do so much more than know law in renewables. My team is completely focussed on understanding, and anticipating what is around the corner for our clients, which in a rapidly developing sector is crucial”.

Maria stated she has an amazing team that work for her, which can only come from her supportive nature and her passion for mentoring her team through opportunities and difficulties. She admitted that her organised nature helps her juggle her conflicting demands, as she not only heads the renewables and energy sector at TLT but is also in charge of a 175-strong real estate group, as well as sitting on the board of a rapidly-growing law firm.

When asking Maria what challenges and barriers she faces she explained, “I also have a seven year-old daughter, but somehow it all works out. The biggest challenge is not the work, and there have never been any gender issues, but the shortage of hours in the day. So, of course, personal organisation is key.” She adds that there should be more women at the heart of clean energy, there are many areas of renewables whether its management to project development, that offers innovative, interesting and creative career opportunities.

When offering advice to others, Maria claimed that women need to network more with each other, as well as with their male counterparts. “I always advise those starting out, to network widely in their peer group straight away, because in years to come it is from that pool that they will get the work and opportunities. I think that one of the biggest lessons I have learned is making sure your voice is heard, particularly in relation to your own career aspirations and what you can bring to the table”.

Where there is a resistance in companies to diversity, Maria suspects it is largely historic rather than wilful and stated that there is no ‘glass ceiling’ to hit. “I always say that providing a level playing field with men in terms of opportunity is only one thing, you also have to turn up to the match and play. There is an obligation on all to push ourselves forward and make a difference.”