

# 240920 - TL Natasha Chahal - WillEdit- enhanced

[00:00:00] **Natasha:** I can't be one of those people that says, Oh, I was four years old and I decided to be a lawyer because I would be lying. I went to university and did an English language and literature degree. And towards the [00:00:15] end of my degree was thinking about, well, what What is it that I'm going to do with my degree?

[00:00:20] **Natasha:** Because English Language and Literature is one of those degrees that's so broad, you know, it doesn't necessarily feed into a certain career. Um, and I went to a [00:00:30] law, well I went to a careers fair, um, in my final year, and there were lots of different, um, businesses, firms, etc. But there were a few law firms there, and they told me that you can do a conversion.

[00:00:44] **Natasha:** [00:00:45] to law.

[00:00:45] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:00:46] **Natasha:** Which I thought was really interesting, looked into it, thought, okay, I hadn't necessarily had my mind intent on being a lawyer, but it was also not something that I'd ever ruled out. So [00:01:00] I looked into the law conversion, did the law conversion, really enjoyed my law conversion. Um, and then it kind of just spiraled from there.

[00:01:10] **Natasha:** Just then during, um, that year I was applying to [00:01:15] various law firms. I was in Manchester at the time. Yes. And so for me, there were a select number of law firms that I felt like I wanted to apply to. Um, I knew I wanted to do commercial law.

[00:01:27] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:01:28] **Natasha:** And so I [00:01:30] applied for a training contract, um, did a couple of or a few vacation schemes and eventually got my training contract with AGE and the rest is history.

[00:01:38] **Natasha:** So, fantastic. Yeah, that's how I got into law.

[00:01:41] **Sally:** And part of that journey, actually, or part of the training [00:01:45] took you, I think, to the Middle East. Yes. Uh, how was that? You

know, leaving the rainy Manchester. Yeah. Uh, to suddenly be in the, in the glitz of the, of the Middle East.

[00:01:57] **Natasha:** It was. Absolutely incredible. I think [00:02:00] one of the things that I will say about AG is some of the opportunities that you get as a, a young, um, professional at the start of her career, you know, I had so many opportunities.

[00:02:12] **Natasha:** One of them was to do as a comment out in our [00:02:15] Dubai office and it was. the best experience ever because you, you know, you get to go over and live in a different country, get to know a different culture, all the while working and earning, [00:02:30] um, and also then get to understand how the law traverses people.

[00:02:37] **Natasha:** countries, cultures, jurisdictions. Um, and obviously, you know, Dubai in the Middle East is a very different culture to [00:02:45] our, I guess, more stereotypical traditional English culture. Um, and it was just fascinating and it was just so, so much fun. And yeah, the sunshine every day. Obviously added to that as well.

[00:02:57] **Natasha:** Um, because like you said, Manchester [00:03:00] is not known for its sunshine.

[00:03:01] **Sally:** No, there's many qualities given that, uh, I live there and, uh, work all over the country. But, uh, the weather, as one high court judge said to me at a recent masterclass, it does rain here a lot. And I said, didn't [00:03:15] you notice? You know, for the last few years, you've been a liaison judge here, um, and it's a wonderful place.

[00:03:21] **Sally:** But yeah, the sunshine, um, helps. Um, and so having began your journey, um, at Adelshaw [00:03:30] and then, you know, now you've moved in, into, um, London and your specialism is commercial law and that traditionally is a much more difficult area to get into for a lawyer. [00:03:45] women and minorities, if you like. And so I've just wanted to ask, you know, did that consideration ever occur to you, or were you just thinking, I'm quite interested in commercial law, I'll just go for it?

[00:03:55] **Natasha:** I think, in all honesty, I, [00:04:00] so how I grew up is probably the reason behind why I say this, but I don't think, No, I've always been aware that I have brown skin. Um, cause what's your heritage? So I'm mixed race. [00:04:15] My mom is white English. Um, she has German and Maltese heritage. And my dad is Punjabi Indian, although British born.

[00:04:25] **Natasha:** So I have, yeah, starkly different cultures on either side of my family. [00:04:30] Um, but growing up, grew up in a very, very non diverse area. My school was not diverse. I think there was six people in my entire year. Wow. 320 that weren't white English. Yes. And so, I'd [00:04:45] always had to, and you know, half my family is white English.

[00:04:49] **Natasha:** And so I'd always been comfortable and felt comfortable in non diverse places. So kind [00:05:00] of going to university, it became quite a bit more diverse, although arguably not as diverse as I would have liked it. But yeah, I think, and I think I had the upbringing, my parents and my father, especially, or both my parents, but my father from what he's.[00:05:15]

[00:05:15] **Natasha:** what he's kind of achieved from being first generation British born to very Indian parents. He's, him and my mum have always instilled in me, go for it. And, and that's kind of the attitude I had. And it wasn't a, Oh, I'm going to get it. [00:05:30] It was just a, well, I might as well try.

[00:05:32] **Sally:** Yeah. You know? Absolutely.

[00:05:34] **Sally:** Absolutely. Now, um, I do want to ask you a question about diversity in AG to the extent that you have knowledge of it. Because I've interviewed a number of people here, [00:05:45] including, um, the brilliant Harold Braco. Uh, and people would listen to that episode if they haven't, they can listen again. It's one of the most listened to episodes, actually.

[00:05:53] **Sally:** Weirdly. I can imagine. I know. Why do so many people listen to it? Because I get sent the stats all the time by our team. [00:06:00] I don't show Goddard the firm, certainly in Manchester office. He increased the diversity by a hundred percent as a black man. And I've been really interested to see what's been going on [00:06:15] since he's been here, because it's quite a lot of work.

[00:06:17] **Sally:** And he did do a lot of work before he joined here. Um, at I think she was Smith. And he's also been to DLA and so on and so forth, but. You yourself are quite passionate about diversity. And AG, from what I can see, is [00:06:30] doing some work on gender traditionally. But you're actually now starting to do some interesting stuff, uh, on race.

[00:06:37] **Sally:** Yeah. And ethnicity through your Embrace Network. Yeah. Um, so let's start there. What is the [00:06:45] Embrace Network AG has here? Um, and then I want to talk a bit about this ethnic business growth program,

which sounds really interesting because that's looking at what clients want from lawyers and how you can support that.

[00:06:57] **Natasha:** Yeah, so AG Embraces our [00:07:00] internal network for all things celebrating, listening, learning, teaching. appreciating, accepting ethnic diversity. So it is open to anybody and everybody in [00:07:15] the hope that anybody and everybody joins, because I mean, in my opinion, everybody is diverse. So everybody has a story to tell.

[00:07:23] **Natasha:** Everybody has a form of diversity. But what we were really trying to do with Age Embrace is to make Those that [00:07:30] do not identify as ethnically diverse, aware of some of the issues and challenges and feelings and day to day struggles that people within the ethnic diverse [00:07:45] space face within law, um, and especially within AG.

[00:07:48] **Natasha:** Yes. Kind of came about and it's a little bit sad to say, but it came about after the death of George Floyd. Um, [00:08:00] you know, I think it's fair to say that the law in general and well, society in general stood up and started to listen. After that, it's sad that it took something like that and something so horrendous.

[00:08:13] **Natasha:** But it, you [00:08:15] know, there was a real focus then put on, right, well, we need to start to listen and learn. Um, and that is basically what Agey Embrace is about. So we, we do a lot of events, um, within the firm. Some are also client facing, but specifically to [00:08:30] kind of promote, celebrate, and advocate for ethnic diversity within.

[00:08:35] **Sally:** Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, you've got loads of networks. I'm sure you can tell me, I, you know, whenever I interview anybody from a law firm, there's a network for everyone. Yeah. Um, which is [00:08:45] great to see, but it's actually building on that and saying what I've been the meaningful Takeaways from the sad, sad death of George Floyd, because I think evidentially, when, when we look at businesses, you've got rid of, you know, their DNI [00:09:00] inclusion leads would be made redundant.

[00:09:02] **Sally:** We only have to look over to the states and see what's happening with the affirmative action and so on and so forth to think, Oh, actually, were people really listening? Yeah. And where are we post George Floyd? Um, and so it's really [00:09:15] interesting to see what you've been doing. And looking at the best graduates and so on from different backgrounds.

[00:09:20] **Sally:** Yeah. But part of what you've been doing is this ethnic business growth program. What's that? Because that's about to launch, right? Sounds exciting.

[00:09:27] **Natasha:** Yeah. So that is [00:09:30] something that was basically Harold and mine's baby, essentially. It arose out of a couple of roundtables that we did last year. Yeah. Where we invited a number [00:09:45] of businesses that were ethnically diverse, owned, founded, et cetera.

[00:09:50] **Natasha:** Um, and we invited them alongside the business desk, um, publication to discuss essentially the challenges that ethnically diverse businesses face. [00:10:00] And one of the key takeaways from those sessions was accessibility and this idea that these businesses do not feel comfortable approaching firms such as AG, um, or do not [00:10:15] feel like they have the right or the relevant access or the relevant opportunity to approach firms like AG and get the kind of legal advice and assistance that they need.

[00:10:24] **Natasha:** And I think Harold would agree, but as a lawyer, and [00:10:30] I'm, I'm such an advocate for furthering your own career, of course, it's important you, um, As an individual, you know, you are a bit, you know, you want to be ambitious and driven and that's all important, but I'm also a [00:10:45] massive advocate for seeing how you can help others because I just think it's so important.

[00:10:50] **Natasha:** And so it basically came out of that. It was how can we as lawyers that have this resource talent [00:11:00] expertise actually assist in furthering the success of the many ethnically diverse businesses within the UK that are. And some of these businesses that we had at these roundtables, I mean, it was mind blowing.

[00:11:12] **Natasha:** Um, and the, [00:11:15] you know, the thought that they might be hindered, hindered in some ways by not feeling like they can go into, you know, some of the institutions in this company, such as some of the banks, law firms, whatever, and, and, you know, access the same support that [00:11:30] their non ethnically diverse counterparts can.

[00:11:33] **Natasha:** It just, it just struck us. And so I think, yeah, it, it evolved out of that. Um, we're actually collaborating with HSBC and so it is basically going to be a [00:11:45] program whereby we onboard a certain number of ethnically diverse owned businesses per year.

[00:11:51] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:11:51] **Natasha:** And we give them a certain amount of free legal advice.

[00:11:56] **Natasha:** They will get an, a legal mentor with an AG who will be a [00:12:00] partner or legal director level. So a senior, senior member of the firm and they will receive advice, support, whatever it is they need for that certain period of time. And also will have access to seminars, kind of [00:12:15] publications, a network within the cohort, as well as HSBCs.

[00:12:21] **Natasha:** business and financial expertise. Um, so I'm hoping it will be absolutely brilliant and I'm really excited about it. Um, but yeah, [00:12:30] we are launching very soon. So fingers crossed it goes. I

[00:12:32] **Sally:** mean, it sounds absolutely fantastic because there is, you know, we're in an economic downturn, even though The Bank of England's latest forecast is quite bleak.

[00:12:42] **Sally:** But, um, [00:12:45] and whilst interest rates haven't risen again, um, and inflation has stabilised, we are in an economic downturn. They've told us that for some time. So we need everyone to be part of the economy. You know, the economy needs to be accessible to everyone and we need growth and businesses to grow. And that [00:13:00] includes ethnically owned businesses.

[00:13:02] **Sally:** You know, I love the title. Um, and so it's a, it's a really great space because I, I recall as you will, in Manchester, there's a market called Melanin Market and it's, um, businesses selling their products, [00:13:15] uh, on a sort of a Sunday before Christmas, I think it is from memory. But I don't mean like, you know, Portobello Market.

[00:13:21] **Sally:** It's in like a very nice, you know, the Royal Exchange Building, theatre, um, and a variety of different ways. And the idea [00:13:30] is what we would call startups.

[00:13:31] **Natasha:** Yeah.

[00:13:31] **Sally:** Didn't have legal support. Um, one is sad, but two, these are businesses who've become multi million power businesses. Yeah, of course. You know, um, and so I suppose to coin a term, you know, If Jay Z or Serena Williams, because they're, [00:13:45] um, ethnically, they have ethnically owned businesses.



[00:13:48] **Sally:** Yes, they do indeed. And, uh, if they wanted to use the services of AG, they'd be very welcome because they've got multi million pound businesses, I assume.

[00:13:58] **Natasha:** They'd be more than welcome. [00:14:00] And they also fit the criteria of being ethnically diverse owned.

[00:14:03] **Sally:** Right. There you go. There you go. So if you're listening Jay Z.

[00:14:06] **Sally:** Um, and Stephen Bartlett, that was the third person I was going to come to. Absolutely. Can they reach out

[00:14:13] **Natasha:** to

[00:14:13] **Sally:** A&

[00:14:14] **Natasha:** G?

[00:14:14] **Sally:** Yeah, [00:14:15]

[00:14:15] **Natasha:** everybody as well, Kim. Absolutely. And we'd be happy to have

[00:14:19] **Sally:** them. Very happy to, because I think it is an important place, isn't it? Because we've got to remember, Certainly from your part of, of, um, the profession than mine, I suppose, [00:14:30] from our sister professions for solicitor's firms, there is also the aspect of the business of law, you've got to bring in business.

[00:14:36] **Sally:** Of course. Um, and that's a skill, isn't it, and it's part of, um, being a lawyer, it's not the main part of it. No. Um, [00:14:45] but that is important, isn't it? Yeah. We are a business, so yeah, of course, that is. So from that, and I wanted to ask you about, um, you know, if somebody is listening to this podcast and it's listened to in so many countries, and they're thinking one about entering the [00:15:00] law, what advice or tips would you have for them?

[00:15:04] **Sally:** Perhaps, or, or maybe they're in it, in terms of skills and how they need to be. in a law firm, you know, not just a global law firm like this one. Yeah. But what, what [00:15:15] advice and guidance would you give perhaps, um, by way of a careers?

[00:15:19] **Natasha:** So getting into law, my key advice, now this might not be agreed with by everybody, but If you are going, if you want to do it via [00:15:30] university, obviously nowadays that is not necessarily the route that you have to take.

[00:15:33] **Sally:** Yes.

[00:15:33] **Natasha:** Ad have, um, silence paralegal, apprenticeships. Yes. Yeah, exactly. Yes. So I

[00:15:39] **Sally:** love that.

[00:15:39] **Natasha:** Yeah. So it, but if you, I went down the university route, so that's kind of my experience. Yeah. [00:15:45] Do a subject that you enjoy.

[00:15:48] **Sally:** Hmm.

[00:15:49] **Natasha:** I. Love that you can do a law conversion. And I think it is one of the probably few professions whereby you can do that.

[00:15:59] **Natasha:** [00:16:00] Um, so you are able to study. A lot of different subjects. You're able to study a subject that you enjoy, such as, I don't know, English language and literature, maybe history, chemistry, maths.

[00:16:11] **Sally:** Art. I have a friend who works, yeah, did art at [00:16:15] Cambridge and yeah, it works in planning now.

[00:16:18] **Natasha:** Yeah. Philosophy, anything, economics, whatever it is that you enjoy, because then you are able to do the law conversion, it does add on a year, but I still think [00:16:30] it's so beneficial.

[00:16:30] **Natasha:** One, because you can show that you've got additional strings to your bow. But also it just gives you that, uh, wider experience and doesn't, doesn't force you to do law. There's nothing wrong with doing a law degree. Law degrees are [00:16:45] amazing. And I respect anyone that did do a law degree. Good. I did one. Yeah.

[00:16:48] **Natasha:** Um, but yeah, I think do something that you enjoy and then you can go into law when it comes [00:17:00] to then going into law. If you want to go into commercial law, especially, and again, that's That's just my experience. Get not only legal experience, but business experience because you are, your clients will be businesses.



[00:17:12] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:17:13] **Natasha:** And it is so important. [00:17:15] Your, your law firm will teach you how to be a lawyer. Um, but it's the business experience that will teach you how to be a good lawyer, um, and how to cater for your clients and be, you know, accessible to your clients. So that would be kind [00:17:30] of pre, pre training contract. That would be my advice.

[00:17:35] **Natasha:** Post training contract, well, training contracts and post training contracts into qualification. Just take every opportunity that comes your way is my advice. If you have a [00:17:45] succumbent opportunity, take it. If you have a, whether that's clients common or. Overseas to common, if you have the opportunity to get involved in extracurricular stuff as people joke when I [00:18:00] call it that, but you know, things that aren't necessarily your chargeable hours in your day job, do it.

[00:18:04] **Natasha:** You know, if you have opportunities to get into involved with, you know, early careers or grad recruitment, do it because it just broadens your [00:18:15] experience and you get to meet people that will likely be Really great people to know later in your career, whether it's your peers that then end up becoming partners or GCs in house [00:18:30] firms or whatever, or whether it's people that you can connect with, you know, not necessarily on a business level, but in more of a social level, but that, that, I don't know, such as this.

[00:18:43] **Natasha:** So for example, you know, [00:18:45] when you've got initiatives like this and you can really connect with people that are really trying to further those. initiatives such as D& I. It's so important. Just get involved with everything and find the things within that. Once you've got involved with everything and you've got that broad experience, find the [00:19:00] things that you really like and carry on with them.

[00:19:02] **Natasha:** Um, I love that.

[00:19:04] **Sally:** Even I'm writing it down after 23 years at the bar. I don't know why I'm writing it. Get involved. Stop saying no to things. Yeah. So I think that's really, [00:19:15] really, um, great because it's important to remember that there are a variety of people who, who, um, listen, but a variety of people who want to be lawyers, aspiring to be lawyers, uh, and beyond.

[00:19:26] **Sally:** Now I've got a quick fire round here. [00:19:30] Um, uh, what is your favorite legal book or, and legal book? If you have one, while you're thinking about that, um, then I want to ask you please [00:19:45] about

wellbeing. How are you looking after yourself? You know, you're quite junior by comparison to a lot of the certainly solicitors I've interviewed on here.

[00:19:53] **Sally:** I don't want to make an issue of that. So I'm not going to read out any ages comment, but I mean, by way of experience, that's quite good to see how you know, [00:20:00] you're managing your wellness and physical and mental health in a profession, because I think it'll be very different, um, or how you're trying to do.

[00:20:10] **Sally:** Sometimes you'll have these good ideas. I appreciate we're recording this, you know, after hours, [00:20:15] after I've been in court and you've had a whole day, um, of work. So that, that would be good. So if I may return back to the illegal. because we have a book club, uh, and the legal character question. Do you have a legal character that [00:20:30] sort of inspires you, or have you got a favorite?

[00:20:32] **Sally:** So she's not a

[00:20:33] **Natasha:** character. She's a person and it's a Mal Cluny. Now I know that's maybe a bit cliché and also of course, [00:20:45] Pick the super glamorous, amazing lawyer that's married to one of the most eligible Yeah. Famous men in the world. Yes. Um, or pre eligible famous men in the world. Um, yeah. I, but I, what [00:21:00] I love about her is that she's, or comes across, I don't personally know her, sadly, but comes across as unapologetically herself.

[00:21:07] **Natasha:** She's so feminine. She's so. You know, she, she doesn't seem like she's had to change [00:21:15] herself too much to be in the job that she is, but she's also such an advocate for one, diversity and inclusion. Her background is diverse, but also in the work that she does, you know, she does human rights law, that's her speciality and works on [00:21:30] some of the most difficult and challenging.

[00:21:35] **Natasha:** Um, matters and cases, and I just respect a woman that can hold her own, you know, people say, Oh, it's not like people refer [00:21:45] to as George Clooney's wife, it's Amal Clooney. And you know, she has her own name. And I think absolutely. Because Transcribed In my opinion, she's arguably the more talented of the two, but yeah, I think, I just think she's wonderful, and I think it's so key to [00:22:00] remain true to yourself, not only with, with the background that you have, but also, you know, not changing yourself to cater for what you're society thinks she should be like, or what the [00:22:15] law thinks she should be like.

[00:22:16] **Sally:** Yes, yes.

[00:22:17] **Natasha:** And so yeah, she's, she's a bit of a hero in my book.

[00:22:20] **Sally:** Well, I love that. Well, Amal has been invited on this podcast. So I will remind Amal, if you're listening, I will contact your clerks again,  
[00:22:30] I doubt it's true, to remind you we'd love you to be a guest on here. And we'll have no interest at all in your husband.

[00:22:37] **Sally:** We're interested in your legal work. So it's a really, Great subject, the subject matter. And I think she just set up a foundation and she's doing a [00:22:45] moment about extradition and where, um, people are prosecuted. It's a great choice. I love that. Now, well being, um, how are you looking after yourself? in the city, wellness.

[00:22:59] **Sally:** [00:23:00] I mean, because listen, we know London is running at a really fast pace. The law runs at a fast pace. You know, by the time I finished this interview, go back to Manchester. I've got to prepare a case for tomorrow and a human rights case. You know, I'll go and [00:23:15] sneak in, say goodnight to my children. Then I have something to eat, have my husband and preparing or whatever.

[00:23:20] **Sally:** Um, you probably don't have those commitments. As much as I do, I'm older than you and I have a family of three children and a dog. I hope someone bought the dog, um, [00:23:30] uh, today. But what I'm alluding is to, is that, um, you know, the law is full on. And I'm very keen for those coming behind us and behind me, certainly.

[00:23:43] **Sally:** Not just entering the [00:23:45] profession or progressing in the profession to have better well being than perhaps some of us did, um, at my stage. So I just wondered what, what, how are you doing that? Are you gymming? What are you doing for your mental health? Are you pilating or, you [00:24:00] know, yoguring? How are you managing your wellness?

[00:24:02] **Sally:** Because it's very important, isn't it? It

[00:24:04] **Natasha:** is. And I think, you know, When you're a junior, specifically trainee and kind of baby junior, after you've qualified, there is the risk that [00:24:15] you obviously want you, I mean, we all want to impress at all stages, you know, you want to make sure that you're doing a great job, but there is the risk that you do that to the detriment of your own health and wellbeing.

[00:24:25] **Natasha:** Of course there is. I think I absolutely went through that [00:24:30] stage. So I think I absolutely went through the, the, the, you know, couple of years where, and I qualified into COVID, which was an interesting time to qualify. Well, I'm going to come back to that. Yeah. Um, where I, I didn't [00:24:45] prioritize my own health and wellbeing.

[00:24:46] **Natasha:** I just didn't. Um, I, I perhaps didn't feel like I had the balance that I should have, and that was no one else's problem, but my own. I am. I just [00:25:00] didn't create it for myself. And so as I've got a little bit more senior in my career, I kind of realized that, realized that it just absolutely wasn't sustainable and now do absolutely take time.

[00:25:14] **Natasha:** [00:25:15] So I, I do, I'm not a huge gym fan, but I do bar classes and I absolutely love it. Well I know what it is, bar classes. Yeah, so like ballet bar.

[00:25:24] **Sally:** Oh yeah.

[00:25:25] **Natasha:** So it's kind of like a cross between Pilates and ballet, but it's, [00:25:30] yeah, and it's, it's wonderful and I love it. Um, so I do those. I, I also just make sure that I have time to just switch off because that is the, also the problem, you know, you can [00:25:45] get into a cycle where you're working, working, working, eating while you work, having a shower and going to bed.

[00:25:50] **Natasha:** And it is just repetitive and it's, you don't have time for your own brain to recover from it being switched on from the day. So I think I just, [00:26:00] I try and make sure, um, That I have moments for myself where there is, whether, depending on my timetable, whether that's in the morning, whether that's in the middle of the day when I've got a gap in stuff, whether that's at the end of the day.

[00:26:13] **Natasha:** Um, and I'm also just a [00:26:15] lot kinder to myself. If I, I'm not, if I'm not gymming or do my bar class because work has been busy, I'm not then berating myself for not going to the gym because why just pile that on top of yourself, you know, there will be times. [00:26:30] In this job where it is mega busy and I might not be able to focus on myself as much as other times.

[00:26:37] **Natasha:** Don't beat yourself up about that. You're focusing in that time on your job and your career. There's nothing wrong with that. [00:26:45] Equally, when those times die down slightly, take the time for yourself and enjoy the down periods and. I have been told so many times by people in this

film from senior people to people at my level when you have a [00:27:00] quiet period, enjoy it because you need to take that time to recover.

[00:27:04] **Natasha:** And yeah, and I just think keeping in contact with my family, I moved down here to London to be close to my grandparents. They ground me. It's, I love spending time with them. [00:27:15] So that is another way for me to just kind of chill and enjoy myself. But yeah, I think it's just about. The key is just don't beat yourself up.

[00:27:23] **Natasha:** Whatever, whatever stage you are in, allow yourself to be in that stage and [00:27:30] be forgiven to yourself if you're not, you know, being that person that does anything and everything all day every day because it's impossible.

[00:27:37] **Sally:** Of course it is. Of course it is. And I think that's really great advice, particularly, um, just from a, you know, a younger, a [00:27:45] younger angle.

[00:27:45] **Sally:** Um, uh, but, but just on that though, I was at a dinner recently and where the person I was sitting next to. I won't name them. Um, but they spent the whole time telling me that the next generation are all snowflakes, which is a term I have heard, [00:28:00] yeah. And uh, and I was like, right, yeah, you know, what do you mean?

[00:28:04] **Sally:** I mean, do you think you're all snowflakes? Uh, um, but it's a term that it's quite the opposite actually. Yeah, it's, it's, you know, like, I don't, I can't do, yeah, I suppose that's what [00:28:15] really what she was saying. And I think it's this idea that law's got a reputation, hasn't it? Not going home for days until transaction is complete and so on and so forth.

[00:28:25] **Sally:** It's unacceptable that, uh, and we have to find better ways to work. But, [00:28:30] um, the notion that, um, uh, I suppose it's about resilience really is what people want to say, but just saying, you know, working seven days a week, including weekends and every hour God sends actually isn't that healthy? And it's not productive.

[00:28:43] **Natasha:** I also don't think [00:28:45] you're being strong in that in terms of, so don't get me wrong. All power to you if you want to work 24 hours, seven days a week. I can't do it personally, but you know, if, if, if that is your drive, [00:29:00] then absolutely, you know, well done to you, but I think, I don't think it's being a snowflake, having more control of your own life.

[00:29:09] **Natasha:** I think actually being able to have the [00:29:15] conviction to say, okay, I will work my arse off and I will, you know, there will be times and if it is required of me, I will work my arse off and I am happy to do that. I knew what I was taking on when I came into this job. Yes. Um, and [00:29:30] I want to do that. It is, I like working hard.

[00:29:32] **Natasha:** I like learning. I like pushing myself. I will work my arse off. However, I think there is strength in also being able to say, I [00:29:45] have worked really hard for this period and now I'm going to take a bit of a break for myself. Yeah. Because that's your life, you know, I don't think there's strength in just Being told to jump and jumping, I don't think there is strength in that.

[00:29:57] **Natasha:** I don't think there's strength in being a [00:30:00] slave to the job because you just go along with something that's controlling you and I, I personally don't. I think that's less strong sometimes than actually being able to say, well, hold on a second, I'm going [00:30:15] to just need this hour to myself, or I'm going, I've worked really hard on this and I'm, I'm allowing myself to take a step back.

[00:30:23] **Natasha:** Obviously, if, you know, if a partner then turns around to me and says, Tash, the job, you need to jump on it. I'm not going to say absolutely not. I'm [00:30:30] taking my, no, of course I will then, and I will continue to work hard for as however long is required, but I will then not beat myself up or look for the next thing.

[00:30:42] **Natasha:** If I have a period of time where I can go, you know what, I can focus on [00:30:45] myself or my children or on my partner or on my dog or whatever it is, like my grandparents, who knows. But like, you know, I think there's arguably more strength in being [00:31:00] strong enough to say. I will work as hard as you require me to, but when there is an opportunity for me, for me to take down time, I absolutely

[00:31:09] **Sally:** will.

[00:31:10] **Sally:** I love, I love that. The reason I'm posing the question is that we've seen a number of cases, um, or [00:31:15] people being, um, disciplined and otherwise by SRA and so on, of people who are just burnt out, you know, and they've, Some of them have tended to be more junior lawyers. Um, and it's important for all of us to look after ourselves because we are more productive.



[00:31:29] **Sally:** Cause if we burn [00:31:30] out, that's when errors occur, of course. And that's where other things, um, occur. So thank you for your question. I've made a note to myself as well. Make more time for me, uh, you know, beyond some of the, the dog walking and obvious, obvious thing. Um, I want [00:31:45] to ask you about COVID. I know we're all trying to forget it, but qualifying into that awful time.

[00:31:52] **Sally:** Um, it was awful for everybody, but actually qualifying into a time where there was less contact with people, um, [00:32:00] must've been difficult. And I just wanted to explore that with you because, you know, you look like a really sound person, but I've seen a number of women that I mentor who were solicitors and barristers and that time was really difficult.

[00:32:12] **Sally:** Um, and very difficult to kind [00:32:15] of come through. And I just wondered if that's part of the reason why. There's a reluctance also for people to come back to the office full time, and a preference for people to work, um, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, [00:32:30] which, you know, is an anachronism for something I will repeat on this podcast.

[00:32:34] **Sally:** Um, but, um, You know, and I wonder if that's what's contributed to it, that people have worked out when to be most efficient and when to use their commute appropriately and when not to. [00:32:45] So the question is, how was qualifying into COVID and how have you adjusted, um, I suppose so well, but it must've been a difficult time.

[00:32:55] **Natasha:** It was difficult. And I think, I think the key, the key from a work perspective was [00:33:00] not being, you know, In a, we have an open plan office at AG, so you will likely a lot of the time be sitting next to or very close to a partner or someone more senior than you. It's so, so useful to be able to just turn to that person and go, [00:33:15] I just asked you a quick question, you know?

[00:33:17] **Natasha:** And when that's taken away and when you have to put some time in someone's diary because you have to book a team's call or it does make it a lot more difficult, you do. I, well, I personally found myself. [00:33:30] maybe umming and ahing or, or struggling over questions or queries that I had for a longer period of time, then I would have, if I was in the office and I could just go, Oh, sorry, can I just ask you a question about

[00:33:42] **Sally:** this?



[00:33:43] **Natasha:** Because yeah, [00:33:45] it was more difficult. It was more difficult. not having the social side of law. Um, obviously teams and, and other apps such as that made it easier to still be in contact with people. But one of the things I valued so much [00:34:00] during my training contract was my training cohort. We were such close friends and we relied on each other for getting through what was, you know, quite an intense two years.

[00:34:12] **Natasha:** And when you don't have that [00:34:15] contact with those people, it's tough because you know, and I, I mean, I was living on my own at the time. So I was living my own in a, in a flat in Manchester and I loved it, but equally it got quite lonely at [00:34:30] times. And

[00:34:30] **Sally:** yeah,

[00:34:31] **Natasha:** yeah. When And also you, you became, you know, you don't have anything else to do.

[00:34:35] **Natasha:** So you worked.

[00:34:36] **Sally:** Yes,

[00:34:36] **Natasha:** exactly. And so you found yourself just spending all hours of the day, not because AG was forcing me to, [00:34:45] but just because it was like, well, what else is there to do? Other than watch the various Netflix programs that I probably watched twice already. Yeah. So I, it was tricky and I, you know, I, I had a supportive team, [00:35:00] um, I had a supportive friendship group within the firm, and I, I think I felt probably more blessed than people that were trying to train, because at least [00:35:15] qualifying, I'm in a team, I've done at least six months in this, in this group.

[00:35:20] **Natasha:** this team. And actually I kind of know where I'm going in the sense that I'm not changing in six months. I'm not having to, you [00:35:30] know, if you're training in, in COVID and lockdown, I really felt for those people, I think, I think it must've been terrible, but yeah.

[00:35:38] **Sally:** Yeah. No, no, no. And actually, you know, you're right.

[00:35:40] **Sally:** I, I felt, I felt it too, because every day I used to do something called lunch and [00:35:45] learns, which were, uh, one to two, maybe do a 12. I can't remember now, which was, uh, an expert talking about a topic where I was asking them questions. And so everybody had to put their cameras on, the [00:36:00] audience, and I could see the various one bedroom flats.

[00:36:03] **Sally:** Yes. Numerous trainees, lawyers, junior barristers were working. You know, sometimes I used to say, anybody, have you been outside today? No. We're going to just pause for 10 minutes [00:36:15] and everybody will go outside and then come back on. Don't grab a glass of wine. It's not good for your health. And then come on.

[00:36:20] **Sally:** Because I was conscious that actually there's lunch and work learned every day. And then Thursdays were wellbeing Thursdays where people could just come. We had a counselor on, we [00:36:30] went around the, you know, the screen to ask how people were and, you know, what the challenges were for the day and what the weren't and so on.

[00:36:37] **Sally:** If people had lost, you know, loved ones and had to say goodbye All of that. came out and it was very [00:36:45] important. And so I saw that firsthand, what you're describing were really talented future lawyers or future leaders that I say, and they weren't always women. You know, we had lots of men too. What came through and the supportive networks that [00:37:00] They had to look for, in a way that was, it was, it was, it was difficult and it was emotional.

[00:37:06] **Sally:** You know, there's still quite a lot of, you know, Women in Law's got 42, 000 followers on the LinkedIn page. A lot of those are members. And so we're [00:37:15] still in touch with a lot of people who say even now, you know, you got me through. So I get it. I really do. And I think, let's not forget that awful period for a number of reasons.

[00:37:28] **Sally:** Um, so we're coming to the end of our [00:37:30] time together. And one of the things I wanted to ask you was, I ask everyone this question, um, and I usually promote people along the way. Um, you know, what, what's next? When I came to the bar, my solicitor colleagues were just kind of solicitors. [00:37:45] And then they became partners, uh, and then they became equity partners and some, you know, would become managing partners.

[00:37:51] **Sally:** But that was the regime. Now you've got all these layers. I'm not sure what most of it means. You've got legal directors, then you've got, um, junior associates, [00:38:00] then senior associates, then associate, uh, then solicitor, then junior solicitor, then partner. So there's about seven layers by the time we Would then be equity partner, whatever else.

[00:38:14] **Sally:** So [00:38:15] I just wondered for you, you know, what are you thinking on the progression line? Because I've moved on now about entrance to law to a different, you know, we're having good entrance now,

particularly from those from ethnic minority backgrounds like myself, and indeed you, [00:38:30] that the progression is still very slow and the progression of the top, the leadership is still very slow.

[00:38:35] **Sally:** Yeah. So I just wondered, you know, what are you thinking? Are you thinking stay at AG and progress on? Yeah. Are you thinking, I don't know, go to competitor? I don't want to be there. [00:38:45] But yeah, we're in London, right? So we've got Florida and May. Never been, nobody's been on the podcast from there. Uh, you know, we've got DLA around the corner and, you know, several other firms.

[00:38:54] **Sally:** But what are you thinking from this? Because, you know, we're going to grow with your career, Natasha, as you [00:39:00] climb the ladder, uh, to the top, maybe smashing any glass ceilings that might exist or may have gone now. Um, you know, what are you thinking for what's, What kind of, what's next and coming, you know?

[00:39:13] **Natasha:** I think, and I, [00:39:15] I think for me, it is just continuing to take opportunities.

[00:39:20] **Natasha:** I am, I really like the area of law that I'm in. So I'm in commercial disputes and I love, one of the things I love about commercial disputes [00:39:30] is it is different every single day. It keeps me on my toes and I love that I'm constantly learning. But I think I want that for my, My whole career. And, you know, and that is inevitable.

[00:39:42] **Natasha:** So, you know, I'm super passionate about D& I and I [00:39:45] will continue to be super passionate about D& I.

[00:39:47] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:39:48] **Natasha:** Specifically, ethnic diversity, but equally I am female. I was also state school educated, you know, so And I'm Northern, in, in [00:40:00] London.

[00:40:00] **Sally:** That is a barrier. I know people don't think it is. It is a barrier. And of course we know, uh, Amal Rajan in his brilliant documentary told us about accents and, you know, everything else that comes.

[00:40:11] **Sally:** Yeah. Um, from being from outside of London.

[00:40:14] **Natasha:** [00:40:15] Yeah. So I think my goal is to just continue to take the opportunities. I am. I'm super happy at AG currently, um, I'm really excited with where the firm's going in terms of its D& I, and I love the fact that [00:40:30] I have had So many opportunities to do things outside of my day job.

[00:40:35] **Natasha:** So I not only enjoy my day job and don't get me wrong, you know, for those that listen in and roll their eyes and go, well, you don't love it every day. No, I don't love it every day. Of course I don't love it every [00:40:45] day, but I enjoy what I do and I enjoy being a solicitor but equally I love that I've been able to be involved and be trusted with as such a junior lawyer [00:41:00] because I am.

[00:41:00] **Natasha:** I'm, you know, I've been at AG for just over five and a half years now, two of those are training. Um, I am still very much a junior lawyer and a junior member of the AG team but I've been trusted with [00:41:15] and Had the opportunity to already do so much. And I'm just actually really excited to see where that goes.

[00:41:24] **Natasha:** Will I make partner one day? I don't know. I don't know at the minute what that looks like. [00:41:30] I, at the minute I'm aiming for the next stage, which for me would be managing associate and, you know, starting to, to think about what that might look like and the skills I need to build in order to eventually go for that.

[00:41:44] **Natasha:** But I [00:41:45] think I don't want to. restrict myself in saying, yes, I'm going to BMA and then legal director and then partner, and I'm going to do X. I think I'm just wanting to see what opportunities arise and, [00:42:00] you know, be as good a lawyer as I can be, but also be someone that does. Other things in her career outside of her day job and, and make sure that there's that kind of [00:42:15] extracurricular giving back aspect as well.

[00:42:17] **Natasha:** So, yeah, I'm just, yeah, excited to see and excited to see what, uh, London brings because it is, it is a different pace and it is a different, um, you know, it is a slightly different team, [00:42:30] although we are very collegiate and collaborative in AG. But yeah, I just, it's a new city and. Yeah. Exciting. Exciting.

[00:42:38] **Sally:** Exciting. I mean, just hearing you talking about doing other stuff outside reminded me of, um, the interview I [00:42:45] conducted with Jonathan Assumption, you know, the former Supreme Court judge who, of course, sits on, um, the board of the English National Opera and various other boards about how doing other things.

[00:42:56] **Sally:** Because as do I do other things in addition to [00:43:00] the day job makes you a better lawyer. Yeah. And it's a really interesting part of that podcast episode that, you know, you're, you're, you're, um, spot on, um, in that. And I love, you know, the fact that you do want to be, [00:43:15] um, continuing, um, your passion for, um, ED& I, um, which is great.

[00:43:20] **Sally:** So I, I'm very grateful to you. I hope you still won't rule out other things like. coming to, you know, the bench. Uh, [00:43:30] and you know, if I, maybe when I'm on the bench and I look back as a full timer on the bench and look at all the many women that I've met and their careers and the different ways they've got that they, you know, they all do different things and are a different spectrum.

[00:43:44] **Sally:** Um, [00:43:45] and that, you know, you look at the full fullness of what progress looks like. So thank you, Natasha. Um, it's been wonderful. Um, talking law with you, um, in this interview, um, podcast, and I hope you'll come back at some [00:44:00] stage to tell us when, you know, when you've taken over the world, uh, and, uh, you know, taken over, taken over AG, um, or women in the law, because I think that, you know, that passion is still there.

[00:44:12] **Sally:** Thank you very much.

[00:44:13] **Natasha:** Thank you, Sally. Thanks

[00:44:14] **Sally:** so much.