

Debbie Ramsay

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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one to one interviews with people at the top of the media game. However, I was definitely not top of the media game this week as technical problems with our audio equipment meant that the recording didn't quite meet our usual high standards, and so my questions have been re-recorded. We were at the BBC's New Broadcasting House to meet Debbie Ramsay, editor of BBC Radio 1 and 1Xtra Newsbeat. The flagship news programme has a weekly audience of around eight million 16 to 24-year-olds with between eight and 14 million views online through articles, videos and social media. Debbie joined the BBC in 2006, and has exclusively served young audiences for more than a decade, covering everything from celebrity news to documentaries showcasing young people's potential. She's also chair of the BBC's digital apprenticeship scheme, which mentors young journalists at the start of their careers. I apologise to Debbie for the poor quality of this recording and to our listeners, we hope it doesn't affect your enjoyment of the podcast too much.

So Debbie, 16 to 24-year-olds are a traditionally hard to reach audience group. How are you doing it?

Well, Newsbeat has always done it. We've been about for 45 years now. So we've tried and tested I think probably every method going, and really just settled on the simple fact that, you speak to people simply and clearly in their own language, and you talk about subjects that matter to them, and you help explain the world for them. I think if you do that without patronising them, then you're in a good place to attract young people.

Could you talk us through a typical day editing Newsbeat?

Editing the programme, and online, and social media, we start the day all together really. So we'll have an ideas meeting first thing, and everybody just chips in whatever they want to chip in, what they've seen. Most importantly, it's about treatments. So it might be the subject of the day is Brexit. We need to talk about how we are going to explain it for a young audience. So we try not to just have a meeting whereby we're all showing off what we know, and we try and ask the question, "What would our audience be interested in, what should they be interested in?" And also look at the stories that apply to their lives as well, that reflect their lifestyles and their

views, and think about how we get that across, and what the news angles are for our audience specifically. So we'll ask, for example, would a 23-year-old in Hull care about this story? And if they don't, how can we make them care about this story? Or should they care about this story? If they don't care about this story, what is the story that they're talking about today?

Because there was a patronising view amongst some older commentators that you have to dumb down stories to get young people interested in the news, and I've found that that's clearly not true.

Absolutely not true. I think if you look at newspapers, I started in newspapers, and if you look at it, it's far easier to write for a broadsheet publication with lots of words than it is to write for a tabloid publication. So you try and sum a story up in a 15 to 20 words in the first line. That's what those papers do day in, day out. There's a real skill to telling the news simply and getting all the main points across. So it's not dumbing down at all, it's just speaking to people clearly and plainly, and not putting on any airs and graces.

Is there a Newsbeat way of doing things? A Newsbeat way of covering a story?

I guess it is just thinking about first and foremost as a reporter, do I understand that? And if I don't understand it, then I shouldn't be repeating it on air. I shouldn't be copying something, and I shouldn't be putting something out on air that I don't understand. So the starting point has to be, do I understand it, and would somebody in our audience understand every word of that and what that means? It's about your tone, and about just not treating people as idiots really, just because they might not get a certain topic, or understand a really long word, like 'superfluous' or something. You just don't use it. It's cut out the jargon and talk to people simply as you would to a mate really; whatever age you are, you don't talk to a mate in jargon, you just talk to them as a normal person.

I'm showing my age now, but I used to much prefer BBC Newsround to the main bulletin, because John Craven actually took the time to explain the background to the stories, rather than just assuming that we knew the rich history of the conflict between these two countries, and I don't.

It's all about context, and I think the BBC as a whole is getting better at that. But it's something that we've always done. It's high up on the list. How are we going to explain it and what is the *context* of this? Where does this story fit in in the world, and how does it explain the world around them?

Because young people, your listeners, are incredibly curious about the world. I imagine that rather than trying to attract their interest, it's actually the opposite – that they are inundating you with an abundance of interesting stories.

They surprise me all the time! And I've been at Newsbeat a long time and I've been working with young audiences for over a decade now, and they still surprise me with their intelligence and their curiosity, and they really aren't like how I think a lot of people might think young people are. You know, just celeb-driven, and not really

much about them, and actually the opposite is true. They care about their health, they care about their mental wellbeing, they care about being successful. They care about working, they care about their jobs, they care about other people in the world. They care about injustice. There's a wide range of topics that I think Newsbeat have covered for years before anybody else even touched them, which are really serious topics like self-harm, and mental health in young people. We've been doing that for years before it became, not *trendy*, but before it became recognised as it should be recognised, really quite mainstream to talk about mental health problems. We don't just focus on celebrity-driven news, although if there is a news story to be told about a celebrity, of course we will do it. But we don't just do it frivolously. We were one of the first people on the Jussie Smollett story – and that's a really interesting, intricate story. There are lots of stories like that around music and around film and around entertainment. That's not to say that we don't like the Avengers, or we don't talk about Love Island, or we don't talk about other areas, or The Bodyguard, or Fleabag. Of course we do – but we always try and strive to actually not just be talking about them for the sake of talking about them. That's what the other presenters are there for, we are there to find a news line for it and talk about the news angle of entertainment stories.

We had Paul Royall on the podcast recently, who was the editor of the BBC Six and 10 O'Clock News, and he was talking about how the six and the 10 differ from one another in terms of their mix of stories like the Ten is slightly longer, slightly more internationalist. Is there a Newsbeat balance of stories? What would an ideal programme look like in terms of the pie chart?

So I guess we always like... this is going to sound really old-fashioned, because it is an old fashioned saying that somebody said to me, we do like light and shade. So we don't like it to all be really, really heavy stuff. We do think about making sure we don't leave the listener sat there down in the dumps, and actually wondering what to do with life. So if we're tackling a serious topic like eating disorders, we try and make sure we give the listener or the reader or the viewer something that they can use to help them if they are experiencing that sort of thing. So we try not to just ever have a programme where it's just all doom and gloom, but we know our audience like those stories, like us to seek out those stories that are inspirational as well. Those stories where somebody has turned a corner and turned things around. So we just always make sure that we are doing our best to do that as well. Of course, you know, being Radio One and 1Xtra, we have access to some of the biggest stars in the world in terms of musicians, and our entertainment teams are great; they strive to get those interviews and get those exclusives as well. Which are often sometimes a bit "lighter" than the rest of the news. But I think probably it's only us news bods who think of news as kind of light and, "Oh, that's a lighter story," or, "That's a feature-y story." If you haven't heard it before, for our audience, it's news.

Back in the good old days when you took the Times every morning and watched the News at 10 and that was it, it was more appointment to view. How have the plurality of different platforms changed your journalism? Because now people are listening to linear radio but they're also listening to it on iPlayer, catch up. There's the podcast; the BBC has hugely embraced it by the Sounds app. How has that changed your journalism? You were talking about

exploring issues like eating disorders. They seem right for longer form journalism.

It's been a really, really long time I would say, five, six, maybe seven years since we just thought of ourselves as radio. We have a fully operating online operation, so we're writing articles, we're making social videos, we are making iPlayer documentaries. We have stuff that goes out on our YouTube channel . Basically we are where our audience is. So I don't think it's something you can be snobby about and think, "Oh, well, young people, they're keen on Instagram, I don't want to go on Instagram," or, "I don't want to go on SnapChat." Our job is, as a public service broadcaster, to get our news to as many people as possible. You can't do that if you're just focusing on radio. If you look at Radio One, they do phenomenally well on YouTube, and I think it would be really strange if people just thought, "Oh, Radio One's just a radio station." It's absolutely not. And it is important, of course it's important, for us to make sure that people know that it's coming from the BBC, and that is more about us focusing and making sure our branding is right. But as for the platforms and how we get it to young people, we can't be snobby about that. We've got to go where they go, and if they leave a platform, then we leave a platform. It's as simple as that really, or else you're just not going to survive in this day and age. You can't turn the clock backwards to the days where everybody just made their appointment to listen when you wanted them to listen.

How have the metrics driven your editorial decision? Back in the good old days a newspaper would only know just how many it's sold on the newsstand, or for radio it'll be RAJAR, or the viewing figures for telly. Now, even with my podcast, I can tell how many people have clicked, what drove them there, how long they listened for and at what point I became boring, and the so called abandonment point, all of that. How do you connect with your audience?

I think everybody used to just pretty much chase clicks. And of course you do. There's no point in doing stuff if nobody's listening to it, or nobody's reading it. But there are things that are more important, I think, or as important like engagement and, like you say, how long are people listening for, how long are people watching something for, how are they sharing it? If you look at your content being shared on Facebook, how are they sharing it? What are the comments? What type of people are they sharing it with? It's really trying to engage with your audience a bit more on that front and also talk to them on those platforms. We still actually get a lot of emails still. I know maybe people at work, but we still get lots of emails, and it's about making sure you are still talking to the audience and not just thinking, "Oh, it's all social media now," or, "Nobody texts in any more. Nobody emails in, it's all done in the ether." It's not. It's just about making sure that you're not just taking, and you are engaging and chatting, and giving something back to the audience.

Without being overly august about the question, as it were, do you feel a special sense of responsibility as the BBC, as a public service broadcaster, to connect with young people? Because a commercial broadcaster might have a token offering to make a bit of money and then say, "Well, we're not going to do it because there's not enough money in it," and that would be a fair

decision. But you guys have a special responsibility to connect with hard to reach audiences.

Absolutely, and I feel really passionately about that, which is why I've done pretty much every job at Newsbeat! I feel really passionately that we have a duty to give young people a voice and to tell their stories, not just explain the world to them. It is a two-way street, and actually is to help them, as a public service broadcaster, it's to help them through life, kind of, I guess. Especially in these years when you're trying to make up your mind about things, it's just about making sure they've got all the tools, all the facts, they know both sides of the stories, then they can make up their own mind. And it's about making sure we're keeping at that, and keeping that in mind, and always keeping the audience in mind. I think it's really important, and really important for the BBC that they actually do engage with young people now, because it's critical. It's about talking to them on their level, and being where they are, and finding and exploring new ways to attract them, like BBC Sounds is a massive, massive project that we've launched at the BBC, with our intent being to attract younger audiences through podcasts. That's a massive statement to make, and it's about continuing to actually, maybe sometimes go against the grain or take that risk, having the right kind of programming, and us as Newsbeat having the right kind of stories. And making sure that those stories appear on other outlets as well. So quite often we will do a piece, a story, and it will appear on a Victoria Derbyshire show, or on Breakfast, or even the Six and 10. We recently had our gaming reporter from gaming BAFTAs who did a piece for the Six and for the 10. It's about us as well, pushing our stuff out there, and pushing young people forward as voices to be reckoned with and not just coming to them on the topics that you think you should come to them on, like college, or education, or knife crime even, or music. That's not all young people do and talk about, and represent and think about. There are some very talented young people in the UK, and we should tap into that more I think as the media as a whole.

And what's your impact internationally? Because I appreciate your remit is the UK, but you must have a lot of international listeners.

We do have a lot of international YouTube followers for example, because some of the content we put out there that people couldn't find in their own countries, content like that. So a couple of years ago we did a documentary where we took two transgender men back to Jamaica, and that's where they came from, but they've grown up in the UK. And that did really well internationally, because it's a topic that you wouldn't see covered by certain media in that area. We've also recently done, BBC World commissioned us to do a series on what it's like being 17 in different places around the world, which was really successful and really interesting and informative. We went to places like Uganda, Ghana, India, Russia. It's just interesting to see how other people are living their lives as well and other people's take on the world. So I think our audience has got more and more internationalist; young people aren't so focused just on their world. But they also *are*, so they're a bit of a contradiction – which is why it's tricky to work with young audiences, and they let us know when they think that we're not covering the right agenda.

I wonder if there's a kind of natural loss of people like me that would, I mean, when you mentioned what it's like to be 17 around the world, that struck me as an incredibly interesting piece of journalism that frankly, because it's Newsbeat and I'm not a young person any more, I might not necessarily have clicked on, and that's to my loss. Is there a cut-off point? Do people self-cut-off?

I think people sometimes they might think that they should cut off, and some people do. Some people do want kind of a different level of news, so they might go to the Today Programme or another outlet for news. Or they might go to 5 Live, but quite often I hear sort of older people, my older brother is a good example, is he makes people listen to Newsbeat in his office before they leave so they can catch up on the day's news, and because it's easy, it's easy to consume, even though he's way outside the target age, he still thinks, "Okay, if I want to know what's going on quickly, I'm going to listen." So even though it's not intended for an older audience, outside of 30, people still listen. Because we tell the news simply.

As editor, what's top of your to do list at the moment other than get the shopping in, like strategically, what's the big thing you've got on, or is there multiple things?

I guess for us, we think a lot about audio as a proposition. Podcasts, we've done a few podcasts, we've done a couple, both of which though are award-winning, I'm pleased to say! We've done the story of Izzy Dix, and a podcast called I Hear Voices, and we have some more podcasts coming out in May around mental health. So we're looking at our role in that kind of arena. But also, we can't ever forget that we still have around eight million listeners every week. So the radio is *really* important to maintain that standard. My team is just super creative, and thinking in ways that I don't think most of the rest of the BBC thinks, or I don't know, the rest of the media maybe – but they are super creative and keep coming up with different ways to tackle subjects. It's really important we don't lose sight of the fact that we can't suddenly just say, "Oh, radio's dead. We don't need to focus on that. We'll just focus on online." But equally, online is important to us. We sort of joined with the main news site a year ago, and that's going really well. So more people are seeing our content, and more young people are seeing our content. So that's really important to us to maintain that, and help change the tone of the entire news site I would hope, and the tone of the rest of the BBC in its approach to young people. Because we're in a prized position to do so, to help our colleagues. Collaboration, another big thing for us this year. I mentioned World, but we have other irons in the fire that we're looking at, collaborating with, and just making sure that we can get these great stories that are out there to a bigger audience, really. Yes, and we're still making our iPlayer documentaries for Radio 1, which are varied. So our last one we followed Dillian Whyte, he tried to pursue a heavyweight title bout with Anthony Joshua. We followed him for eight months, so great access. That appeared in lots of places, not just the BBC. We're looking at doing one on migraines next. So they're very varied. We've done ones on M.E., we've done ones on what it's like to go bald when you're young, from a male and female perspective. Because I think most people have maybe thought about it from a male perspective, but not from a female perspective. It's really important for me, and for Newsbeat, that we make sure we're telling those

tales and they are diverse tales, diverse stories, and we keep giving our audience a voice.

You clearly speak with evident passion about your job and connecting with audiences like you're doing. And you've mentioned that you've done every single job within Newsbeat. So the question is, why? What is it that attracted you to this type and style of journalism that has kept you still at it?

I started in newspapers because I could always write, I was always a good writer, and I didn't really know what I wanted to do. But then I very sort of quickly thought, "Radio is a lot quicker, lot more immediate for me." So I moonlighted. So I worked five days at a bi-weekly newspaper in Southport. Then at the weekends I moonlighted at Rock FM in Preston. So yes, and then I got into radio full time. I just like the immediacy of it. Quite early on in my career at Newsbeat, I was asked to commission documentaries, which were hour-long documentaries working with indies as well as internally. I just absolutely loved that, the chance to get in depth on those stories. So even though I've been here a while, I've done lots of things. So I've done the reporting, I've done the editing, the commissioning, documentaries, I've edited the programme, I've been online editor, I've been planning editor, I've been deputy editor, and now I'm editor. I do feel there is a lot that's still to be done, because everybody's in a bit of a transition period, and trying to cope with grabbing everybody's attention. The mobile changed everything for everyone in terms of getting people's attention, because you can get everything on your phone. So, why are you going to come to the BBC? And that's a challenge for us all, and I think there is lots that Newsbeat can still do around that. So yes, I haven't decided what next yet, quite.

It seems to me that we're in a kind of time and attention-poor society these days. We had an editor of a paper in about a year or so ago, said that in the good old days the Sun's main competitor was the Mirror. Now the Sun's main competitor is the Netflix app icon, which is next to it on the phone. You know, everything, Facebook, all social, people are competing against. If I look at my Facebook feed, it's what my friends are doing, but it's also the latest posts from say, Barack Obama, or the New York Post or Newsbeat. It just seems to be all in the mix these days.

It really is, and people squeeze in more activities into such a short space of time than they used to as well. But you can't turn that back now, so you just have to find ways of riding that wave and actually turning it to your advantage. So it's challenging, but it's quite exciting in terms of opportunities as well, for the BBC especially.

Do you see a sense of responsibility that Newsbeat is a kind of beacon of change within the BBC more widely? In terms of diversity, you've spoken about where they are now, integrating with the website, attracting different audiences. Do you feel a special sense of responsibility, even within the BBC?

Absolutely. I do feel that it is our job to actually effect change across the board where it needs to be changed. Obviously, we're not going to go and sweep in and suddenly say that we think the Today Programme should be different, and they should play

music beds under it, etc. But we have had our stories and our content run on Today. It's about finding the right tone for the audience, but still telling that story. That's important. We do have pieces that go out on PM, pieces that go on 5 Live, and as I said, also on the TV – and I think that's really important, that we are playing that role more and more of just bringing those different sorts of stories out. There's more diverse stories, and more importantly there's authentic stories, because I think there are a lot of people who try to do young then don't perhaps do it very well.

Are you kind of pulled in different directions sometimes within the BBC? I mean I've watched all episodes of W1A as research, but you know, given that you're doing so well, if I was head of a different department within the BBC, I'd want to nick all of your ideas and try and get as much of your energy and creativity. Do you find that you are nicked and volunteered onto some of the boards?

Yes, yes, quite a bit! But I don't think you can be in a position whereby you felt maybe that not enough attention was paid to news for young people, and then suddenly think, "Okay, there's too much attention now, I don't want it." You just have to find a way to navigate through it I think, because it's important. I do give my time where I can, and give my ideas where I can, because I do think there are enough of them for people to tell. It's not a case of, "This is our territory and nobody else can touch it." It may be that we think, or we know, that we can tell it in a better way, which is different to saying nobody else should touch this. But it's about trying to influence the whole of the BBC into a different, more relaxed way of thinking, I would say.

Does this job keep you young? Because I remember in my mid-20s there was almost like a moment when I deliberately stopped listening to Radio One started listening to Ken Bruce on Radio 2, who is of course a legend and when I officially declared myself proto-middle-aged. None of us are getting any younger but you're still doing youth journalism. Is that because you are absorbed in it day to day and it's keeping you young?

Yeah. In some ways and also I think it's really important to have a diverse team. Not just in terms of race or gender, but also in terms of age. It's really, really important that we have a wide range of people in terms of age and experience and knowledge. Because while the younger members of the team might bring certain story that an older member might not bring, to realise that story they need the experience of an older member of the team. So you know, we have people from 19 upwards on our team, and it's really important not to think, "Okay, all our team, we need to get rid of everyone who's over the age of 25 and just bring in lots of young people." Though we do need to bring in more young people, and learn from them, and realise that it is a two-way street.

Well, young people themselves aren't ageist either. You only have to look at the phenomenon of say Jeremy Corbyn for example, who some people say is an old giffer. He said that himself. And yet on the other hand, he connects incredibly well with young people because they see past his age and look to

his authenticity as a politician. I don't agree with his politics, but I believe he believes it and that's got to mean something.

Yes, authenticity is so important for a young audience, and it's again in terms of the correspondence we use, we have had Jon Sopel, the US correspondent, do stuff for us. We've had Frank Gardner do stuff for us. It's not about age, it's about authenticity as well. If somebody is an expert in something, then they will get on air, if they're a good talker. because again it's about sound and production as well, and who can get the message across in the simplest way. It is just about having that range, I would say.

Tell us about the videos you're doing on iPlayer then, because they seem to be having a huge impact.

Yes. Again, this is from my team. My team is a multimedia team. They are truly multimedia. They might be on a shift whereby they're reading the news bulletin, writing an online article, creating a video, or making a documentary. And the thing about the iPlayer documentaries is that actually they are all ideas suggested by the team, and then we build on them. What is really important to us is that the subject, the contributor, is front and centre. So lots of them don't have reporters in, but they have reporters behind them. And we just try and pick topics that also, I think people don't think of young people in certain lights. So we did one on young undertakers who are in their 20s, well, two of them were 17, training to be undertakers, and there was a chap who was in his 20s, who has an undertaking business. We did a documentary on that, and it was just so, just the care of which this, one of the young trainees, this young woman, took while painting the nails of somebody's gran who died was just, you just don't expect to see that sort of thing. So I think our documentaries are all about exposing subjects you wouldn't necessarily think about. Like M.E., that was kind of one of our really strong documentaries from last year. Just focusing on what it is and what the latest research is, and trying to give people a sense of what it was like. Just really important for those docs to be really authentic, and have the right people in. We did a doc called My Mind And Me, where we followed six listeners actually, they were listeners, who had different mental health conditions, had been diagnosed with different mental health conditions, and we followed them over the course of a year pretty much. So we could show the ups and downs. And I don't think there are many people commercially who would even consider that project, but we felt it was really, really important – and it had such huge impact on our audience. Yes, it was well worthwhile. So we try and tackle subjects whereby you learn something or discover something, or identify with something, you know. Same for the baldness documentary.

When you buy a newspaper like the Guardian, you expect it to have a left of centre approach, and if you bought the Times you'd expect it to be right of centre. Now, in terms of the generational focus that you're dealing with young people, is there any tension between generations, and how would you cover that? So for example, Brexit, it's a fact that largely older people voted leave and the younger you are, the much more likely you are to have voted remain. So is there potentially a generational tension there, and do you take the side of young people?

We do reflect that, but we also acknowledge that actually if you move out of the M25 and go upwards, the age difference becomes less of a factor. If you go to the north west of England and talk about Brexit, then you don't get as much disparity necessarily as you do if you were in the south. So it is just making sure that we give equal opportunity for those arguments to be heard, and challenged, on both sides. I don't think I found... I think that most people think that we would find that tension being a lot more. But I don't think we've found that in terms of our listeners. We've covered Brexit in the sea on surfboards, with two surfing friends who had differing views about it, and they're both young. It's about making sure that we're not going with the assumption, just totally along the lines of saying all young people wanted to remain, all old people wanted to leave. Because it's just too complex for that. So we just make sure we are keeping all that context.

Do you have a unique angle on issues of particular relevance to young people, like knife crime and gun violence, when they are statistically, evidentially, much more likely to be victims of gun and knife violence?

Yes. We try, again, to make sure we are getting that in the authentic voice. So it's not just coming at it from one way. So it's not just coming at it from, "Oh, drill music is to blame," or, "All young black men do this and this is why, and they shouldn't." It's a bit more complex than that. So you know, we recently had a very successful video and article, of a guy who has been to jail, is rehabilitated, and he explained why he carried a knife and why he stabbed somebody. It was a lot more complex than the kind of general... that you've heard. And to the point of, we know that our certainly our audience on 1Xtra, the reaction from them and the teams around the building was that, "Okay, that's the first time I've ever heard somebody speak just authentically about the realities." We were still challenging of course, but you still need to hear what people have to say and how they felt and their experience. So it's really important for us that we don't rush in and look at things from the same angle. It's also again about the context as well. Because things like knife crime, you would assume, I think from a lot the coverage that is just a black problem, but it's not. If you look at the actual stats, there are far more white people being stabbed than black people. Maybe not in London, but overall. It's about making sure we don't lose sight of, yes, this is the problem, but we don't lose sight of the context. And that's what I think sometimes other places do, that we try not to. Really try not to, it's *all* about context, and it's about getting those different variety of voices so that people can then make up their own minds.

Does it frustrate you when certain middle-range tabloids merely want to condemn and sensationalise headlines like that? It doesn't seem to be helpful to society to stoke the flames of this kind of practice.

Tabloids would perhaps argue they wouldn't do it if people did buy it. I don't know if I would say that... is that their role? I think it's probably a wider conversation for the entire media of what your role is. But in terms of the tabloids taking a certain line, they know their readers very well. They're reflecting their reader's views.

What's been the best day of your career so far? And the final question, what piece of advice would you give to someone starting out in journalism now that,

listening to this, thinks, “In a decade or two I want to be the editor of Newsbeat.” What advice would you give them?

My best day is really rubbish! The best day of my career, and I shouldn't say this, this is not even newsy really, the best day of my career was when I was at Capital on the breakfast shift. Patrick Stewart came in. He came in, the sports guy told him that I was a massive fan, but I couldn't go meet him because I thought I was going to be sick. I just couldn't. So one of the reporters printed out a picture and he wrote me a note on a picture. I know that's not very newsy!

And if an ambitious person listening to this, is starting out on a journalism career now thinks I want to be the editor of Newsbeat, what should he or she do, or not do?

Keep learning. Don't tread on anyone to get there. Don't claim credit for work that's not yours. Keep coming up with ideas and being open to people challenging those ideas, and changing your mind. And also don't get bogged down in other people's hang-ups, because I think if I had got bogged down in other people's hang-ups I wouldn't be where I am today. If I had got bogged down in the person who thinks, “Oh, well that's a bit strange. She's a black woman who's in a position of leadership,” and got bogged down in their agenda, then I wouldn't be where I am today.

Debbie, I think you're awesome, and I think you're an inspiration. Thank you ever so much for your time.