

THE CONVERSATION:

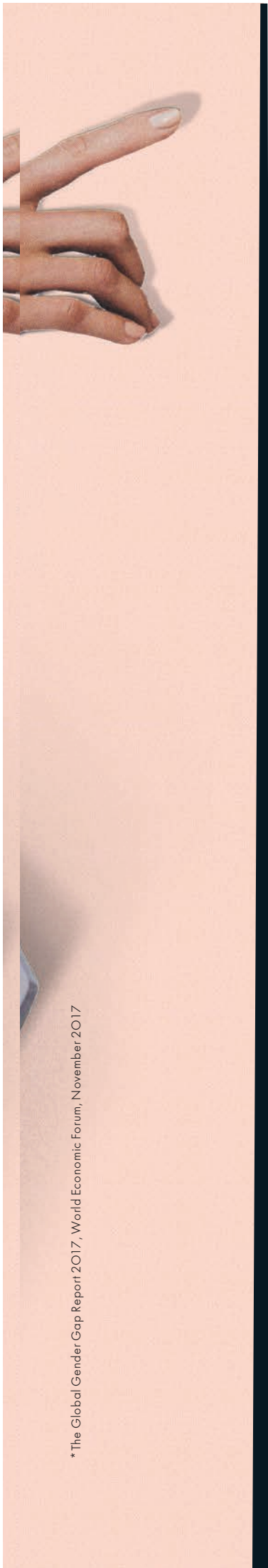


Let's talk about money

It's going to take more than
200 years to close the
gender pay gap*. That's 199 years
too long. From jungle-gym
careers to quitting conventions,
women are changing the
narrative around the way we
work, the money we earn and what
it means to be successful
now – and that includes failing

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THE CONVERSATION

'dream' is that no one knows what a let-down money and status can be until they've dedicated years of their life working towards them. We're learning that success doesn't have to be a meteoric rise to the top for a bigger salary – but if it isn't that, what does it look like? Freelance? Founder? Part-time florist?

'We've started to look at success as an individual thing, rather than one concept. I think it's about being stimulated; having your intellect triggered and your ability recognised,' says Louise Troen, vice president of international marketing and communications at Bumble Bizz. We want successful lives, not just successful

careers, and that means looking at work holistically. Does it feed my self-worth? Do I have a healthy work-life balance? Do I feel valued?

'If we are ever in "should" mode, that is a red flag, because it means we're being influenced by things outside of ourselves,' says Lucy Sheridan, the world's first 'comparison coach', who helps people to stop comparing themselves to others on social media. We all need our own definition of success. She adds: "'Should' means we've outsourced our power, direction or decisions, and we need to claw that back.'

Women are learning to bat away shame and face taboo

subjects. In the wake of #MeToo and the pay-gap revelations, we know we can't keep having the same, tired conversations when it comes to work and money. I asked writer Liv Siddall about the warm, chatty podcast she started this year, which she named Redundancy Radio after, you guessed it, being made redundant. 'At the time, my dad kept saying to me,

"You are not redundant – just say you left. Don't tell anyone; don't use that word," she says. 'But by talking about it and owning it, it doesn't define me.'

Owning failure is not the end goal for these women. It's about examining what it means to be successful. Even Sophia Amoruso, the original #girlboss, filed for bankruptcy and lost her place on *Forbes*' list of the richest self-made women (above Taylor Swift and Beyoncé). Now that she's 'failed', she's

started a new company, Girlboss Media, the mission of which is to 'redefine success for millennial women' by exploring subjects from money and self-worth to intersectionality and preventing discrimination in the workplace.

It was the pay-gap revelations earlier this year that made me confront my own complicated relationship with work, money and success. I worked in advertising for 12 years and, aged 30, was made ▷

THE MAIN ESSAY

SUCCESS IS NOT A SINGULAR DESTINATION

by ALEX HOLDER

IF YOU HAD TOLD *me* A FEW YEARS AGO THAT ONE DAY MY SOCIAL LIFE WOULD CONSIST OF GOING *to* WATCH OTHER WOMEN TALK ABOUT MONEY *and* FAILURE...

...I'd have pictured a pretty bleak future. But here I am, a bottle of beer in hand and a front-row seat, watching four women speak candidly about their lowest career moments – and I feel empowered. The panel event The Power of Quitting – started in London by Naomi Oluleye, a communications manager at Bumble – proved so popular it's been rolled out to New York and Berlin. It's a celebration of rebellious women who have made their careers their own. But the real pull is that nothing in the room is left unsaid: quitting big jobs, being a shitty mum, being underpaid and even being very well paid.

For women, it's been hard enough to get to the top. But now we're questioning whether we even want to get there. There's a language developing, rejecting the idea that there is only one way to be successful. Sheryl Sandberg gave us the term 'jungle gym' to replace the tired 'career ladder' in her book *Lean In*. 'There's only one way to get to the top of a ladder, but there are many ways to get to the top of a jungle gym,' she says. 'Plus, a jungle gym provides great views for many people – not just those at the top.' Emma Gannon de-stigmatised the 'slashy' by renaming them 'multi-hyphenates', celebrating those who hold down more than one job title in multiple industries at the same time. And Arianna Huffington wrote a manifesto to redefine success 'beyond the two pillars of money and power' in her book *Thrive*.

These books all push against the fact that we've been sold success as a singular destination – that if you work hard enough, you'll get there and then you'll be happy. The problem with this

"IT'S BEEN HARD ENOUGH *for* WOMEN TO GET *to* THE TOP. NOW WE'RE QUESTIONING *if* WE EVEN WANT *to* GET THERE"

partner of a large advertising agency serving global clients such as YouTube and P&G. At 33, I quit for the simple reason that it wasn't making me happy.

The day the pay-gap figures were published, I looked at the pay disparity at every company I'd worked for. The gap reported by WPP, the agency where I spent my most formative years, was 42.2%. Seeing that figure meant I finally felt validated; I hadn't imagined the sexism I felt throughout my career. Ironically, it was a triumphant feeling. With our struggle out there in the public domain, my friends and I started talking about work – the good and the bad bits, as well as the money we earn.

As we shared, I realised how many of my previous conversations about work were inauthentic because the money parts were missing. How can you get advice on quitting a full-time job and going freelance (which is what I did) without talking about money? For that conversation to be of real use, you have to say out loud: this is how much my rent is; this is what I could earn per day; this is what I will be

risking. By being more transparent about what we earn, we could actually make ourselves better off. In July 2018, a study by Starling Bank found people gained more financial confidence from discussing money than from putting money in their

The STATISTIC

22%

OF THE TOP QUARTILE OF
EMPLOYEES AT GOOGLE
UK ARE WOMEN*

savings account, which is pretty crazy.

Some companies are even doing the sharing for us. I asked Hailley Griffis, a PR specialist at US tech company Buffer, which has a transparent pay policy, how she felt about that being public. I looked up her salary – how could I not? A quick Google showed that, with a salary of \$90,091 (£71,100), she was the fifth-highest-paid in her department. 'I am more open with friends now; it adds so much to my conversations,' she told me. 'Knowing a friend's financial situation adds clarity and understanding to what their perspective on a situation might be.'

We're talking about money and redefining success – but is it all positive? 'At the moment, as a woman, going freelance is the ultimate middle finger to the corporate career,' says fashion blogger Brittany Bathgate, who left her retail job to work for herself this year. 'Adjusting to freelance has been hard. Some days I didn't even want to get out of bed, so it's not the answer for everyone.'

A friend I often work with raises another good point. 'If we're heroing those who choose a life balance, what does it mean in real terms?' she asks. 'If I told you I wasn't that bothered about getting to the top in my field, how would you, as my col-

league, feel about that? Would that colour your view of my ability to do my job?'

Then there is the constant talk of the 'portfolio career'. Over a third of 16- to 34-year-olds are balancing at least one project with their regular job**, so it's easy to feel like you're under-achieving if you don't have a side hustle. Diversifying should feel empowering, but while we celebrate the 'accountant slash baker', we should be real about the 24/7 work schedule that a portfolio career can entail, and the strains it can have on physical and mental health. Sometimes just honing one skill, like passing those accountancy exams, should feel enough. As we broaden our definition of success outside of salary and status, it's important there's still room for the women motivated by money. It's too easy to paint the underpaid as virtuous and, in light of the pay gap, that's something we definitely don't want to do.

We're living in a time of brave conversation, delving into the taboo of money and owning the terms that are used to quiet us. We were 'bossy' in 2015, 'nasty' in 2016, in 2017 we crowned ourselves 'difficult' and now, in 2018, I'm seeing the triumphant rise of the quitter, the failure, the outraged and the rebellious career woman. Go on, tell your best friend what you earn. Own your latest fuck-up. It's OK to admit that your dream job isn't actually that

dreamy. You're allowed to be passionate about being a part-timer – and if you're happy with your work, say it out loud. It's you we need to hear from most of all.

Alex Holder is the author of *The Money Book: How Talking About Money Could Change Your Life*, out early 2019

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Working OVER

39

HOURS A WEEK IS A
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