TL Susanna McGibbon

**Sally:** [00:00:00] Hello and welcome to the Talking Law Podcast this week I have a phenomenal lady that I've been literally chasing for ages. Uh, and that person is Susanna. Well, I'll let you introduce yourself. Who are you?

**Susanna:** Thank you very much, Sally. Uh, I'm Susanna McGibbon. I'm the treasury solicitor. I'm his Majesty's Procurator General.

I'm also the permanent secretary of the government legal department.

**Sally:** Wow. Now that's quite a mouthful. Um, c can I start from the beginning and ask what is your role? A lot of us nearby the government, legal department, but specifically your role, because you've got quite an interesting career and I've got tons of questions.

So let's start in the beginning really. So what does that role

entail?

**Susanna:** Of course? Well, uh, my role is to be the most senior. Civil servant who is engaged in giving legal advice to the government of the day. Right. Uh, and I've been a civil servant since 1993. [00:01:00] Um, so I'm one of the lifers within the civil service,

**Sally:** um, that was reading my face in response to, uh, the

**Susanna:** years.

Yes. Um, and as part of my career and the careers of the people that work in the government legal department, We have a range of disciplines. We have many people will be familiar with the litigation group that we have. Yes. Defending the government in court. Yes. Defending particularly judicial reviews. Yes.

But we in fact, uh, represent the government in the wide range of litigation matters, both private law and public law. Because like any organization, the government and the civil service has all sorts of. Private law matters, whether it's employment issues Yes. Or commercial matters. We're a big buyer of, uh, of, of, of stuff.

Yes. So, uh, lots of legal advice required around that. We also have teams that are. [00:02:00] Co-located with government departments providing a general council type advisory role for each government department. Uh, and they're the people who are advising on new policies? Yes. Who, uh, advise on legislation and in instruct parliamentary council, uh, our specialist drafters, uh, to in, to draft the legislation that's put before.

Parliament. Wow. We also have, uh, within our teams, and when I was an advisory lawyer, I also was involved in drafting secondary legislation. So any, uh, regulations, orders, and statutory instruments are drafted by the G L D lawyers mostly. Wow.

**Sally:** I mean, that is a huge, huge department and your role is huge. And I'll come later on to some of the, perhaps, Um, the case that meant something to you, A particular one I've got a question about, [00:03:00] but I, but I, how did you end up in that role?

Cause you're from Bolton now. Let, let me finish. That's, lots of great people come from Bolton. Yes. Let me list some of them who have been on this podcast. Maxine Peak, the actress from Silk. Mm-hmm. Um, Chris Cue, who was an advisor to a police department, he's now a lecturer, Peter k. From Bolton. Have you had him on the podcast?

No, not yet. Not yet. Not yet. And of course now, um, you a great deal of talent has come outta Bolton and I have a soft, soft spot for Bolton. Cause I used to go there to do a lot of cases of Bolton Crackled. So I, I just wondered how. You know, a northern last, if I may say so, uh, has ended up in such a huge, uh, uh, role, uh, with great expertise.

How did that come

**Susanna:** about? Well, it's an interesting question because I don't quite know how I got into law in the first place. Um, because there were no lawyers in my family. But I, I'm gonna show my age again now, but remember that program, [00:04:00] crown Court? Yes. That was on the telly. Yeah. Um, I remember particularly liking the outfits that, uh, the barristers were wearing, and I thought I quite fancy being a barrister and knew nothing about the study of law.

But fortunately and quite, uh, unusually the school where I did my A Levels, uh, offered. Law as an O level. So I just thought, well, I'll have a dabble, I'll, I'll do another O level Yes. And see if I, see if I find it interesting. Wow. Um, and that's what I did. And then came from there and I was the only person in the school doing law O level, uh, taught by someone who I think.

His only qualification was as a magistrate. Um, but it was, but it was fine. And it confirmed to me that I was not going to be the research chemist that I originally had my heart set on, but actually was interested in developing arguments. Yes. Public speaking language and [00:05:00] history and I, it sort of put all that in a bowl.

Yeah. And I think law comes out. Yes.

**Sally:** Amazing. Well, t tell me, when you came to London then, or when you began your career in the civil service, what was it like? Were there many women? I mean,

**Susanna:** so the civil service is a separate matter entirely. When I first came to London and did Pupillage, uh, in chambers, yes, there were some women around, but I have to say it was quite a culture shock suddenly to be surrounded by so many privately educated.

And Oxbridge graduates. Yes. Um, uh, but it was lovely as well. Yeah. So, um, but it was, uh, it was unusual, uh, to be state educated and non Oxbridge in those days. Yes, yes. I suspect so was. Um, so I think I always thought I would come to London. Mm-hmm. Um, I think London was the home of law and at the time, of course, you could only do bar exams.

In London. [00:06:00] Yes. Uh, whereas now you can, you can everywhere. You can live them all over the place, can't you? So. Yes. Yes. Um, so, and funnily enough, I was born in London, so there's a sort of symmetry in it, in, in

**Sally:** the end. Yes. Or always meant to come back somehow. Well,

**Susanna:** interestingly, I mean, you will joke at this.

Uh, I, I do like my coincidences, but I was born in Westminster Hospital. Huh. So, not only did I, um, Uh, come back to London and, and do law. I ended up in the civil service, uh, where I live and breathe Westminster. Yeah.

**Sally:** Well, cause I've been to your office, you can actually see Buckingham Palace Froms, right.

Your, your office and all things, uh, in the location. Yeah. Well that's really interesting, um, that you've come to London because of course the government legal department has offices. In Leeds, Manchester, Bristol, I think. Absolutely.

**Susanna:** Yeah. Um, and I'm really thrilled about that. Yes. This is quite a recent development.

Yes. I was going

**Sally:** to say, it wasn't always. Of course. No, not sure. How's that? So why has that come

**Susanna:** about? Well, partly [00:07:00] because I'm committed to G L D. Yes. In line with broader civil service policy reflecting the country that we serve. Yes. Uh, and that means, Nationally, that means tapping into, uh, talent. Yes.

Across the country. Yes. Uh, so there's a, there's a business dimension to it as well. Um, and I think it's important that the government of the day is advised by people who reflect the society we serve here,

**Sally:** here. And if ever there was leveling up. That is leveling up, if I may say so, which I had been banging on about.

Talent and a wide sort of pool of talent all round. Um, Suzanne, I I want to ask you about, um, What, what, what's it like, like what's your typical day working in the government legal department and being head of it? I have rather assumed, before I did some research, you had to be a solicitor by virtue of the title.

No, exactly. It doesn't mean that at all. Doest it. No, I,

**Susanna:** neither am I a solicitor, nor do I [00:08:00] only work for the treasury. I work for every government department. I see. Yes. So it's a, uh, the treasury solicitor is an ancient, uh, Role, uh, goes back into the 12th century or something. Wow. Uh, when, uh, the Treasury was the main le uh, civil service department supporting, supporting the Prime Minister, and if you, uh, remember the Prime Ministers actually called the first Lord of

**Sally:** the Treasury.

Yes. I've, I read that and I didn't really understand

**Susanna:** it. It, so that's where the two come together. I see. Yeah. So, uh, what's a typical day? Typical? My typical day will be very different to the typical day of the junior lawyers in the department. Yes. So as I was in my career developing, uh, my skills as a lawyer, then I would, my typical day would involve, as I've mentioned, drafting legislation.

Yes. Talking to policy colleagues. Uh, fellow civil servants who are developing new policies. [00:09:00] In the past, I was, uh, responsible for advising the people who were. Creating policy around teachers and, uh, the teacher's terms and conditions. Wow. And teacher's pensions. Um, and then I would draft the regulations that would bring into force the amendments to the teacher's pension scheme, things like that.

Things like that. Um, nowadays, uh, I'm much more likely to spend my time in meetings rather than drafting Learned legal opinions. Yes. Um, very much, uh, advising personally on. Some of the most sensitive and significant issues affecting government and the civil service. Yes. So the cabinet secretary, Meg may call me for urgent advice, but most of the time the advice comes from my teams and I'm very much, you know, the, almost the lawyer of last resort.

Yes. Yes. Um, uh, because the teams are terrific and they have excellent relationships with their [00:10:00] client departments, uh, and. You know, prepare the legislation, provide the advice to ministers, um, and, you know, generally, uh, provide what government needs to implement its policies.

**Sally:** Yeah, yeah. Now this is a good time to ask you if I may, about, um, A case that I suppose might, I, what might say means a lot to you.

And, and what I mean by that is just that, um, I don't give many interviews, but, uh, when I do outreach work, universities and schools, you know, they, they like, they like to ask you. Mm. And I often go back to kind of. You know, there's lots of big cases, aren't they? Good results, whatever. You know, some of the court of appeal, some not, whatever.

Um, and I go back to sort of some of the first cases that I did because that's when you are at the height of it. But in your case it's very different, I would've thought. And um, and there is a case, I think, because you in Miller one. That's right. Yes. But just tell us a bit about

**Susanna:** that. So, uh, you might expect me to, uh, identify a case where it was a, [00:11:00] you know, a glorious victory Yes.

Uh,

**Sally:** for, for

**Susanna:** the government, but of course, uh, it wasn't. Mm-hmm. Um, but it was. Uh, fascinatingly significant case to be involved in. Yes. As it was developed, we were breaking new ground. All the parties to the litigation we're breaking new ground. Yes. In, in the post Brexit environment and understanding just where the constitutional balance lay between the executive.

Parliament and the courts Yes. Was, was was super interesting. Yeah. And very important. So I was privileged enough, I was head of litigation at the time, the director of our litigation group. Um, and so I was involved as we. Prepared the case, uh, in the run up, uh, for the high court, and then, uh, ultimately of course the Supreme Court.

And I was fortunate enough to spend the full week, uh, in the Supreme Court, either sitting behind [00:12:00] counsel or, uh, in one of the rooms behind watching it on, on, on the video. Yes. Um, but yes, fascinating to be involved in it and you know, it's, A, a landmark case. Absolutely. Um, everybody knows about, and everybody, um, is now, uh, fascinated with, I think.

Yeah. Yeah. And really sort of shaped that sort of dualism as between international law and domestic law and the relationship there. Yes. So, um, we continue to see it as a guiding principle. Well,

**Sally:** it's really interesting cuz you complete for me those who were involved in the, in that case to an extent, Barness Hale, uh, now of course retired, uh, Lord Panic and of course Gina Miller herself, all of whom have been at different times over the years on this podcast.

So it, it is really interesting. Tell me though, in that case it was noticeable that there was an absence of women. Yes. Uh, in front of the cameras, if I may say so. Um,

**Susanna:** particularly on

**Sally:** behalf of the government, I'm afraid to say, well, that's where I [00:13:00] was going. Um, but contrary to that, in your department, your leadership is actually quite heavily Absolutely.

Senior

**Susanna:** leadership. Yeah. So it was the council team that was, um, that was Paul afraid, I think you can say that Embarrassingly. All white male. Yes. Uh, on behalf of the government. Yes. And, um, some listeners will have heard me say another Forer, uh, how I've been committed to improving our instruction practices at G LD in order to ensure we have greater diversity amongst the council teams that are representing the government here, here.

And my litigation colleagues are actively working on that. Um, uh, so that we don't find ourselves in that position again. Yes. You know, famous last words. Let's, let's get, there'll be

**Sally:** another one, won't there? No, but having said that, it's important, isn't it? It's to have a desire for change, not just in gender.

Yes. But of course other, other characteristics as well. Absolutely. But, so that's why I was interested to see your [00:14:00] leadership team.

Uh,

**Susanna:** yeah. So, so my three deputies on the legal side, um, are all women. Over 50% of our. Legal director ra. So that's partners level? Yes. Um, or women because I think the civil service and G L D attracts it attracts great women.

Yeah. Um, but we've had for many, many years, long before, um, it became fashionable, uh, we've embraced flexible working. Yeah. We've supported families, we've supported. Uh, people to juggle their family lives and their professional lives. Uh, we have, uh, in fact the current attorney general used to be, um, uh, a government lawyer within Yes, I read that.

Victoria Apprentice. That's right, yes. Within, within, uh, the predecessor of the government legal department, uh, and was one of the first job [00:15:00] share, uh, duos Wow. At deputy director level. So, um, we've, we've, we've really been in the vanguard of, of, of those. Flexible working practices, which actually attracts lots of men who want to take family life seriously as well.

Yes, yes. So it does create a particular culture, I think. Um, one that's supportive, one where, It's not as I would describe it, elbows at dawn. Yes. In fact, when colleagues have family responsibilities, what you find is people leaning in and, um, taking on some of their cases or, um, providing a bit of extra support, telling them to go home and collect their ill child from school.

Yes. Um, and that's, you know, that's the sort of culture we want to promote and continue. And maintain.

**Sally:** Absolutely. God, you're really selling this. This is sounding very attractive to, uh, somebody listening. So let me pose this question. If, for example, two [00:16:00] questions really. One in turn. The first one is if having listened to this podcast or you know, doing a bit of research and.

Uh, one is listener who's about 10 years Cool. Or 12 years Cool. Mm-hmm. Um, and thinking I fancy this. Mm-hmm. I fancy, you know, this sounds great. An opportunity to be in the heart of sort of law making really. Yep. Um, what career advice might you give to somebody at that level? And then the secondary question is for somebody.

Fairy duty wanting to enter the law per se. Mm. So there, there're two big questions I know, but I'm thinking, you know, somebody's being perhaps at private practice, whether at the bar or you know, our sister's profession, this solicitor's profession, um, and others, and it's thinking it's time for a change.

Something

**Susanna:** a bit more challenge. Well, I think because our work is unique, um, we don't really expect people to come with huge amounts of. Necessarily directly relevant experience. Yes. We recognize that it's so different, uh, [00:17:00] to what most people do in private practice. Yeah. That actually we're looking for aptitude.

We're looking for people with an interest in law and politics and the relationship, uh, that that entails. We're looking for people who are, um, committed to public service, who recognize that, um, you might not get the financial rewards that you get in the private sector. Yeah. But actually the impact of the lawyers in G L D.

Yeah. Uh, on everyday life in the UK is, is significant. Yes. And it's a huge privilege, uh, to those of us that, that get to do that. Mm. Um, so as I say, we tend to look for aptitude and commitment and interest, I would say in terms of. Tips. We certainly have lots of examples of people coming from private practice, mid-career, or perhaps post post family.

Yeah. Um, or post caring responsibilities. And in fact, I was just talking to a [00:18:00] colleague at one of our introductory training sessions the other week who came up to me and said, thank you so much for giving me, not wasn't, that wasn't me personally, but, you know, thank you so much g l D for giving me an opportunity to do some amazing work.

Local to me in Leeds, um, that I would never have had the opportunity to do. Yeah. In, in times gone by. So that, that is really en encouraging for me and, you know, really inspiring actually.

**Sally:** Yes, it is. And of course, as we know, I, I'm always talking about. Um, the breadth of care and responsibilities, elder care and people returners is really important, um, to remember to keep those in the profession.

You've got all those skills, uh, after a break. And what about a junior person? You know, starting out, maybe not necessarily in Bolton, just thought of another Bolton, uh person. Dame Janet Smith, indeed, Shipman inquiry. Another Bolton last. I'll be thinking about all of these ones be finished, um, but I wonder it.

You know, younger or [00:19:00] aspiring lawyers, you know, this is a different playing field for them now. Uh, there are less opportunities when they ought to have been. We've been in the pandemic, very difficult. Um, and they'll be thinking about skills when they op, you know, in different ways to practice law. So I wondered if you had any tips, particularly sometimes for those from underrepresented groups, which is a term I don't like, but I would say, Marginalized groups, you know, who don't always feel as though they're perceived as belonging.

If you just want to be a lawyer and you're thinking, mm, I want to come into the profession. What skills or tips might you give? I suppose from a government legal department point of view, because a lot of people don't know. What you do now. Yeah, absolutely. But don't know what you do.

**Susanna:** So I would recommend people, um, have a curiosity, a as about the relationship between government and the state.

Um, so. Uh, if you are, if you're a student, brush off your public [00:20:00] administrative law. Um, there's a publication that we g l d, uh, produce, which we, we produce it primarily for our lay clients. Um, uh, but it's called The Judge Over Your Shoulder. Oh, and there's a, the sixth edition has just been published.

You'll find it on, on, on the website. It's, it's, Publicly available. Great. I'll share

**Sally:** a link to it. Yes.

**Susanna:** Do. And, and that talks about the relationship between the government and the state. It talks about the legal framework within which government decisions are made, talks about the duties that, uh, government ministers are under, um, in.

Developing their policy and then sometimes preparing legislation, sometimes it doesn't need legislation. Um, but all of those public law principles of, uh, rationality, uh, and correct use of powers, that sort of thing is, is, is explained in that. Uh, publication in, in layperson's [00:21:00] terms. Yes. So, uh, if you think you might be interested in, uh, government law, have a read of that.

**Sally:** Great. And what, what might be a lay cl a a lay, you said a lay for a lay clients. What would be a lay client?

**Susanna:** So that's a fellow civil servant. Oh, right. A policy developer who doesn't have a legal background, but many of them of course, are. Steeped in the legislative process and uh, uh, and the formulation of, of, of government policy.

Yes. Interesting. But for those, um, for those, uh, very new to the profession or even just exploring, um, Um, other opportunities. Uh, we in G l d run a legal trainee scheme and pupil barrister scheme, uh, which I is highly competitive and very, uh, sort of very much sought after. Um, and we're also exploring the use of apprentice, uh, the development of an apprenticeship scheme and early talent generally, some of which I think will be of [00:22:00] particular interest for those, uh, from.

Perhaps less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Yes. Our recruitment practices are aimed at trying to eliminate, um, Uh, preferential treatment for those of particular privilege. Yes. So we are university blind. We are name blind. I was just going to say name. In, in, in many of our in, uh, early stages of our, of our recruitment processes in order to have a level playing field so that in accordance with civil service principles, generally our, um, appointments are absolutely on merit and merit alone.

Fantastic.

**Sally:** So, Crikey. I feel like I'm advertising this now. I'll go back to being neutral. Well, it doesn't matter. Why don't I ask you perhaps a, a serious question then? Um, because you are advising government departments, I'd like to ask about. Impartiality of service. Mm-hmm. And, um, what, [00:23:00] what does that mean?

Can you be impartial and do you, do you have to be on site of the government of the day, for example? I asked that because of the titles. Mm. And perhaps the work, how does that work? How, how does sort of impartiality or independence work, you know, in, in

**Susanna:** this, um, yeah. So circumstance. So, uh, it's very similar to general counsel.

Um, in the private sector Yes. Who are employed by the employers, the company. Yeah. Uh, and are very much there to help the company achieve its OB objectives, but of course, still absolutely bound by professional obligations of uh uh, Ensuring you act in your client's best interest. Absolutely. Um, but at the same time as a civil servant and a lawyer, yes, we are politically impartial, which means that our advice is not tinted by any of our personal political [00:24:00] views.

Yes. Uh, and we are there to deliver for the government of the day. So there's, it's not entirely independent. But it is impartial and, uh, non-political. So,

**Sally:** um, because obviously we all watch the news, you know, even those of others who are, are watching the news. But if there's a new government in two years time or whatever, presumably you work just carries on.

But the new government of the day, It

**Susanna:** will because the government, the government of the day, will have new priorities. Yes. And, um, as they come into power, uh, we'll be discussing their new priorities with them. And it's perfectly possible that they will be repealing some of the legislation that the current administration, uh, has, has brought to pass.

Uh, that's if there's a change of government. Yes. If there's not a change of government, There still might be a change in makeup of government, [00:25:00] uh, and priorities might shift according to the time. So yes. Um, the continuity of the, uh, impartial civil service is for me one of the great constitutional safeguards that.

The min, the, uh, new government coming in or new, new members of Parliament are supported by people who are experts and not politically aligned. Yes. Well, it, it's

**Sally:** so interesting because it was important for me to understand that and for listeners to understand that. Cause I think sometimes it can be confusing.

Um, and it's, it really. An interesting

**Susanna:** safeguard and it's important that we're there to deliver Absolutely. The government of the day. Absolutely. They're the democratically elected government. Um, it's not just a case of here's my advice, take it or leave it. Yes. We strain to get solutions that meet manifesto commitments.

**Sally:** Yes. Now I want to ask you some fun questions. Yeah. Um, you've got a big job. [00:26:00] Additionally, you are venture at Lincoln's Inn. Indeed. You are managing this huge team. Your three immediate tech deputies are women. Yeah. I mean, it might be men for all I care. You've got a large department. What do you do for wellbeing?

Because a little bird tells me you are very much into music. You're quite a talented, um, pianist. Is that right?

**Susanna:** Well, I wouldn't claim to be talented, um, but I'm, I'm an enthusiastic amateur. Um, so yes, I, I do play the piano, uh, learnt as a child, um, and then took up lessons again, uh, about. Three or four years ago.

Um, wow. Uh, I've been a bit remiss recently, I must confess. Well, you have been busy, but it's, um, it's, it's a lovely thing to do and music generally is, is a big passion of mine. So I do try to get to a concert or the theater. Almost weekly. Yes. Um, so I've got, I've got a, a summer of prom concerts already in the diary, which I'm very much looking forward to.

**Sally:** Good. [00:27:00] Well I'm glad to see, cuz this is a big job. Mm-hmm. You know, not just yours but in general And we are, the bar need to get better at it. And you, yourself has said, you know, you get a phone call. Uh, about something Yes. Important. Important. You, you have to react to it. So, uh, you know, we're trying to push wellbeing now.

I wanted to ask you about books. Mm. Um, we have a women in the law book club. It's not just for women. They are men's had all sorts of people on Queen Secret Barrister, and I wondered if you had a favorite book. And or a favorite legal character and why that you can share with us.

**Susanna:** Okay. So I suspect lots of people talk about To Kill a Mockingbird, don't they?

Yes, absolutely. My favorite and I, I, I suspect that did plant a seed back in the day. Yes. Um, but I'm not really a big one for reading. Legal novels No. These days. But if I may, yeah, just give a little plug. Ooh. For a former colleague of mine called Anna, Matt Sola, who is a novelist, she used to, she [00:28:00] was one of our G LD trainees back in the day.

And she writes great books, some of which have a legal dimension to them. Oh. Um, but I would absolutely look out for the. Those.

**Sally:** Wow. Well, in my book club we invite the author. So we would love to have and discuss her books. That's really, um, that's a real good club. Uh, very, I didn't tell

**Susanna:** her I was going to do that.

That's all right.

**Sally:** This is a neutral podcast. Doesn't matter. Um, that's fantastic. And what about a legal character? Did you ever have one? I know you said, um, to Kill a Mockingbird, so I presume Attica's Finch, but Atka

**Susanna:** Finch would've been the obvious one. But as I say, I sort of, um, law was not something no.

Um, you know, that was a, a, a great sort of longstanding ambition. Um, but having said that, uh, I think when I was a child, lots of my sort of role models and in, and. Uh, inspiration were sports women. Yes. Because sport is an area where [00:29:00] women are more visible. Yes. Isn't it? Yes. So, you know, Virginia Aid winning Wimbledon, um, in the year of the Silver Jubilee Yeah.

Is, is like a historic event for me. Yes. Um, so I suspect. Uh, that was the sort of thing I was looking at as a child. Um, of course, I would have to say now, wouldn't I? Um, the character, Maxine Peak plays in in Silk. Yes. Uh, being a Ian, and she could probably do my

**Sally:** accent better than those. That's because you've left.

Bolted for so long. Absolutely. Yeah. No, that is, that is, um, fan fantastically brilliant. Uh, tell me, um, if I may, I, I saw that you, um, contributed to certainly the Lincolns Inn a hundred. Yeah. Celebration. That's right. When the first one was called to the bar. Yeah. And, uh, as we record this in grazing my own in, um, we are celebrating, I wouldn't say copying, we're just a bit behind you.

Um, uh, Edith [00:30:00] Hesling, our only our own woman, the first woman to be called to the bar. But I wondered why were you. Keen to support that project and I suppose advocate for women because it's a great, great. It's a, it's a film Mm. In which they interview a series of women, um, in In the bar. Bar, yeah. In different roles.

And it's a brilliantly wonderful diverse, um, how, how did you get involved in that? Why did you get involved? Do you think it's important to be advocating

**Susanna:** and celebrating? I think it is. I think as I became more senior within the government legal department, and frankly probably having. Taken for granted the equality Yes.

That I experienced myself. Yes. Um, in the civil service. Um, I recognize that that wasn't necessarily replicated elsewhere. Yeah. And also it's very precious. Um, we shouldn't take it for granted. Uh, and therefore I felt as a senior woman, Uh, within the government legal department, uh, it [00:31:00] was important for me to be more visible.

Yes. And I thought it was also important for me to be visible as a government lawyer. Yeah. Out and about Yes. In the profession. Yes. Um, uh, and so I take that very seriously and the a hundred years women in law, um, project provided a perfect hook for me to dip my toe in that world of networking across the profession.

Yes. So, to walk into. Uh, Lincoln's in Old Hall to a room predominantly full of women. Yes. Um, was actually, uh, you know, easier than it might have been had it been a different makeup, shall we say. Yes. Yes.

**Sally:** And I, I can see that actually. Well, t tell me, we talk a lot about imposter syndrome. You know, I'm a short black woman.

People think I'm tall until they meet me, uh, or see me in court, but, but, Uh, in your career because you've been hugely successful, did you ever suffer it? And I know it's not a syndrome, it's not an official condition or anything. I [00:32:00] often feel that it is when one feels as though everybody in the room thinks you don't belong.

And when everybody in the room doesn't look like you or doesn't come have the same background as you or, or whatever it is. So there's a, a feeling of exclusion. Which we then think, we don't belong here. Somebody's going to come and say Get out. Because everybody thinks that. And I wondered, in your career, did you ever have any instances like that?

Because you know, you are really hugely clever. Uh, Brady Woman. I'm not just saying that. You know, I've done a bit of research, uh, and you know, I know people who know you as a child who say she was just clever. She did like five L levels. You know, high barks and all of them. But, you know, joking aside, did you ever experience any of those kind of, I don't belong here.

And how did you get over it? Because in my own career it's been trying to overcompensate, knowing the most in the room. Mm-hmm. Over preparing, you know? Um,

**Susanna:** so I've very much, I think I alluded to it earlier and very much felt that when I first [00:33:00] came to London Yes. Um, uh, particularly when starting Pupillage, that I was surrounded by people from.

Very different backgrounds. Yeah. Um, and back in those days, I'm afraid probably, that's probably why my accent isn't as broad a bolt, an accent as it might have been back in the day. Uh, and also I think there was an element of faking it to make it Yeah. Uh, as you say, overcompensating. Yeah. Making sure that, um, You know, you could talk the talk when people were talking about rugby or cricket.

Yeah, actually cricket was a good one cause my dad liked cricket, but, um, uh, but just to, to feel like you fitted in. Yeah. Um, so when I joined the civil service, it was like a breath of fresh air and I didn't feel necessarily that I needed to do that. I was surrounded by people from a range of backgrounds, all of whom were super clever, um, but not necessarily quite so, uh, Privileged in their background.

Yes. Yeah. [00:34:00] Um, but that imposter syndrome, if that's um, or a sort of sense of you have to pinch yourself Yes. And think. Is this really me? Mm. Um, I'm here, you know, at the big events in the legal year. Yeah. The opening of the legal year at the coronation. At the coronation.

**Sally:** Indeed. I saw your tweet. Yes. It was just the invitation, I think.

I don't even think you were saying anything,

**Susanna:** you know. Absolutely wonderful, wonderful. I was quite coy. Yeah. Um, but yeah, I mean, you pinch yourself and just think, crikey, um, what am I doing here? Yes. Uh, and if, if I'm feeling I. Unconfident in terms of, and this is a tip I share with, uh, with junior colleagues, is if I'm feeling unconfident or um, uh, Perhaps not as resilient, um, uh, as I am most of the time.

Mm-hmm. It's worth just remembering some of those little victories early on. Yeah. So I, [00:35:00] I was knocked back, uh, in, at the self-employed bar. What, uh, so I was disappointed not to get tenancy in a couple of chambers. Um, and the reason I ended up in the civil service was because I needed a job. Um, I needed. To earn some money and I was applying for pretty much every job in the paper that I was vaguely qualified for.

So it wasn't a grand plan No to, to join the civil service, but with those knock backs and yet then you overcome them. Yes. And it's worth remembering that however unconfident I am now, I'm in a far better, more privileged position than that 22 year old who failed to get tenancy. Yes.

**Sally:** And it's being able to build that resilience, I guess.

Yeah. Wow. That is so amazing. Um, I especially like the way that, um, you talk about your team and because you've won some [00:36:00] prestigious at awards recently. I may say so. Yeah. And, uh, I was thinking government legal department. Wow. And there's quite a few women there and various said the diversities, um, and you kind of, you don't talk about yourself.

You're often talking about your team, and I think as a leadership quality, it's really wonderful to see that. Is that a deliberate thing or are you just really proud of the team that you've built and the work you're doing? Well, I'm

**Susanna:** proud of the team that I've built, but I'm equally proud of the team that's supported me.

I'm only here because I've had amazing colleagues throughout my career, um, from whom I've learned such a great deal. Um, I mentioned we have a culture that isn't really elbows at dawn. Yeah. And that people are terribly supportive. So every, I've had hugely encouraging managers throughout my career, uh, who have given me, uh, great feedback.

Sometimes it's been hard to hear, um, but actually given me, The development opportunities that have [00:37:00] enabled me to continue to grow and I want to do that for others. And that's the sort of organization I want to lead where it's all about the work, it's all about helping others to, uh, reach their potential and ultimately all about doing the right thing for society.

**Sally:** Absolutely. Absolutely. Well, what a great role model you are. Is that model, what type of leader do you think you are? What or what sort of leadership? Skills you think you have cuz you bring so many people with you. We just saw a young woman as we were entering Grey in who was very friendly and chatted to you and I thought, right, yeah, I could be her mother.

And she seemed to know you and to me that's what great leadership builds people who want to talk or, you know, connect and remember you. What, what type of leader do you think you are? What, what makes a great leader,

**Susanna:** leader for you? Well, I, I'd like to think I'm a very open and accessible leader. Um, so the.

The, the young woman we, you referred to Sally, uh, is [00:38:00] one of our current pupils, uh, within G l D. Yes. And she's spending some time at some chambers, uh, in the, in, in Grey's Inn. She's also a, um, a Lincoln's Inn member as well. So, uh, I've seen her around and about Lincoln's Inn as well. Yeah. Um, but yes, so I hope I'm approachable.

Uh, I hope I'm friendly. Uh, I hope I set direction because I think that coming back to that purpose of why G L D. Is an important part of the civil service and an important sort of constitutional safeguard for the country is it's really important. Our strap line, as you probably know, is that we help the government govern well within the rule of law.

Yes. Um, and what that means is the government needs to get the best possible, highest quality legal advice, uh, to enable it to make its policy decisions. Uh, and I think that's a, a, a really important purpose, uh, for all of us to be united behind. Absolutely.

**Sally:** And to do that in either widest [00:39:00] possible

**Susanna:** pool.

That's right. Um, and so I think it's really important to celebrate the great work that all of our teams do, and comes back to your point about it not being terribly well known in the outside world. Yeah. And I'm really grateful for the opportunity to. Blow our trumpet, our collective trumpet. Yes. On this, on this podcast.

So at any given moment, we've got colleagues negotiating trade deals, we've got colleagues litigating immigration cases, we've got colleagues, you know, preparing contracts, uh, for the most important procurements that governments got on the go at the moment. Yeah. Um, Vaccines was a, a a, a a case in point during the, yeah, during the pandemic.

Yeah. Which was we advised on the, uh, licensing and the approvals of the vaccines. Uh, and then went on to do the purchasing of the really important work collecting, you know, and quite a lot of the work is [00:40:00] professionally rewarding and it has a personal. Real life impact Yes. As

**Sally:** well. Yes. You can see, you can see quite the results.

Yeah. Now, um, there is, uh, one woman left in the Supreme Court. I don't say left. The others retired. Uh, and I'm always saying, talking about this, on this podcast and whoever will listen I suppose. Um, but you know, David V. Rose, who's a bencher at this end, grazing of course was herself. A government legal lawyer.

She was. And um, there are a number, a number of senior women in leadership position, Victoria Apprentice, I already mentioned the attorney general, um, who have come your route. So I wondered really what's next. Oh, I think this is, might we see you? I know, I know it's a big question. You'll try to fob me off, but might, might the Supreme Court or, you know, another.

You've led so many important departments. [00:41:00] I just wondered what, what was

**Susanna:** next for you? I think, well, I think this is the pinnacle. Of my career. Um, uh, and I'm not going anywhere anytime soon. Make No, no. I

**Sally:** wasn't suggesting that. Just lemme just make that clear. No, no, no. I meant, I meant whether you were going upwards.

Yeah. There's even more,

**Susanna:** uh, there's, there's plenty to be done in G L D I've got huge ambition. We're just about to start on a, a new strategy period. Um, as you mentioned, there will be. A general election, uh, in the next couple of years? Yes. Whatever the outcome of that general election, I'd like to, I'd like to be the continuity act.

Yes.

**Sally:** Yeah. Fantastic. Well, I, I feel like I should be ca calling you de. Suzanne. Oh, goodness. No. Um, uh, but, um, one of the interesting aspects of your work as we, uh, come to a close was, um, the, the coronation and the laws involved. Yes. [00:42:00] In the coronation, but the Coronation Act, which I think was 12 something, uh, I can't, I haven't got my notes in front of me,

**Susanna:** is the Coronation OS Act of 1688.

**Sally:** Yes. 16. There we are. I think I, I wrote about it. You probably did too. Did you think in your lifetime you would be using No.

**Susanna:** It's astonishing, isn't it? I mean, such a niche. Uh, a niche role to be involved in that. Uh, and fascinating and a huge privilege. Yes. Um, so, and as well as the, uh, advice on that act and the terminology of the oath and all of that, there were a whole load of other things that our lawyers were advising on.

**Sally:** Well, I was coming to that, which people wouldn't have think thought of, you know, I think a lot of people are probably just watching the marches and the concerts and what have you, but there's a whole load of. Oh,

**Susanna:** the law license. Yes. Licensing to make arrangements for the use of the Parks. Parks, yeah. And, um, you know, stopping the traffic.

Yeah, yeah. All that sort of thing. So, um, [00:43:00] it's quite a role. Once, once in a lifetime opportunity for some of our most junior colleagues, which is great. Yeah,

**Sally:** absolutely. Absolutely. Well, Susanna, thank you so much for um, talking Law. With me in this interview. We ha I feel like we haven't talked about a lot of substantive law, but I think that's what people listen to this podcast totally for.

It's been wonderful to have you on. You're a real inspiration. Thank you for

**Susanna:** your time. Thank you so much, Sally. It's been a delight. Uh, and I just hope people think about applying to G LD

**Sally:** here. Here. Well, you heard it here first, first.