

240206 - Talking Law Joanna Hughes - WillEdit

[00:00:00] **Joanna:** So I joined Allen Overy in 1996 as a trainee solicitor. Um, I qualified into the litigation department, uh, worked as an associate and then a professional support lawyer in litigation, always involved in the social mobility side of things too. And then I asked if I could stop being a practicing lawyer to launch solicitor apprenticeships at ANO, but we'll get on to that I'm sure.

[00:00:26] **Joanna:** Yes, absolutely.

[00:00:27] **Sally:** Hang on, hang on, hang on. [00:00:30] So, well, you, so you did that. Why did you ask to do that and then what the solicitor apprenticeships actually do?

[00:00:37] **Joanna:** So, I asked if I could focus on solicitor apprenticeships and introduce them at Alonovary, and I don't like the term, but they would have been, they were the first magic circle firm to introduce solicitor apprenticeships.

[00:00:52] **Joanna:** Um, and I did that with somebody I'd worked with in the litigation department who was then, uh, head, the graduate, graduate [00:01:00] recruitment partner, or later re termed early careers. recruitment partner. So we worked on it together and the reason I wanted Alan and Avery to introduce solicitor apprenticeships was because the firm is and was excellent at outreach into schools, but there were only a limited amount of positions where that could translate.

[00:01:23] **Joanna:** into full time permanent roles. I see. So I did some research and I came to the conclusion that [00:01:30] solicitor apprenticeships were the answer. And they are. Wow.

[00:01:33] **Sally:** Bells on. With bells off. I always have to stop myself because I'm obviously in the sister profession at the bar. Um, but it's really quite interesting because currently There are various routes to qualifying as a solicitor out there.

[00:01:47] **Sally:** So, you know, the usual training contracts, uh, which is Well, you tell us because, yeah, then one can make a distinction between why you're so pro solicitor apprenticeship.

[00:01:57] **Joanna:** Exactly. So, I will start by [00:02:00] saying how two routes are very similar. Yeah. So essentially they work out at the same amount of time. So if you imagine you did a traditional degree and then you had to do the professional exam, which was called the LPC, which I did, but now SQE.

[00:02:15] **Joanna:** Yes. And then if you had done a non law degree, you'd have to do the conversion course, et cetera, et cetera. So it adds up to an amount of time. Yeah. The solicitor apprenticeship is six years long, um, you work [00:02:30] four days a week and you study one day a week. It's a protected day and you go to university. on that day.

[00:02:38] **Joanna:** Within four years, just to keep things simple, you essentially end up with exactly the same law degree that I have. And then the last two years are dedicated to getting you through your professional exams. So for the solicitor apprentices doing it now, they do SQE1 and SQE2. So by the end of the six years, you have a law degree.[00:03:00]

[00:03:00] **Joanna:** And you're ready to go. Wow. I know, there's literally no downside.

[00:03:04] **Sally:** So, why did it take you to, to start it? Well, no, I

[00:03:09] **Joanna:** can't play, I can't.

[00:03:10] **Sally:** I'd love to play. I promote everyone on this. Thanks, Sam. On this podcast. all your idea.

[00:03:16] **Joanna:** No, um. Solicitor Apprenticeships have been running, um, in sort of a big way since 2017, and outside London, in fact, there had been quite a good take up in places like Manchester and [00:03:30] Birmingham and Leeds.

[00:03:31] **Joanna:** And there were some firms in London that were already doing them, but I suppose what I like to think I've done is create a bit of a buzz around it, uh, and working, uh, together with the City of London Law Society and my co lead Patrick McCann a bit later, um, yeah, we've got this collaboration of 50. Five zero.

[00:03:53] **Joanna:** Wow. Wow. City law firms all collaborating together and it's really, really special in my [00:04:00] opinion to see law firms working together like that to promote solicitor apprenticeships. Some of them already had solicitor apprenticeship schemes, which is even more incredible to me

because they're showing real generosity of spirit, sharing their knowledge, and then the rest of the firms.

[00:04:16] **Joanna:** we've encouraged to start programmes. So there's many, many more positions, over a hundred new positions available each year now because of the work we've done. That is fantastic.

[00:04:26] **Sally:** And also, um, fantastic, I'm giving you, um, [00:04:30] praise. Limited praise. Thank you so much. I'm really joking. But um, I'm giving you praise because what I noticed from the cohorts of the apprenticeships that are coming through, uh, and involved in your work are that they are actually from global majority, black and ethnic minority, you know, kids, boys and girls.

[00:04:50] **Sally:** Definitely. Um, and that's quite impressive because the criticism has always been. There are a lot of these programs actually end up attracting the same types of [00:05:00] people and they're not socially mobile. They're not working class, um, uh, people. Was I deliberate when you were curating this that you wanted You know, all diverse backgrounds rather than some.

[00:05:13] **Joanna:** Yes, a hundred percent. Um, and while socio economic, uh, background is not at the moment protected characteristic under the Equality Act, I would very much like it to be one day. And a number of us are working towards that. But yes, [00:05:30] we, I certainly encourage any law firm to target their recruitment efforts towards those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and there are a number of ways that can be done very effectively.

[00:05:41] **Joanna:** And then of course, to include people across all strands of diversity, um, and what I always say is. Solicitory apprenticeships are not inextricably linked with social mobility, but they are an incredibly powerful tool, both on an individual level and indeed on a structural level, [00:06:00] to change the make up of lawyers in the City of London, and for that reason it's extremely

[00:06:05] **Sally:** exciting.

[00:06:06] **Sally:** And one of the other unique things really about, um, you know, trying to use solicitory apprenticeships, is that, um, you know, you're from London. That's where you live, you know, you've got four boys, but you're very keen for it to be a national um, organization and reach apprenticeships nationally so people can apply from all over the country.

[00:06:26] **Sally:** Yeah. Why is that? Because I know I've been critical in the past [00:06:30] of organizations that are very London centric. Yeah. Um, why are you so keen actually? to realise that and encourage a national distribution?

[00:06:39] **Joanna:** Yeah, thanks for that question. So, I will answer it in two ways. Um, one with my Joanna Hughes Solicitor Apprenticeships hat on, and then one with my Advisor to City Century hat on.

[00:06:48] **Joanna:** So, as Joanna Hughes Solicitor Apprenticeships, I'm super keen to do things nationwide. So, I've become a partner for the Ladder for Birmingham. I've [00:07:00] taken up a judge role and a patron role with the Multicultural Apprenticeship Alliance and the Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards. Great. Amazing. They're my new family.

[00:07:09] **Joanna:** I love them so much. Um, and they're based in Birmingham. And then I have roles on the UCAS, uh, Apprenticeship Stakeholder Group and the Sutton Trust Apprenticeship Stakeholder Group, and they are national. So. I get to do lots of things nationally. In terms of City Century, what we [00:07:30] always have to spell out a little is, while the roles themselves are in the City of London, we're very much about making sure we encourage firms to recruit.

[00:07:40] **Joanna:** nationally. Yeah. And so for that reason, um, whenever I do in person events, I will try to make sure that there is an event outside London as well. So in fact, we're recording this in Manchester and we had one of our events in Manchester. We did a mirror event in Manchester. Um, and Which

[00:07:58] **Sally:** is brilliant. Which is brilliant.

[00:07:59] **Sally:** No [00:08:00] one has to travel to London. Exactly. No, it's just, it's just good to have the opportunity, even though I get to London a lot. Um, but it's just good to have that. Yeah,

[00:08:07] **Joanna:** and it's, it's really important in rural areas as well and coastal areas. So with UCAS, we're going to do some in person events, um, and actually this is breaking news, I haven't announced this yet.

[00:08:19] **Joanna:** Ooh, exciting, I love this. You heard it here first. We're going to do an event in Ipswich, and Leeds, and Nottingham, and [00:08:30] Newport. Wow,

[00:08:31] **Sally:** Newport, Wales? Yes. Wow.

[00:08:33] **Joanna:** Because why not? No, I mean, do you know? We're going to be there for two days.

[00:08:38] **Sally:** Wow. Yeah. You see, how many people, one, would think that there would be an event

[00:08:43] **Joanna:** like this?

[00:08:43] **Joanna:** I know, it's really special and of course we always make sure that we do things online as well for accessibility reasons. Absolutely. There are many other aspects to accessibility as well. Yeah. Not just affordability and location. So yes. Wow. And social media. [00:09:00] Oh, don't get me on. Oh yeah. The power of social

[00:09:02] **Sally:** media.

[00:09:02] **Sally:** I'm good. That's a later question, but I might as well deal with it now. I follow you on LinkedIn. You're very active. You've got hundreds of followers and young people. 11, 000.

[00:09:12] **Joanna:** Oh my gosh. Not as many as you. Only half your amount, Sally. Oh,

[00:09:16] **Sally:** crikey. No, mine's only because of podcast listeners. Um, but you're very active on there.

[00:09:22] **Sally:** You're very active on Instagram. You're very active on, on X and, you know, all, all the social media, um, [00:09:30] platforms really. And my question is, has that been a deliberate decision? Because of course you can reach. Yes. More people. And the very people who are applying or thinking about applying for apprenticeships or aspiring lawyers.

[00:09:42] **Sally:** So has that been a deliberate, um, because I love following you because it's so good and you're surrounded by, you know, future lawyers. Yeah. It's

[00:09:51] **Joanna:** brilliant. So as, you know, as a trained solicitor. You slightly cringe at having to put yourself out there on LinkedIn, and I didn't really [00:10:00] do anything apart from posting a few academic articles when I was working as a solicitor, but I think the power of social media is twofold.

[00:10:08] **Joanna:** One, link, I do think it's had a big part, um, both Patrick McCann and I have quite a lot of followers on LinkedIn, and I think it's created a buzz to what, to make law firms want to get involved. But much more important than that is what you've just alluded to, which is, it can inspire young people to think this might be for me.[00:10:30]

[00:10:30] **Joanna:** And so quite often, actually, before they come to LinkedIn, they'll be on Instagram or TikTok. I'm not on TikTok, but we've hired like creative agencies who know what they're doing to create content that will inspire people who might not, who might not have ever considered a career in law, let alone that solicitor apprenticeship route is a very high prestige and credible way to get into the profession.

[00:10:56] **Joanna:** So we're on TikTok and then we sort of [00:11:00] encourage people to then move on to LinkedIn and read my content, Patrick's content, City Century content, and then eventually to land on the websites that give them all the information they need. But really what the power I see social media having is to create that spark that might be passed around the dinner table and middle class families. Yes, and just put that spark in someone's mind who might not have the social and cultural capital to think yes laws for me [00:11:30] Yes, it probably is for them that has never had anyone to tell them that yes, that's why I think social media is

[00:11:35] **Sally:** powerful You're spot on because also they're using it anyway.

[00:11:40] **Sally:** Yes, why not? Why not? I mean, I'm not talking about, you know, people giving legal advice on TikTok or whatever. People do. I'm not on TikTok either. I'm completely hopeless. I could just about manage my Instagram, you know, pictures of my dog or whatever. But it's a really important point because one of the issues about accessibility, for example, I'm often [00:12:00] talking to students about writing essays there are lots of essay competitions and mooted competitions and so on but particularly with essays. Um, actually if you don't advertise the essays in the areas where they will see it, they'll never see it. They'll never

[00:12:12] **Joanna:** know exactly you'll just get the same middle class people applying

[00:12:16] **Sally:** exactly exactly and often they come with you know Quite decent amounts of money firstly and secondly actually You know, there are certain narratives, aren't there?

[00:12:24] **Sally:** You know, if you want to have opportunities for people to marshal in a court, and you say, well, there's an essay competition. If you're not [00:12:30] great at writing essays, then that's not for you, is it? But if you can do a video, because you've seen somebody do something on LinkedIn or Instagram or whatever, then it's really good.

[00:12:39] **Sally:** So I really admire that, and I love the buzz. that, you know, that you've created, um, in that way. You've talked about City Century a lot. What is City Century and what is your work with them? So

[00:12:52] **Joanna:** City Century is a career creating collaboration of 50 City of London law [00:13:00] firms. Um, and it aims to significantly widen access to the profession by enabling as you've Um, as I said, diverse and socially mobile group of high achieving students to access city law, and it was a joint vision between me and Patrick McCann, who's director of learning at Linkgate is to shake up the market, actually, and boost social mobility by dramatically accelerating the adoption of apprenticeships in city law.

[00:13:29] **Joanna:** We [00:13:30] originally started working with a small group, as I've said, a spearhead group of law firms. And then we reached out to a much larger number of city law firms and we ended up at 51. I mean, I hope it doesn't sound like I'm blowing my trumpet too much to say, but this project is really unprecedented in city law.

[00:13:47] **Joanna:** I've never seen anything like it in my 25 years in the city. Um, and you know, it's brought together what essentially are rival firms who would traditionally compete for the best talent and they [00:14:00] share expertise and resources and costs. Um, and I suppose. There's so much I could say, but if I just say that we're doing it in, there's two strands to our work, there's the the setup and we have nine work streams where we advise law firms on what they need to do like business case and outreach and comms and how to train their trainers and so on.

[00:14:26] **Joanna:** Yeah. And we've taught them through webinars, [00:14:30] meetings, inter firm mentoring and so on. And then there's this whole other strand which I've touched on earlier about. outreach over social media and the events and so on. So, you know, we're delighted that we're such a new little organisation and we've already been shortlisted for five awards for the impact we're having.

[00:14:51] **Joanna:** So brilliant. Yes, it's nice. We're not in it for the awards, but We're a little baby organisation, and there's two of us [00:15:00] who do it, sort

of, in theory, one day a week. The other two people in the project team do it on the side of their jobs at Linklaters. And so, it makes us happy that people see value in what we're doing.

[00:15:11] **Sally:** Yes, and you can see the impact beyond the

[00:15:14] **Joanna:** optics. Yeah, yeah, that's right, and that's

[00:15:16] **Sally:** key, isn't it? Absolutely, absolutely. So my question then is about young people, in the sense that Who inspires you? Sometimes I ask this and people say oh, it's my kids or it's my husband or [00:15:30] some are perhaps much more nuanced answers, but what I mean is who are the people that You know, I can remember the first time I saw Black Barrister.

[00:15:41] **Sally:** I've interviewed her on this and she knows this on this, uh, podcast, um, because I'd never seen a professional woman in that sort of, um, way. And then obviously the people who inspire me have changed as time's gone on. Yes. Actually, so who inspires you, you know, in the work you're doing? Because, you know, [00:16:00] 25 years as a solicitor is a long time to give up a profession you love.

[00:16:04] **Sally:** to be doing work that's going to have more impact for, I suppose, a legacy, uh, and there's a lot of hopeful stuff. So, who are the people, if there's more than one, that inspire you to do what you do really? So it's

[00:16:18] **Joanna:** interesting that you say, you know, role models and sources of inspiration change. So when I was a lawyer, I probably looked up to people who were more senior than me.

[00:16:27] **Joanna:** But now, I'm very [00:16:30] inspired by the Gen Z, um, generation. And I learn so much from them and I have the biggest admiration for them. And if I could choose one, I would say Sophie

[00:16:42] **Sally:** Pender. Oh yeah, 93%. Yes. She needs to come on this podcast. Oh my gosh. I know she's super busy. She's very busy. And I've mailed, you know, emailed her and all the rest of it, but, you know, I'm busy too.

[00:16:53] **Sally:** But yeah, tell me

[00:16:54] **Joanna:** why. But she has actually, to be fair, she's made the time to come to an event that I'm running uh, for [00:17:00] Year One Sister Princess on Monday. Brilliant! So if she believes in a cause She'll be there. So great. Great.

So for people that don't know, um, Sophie is a practicing lawyer from a working class background, and she's both the founder and the CEO of, as you said, the 93 percent club.

[00:17:18] **Joanna:** It's a state school society for people like me who went to comprehensive schools. What I love about it is it describes itself as the least exclusive members [00:17:30] club. Um, and it's called of course the 93 percent club because 93 percent of the UK population, um, go to state schools. But that 93 percent are grossly underrepresented at top universities and in top professions, including law.

[00:17:47] **Joanna:** Um, what's slightly new information is the original 93 percent Club is for students, but last year they launched something called 93 percent Professionals. Yeah. Which is for professionals who went to state school, [00:18:00] um, and I'm really proud to be one of the founding members of that. Um, why does Sophie herself inspire me?

[00:18:08] **Joanna:** She's brave, she's a disruptor, to the degree that she's on the Forbes list. I know, I've seen that. She downplays that, but that's a big deal. And also because she's kind and authentic and doesn't have an ego. And I love the way that she It's very open and honest and she tells the [00:18:30] stories about the personal sacrifices that are sometimes behind this kind of ideal of social mobility.

[00:18:35] **Joanna:** It's not always easy, it comes with sacrifices. Um, I just adore her, to be honest. Um, and I, I love the way that she talks about, so she's become a friend despite the generational difference between us, we've become quite good friends. And She and I both have this strong feeling that it's not enough to make a few [00:19:00] students socially mobile.

[00:19:01] **Joanna:** What we'd love is for there to be more structural institutional change. And I, obviously she's doing what she's doing, which is having a huge impact. And in a, in a narrower way, um, because obviously it's not cross sector and it's not even all of law. But I do hope that the power of solicitor apprenticeships will make some structural change.

[00:19:22] **Joanna:** Yeah,

[00:19:23] **Sally:** and I think it is, because it's firstly open access, um, and, um, [00:19:30] you know, it's slow, slowly, slowly, but if we can keep the momentum, um, going, then it's a really important, important cause.

[00:19:39] **Joanna:** Yeah, and actually, you just used the phrase open access, it occurs to me I haven't actually explained why it is open access.

[00:19:46] **Joanna:** Yeah. And it's open access because with traditional universities, You have to take on student debt. Yeah, and that's not comfortable for people from low income backgrounds It could be quite triggering [00:20:00] even if you've had very unpleasant deprived background where you know, all sorts of things have happened For people with certain religious backgrounds, it's not comfortable for them to take the student loan either and so not having to take a government student loan and having your training costs paid for by the law firms who pay from it with the apprenticeship levy and earning a salary from day one, it means that Anybody can do it.

[00:20:29] **Joanna:** And I [00:20:30] also have made quite good friends with somebody who we think, um, she doesn't want to claim it, but we think she's the first person, um, from, for a care leaver to qualify as a lawyer. It's so powerful. She didn't need to rely on anybody. She's done this all by herself. It's brilliant. I have to say, One of my proudest moments was I asked, we did this big event in the QE2 centre in Westminster, and we had a thousand students in [00:21:00] person.

[00:21:00] **Joanna:** Wow! I know! In the morning, and then 800 in the afternoon, and had all sorts of the great and the good on stage as well as solicitor apprentices. Um, and then there was a panel where Our project team were interviewed and I asked Sophie if she'd interview us and bless her, she said yes and made the time to come.

[00:21:19] **Joanna:** Actually not just in the morning but the afternoon as well and like a real, it even makes me feel a bit emotional now. One of my proudest moments was when she said, she introduced me as one of [00:21:30] like the key disruptors that she knows in law and it meant a lot to me, especially coming from her. Yeah.

[00:21:36] **Sally:** And you are.

[00:21:36] **Sally:** You are. I mean, I've got to recount the story, which was quite, um, funny to us. But we went to a lunch, um, where you have to be nominated to be in the room. But when you get there, you think, oh, you're going to get an award. And there were only three awards given. And there's just, you know, the people who got the awards were like Baroness Hale.

[00:21:53] **Sally:** Uh, and then I can't remember many of the others. But these are like Top end and it wasn't a legal, a legal award, was it? And one of the [00:22:00] nicest things were That they had lots of sort of young volunteers And wherever I go I tend to speak to people serving the food Whoever's taking your code, they're much more interesting anyway Um, in general And, uh Emma Bunton, the Spice Girl, was there, and we were all laughing about it, you know, I was hosting the table.

[00:22:18] **Sally:** And you were so good in just going, come on, let's go and get a photo. I'll take a photo of you guys. You weren't really going, ooh, you know, me, me. And what was nice about that is actually [00:22:30] Um, not quite disrupting, is it? But it's actually just going, It's okay, I'm slightly more grown up than you, so we'll go.

[00:22:37] **Sally:** And I thought, oh, Jo obviously knows Emma Bunton. How? How? I don't know. if Emma Bunton's ever been an apprentice. But it, you know, it's owning that space, hasn't it? And I wanted to ask you, have you always been like, you know, let's take the step forward? Because It must have been a different skill set to go from being a lawyer to then actually setting up an [00:23:00] organization that you want to have impact, um, and legacy.

[00:23:04] **Sally:** Um, it's a different space. You know, I remember Mary Bonser who's been on this podcast. She went from being a solicitor to setting up, you know, Flex, uh, Misha Katona. you know, going from being a family barrister to setting up Mowgli, the, you know, the Indian street food restaurant. It's a different skill, isn't it?

[00:23:21] **Sally:** It is. Um, and were you always sort of not bolshie, but kind of owning it and trying to help forward? Did you find the space actually somewhat [00:23:30] different and you had to navigate it? Well,

[00:23:32] **Joanna:** I think. just speaking honestly, but sometimes like my sort of innate extrovert nature isn't necessarily ideal. Yes. And so you are sort of, you, you teach yourself to pipe down a bit

[00:23:45] **Sally:** or be less.

[00:23:46] **Sally:** Yes. Um, I can identify with that. You know, you kind of just sit quietly. Yeah. Uh, some, you know, observe first that sort of thing. Okay. But

[00:23:55] **Joanna:** now I can be my true self and, and do things like that. And it's [00:24:00] nice. It is nice. Um, And you can't, you don't worry that somebody's going to tell you off. And look, I check my privilege.

[00:24:07] **Joanna:** The only reason I've been able to do this as sort of 50 plus is because I have worked for 25 years and I've got the luxury of doing something where I don't earn the money that I used to earn. But, but there can be some very sort of. Nice moments, and you mentioned the one where I, I saw, like, I saw the, the serving, the, the students whispering about Emma, [00:24:30] and I said, come on, let's just go over, and, and I, as another thing, the National Apprenticeship Awards, I was lucky enough, I still quite, don't quite know how I was invited on to this VIP table with, um, the Minister, Robert Halfon.

[00:24:46] **Joanna:** And other people from the Department for Education. And they put me next to Baroness Lawrence. Wow! Yes, um, which was, I just wish they'd warned me. There were probably very good reasons why they couldn't. So, I was sort of talking to her and [00:25:00] looking after her before and after she presented awards and making sure she had everything she needed.

[00:25:05] **Joanna:** I could just tell that, you know, maybe she'd like to talk to someone else. So I thought, well, the whole room would love to be introduced to Baroness Lawrence, obviously. But I looked sideways and there's this, someone else who inspires me, this young woman called Paris Small, who doesn't work in the legal sector, but she is a degree apprentice, she's just qualified actually.[00:25:30]

[00:25:30] **Joanna:** And she won, not last year but the year before, the Multicultural Apprenticeship Award for the The overall winner. And she's so fabulous that they actually got her to host the entire awards in front of 700 odd people. Alongside a professional. Paris and I hit it off, um, a lot. And so I looked sideways and I thought, I'm going to introduce Paris to the Baroness.

[00:25:57] **Joanna:** And then they just started talking. [00:26:00] And she was like, you know, as a young black woman, what do you think? And I just let them chat. And Paris said. Thank you. I wouldn't have had that opportunity before and I said, yeah, but we are in years. She'd much rather have spoken to you than me. So, you know,

[00:26:15] **Sally:** yeah. Well, it all, it all works out.

[00:26:18] **Sally:** Um, tell me, Joe, if you had your, um, time again, and you know, 25 years ago, would you, [00:26:30] um, go to the same route of being a

solicitor that what I call the traditional route. So not Silex and people can find out about Silex from another podcast interview I did, but you know, it's different. Um, but would you, um, do the traditional route or would you go solicitor apprentice?

[00:26:48] **Joanna:** No, I would a hundred percent. I'm just

[00:26:51] **Sally:** testing what you're advocating.

[00:26:53] **Joanna:** No, I would a hundred percent do it. And there's so, there's so many reasons. Well, first of all, I don't like to start with the financial reason, but [00:27:00] it's just popped into my head. My parents earned a certain amount of money, which meant I got a full grant.

[00:27:05] **Joanna:** Um, And so, uh, I didn't have any debt. That was very lucky for me. But of course other working class young people now don't have that luxury. There's no such thing as a full grant at university. Far from it. Yes, I think that, I've read studies that say you end up with an average of 50, 000 debt, it's, it's That's

[00:27:26] **Sally:** probably right for law, even.

[00:27:27] **Sally:** Yeah,

[00:27:29] **Joanna:** really [00:27:30] uncomfortable. So, yes, I would have done it for that reason. But also, and this doesn't get talked about enough, I think, is someone who believes passionately in the power of networking for good reasons, not just self promotion, but networks can be brilliant for all sorts of reasons. Young lawyers get to start their network, like, four years earlier.

[00:27:53] **Joanna:** And if you're a solicitor apprentice, you're noticed because we've made it a very exciting route. So a [00:28:00] young man said to me, um, it's so brilliant being a solicitor apprentice at this big law firm, because the managing partner knows who I am. And said, oh, hi, you know, whereas he might not know if I was just a, a A trainee.

[00:28:12] **Joanna:** Yeah, a trainee. Absolutely. Um, so I would definitely have taken that route.

[00:28:18] **Sally:** Yeah. Yeah. So on that then, um, sort of area, what advice would you give to, um, young lawyers, um, , [00:28:30] young lawyers who are um. or aspiring lawyers, and of which there are many, you know, I don't think

there's a day that goes by without me getting an email, some description via LinkedIn or any other platforms about entering the law.

[00:28:43] **Sally:** You know, what would you, because it's important to at least get three quick tips, um, on. The law what area mine is usually solicitor or barrister That's what the questions that they may ask and then there's a variety of other. Yes questions as well But really [00:29:00] about the profession and you know building stuff.

[00:29:03] **Sally:** So I wondered if you had three tips for aspiring lawyers Entering the law

[00:29:10] **Joanna:** so three quick tips. Yeah tip number one My previous answer will suggest I'll say this is start to build a network It doesn't matter if you don't have a sort of inbuilt middle class network already. You can start building very effectively and very quickly and use social media as [00:29:30] your friend.

[00:29:31] **Joanna:** Tip number two, and I feel quite passionately about this, be true to yourself and be authentic. One, especially if you're entering city law or big law, as a member of a diverse community like myself when I joined. Don't feel that you need to assimilate to a dominant culture. That might have been the case back in the 90s, but it genuinely doesn't need to be the case now.

[00:29:57] **Joanna:** And there's lots of people working [00:30:00] to try and make people understand that they don't need to assimilate to a dominant culture. And by that I mean it covers all sorts of things, even down to accent bias. Yes. Tip number three, grab every opportunity you're given.

[00:30:13] **Sally:** Ooh, yeah. I love that. What about making the tea?

[00:30:19] **Sally:** If it s for yourself, yes. Yeah. Uh, quite. Or, or some, some highbrow client. That s really great. That s, um, great. Um, so tell me Jo, [00:30:30] then, what about perhaps, you know, um, somebody much more advanced experience in their career? Maybe it s gender specific, maybe it s not. So I m talking about 10, 15 years plus, who s thinking about setting up a, you know, something else?

[00:30:47] **Sally:** That might have a bigger impact any career tips or advice in that sense because you know quite often Um, I don't have it. I'm not very good at sales Yeah, exactly and [00:31:00] I don't think that law teaches you that because I have quite a black letter lawyer I'm an advocate in court. Those are

my skills. I'm quite aware of it, but um, I wonder you know when I'm trying to persuade law firms just to Host an event for women or young people with a few nibbles and whatever.

[00:31:18] **Sally:** Um, is that a whole different skill set that you would say, if you're thinking of setting up something to have a bigger impact, you need to be clear about? I don't mean sales, but what are perhaps, you know, any advice [00:31:30] or tips for anyone considering, um, a change from the law or an addition to the law, um, So

[00:31:38] **Joanna:** I only set my My little one person company up in uh, july 2022 so I haven't been doing this very long.

[00:31:47] **Joanna:** So i'm probably Entirely the wrong person to ask sally, but what I would say is Don't undersell yourself. And I say that because I had no idea what I should be charging myself my [00:32:00] time at, and I'm terrible at it. I barely charged for, I charged for a very small portion of it, but somebody said to me, you know, you probably need to double that, you know, don't be ridiculous.

[00:32:09] **Joanna:** So yes, terrible at that. So don't undersell yourself. Number two, Don't be upset by no's and don't always take the no's. Go back again, have another go. In terms of getting 50 city law firms to join the collaboration, we are such a happy and [00:32:30] creative community now, but not everybody said yes first time. We had like a, a hardcore group that we call the spearhead group, um, of law firms.

[00:32:40] **Joanna:** Who were brilliant from the, literally from the day where I did my first presentation as we were walking out through coffee where we want to be part of this. Mm. But others took a bit more controlling, but I don't give up. Sally.

[00:32:50] **Sally:** That's very good. . Very good.

[00:32:52] **Joanna:** So don't tend to sell yourself. Yes. And don't take no for an answer first time at least.

[00:32:58] **Sally:** That's very good to me. And [00:33:00] enjoy it.

[00:33:00] **Joanna:** Yeah. And surround yourself by I keep thinking of more. No, it's good. And surround yourself by nice people. I work really, really, really hard now and obviously not for the salary I used to earn. But I work in a little

project team with, uh, three people called Patrick and Joe and Cassandra and they make my life a joy every day.

[00:33:24] **Joanna:** That sounds quite trite but it's so

[00:33:26] **Sally:** true. Yes, well especially if you're going to, you know, leave what you know. [00:33:30] to do something brand new. It's got to be in an environment that works. So, um, I want to ask you some of my fun questions. Ooh, I like fun questions. Um, what's your favourite book and why? And, um, what or who is your favourite legal character?

[00:33:47] **Sally:** Mmm. Um, this is mainly because we have a book club, so I'm always keen to hear what people's inspirational Hey, can I join your book club? Oh yes, we always invite the author. This is the only snag of the book club. So the author of the book, [00:34:00] and he's got to have a legal link. Ah,

[00:34:02] **Joanna:** okay. Well actually I'm glad you said that because my friends all tease me because I only read non fiction.

[00:34:10] **Joanna:** I'm sorry about that, I know. Just because there's only a limited amount of time in my life and I just love non fiction. So I'm just going to tell the truth about my most favourite recent book. It's called Understanding Apprenticeships, A Student Guide. [00:34:30] Because, no don't laugh, because it's really, it's new and it's written by someone who really knows his stuff, this guy called Ben Rowland, who actually is now also the CEO of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers, but there's no book that exists like this and And I know that you're as passionate about Korea's education as I am.

[00:34:49] **Sally:** I am, I am, but I was hoping for an escapism book. Sorry, no,

[00:34:54] **Joanna:** I don't do escapism. And then the other types of books that are my [00:35:00] favourite is I have Two enormous stacks of books about social mobility. Um,

[00:35:06] **Sally:** yeah. I think I saw some. They're on my website. Yeah, they are. And I give a little list,

[00:35:11] **Joanna:** so if anybody's interested in my recommended social I'm not on the commission, but If it helps, that book, it doesn't just come recommended by me, it comes recommended by people.

[00:35:21] **Joanna:** All sorts of people. Someone else who really, really inspires me, Lindsay Conroy, who's Head of Apprenticeships at UCAS. She calls, and [00:35:30] I wrote this down, she calls it the most comprehensive, authoritative, and engaging book.

[00:35:35] **Sally:** Wow. Well, whilst we're on there, I hadn't asked you, what's your role with UCAS?

[00:35:40] **Sally:** Because they've got some new things they're rolling out,

[00:35:42] **Joanna:** aren't they? They roll out something wonderful almost every month. They are, I'm such a big fan of UCAS. So, um Well, they do so many things. So the most important thing they've done recently is ensure that [00:36:00] degree apprenticeship opportunities, including solicitor apprenticeships, appear literally side by side traditional degree options for students.

[00:36:10] **Joanna:** Um, they have a talent finding matching service. for employers and students. Next September, you will, students will be able to apply for apprenticeships through UCAS. They do so much work in like research work, um, their policy units headed [00:36:30] up by a guy called Ben Jordan, who does amazing work. They do conferences, for example, I'm speaking for them at, I can't remember if it's February or March, but a Teachers and Advisors Conference.

[00:36:42] **Joanna:** Yes, I saw you down on that. Which, importantly, will now include apprenticeships as well. Um, And,

[00:36:50] **Sally:** because it's not all one of the most searchable, although I made this up, I'm sure I saw the statistics. You're correct. Searchable.

[00:36:56] **Joanna:** Top three search terms by year 12 and year 13 [00:37:00] students. Wow. I know. That's amazing.

[00:37:03] **Joanna:** And so when you combine that with all the materials that they're putting out, including, um, there's a new industry guide, and by the time your listeners hear this, there will be application guides coming out, including one on law. They're prolific. I absolutely love working with them.

[00:37:22] **Sally:** That's amazing. Now, have you got a favourite legal character?

[00:37:26] **Sally:** Because I think you dodged that question. Oh yeah! Because I'm coming to the end now and I want to [00:37:30] make sure. Um, so Or somebody who would play you.

[00:37:34] **Joanna:** Well okay, I'm going to choose the same person for both. Oh great! Nicola Walker.

[00:37:39] **Sally:** Who? Oh! I know what I know! Yes! Um, in the, not the divorce, what's the Yes, the split!

[00:37:45] **Sally:** The split! Yes, I do like her. Because she was in that Yorkshire drama as well.

[00:37:49] **Joanna:** Exactly! I love that pro So, like you, I don't watch much TV. But one of my best friends had a big part in the split. She was a character [00:38:00] called Goldie. So she was someone whose millionaire husband was divorcing her. But I love the Nicola Walker character because She shows that as well as being a brilliant lawyer, sometimes life is messy and chaotic and it comes back to that authenticity point.

[00:38:18] **Joanna:** Yes. So, yeah.

[00:38:20] **Sally:** Ooh, I love that. I need to try and watch that again.

[00:38:24] **Joanna:** And so I think I'd like her to play. We're a similar age, so yes. Nicola Walker.

[00:38:29] **Sally:** Nicola [00:38:30] Walker, if you're listening, I've had Maxine Peake on this podcast and then Martin Shaw, so maybe Nicola, you can come on too and you can play Jo in her story about a woman who leaves her corporate life to set up an impactful organization.

[00:38:47] **Sally:** Um, so we are coming to the, to the end of this, um, podcast. I want to ask you about wellbeing. Yes. It's not the last question. You know I always have a few, uh, lined up, but, you know, the law, [00:39:00] and I've said this now repeated, is a marathon, not a sprint, and it's long hours, as it was, and then actually to leave that, once you think you've got a way of managing.

[00:39:11] **Sally:** Um, to do something else. But I want to ask you in the same vein really. What you do for well being. You know, you're married. I said before you've got four boys. And you know, in a profession which Um, is full on. Uh, let's be honest about it. How do you look after yourself? [00:39:30] Um,

especially now that you know, You're still building stuff and I know you'll say oh, I've got luxury because I I've left at 95 Formally as a solicitor, but how do you look after your well being, you know mentally and physically I suppose

[00:39:45] **Joanna:** So friends and carving time out very deliberately otherwise, it doesn't happen so I'm blessed with very very very good and dear friends and And for that, I'm thankful every [00:40:00] day.

[00:40:00] **Joanna:** In terms of carving time out, that can be on sort of a daily, or let's be honest, maybe weekly basis. So, I do like reading, and so I have to deliberately carve out time to read. Um, Actually, I know I've said this to you before, you probably don't believe me, but I've got a new Saturday routine where I listen to your podcast while I, while I do fold the washing from the previous week.

[00:40:28] **Joanna:** And it's such a little treat, and I [00:40:30] listen to it really early before those four pesky boys get up. And it then ties in with my love of books, because you do ask this question, and so I get book recommendations. I love

[00:40:42] **Sally:** it. This is not scripted in any shape

[00:40:44] **Joanna:** or form. No, I know. I'm just naturally sick of handicap.

[00:40:47] **Joanna:** My husband's like, oh Jo, I just cringe when you suck up to people. I love it.

[00:40:51] **Sally:** More of it, please. More of it. More of it. But there's a

[00:40:55] **Joanna:** really sweet little story that just before I went away, [00:41:00] my best friend treated me to a lovely weekend in Lisbon. And just before, for my birthday, and just before I listened to your podcast with Paulette Muston and she'd recommended the book, Who Moved My Cheese.

[00:41:13] **Joanna:** Yes. So I bought two copies of it and we read it in our little hotel room together. Oh

[00:41:18] **Sally:** my gosh. Isn't that cute? Yeah, and actually she's one of the Very early episodes of the of the podcast after Shereen Blair, I think so. It's actually very good It's good. That's a good [00:41:30] good. It was a good book choice

[00:41:31] **Joanna:** and this Saturday because it's a Saturday when we're doing I Listened to your interview with Nicola Williams, and I'm going to buy her book without prejudice

[00:41:40] **Sally:** Well, do, because she's actually due to come to the book club.

[00:41:42] **Sally:** We had to reorganise it because I was stuck in a, in a case. So, that would be a very good one because it's quite a good opportunity to ask the authors, you know. So exciting. Yeah, very exciting. This is very good. Yeah. This is very good to know. You often think, nobody listens to the podcast, don't you

[00:41:59] **Joanna:** David?

[00:41:59] **Joanna:** [00:42:00] Every Saturday morning, Sam. That's so good. And then, apart from books, theatre. And exercise. I love the theatre. I'm lucky to be friends with people who move in that circle. So one of my best friends has actually just become Resident Director of the Donmar. And before that, for 15 years, he was the Resident Director of the Open Air Theatre.

[00:42:21] **Joanna:** So I get to hear about all the interesting stuff. Um, and in terms of exercise, I do weights. And until [00:42:30] recently, I did boxing. And then I stopped because I got too busy, but I take you asking me this question today as a signal that maybe I should get back to my boxing because I loved it. Wow. Hmm.

[00:42:44] **Sally:** Oh, I didn't think now.

[00:42:45] **Sally:** You didn't have me down as a boxer. I didn't. I was thinking maybe weights because I know that weights are the new thing that's trending. We should all be doing if we are approaching or perimenopause or not and just helping the bones. Yeah. [00:43:00] Um, so I thought you might have said that 'cause quite a few guests have said, have said that, um, and you know, they have 4 million people listening to this podcast, so they do often message me with their own wellbeing tips.

[00:43:11] **Sally:** I know, I know. Don't ask, I'm, I'm very grateful for it. But I did have you down as a boxer. What's so attractive about boxing and 'cause a friend of mine actually was a boxer, Stacy Copeland.

[00:43:22] **Joanna:** So, again, I check my privilege because I wouldn't be too scared to go to a class, but I treated myself [00:43:30] to a personal trainer, and

he was a, he's a boxer, and he just took it very slowly, and Made it accessible for me.

[00:43:40] **Joanna:** I think it just ties back into that accessibility

[00:43:42] **Sally:** point. Yeah, and actually it's a good way to sort of get a frustration

[00:43:45] **Joanna:** out. Yes, and he played really cool music and we used to do it outside, near Stratford Park on the canal. It was fun. Did he used to bring

[00:43:54] **Sally:** Rocky, um, the

[00:43:56] **Joanna:** Rocky soundtrack? No, but I wish he had![00:44:00]

[00:44:00] **Joanna:** He did used to make me run up concrete steps and down again, so maybe I could have like, asked him for that track next time. Yeah,

[00:44:06] **Sally:** come on, Roqueen, I love that. No, I do, I know we, you know, we've been having quite an interesting interview and conversation about the law, uh, solicitous apprenticeships, and of course City Century, which we're also involved with, UCAS.

[00:44:22] **Sally:** But I wonder what's next? You know, you've set up this organization. Yes, I mean, I thought you'd set it up much longer, actually, until [00:44:30] I checked the date, because it was kind of post, um, lockdown on your own, that branch of it, um, Joanna Hughes Solicitous Apprenticeships. But what's next for, um, you know? The company, where do you want to go next?

[00:44:44] **Sally:** Do you want to sell it? Do you want it to be in every town in the country? Are you going to go global? Because it's quite a special thing and from my point of view You know, as a black professional woman, I love the fact that it is diverse. It is attracting [00:45:00] diverse cohorts. Um, not just in terms of the optics, but from different backgrounds.

[00:45:04] **Sally:** Yes. And it's socially mobile. Yes. And it's dealing with the issue we have now in Britain. Um, in allowing working class kids and people from really truly different backgrounds to apply. So where do you want to go with it next? Or what's next for you? And indeed the company.

[00:45:22] **Joanna:** So I haven't thought about selling it, I haven't thought about going global, but what I have thought

[00:45:27] **Sally:** It's probably not worth anything because all you're doing is recruiting [00:45:30] more lawyers.

[00:45:31] **Sally:** Exactly, there's no money in it.

[00:45:33] **Joanna:** Um, so what I would like to do is Year one, it was all about bringing law firms together and getting, helping law firms to implement the work streams and the structures they needed to have solicitor apprentices. But especially with my work through City Century, we are now all about the experience of the solicitor [00:46:00] apprentices and the aspiring solicitor apprentice.

[00:46:03] **Joanna:** And so it means a lot to me and I've actually spent the last week seeking feedback from current solicitor apprentices that I hear how it's working on the ground in terms of Would it be helpful if more guidance was given on accommodation in year one? That's, that's something that's on my mind. Um, managing finances, uh, mentorship, [00:46:30] buddying, um, Um, network events, all that kind of thing.

[00:46:34] **Joanna:** Um, study leave for these, you know, very difficult, it's not meant to be easy exams. So that is what is next. That's what's in my heart. And the second thing that's in my heart, because I've been very well trained by the City of London Corporation's Socio Economic Diversity Task Force, which is one of the reasons that prompted me, actually.

[00:46:57] **Joanna:** To leave Alan Overy where I worked and to share knowledge, [00:47:00] because in that taskforce we were all about working together to make the biggest change. And Something that we talked about in that task force as much as working together was collecting data and making sure that your decisions are well informed and data driven.

[00:47:19] **Joanna:** And so I have some plans for ensuring that the law firms who are kindly investing in this work that we're doing to raise the profile of solicitor apprenticeships have data that they [00:47:30] can work from.

[00:47:31] **Sally:** Yes, but, but not just a tick boxing exercise. Gosh no. Which would be quite easy to do wouldn't it, you know, just collecting it and, and seeing, uh, where it's going.

[00:47:43] **Sally:** It's needed

[00:47:43] **Joanna:** for progression as well. Absolutely. It's as, if not more important to measure progression as it is entry. Oh,

[00:47:50] **Sally:** of course. You know that. Oh, I know that. Don't get me started. That's a whole other podcast.

[00:47:58] **Sally:** Because, you know, finally we're having [00:48:00] great entrants but we need it for progression, um, and then that's part of the next stages, isn't it? Ensuring people actually, um,

[00:48:08] **Joanna:** uh, progress. So let's make that my what's next. Yes. Progression.

[00:48:13] **Sally:** Absolutely, absolutely. Not my own. No, you're quite happy doing what you're doing, I think, from what I can, uh, gather and, uh, and glean.

[00:48:22] **Sally:** Well, Jo, it's been wonderful, um, interviewing you on the Talking Law podcast. It's been such a revelation. I feel like this [00:48:30] is a film that someone needs to make. Oh, do you think

[00:48:32] **Joanna:** so? Yeah.

[00:48:33] **Sally:** Let's make it happen. Well, I don't know if there are any filmmakers listening to a podcast about people in law. As

[00:48:39] **Joanna:** my friend Patrick says, hashtag happen it.

[00:48:41] **Joanna:** Oh,

[00:48:42] **Sally:** right. When this podcast goes out, that will be one of the, one that I've never heard of that.

[00:48:51] **Sally:** Well, it's been absolutely wonderful talking about this list of apprenticeships and your work with, um, City Century as well and the different [00:49:00] hats that you wear, uh, and it's been wonderful having you on the Talking Rock podcast. Thank

[00:49:03] **Joanna:** you so much. Thank you for your time, Sally.