

 **Airwallex**

20 UK Step Changers 2024

With special thanks

 EU-Startups

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 GREAT BRITISH
ENTREPRENEUR AWARDS

 UKStartUp
Awards

About the list

About the list

In summer 2024, Airwallex set out to find the most extraordinary business leaders who exhibited a step-change attitude. The call was well and truly answered.

We received over 500 nominations from peers who wanted to recognise business leaders who had created - and were creating - step-change in their industry. Our panel of judges - deep advocates of a step-change attitude themselves - shortlisted their top 20. They based their decision on the strength of the nomination, specifically: evidence of leadership qualities, determination, passion and excellence in their field.

www.airwallex.com

Foreword



Immy Spence
Head of SME Growth
Airwallex EMEA

Foreword

The genesis of the Airwallex business was a willingness and excitable curiosity to look at challenges from a different perspective. To take the common frustrations found in ageing financial infrastructure, and explore new paths beyond them.

Ever since then, we've been building a more efficient and cost-effective way for entrepreneurs to access the global marketplace. This vision has driven us to push boundaries, challenge conventions, and create genuine step-change in the way businesses think and operate globally.

The inaugural Top 20 UK Step Changers 2024 list celebrates and recognises business leaders who share a likeminded aspiration to create step-change.

Foreword

Step Changers aren't just making incremental improvements; they're driving breakthroughs that fundamentally reshape industries and, by example, inspire others to do so. They defy conventional norms, turning challenges into platforms for innovation and growth. They are more than just successful entrepreneurs – they are visionaries who've suffered setbacks, put one unfaltering step after another, and redefined what's possible.

Their narratives illuminate fresh perspectives on pioneering change and serve as a testament to the power of perseverance, creativity, and the willingness to view problems from unconventional angles. These Step Changers embody the resilience and innovation needed to drive meaningful progress.

We hope you enjoy reading these stories as much as we did, and that they offer words of encouragement that resonate with your own personal journeys. May it also serve as a reminder that every step is progress, and that breakthrough success often lies just beyond our comfort zone.

Immy Spence

Head of SME Growth

Airwallex EMEA

What is a Step Changer?

A **Step Changer is a visionary leader who pushes beyond incremental progress to create transformative change in their industry.**

What is a Step Changer?

Unlike those who seek only to improve the status quo, Step Changers challenge conventions, embrace bold ideas, and actively pursue opportunities that disrupt the norm. They recognise that real progress comes from taking decisive actions that open new possibilities, whether by scaling globally, innovating products, or reimagining entire business models.

Step Changers are not defined by the absence of challenges but by their ability to turn obstacles into catalysts for growth. They think big, act decisively, and inspire others to do the same. Their journey is characterised by ambition, resilience, and the courage to push beyond comfort zones, driving their businesses – and industries – toward significant breakthroughs.

In short, a Step Changer is someone who isn't just responding to the future but actively shaping it.

Judging Criteria

Our judging process for the Top 20 UK Step Changers 2024 is designed to recognise exceptional leaders who drive transformative change within their industries. The criteria focus on several key areas, beyond commercial success.

These criteria ensure that we highlight leaders who not only excel in their fields but also drive meaningful change and inspire others.

- 1. Innovation and Impact:** We evaluate how the nominee has introduced groundbreaking ideas or technologies that have significantly altered their industry landscape. The emphasis is on originality and the extent of impact.
- 2. Vision and Strategy:** Judges assess the clarity and ambition of the nominee's vision for their business or sector. We look for strategic foresight and the ability to execute plans that drive substantial growth and development.
- 3. Leadership and Influence:** Effective leadership and the ability to inspire and lead teams are crucial. We consider the nominee's role in fostering a culture of innovation and influencing others within their field.
- 4. Resilience and Achievements:** We examine how the nominee has overcome challenges and the tangible results of their efforts, reflecting their perseverance and success.

20 UK Step Changers 2024

Meet the judges

with special thanks



Laura Youngson

CEO - IdaSports & Co-Founder

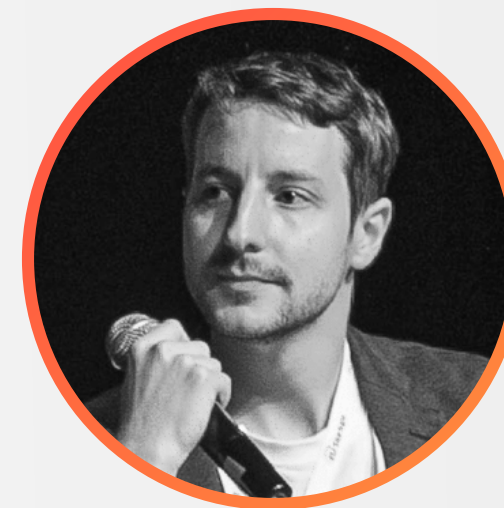
Laura Youngson is the CEO and co-founder of Ida Sports, leading a step-change in women's sports by revolutionising athletic footwear. Frustrated by the lack of options for women, she designed the first soccer boots specifically for women's feet. A Guinness World Record holder with Equal Playing Field, Laura is driving inclusivity and gender equality in sports through innovation and empowerment.



Francesca James

Founder - Great British Entrepreneur Awards

Francesca James is the founder of Ideas Forums, a platform dedicated to fostering entrepreneurship and business growth across the UK. She leads initiatives like The Start-Up Awards, which celebrates the UK's most innovative young businesses, and the renowned Great British Entrepreneur Awards, often called the "Grammys of Entrepreneurship."



Thomas Ohr

Founder & CEO - EU-Startups

Thomas Ohr is the Founder and CEO of EU-Startups, a leading online publication covering Europe's startup ecosystem, which he launched in 2010. Passionate about driving step-change across Europe, Thomas highlights innovative business ideas and the entrepreneurs shaping the continent's future.

20 UK Step Changers 2024

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2024 UK Step Changers

By  Airwallex

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| 20 James O' Keefe
Marketing Technology Director - Legal & General | 10 Nnaemeka Obodoekwe
Co-Founder & CTO - Lenkie Technologies |
| 19 Alun Edwards
Global Senior Director - The Coca-Cola Company | 09 Bartek Ogonowski
Co-Founder & CEO - LEVRA |
| 18 Chris Forbes
Co-Founder - The Cheeky Panda | 08 Russell Frayne
Director of Transformation - Gravita |
| 17 Alastair Blenkin
CEO & Founder - ProcurePro | 07 Rich Evans
Founder - Get Better |
| 16 Ruby Raut
CEO & Co-Founder - WUKA | 06 Natalie Luckham
Founder & Director - Naturally Social |
| 15 Michael Shearer
Chief Solution Officer - Hawk Ai GmbH | 05 Jos van der Steen
COO & Founder - CONDUCTR |
| 14 Grainne Bannon
CEO & Founder - Shareit biz | 04 Claire Halliday
General Manager & Co-Founder - Ormeau Labs |
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| 12 David Boyd-Armstrong
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Founder and CEO - Salderson Media | 01 Katrina Hutchinson-O'Neill
CEO & Founder - Join Talent |

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James O'Keefe

Marketing Technology Director - Legal & General

James is an experienced leader with over 25 years of track record in brand, marketing, digital strategy and business transformation. During his career as a successful change leader, James has garnered an impressive skill set including building diverse teams, leveraging data, developing technology solutions and optimising customer experiences. Today, James is Director of Marketing Technology at Legal & General.

Goals are almost always impossible to imagine achieving on day one. But with each step, momentum is built and lessons learnt are implemented. That progress starts to inch us forwards towards our objectives, however audacious.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

The characteristics of a Step Changer include persistence, resilience and a desire to make a difference. This might not manifest in great leaps forward. Often it takes the form of lots of small steps, or incremental change. Ultimately, being a Step Changer is having the ability to deliver against a vision and audacious goals.

20 - James O' Keefe

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

Many years ago I had the pleasure of hearing the British Olympic rowing team using their daily pivotal question. Their most important metric that would frame any decision they needed to make was this; 'Will it make the boat go faster?' They applied this to everything, from what to have for breakfast to whether to skip that day's gym session. So for me, having a key metric for success, or a northstar, has always been crucial, so I know whether I'm on track.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

1. Anticipate things going wrong: I've learned that things will rarely go to plan or without flaws, errors or surprises. So accepting this and having shorter delivery cycles prevents a compounding effect. This allows you to respond and adapt.

- 2. Transparency is everything:** If we all know what's expected of us and our teammates, then we can all be accountable to one another. Importantly, this means we can build psychological safety for the times we need more support, or to offer more support when crunch moments come. We win together, we fail together. Business is a team sport.
- 3. Prioritisation is the greatest enabler of all:** If you have too many priorities, then you have no priority. Whilst we can always seek to spin more plates and try to manage competing priorities, it doesn't build resilience. It almost always guarantees burnout. So learn to disagree and commit to the real priorities. Teams that aim for the same horizon are almost always more resilient, able to respond to and overcome setbacks and perform better as a collective.

— **What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?**

We live in a hypersonic world where change has never been faster and will only speed up. We have more data and insight than ever before, so being agile will be vital for future Step Changers. Agility is about focusing on the right things, and being the fastest to respond to new data, insights and trends.

Future Step Changers will organise their people and processes to enable the democratisation of data to drive brilliant outcomes. These organisations will have a greater chance of winning in the long-term. Technology and data are always crucial, but vital to their execution are skilled people and the right processes to achieve their maximum potential.

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Alun Edwards

Global Senior Director II - Operating Units & Experiential, Shopper & Promo, Global Marketing Procurement, The Coca-Cola Company

Throughout a 28 year career in the fast moving consumer goods sector, Alun has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership and strategic acumen. His expertise spans procurement, commercial, operations, logistics and transformational projects. Now a Global Senior Director at The Coca-Cola Company, Alun drives innovation and efficiency in global marketing procurement strategies, resulting in strong strategic partnerships, substantial productivity and value.

Understanding the broader impact of our work helps me stay motivated. Whether it's contributing to the success of a major event like the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games or driving sustainability initiatives at The Coca-Cola Company, knowing that our efforts make a difference keeps me focused and driven.

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

To me, a Step Changer is someone who not only adapts to change but also drives it, setting new benchmarks and inspiring others to follow. Ultimately, being a Step Changer is about having the courage to challenge the status quo, the curiosity to explore new possibilities and the leadership skills to inspire and develop high-performing teams. It's about making bold moves that drive transformational change.

19 - Alun Edwards

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

Throughout my career, I've learned invaluable lessons about resilience that have helped me navigate complex situations and emerge stronger, as well as overcoming unforeseen setbacks.

- 1. Embrace change as an opportunity:** Instead of resisting changes, my team and I embraced them, using each challenge as a chance to innovate and improve. This mindset allowed us to pivot quickly, develop new strategies and ultimately achieve triple-digit growth.
- 2. Leverage the Power of Teamwork:** Resilience is not a solo endeavor but a collective effort. During challenging times, the strength and unity of my team have been instrumental in overcoming setbacks. By fostering a culture of open communication, mutual respect, and shared goals, we have been able to tackle obstacles together and find creative solutions.

3. Maintain a Long-Term Vision: Maintain a long-term perspective, even when faced with immediate challenges. By maintaining a long-term vision, we can stay motivated, make informed decisions, and ultimately achieve remarkable results. This lesson has taught me that resilience involves not only bouncing back from setbacks but also staying committed to the bigger picture.

— **How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?**

Setting clear and ambitious goals: Having clear, ambitious goals is crucial for maintaining motivation. I set specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) goals for every project and initiative. These goals provide a roadmap for success and a benchmark against which progress can be measured. By breaking down larger objectives into smaller, manageable tasks, I can maintain focus and momentum, celebrating each milestone along the way.

19 - Alun Edwards

Fostering a culture of continuous improvement: I believe in the power of continuous improvement and the importance of always seeking ways to do things better. This mindset drives me to stay curious, seek out new knowledge and embrace innovative solutions.

Drawing inspiration from my team: The dedication, creativity and passion of my team are a constant source of motivation. Seeing their commitment to our shared goals and their willingness to go above and beyond inspires me to do the same.

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18 - Chris Forbes

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Chris Forbes

Co-Founder - The Cheeky Panda

Chris is Co-founder of The Cheeky Panda and a prominent figure in the startup world. Driven by his mission to build sustainable, commercially viable companies with purpose over profit at the core, Chris has inspired countless others to become environmental entrepreneurs. Cheeky Panda is a Fast Track 100 company and has ranked as one of the UK's top 10 start-ups.

“I’m someone who’s motivated by outcomes. If I’m working with great partners and our goals are aligned, I’m excited to realise the potential of these partnerships. I truly believe that excellent results are achieved by working with excellent people.”

— **What does being a Step Changer mean to you?**

Simply copying or using plug-and-play tactics simply doesn’t cut it as a Step Changer. It’s about taking risks, challenging the status quo and taking the right course of action for the right reason.

18 - Chris Forbes

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

The biggest challenge I've encountered is adversity. These past few years have been somewhat overshadowed by black swan events like the COVID-19 pandemic and the supply chain crisis. These challenges have been extremely disruptive in terms of markets, sales margins and channels. It's my belief that, until we start living in a more sustainable economy, we'll continue to suffer from socially, geographically or politically-adverse events.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. Keep your audience in mind:** As a public speaker, I've come to understand that it pays off to avoid getting too emotional about negative topics. It's bad energy and you can't pick up broken eggs.
- 2. Explore your options:** I always try to look for solutions. In my experience, there are many alternative ways to do things.

- 3. Expect the unexpected:** I've learned that things can, and do, go wrong. Planning for unforeseen events in our cashflow has helped me navigate these situations.

— **How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?**

At Cheeky Panda, we've successfully helped to build a new category from scratch. We were the first company in Europe to create and sell bamboo toilet tissue, which is sustainable and biodegradable. From this we've expanded our range to include plastic-free wipes, making a true dent in a competitive market. We've also created truly innovative products like flushable hand towels.

With our sustainability-first approach to developing a unique product range, we've made a lasting impact that will benefit generations to come. These initiatives and the response from our customer base have helped set a new gold standard for our sector, which is incredibly exciting and rewarding.

18 - Chris Forbes

— **What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?**

Sustainability measurement and reducing carbon in the supply chain will have the greatest impact in the fast moving consumer goods sector. Technology and data insights have a role to play, of course. But it's not technology alone; it's the commodities we use, and the way things are packed, tracked and delivered. Leveraging technology within these processes in a cost-effective manner will be the winning combination for future Step Changers.

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17 - Alastair Blenkin

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Alastair Blenkin

CEO & Founder - ProcurePro

Formerly a top-tier property lawyer, Alastair leveraged his expertise to create Hyra iQ, a contract solution for the commercial real estate sector. The COVID-19 pandemic forced him to pivot towards the construction sector and in 2020, ProcurePro was born. This leading construction procurement solution has managed almost 2,000 projects valued at over \$40 billion in construction value globally.

“I have an innate desire to be the best and to not accept mediocrity. Working smarter and finding more efficient ways of working is what I do best. I’m striving to be a world-class operator, building systems of work that drive the highest standards and quality execution across more and more people.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

I’m honoured to be recognised as a Step Changer and to raise awareness of the power of connected procurement. I strongly believe that digital solutions and innovations within the built environment, like ProcurePro, are critical catalysts for much-needed change.

Construction is a huge industry that’s critical to our society, employing and providing prosperity to ~10% of the global population. The construction industry impacts every one of us, every day - it’s the homes we live in, schools we learn in, buildings we work in and the hospitals we heal in. I’m proud to be pushing the boundaries and innovating to move the construction industry forward.

17 - Alastair Blenkin

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

I believe that challenges experienced throughout my career help shape who you become, and overcoming these provides strength and defensibility whether others may not persevere.

I established Hyra iQ in 2017, but COVID severely impacted the company's anticipated success. But this was just a fork in the road. The pandemic forced me to pivot our solution towards addressing needs in an essential service; the construction industry.

The pivot itself was full of challenges, decisively changing strategy to tackle a new industry that has a complex set of needs that technology has not yet fully addressed. Many companies are still very slow to digitise.

But on the upside, the pandemic revealed how outdated manual processes can be digitised by embracing technology-focused solutions, such as ProcurePro.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

I've learnt (and continue to learn) many, many lessons about resilience so far. Here are my top three:

- 1. It's a bumpy road to success:** I've experienced many setbacks and roadblocks along the way. Pivoting Hyra iQ into ProcurePro meant losing our top customers and starting almost from scratch, a difficult reality to accept.
- 2. Stay committed:** Resilience is crucial to building a company. You need to put in endless hours that no one sees, including 5am meetings, turning in after midnight and regularly working weekends.
- 3. Be courageous:** If you truly want to dent the universe, you have to go against the grain. Believe in a better world when others don't, educate others on the future and win supporters to your cause. It takes blood, sweat, and tears for the snowball to start.

17 - Alastair Blenkin

How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?

Through extensive experience working in Australian and UK Tech/ConTech, I've become a leader in those communities. Having made it through the 'valley of death', I now provide leadership, advocacy, advice and support to those earlier in the journey seeking to make positive change.

At ProcurePro we're on a mission to save one BILLION hours in construction administration, positively impacting many people's lives while building an iconic Australian technology business on the world stage.

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16 - Ruby Raut

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Ruby Raut

CEO & Co-Founder - WUKA

Ruby Raut is the trailblazing CEO and Founder of WUKA, the UK's fully leak-proof reusable period pants that eliminate the need for single-use pads and tampons. Ruby is driven by her vision to improve access to quality, sustainable period products, eliminate period poverty, and challenge the stigma around menstruation. Ruby's efforts successfully changed UK law to make period underwear VAT-free.

“At WUKA we believe Menstrual health is Women's Health, and it should be a journey of empowerment. Being a Step Changer means WUKA will stand at the forefront of this change, ensuring every woman has the support, knowledge, and technology to lead a healthier, more fulfilled life.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

Being a Step Changer means going beyond our company's core mission. It means innovating in ways that address the broader challenges faced by people who menstruate and contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable world. By pushing the boundaries of what's possible, we can create meaningful, lasting impact for those who need it most.

16 - Ruby Raut

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

One of the biggest challenges I've faced in my career has been creating and launching a habit-changing product. Establishing a new category in the menstrual products market meant we had to innovate and educate while challenging traditional norms. In the menstrual product industry where trust and reliability are paramount, we had to persevere through slow adoption rates as we built consumer trust.

As a woman of colour, starting and funding a business has always been an uphill battle. The statistics around funding for female-founded businesses are daunting, and even more so for women of colour. Convincing investors to back a female-founded business in a category that doesn't promise immediate growth was a significant hurdle.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

Stay committed to your mission: One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that meaningful change takes time, and persistence is essential. The ability to keep pushing forward, despite setbacks and delays, is crucial to achieving long-term success. For example: Our campaign to remove the VAT on period underwear took us 5 years, but what a success for all womankind.

1. Be flexible and adaptable: Launching a habit-changing product in a market dominated by traditional products has taught me the importance of adaptability. This experience reinforced that resilience isn't just about holding firm; it's also about being flexible and responsive to market demands, consumer behaviours, and unforeseen challenges. Our stretch multisize period underwear is a perfect example of creating WUKA 2.0.

2. Dedication is a superpower: Building trust requires patience and unwavering dedication to the cause. This lesson in resilience has shown me that while quick wins are rare, a slow, steady and consistent approach can lead to lasting trust and loyalty from customers.

16 - Ruby Raut

How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?

My actions and leadership have positively influenced the menstrual products industry by making menstruation positive, taboo-free and environmentally-friendly. I hope to leave a lasting impact by normalising conversations about periods, promoting sustainability, and ensuring that menstrual products are available to everyone.

I'm working towards this by continuing to innovate, advocate for policy changes, and educate the public on menstrual health and sustainability.

How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?

Growing up in Nepal, I experienced firsthand the stigma and poverty surrounding menstruation. This ignited my passion to create WUKA, offering a dignified, sustainable solution accessible to everyone, regardless their background or economic status.

My drive comes from knowing that menstrual health is women's health. I envision a world where every girl can access affordable period underwear and never miss out on life because of her period.

Funding in this area, especially for ethnic minorities, is severely lacking. I'm motivated by the desire to upend these statistics. This mission fuels my relentless pursuit of excellence in everything I do.

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Michael Shearer

Chief Solution Officer - Hawk Ai GmbH

Michael Shearer is a seasoned expert and author in financial crime risk management, compliance product management, and data analytics. He currently serves as Chief Solution Officer at Hawk, the global design and implementation of financial crime solutions for Tier 1 financial institutions. Previously, Shearer spent 10 years at HSBC as Managing Director and Group Head of Compliance Product Management, and 20 years to government intelligence and counter-terrorism, managing strategic industry relationships essential to national security.

“I’d say my biggest challenge is connecting the boardroom and the engine room. Navigating this involves finding a common language to help senior leaders and experienced professionals find the right balance.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

For me, being a Step Changer means seizing the opportunity to draw attention to the vital work that I’ve dedicated my career to. In a nutshell, that’s combating financial crime, protecting our communities and safeguarding the integrity of our financial systems.

I’d say my biggest challenge has been connecting the boardroom and the engine room of today’s organizations.

In my experience the most innovative ideas, the barriers to success and the potential remedies, are well known to those in the engine room, but they lack the influence to create the space for the change.

15 - Michael Shearer

Similarly, the boardroom knows where an organization needs to be but is so far removed from operational realities that it doesn't know how to make it happen.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

As George Bernard Shaw said: "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world, the unreasonable man persists in adapting the world to himself, therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."

In my experience in a corporate environment 'being unreasonable' is about conviction, curiosity and courage. You need conviction to be willing to keep pushing against the inertia that is inherent in many of today's organizations that optimize for short term efficiency not long term innovation; curiosity to spend the time to understand the trade-offs that are at heart of doing some new that inform the right decisions, and courage to put your reputation on the line and invest in an endeavor whose ultimate success that you can't control.

— **What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?**

The path to meaningful change starts with a genuine need, a compelling vision and a quick win. At the start of the journey, when we know the least, it's very common for stakeholders to talk past each other, thinking they share the same view only for fatal divergence to emerge later on.

The ability of modern technology to rapidly 'make it real', with a precision that countless workshops often fail to succinctly communicate, is an essential tool in the Step Changer's toolkit. The chance to identify 'oh that's what you mean!!!' or 'I don't want that because...' is invaluable for course correction and coalition building based on truly shared understanding. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a working prototype is worth a million.

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Grainne Bannon

CEO & Founder - Shareit biz

After a 20 year career as a Business Banking Relationship Manager, Grainne took the plunge and began her startup journey. Today she's the CEO and founder of Shareit biz. Through innovation, inclusivity and accessible resources, Shareit biz is positively impacting small businesses and startups. Grainne is committed to building a world-class global platform empowering businesses with knowledge, opportunities and support.

“To continually push for excellence in the projects I lead, I visualise the seismic transformation that Shareit Biz will have on a global scale. It takes every single cog to make the wheel of change turn, and I’m one of those cogs.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

It's been incredible to realise my passion for helping businesses succeed and drive a team that's transforming the business support eco-system for the better. Together we've revolutionised the business support landscape with our AI-driven platform that simplifies access to funding and support for SMEs and entrepreneurs. By creating a comprehensive, unbiased resource to empower small businesses to grow, innovate and succeed, we're playing a vital role in fostering a more vibrant and resilient entrepreneurial community.

14 - Grainne Bannon

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

The biggest challenge so far has been building my team. It's vital to the success of Shareit Biz that every team member feels a sense of ownership and has the drive and passion to realise our goals. I've overcome this challenge by building genuine and lasting professional relationships via our network. This has led to the creation of a highly innovative, committed and enthusiastic team that I'm really proud of.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

That's a great question! I'd say number one, hold your nerve - life in business can be a bumpy ride! Number two, explore all the options - There is always a way forward. And finally, keep moving: Take action even if it doesn't turn out how you expect, as you'll always learn something about your business in the process.

— **How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?**

Setting up Shareit Biz has enabled me to channel my passion for helping businesses find the support they need at exactly the time they need it. Creating a dedicated platform for connecting entrepreneurs and businesses has resulted in high-impact achievements and lasting change by addressing a pressing need I personally experienced.

To ensure that every entrepreneur and small business has access to the resources and support they need to thrive, I'm committed to continuously improving our platform with personalised AI-driven features and expanding our reach through strategic partnerships. My actions centre around our vision to work towards a future where business success is accessible to all, regardless of size or background.

To achieve our lasting impact, we employ four key strategies focused on leveraging innovation, establishing strategic alliances, taking a user-centric approach to future developments and community engagement.

14 - Grainne Bannon

— **How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?**

To continually push for excellence in the projects I lead, I visualise the transformative impact ShareIt Biz will have on a global scale. I'm personally driven by the vision of empowering entrepreneurs and businesses, regardless of race, culture, or location, to thrive and contribute positively to their local economies. This potential for widespread, meaningful change fuels my motivation and commitment to excellence.

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13 - Gayatri Panda

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Gayatri Panda

Co-Founder - Themis Technologies

Gayatri is a tech business enabler, author and speaker with a unique combination of expertise, experience and a deep understanding of the challenges entrepreneurs in the global business landscape face. Today she drives strategic initiatives at a renowned London consultancy, Themis Technologies. Gayatri is also spearheading the development of UKiPortal, an AI immigration tech product designed to transform visa applications.

“Step Changers aren’t afraid to break out of their comfort zone and challenge the status quo. They’re open to new ideas and approaches, even if they seem radical at first. Big leaps require effort, and Step Changers are prepared to tackle the difficulties that come with significant change.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

Being recognised as a Step Changer fuels my passion to work harder despite the hurdles. It’s humbling to gain this recognition and motivates me even more to continue to drive innovation. To me, being a Step Changer means striving for positive change that makes a significant impact.

— What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?

One of the biggest hurdles I've faced in my career has been navigating unconscious bias. As a woman in tech, particularly coming from a small place in India, I've often encountered situations where my capabilities were underestimated.

Leading a project in London stands out as a prime example. Initially, the client expressed reservations due to my background. However, I saw this as an opportunity to turn the tide. Instead of being discouraged, I channelled my energy into proving my knowledge, skills and value. I leveraged my communication style to clearly articulate the project's vision and meticulously ensured my technical expertise shone through in every deliverable. The results spoke for themselves – we not only met, but significantly exceeded all expectations.

This experience was a pivotal moment for me. It also ignited my passion to empower other women, especially young girls who might face similar challenges. I see myself as a role model, paving the way for a future where tech embraces diverse talent without reservation.

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12 - David Boyd-Armstrong

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David Boyd-Armstrong

Co-Founder and Head Distiller -
Rademon Estate Distillery

David Boyd-Armstrong is the Co-founder and Head Distiller of Rademon Estate Distillery, an award-winning distillery producing expertly crafted Irish whiskies and gins. Positioned at the forefront of the distillery process, David is also a key figure in his industry. Today he is the Chairperson of Drinks Ireland Spirits Council and a member of the Irish Whiskey Association's Technical Committee.

“My mantra is this; if you believe in yourself, and focus on your goals, then you can always do better.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

It's a fantastic honour to be recognised as a Step Changer. Helping guide Rademon Estate Distillery from inception and through the events of the past few years has been eye-opening for me. This dramatic journey enabled me to demonstrate my personal resilience, determination and excellence to overcome challenges, and subsequently build a successful business that I'm really proud of.

12 - David Boyd-Armstrong

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

What's been most challenging for me was reshaping our business in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This involved transforming everything, including all our operational processes necessary to produce and deliver our products to our customers at the quality they expect. Having worked for eight years in bid and project management in the defence sector, I was fortunate to be able to call upon my resilience and determination, enabling me to play an instrumental role in helping our team through these challenges.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. Be brave:** Don't be afraid; every challenge is an opportunity to learn something new.
- 2. Stay positive:** A positive mindset is key to overcoming any challenge, whether it's big or small.

- 3. Collaboration:** Both within your organisation and with your customers, it's the surest way to develop the right solution to overcome a problem.

— **How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?**

As Chair of the Drinks Ireland Spirits Committee, I've continued to promote the Irish drinks sector and encourage greater collaboration. I've personally worked really hard to help the Irish spirits industry grow and thrive both within Ireland and internationally. It's been a real success story for everyone involved with effective collaboration at the heart of it all. I hope that my efforts will help ensure the Irish drinks sector continues to go from strength to strength.

— **What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?**

I believe that Step Changers of the future need to embrace a mindset focused on digital transformation. Doing this will enable them to leverage the technology and tools needed to improve how they operate and deliver value to their customers.

11



Suhit Amin

Founder and CEO - Salderson Media

While working at ESL, Suhit switched gears to become a successful entrepreneur. In 2018, he created Salderson Media, a talent management and influencer marketing agency specialising in gaming, tech and entertainment. Suhit has worked with major brands including ASUS, Ubisoft, ACER UK, AB Inbev and Netflix. He also inspires the next generation of entrepreneurs with his online education venture.

“Being diagnosed with Stage 2A Hodgkin Lymphoma at the age of 16 became a defining moment for me. I decided to channel all my energy into becoming a successful entrepreneur and that same year, Salderson Media was born.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

I believe that being a step changer means taking a conscious decision and having a genuine ambition to create massive change in a particular field. True Step Changers want to go above and beyond in everything they do and won't accept anything less than excellence.

11 - Suhit Amin

— What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?

Without a doubt, the biggest challenge I've faced was when I was diagnosed with Stage 2A Hodgkins Lymphoma at the age of 16 while working in influencer marketing at ESL.

My mindset massively shifted and my perspective on life changed. I realised that if I wasn't going to be here in a year's time, then I needed to leave some sort of legacy behind.

I decided to follow my passion. That was the catalyst for me starting my company Salderson Media, a premium talent management and influencer marketing agency specialising in gaming and esports, tech and entertainment. Building my business from scratch has enabled me to achieve all my goals up to this point.

#UKStepChangers2024

10 - Nnaemeka Obodoekwe

10



Nnaemeka Obodoekwe

Co-Founder & Chief Technology Officer - Lenkie Technologies

Nnaemeka is Co-founder and Chief Technology Officer at Lenkie Technologies, a platform that delivers operational efficiency for finance teams. Beginning his career as a machine learning engineer, Nnaemeka transitioned into leadership, guiding technical teams at financial and technology companies. At Lenkie, Nnaemeka drives innovation and growth, successfully transforming the business into a data-driven lending platform serving hundreds of small businesses.

“Being a Step Changer means embodying the spirit of continuous improvement, innovation and resilience. It involves challenging the status quo, pushing boundaries and leading by example to drive transformative change within the industry.”

— **What’s been the biggest challenge you’ve faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

One of the biggest challenges I faced in my career was launching a lending platform for small businesses, particularly because of the wide range of financial profiles we had to accommodate. Creating a system that could provide accurate, real-time risk assessments for such a diverse group was no easy task. We had to rethink traditional models, which often overlook small businesses, and build something that truly worked for them. It took a lot of trial and error, but the biggest lesson I learned was the importance of adaptability and collaboration.

10 - Nnaemeka Obodoekwe

To overcome this challenge, I focused on building a strong team that was willing to learn and grow alongside the project. We fostered a culture of continuous improvement, where everyone was encouraged to experiment, share ideas, and find innovative solutions. This approach was crucial in pushing past the difficulties we faced. Ultimately, we succeeded in building a data-driven platform that not only serves the unique needs of small businesses but also aligns with our long-term vision of creating more inclusive financial solutions. This experience played a pivotal role in shaping my leadership style and approach to problem-solving.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. Adaptability is crucial:** The ability to adjust my approach and use this to navigate unforeseen challenges effectively is essential.
- 2. Continuous learning is key:** Remaining knowledgeable about the latest industry trends and technologies empowers me to overcome setbacks and continuously drive innovation.

3. Strong support systems matters: Building a reliable and cohesive team provides the necessary foundation to tackle inevitable challenges and achieve collective goals.

— **How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?**

At Lenkie, my leadership has focused on positively impacting small businesses in the UK by improving their access to funding. By streamlining application processes and offering tailored financial solutions, we've helped underserved businesses secure the funds they need to grow.

This has contributed to a more inclusive and transparent financial ecosystem, empowering entrepreneurs to thrive and boost local economies. My goal is to ensure that all small businesses, regardless of their size or background, have equitable access to the financial tools they need for long-term success, leaving a lasting impact on the UK's business landscape.

10 - Nnaemeka Obodoekwe

— How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?

My motivation stems from seeing the tangible impact of our work on small businesses. I draw inspiration from my journey so far, the challenges we've conquered and the dedication of my team. But beyond that, the evolving needs of our customers drives me to push for more innovative solutions and maintain the highest standards in every project and initiative I lead. Crucial to this is setting clear, ambitious goals and always striving to exceed them.

— What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?

I believe that creativity, combined with building specific knowledge, will be key for future leaders in an AI-driven world. As technology evolves, the ability to think creatively, alongside deep expertise in specialized areas, will help leaders solve complex problems, foster innovation, and develop unique solutions that adapt to the rapidly changing landscape. Specific knowledge will allow them to navigate challenges more effectively and offer insights that general approaches might miss.

#UKStepChangers2024

9 - Bartek Ogonowski

9



Bartek Ogonowski

Co-Founder & CEO - LEVRA

Bartek is a qualified Chartered Accountant (SA), and spent his foundational years at Deloitte. It was here that he identified a pressing problem among young, talented trainees, who were technically capable, but lacked soft skills, or as LEVRA refers to them as - Human Skills. While studying for his MBA at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, Bartek was determined to make a difference on this growing problem and co-founded LEVRA, which now helps businesses train their employees on critical human skills for the workplace using digitally-enabled and immersive learning experiences.

“The Step Changers of the future will harness not just the latest technologies, but more importantly, a growth mindset. This will enable future leaders to expand their capabilities, push beyond comfort zones and drive meaningful change.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

A Step Changer signifies a transformative force that propels significant progress and innovation. Pushing to the edges of boundaries, seeking innovative solutions and inspiring others to pursue their passions is what being a Step Changer means to me.

This journey is about more than achieving milestones; it's about leading by example, fostering resilience and making a tangible difference in the world.

9 - Bartek Ogonowski

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

No one can prepare you for the mental and physical challenges that starting a business thrusts at you, especially in the first year. Gone were the days of a steady salary and a comfortable lifestyle, and the financial pressures really got to me.

During this challenging time, my anchors became resilience, determination and prayers. I learned how to manage stress and developed coping mechanisms, and in the process I expanded my comfort zone and pushed myself beyond my perceived limits.

This journey has reinforced my commitment to making a difference and has been instrumental in shaping my entrepreneurial path. It strengthened my resolve and taught me crucial lessons in resourcefulness and perseverance. Overcoming these hurdles not only bolstered my confidence but also equipped me with the skills and mindset needed to navigate future challenges.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. Remember self-care:** Always look after your health, both body and mind. Neglecting this can lead to burnout, which undermines resilience and hampers productivity.
- 2. Stay focused:** Always remember your WHY and your north star. Staying connected to your core purpose provides direction and motivation.
- 3. Be kind:** Kindness is a powerful tool in building resilience. Whether dealing with team members, clients or partners, empathy and compassion creates a supportive environment and fosters positive relationships.

— **How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?**

My actions and leadership have inspired people to take risks, with many expressing how my journey has motivated them to pursue their own

9 - Bartek Ogonowski

dreams. I strive to be a beacon of hope for young Chartered Accountants and other professional services trainees, demonstrating that there's a purpose for everyone; they just need to find it.

I'm deeply aware that life is short and precious, and this fuels my determination to leave a lasting legacy. I strive to inspire others to value each moment, and promote happiness, health and a zest for life to create a community where individuals feel empowered and fulfilled.

— How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?

I motivate myself to continually push for excellence by embracing the belief that life begins at the end of my comfort zone. Expanding my range and taking on new challenges not only drives personal growth, but also enables me to make a bigger impact. Above all, I'm inspired by my family, who have sacrificed so much for me. Their unwavering support and belief in my potential compel me to strive for greatness in everything I do.

#UKStepChangers2024

8 - Russell Frayne

8



Russell Frayne

Director of Transformation - Gravita

While working in accountancy, Russell recognised the regulatory and technological changes ahead and was drawn towards cloud accounting solutions. Handing over his client portfolio, he embraced a transformational role in his previous role in a top 10 firm, and now at Gravita delivering the adoption and implementation of accounting technology. Underpinning this is Russell's desire to provide value to business owners and empower accountants to become advisors of the future.

“I found it incredibly frustrating when people couldn't see or understand what I was trying to achieve. I realised that by visually showing them and explaining the benefits in the context of their day to day work meant they could understand the true impact. Recognising this has massively contributed to my success.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

Being a Step Changer for me is about stepping away from the traditional and having the resilience and foresight to embrace something new. By introducing a culture of continuous improvement, I've played a pivotal role in reshaping an industry known for its traditional ways. This has not only allowed me to progress my own career in a way that interests me, but also to create entirely new job roles, services and career paths for others.

8 - Russell Frayne

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. My favourite saying is 'You don't know what you don't know.'** This is true of myself and for others. You can and should learn from as many different people as you can in your career. Sometimes the answer is only a question away.
- 2. Seeing is believing:** You have to show people exactly how something will benefit them to demonstrate its true value. I learned this early on, and it's been a game-changer for me when talking to clients.
- 3. Care very little about what others think of you:** Specifically, ignore the one negative voice in the room. Don't allow it to draw your energy and focus away from your goals.

— **How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?**

I've seen far too many transformation projects fail as a result of poor embedding or adoption, which then leads to wasted time spent retraining and redelivering. What motivates me is to ensure that projects are

delivered not only on time, but successfully adopted and embedded into the organisation's processes and working practices from the outset.

With the majority of projects or initiatives I've led, I've usually performed the day job in the past, making me fully aware of the impact these changes will have on end users. Armed with these insights, I can put myself in their shoes, and ensure that projects are planned and delivered in a way that I know will deliver maximum value.

— **What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?**

AI is the obvious answer here. In its broadest meaning, AI will continue to develop at an unprecedented rate with so many potential benefits and applications. Personally this excites me, and I can't wait to see what lies ahead and how we can leverage AI to achieve more and deliver greater value.

7 - Rich Evans

7



Rich Evans

Founder - Get Better

Rich is a seasoned digital marketing agency founder, with his first successful venture achieving £1m+ turnover and a client list including Greene King, wagamama and Kettle Chips. After battling mental health issues, Rich focused on a new goal; climbing Mount Kilimanjaro to raise funds for a charity close to his heart. In 2022, Rich founded his email marketing agency Get Better.

“Through my leadership, I try to encourage people to feel comfortable in being themselves, to be open, transparent and honest about how they're feeling. I want them to know that it's ok not to be ok, that it's vital to ask questions and that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

A step changer is someone that strives to make everything and everyone around them Get Better. Going through what I've been through has made me very open and transparent about the importance of physical and mental health in all walks of life.

Being a step changer means making a difference, and I'm passionate about developing people, relationships and brands. Connecting dots where possible, and not only for personal gain.

7 - Rich Evans

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

My imposter syndrome was a constant challenge for me for years and a massive contributor to my mental health issues. Over time, I've managed to build a relationship with my imposter syndrome, which I believe is now what makes me good at what I do and has helped me achieve my goals. Now I can talk to hundreds of people on the topic, and co-host events in eCommerce. Not to mention lead a growing team at my agency.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. Support:** Surround yourself with good people because we all have different levels of resilience. Multiple heads are better than one. I have a coach, a psychologist and a very understanding fiancé.
- 2. Awareness of capacity:** I'd argue that this is equally as important as resilience. Even the most resilient of us can't overcome anything without sufficient capacity. Ensure you're always doing things you

enjoy to release pressure and create capacity for dealing with unforeseen challenges.

- 3. Self-belief:** Ultimately, I back myself to effect change, if change is possible within my circle of control. I have a strong belief that things won't always go to plan, but they will definitely all work out in the end.

— **How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?**

Pride is a big motivator for me. I take pride in seeing projects succeeding for the people we create them for. And it makes me really proud to see my team flourish and succeed. I have a solid plan to grow the business and the people in it, so when I say it's 'our' business, I really mean it.

I also want to show others with mental health issues or imposter syndrome that success is possible, because I've been through the journey myself.

6 - Natalie Luckham

6



Natalie Luckham

Founder & Director - Naturally Social

After leaving her public sector comms role in 2015, Natalie founded Naturally Social, an award-winning, high-impact social media agency. Recently named as the UK's number one marketing adviser, Natalie is driven by the pursuit of social good, and extraordinarily good social media. Natalie runs a non-profit organisation on a mission to fix the digital divide alongside her social media agency.

“I’m passionate about people and the true power of social media, with conversation and creativity driving the way we work. I have a lot of intrinsic motivation, which is how I am where I am today. I picture the positive outcomes of the work we do, particularly those that will benefit as a result of our work.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

It means to re-write the rule book! Being a step changer is about doing things differently and having the courage to do so.

— What’s been the biggest challenge you’ve faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?

Imposter syndrome has been an enduring challenge of mine. Comparing myself to others and taking 'No' personally. I began to feel like I wasn't

6 - Natalie Luckham

good enough because I would set a ceiling of perfection that was impossible to achieve.

To counter this, I took the time to ask myself where I felt least comfortable in my skill set, and invested my efforts into developing in those areas while also working on my overall mindset. This has made me more forgiving of myself and given me a far better relationship with the concept of feedback. Now I can see feedback as a gift above anything else.

3. You have to find time to celebrate the wins: because these will spur you on in moments where you may feel at your lowest.

— **How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?**

I want to be a positive role model for young women in business and so every day I aim to be as open as I can be about the journey and what it means to run a business.

I hope that I've inspired everyone I've met, hired or worked with over the years with my story that anyone can be who they want to be, and achieve whatever it is they set their mind to.

— **What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?**

AI will undoubtedly play a huge part in how we work in the future. For me, I truly believe that learning how to use it safely and ethically must be the first priority.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. Resilience starts with mindset:** An open mindset will allow you to see the setbacks as opportunities for growth and development.
- 2. You are not alone:** People will have experienced exactly the same, or at least something similar to you, so don't be afraid to share and ask for help.

5 - Jos van der Steen

5



Jos van der Steen

COO & Founder - CONDUCTR

Stepping out of his comfort zone and pursuing his passion was a crucial turning point that has defined Jos' professional journey and success. In 2022, he founded CONDUCTR, a successful global business fusing cutting-edge technology and creativity. Today, Jos and his team create highly memorable experiences that captivate human connectivity and transform physical environments using media and next-gen technologies.

“The lasting impact I hope to have is to inspire the industry to adopt and integrate innovative technologies and immersive experiences, ultimately enhancing the way people connect and interact. By continuously pushing the boundaries of what’s possible, we can work towards a future where storytelling remains at the heart of memorable experiences and technology enriches human connections.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

Having the resolve to power through the inherent risks involved in implementing innovative ideas encapsulates what it means to be a Step Changer. Put another way, embracing a model of failing fast and failing often is crucial. Instead of being deterred by failure, I view it as a positive learning experience. The only time we truly fail is when we fail to learn from our mistakes.

5 - Jos van der Steen

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

While working at IBM, I ranked in the top 5% of performing employees globally. However, I felt a strong pull towards aligning my career with my personal interests and passions. The prospect of engaging in work that fulfilled my creative interests and personal passions was too compelling to ignore. So I followed my gut instinct and left IBM.

Being brave and taking this leap was a pivotal step towards achieving my goals and ultimately establishing CONDUCTR. It allowed me to channel my skills and experiences into building a successful business that stands at the forefront of our industry.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

1. Embrace failure: Adopting a mindset where failing fast and often is seen as a step towards innovation and improvement.

- 2. Adaptability:** Being open to change and prepared to pivot strategies to meet new challenges and opportunities.
- 3. Team collaboration:** Building a strong, dedicated team that shares the vision and can support each other through challenging times.

— **How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?**

I stay motivated by remaining focused on a clear direction and being acutely aware of our standards of work, primarily quality and consistency, across all our projects.

My approach to continually push for excellence is by being a bastion for quality. I implement review cycles to ensure we always meet the highest standards, but I try to avoid micromanaging. I know it's important to allow my team the freedom to execute their ideas while maintaining a clear framework for success. This balance of structure and autonomy keeps me motivated and is an important driver for excellence in every project we do.

5 - Jos van der Steen

Finally, I believe in providing a platform for others to fail, learn and grow without undue scrutiny. This approach fosters an environment where teams can innovate and develop confidently.

— What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?

Step Changers of the future will rely heavily on a mentality of commitment and resilience. As our world becomes increasingly connected online, maintaining genuine connections and understanding will be vital. While tools and AI technology will enable progress, personal dedication and perseverance will always be paramount.

#UKStepChangers2024

4 - Claire Halliday

4



Claire Halliday

General Manager & Co-Founder - Ormeau Labs

Claire is passionate about people, and loves building the culture and community at Ormeau Labs. Overseeing hundreds of events, meetups, accelerator and innovation programs, Claire has been instrumental in building an energised, resilient community for the brightest and best indigenous tech start-ups in Ireland. Her efforts connect people with the right information at the right time to create big opportunities.

“Future Step Changers will not only leverage a diverse toolkit of technology but will also prioritise inclusivity, collaboration, and human-centric design. By focusing on both technological innovation and the people behind it, they can create sustainable, inclusive and innovative solutions for a rapidly changing world.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

Being a Step Changer means embracing the role of a catalyst for growth and innovation. I find immense joy in cultivating strong communities, designing events and innovation programmes to foster collaboration and creativity. My deep connections with the startup community, angels, VCs and hubs across the island of Ireland enable me to bridge gaps and make great things happen.

4 - Claire Halliday

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. Embrace change and flexibility:** One of the key lessons I've learned is that change is inevitable, and the ability to adapt quickly is crucial. We've faced many challenges over the years, but embracing these with a flexible mindset meant we could pivot strategies and seize new opportunities.
- 2. Build a supportive network:** Having a strong community makes you more resilient. I've learned the importance of having a reliable network to lean on for practical support and emotional encouragement to help navigate setbacks.
- 3. Maintain a positive and solution-oriented outlook:** Instead of dwelling on problems, I focus on solutions to overcome obstacles. My optimism and proactive mindset has enabled me to turn setbacks into learning experiences.

— **How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?**

I'm striving to strengthen the foundation of the startup community across the island of Ireland for the long-term.

By spearheading numerous events, meet-ups and accelerator programs, I've helped create a dynamic ecosystem where startups thrive and innovation flourishes. Through these initiatives, I've played a big part in connecting entrepreneurs with essential resources like funding and mentorship as well as fostering a culture of collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

In addition, we prioritise building sustainable programmes that nurture talent and encourage diversity, aiming to leave a legacy of empowered entrepreneurs and a resilient community. By continuously expanding our network, we ensure there will be ongoing support and opportunities for growth.

— **How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?**

I motivate myself to strive for excellence by anchoring my efforts to my passion and purpose. I've realised that understanding the impact that our

4 - Claire Halliday

work can have on our community and industry fuels my determination to achieve the highest standards. I need to know what I'm working towards, so I set ambitious yet achievable goals, constantly seeking new knowledge and skills to innovate and improve. I make sure we celebrate milestones along the way, because this reinforces our commitment and keeps everyone energised. By creating a supportive network of colleagues, mentors and peers who share my drive for success, I've stayed motivated and focused on delivering exceptional results.

— What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?

The importance of people in our highly-tech future landscape cannot be overstated. The success of technologies like AI, augmented reality and advanced remote work tools will depend on the diverse, talented individuals who develop, implement and use them.

#UKStepChangers2024

3 - Ana Gallacher

3



Ana Gallacher

CEO - BabyReady Finance

Ana is a dynamic fintech leader and the CEO and founder of BabyReady Finance.

Her background in digital transformation revealed the potential for fintech to improve lives and led to her developing a deep understanding of the sector. In 2020,

Ana created BabyReady Finance, an innovative platform that uses AI to provide personalised financial guidance to new and expecting parents.

“Future leaders need to understand the importance of emphasising user-centred design and leveraging big data to understand and anticipate needs. Creating more personalised solutions will become even more important, helping to bridge the gap between technology and human interaction.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

Being a Step Changer means pushing boundaries and making impactful changes that address pressing issues and massively advance the status quo. For me, this means leveraging technology to bridge the financial literacy gap among underserved demographics. It’s about creating transformative solutions that redefine financial planning and accessibility for new and expecting parents.

3 - Ana Gallacher

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

The biggest challenge in my career was launching and scaling BabyReady Finance during the COVID-19 pandemic. The uncertainties and economic pressures made it difficult to secure funding and build a user base. To overcome this, I dug deep and leveraged my network, securing support from fantastic innovation schemes.

Going through this experience was pivotal for me, making me more resilient and adaptable. It also reinforced the importance of a strong support system and strategic partnerships, which have been crucial in achieving my goals.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

1. Flexibility is key: The ability to pivot and adapt to new circumstances is crucial. When initial plans don't work out, I've needed to switch strategies, and found that this can lead to unexpected success.

- 2. Leverage support networks:** Building and maintaining strong professional relationships has given me invaluable support during challenging times. My connections within the fintech and entrepreneurial sectors have been so important in overcoming obstacles.
- 3. Stay mission-focused:** Keeping a clear focus on the mission and long-term goals helps me navigate short-term setbacks. This clarity of purpose has kept me motivated and driven through the toughest times.

— **How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?**

Leading BabyReady Finance has positively influenced the fintech community by demonstrating the power of AI in addressing financial literacy and planning for underserved groups.

The lasting impact I hope to achieve is to create a more financially literate and secure society, particularly for young families. To do this, I'm continuously improving our AI technology, expanding our reach and

3 - Ana Gallacher

mentoring the next generation of fintech professionals to foster innovation and education in the industry.

— **How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?**

I motivate myself by focusing on the impact our work has on people's lives. Knowing that our technology can make a real difference to the financial wellbeing of families drives me to strive for better.

— **What technology, tools or approaches do you think the Step Changers of the future will harness?**

I'm confident that Step Changers of the future will harness advancements in AI and machine learning to create more efficient solutions. I believe that integrating open banking data with predictive analytics will become essential in financial planning and management. Plus, transparency and security in financial transactions will be revolutionised by blockchain technology.

#UKStepChangers2024

2 - Alex Woods

2



Alex Woods

Founder & CEO - Newrotex

Alex isn't your average Trauma and Orthopaedic surgeon. In 2019, he co-founded Newrotex to bring the incredible regenerative properties of silks to patients suffering from nerve injuries. Combining his zoology PhD from Oxford University with a busy NHS practice in medicine, Alex is bringing life-changing operations to patients, inspired by the natural world, while also being the CEO of a successful business.

“When it comes to excellence, what helps continually focus my efforts is understanding there is no end point where something is ‘excellent enough’. It's about the process you apply and the resilience to accept the opportunity cost of the decisions you make.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

Being recognised as a Step Changer is a great honour and testament, not only to my achievements, but the collaboration and support from everyone who's helped drive my work at Newrotex and the NHS. It highlights the incredible journey I've been part of, finding an unconventional route to bringing a brighter future to patients with devastating nerve injuries.

2 - Alex Woods

— **What's been the biggest challenge you've faced in your career and how did you overcome it? How was this experience pivotal in helping you achieve your goals?**

By far, my biggest personal challenge has been combining a busy NHS practice and building my successful startup company, Newrotex.

Being in two places at once simply isn't possible, so I've learned to be honest with myself about what I can realistically achieve and not beat myself up too much about what I can't do. I've also had to be creative in designing a less conventional business structure. This includes being flexible with on-site and remote working, adopting unconventional business hours and building a global team of people who are motivated to bring our exciting solutions to patients.

I believe that the spirit of collaboration is the most valuable asset you can have in any endeavour, whether that's teamwork, innovation or problem solving.

— **An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?**

- 1. The art of letting go:** I've learned to be truly honest with myself about what I value when making decisions. Every decision has an opportunity cost, and it's rarely possible to do everything. Remembering this has helped me overcome thoughts of regret or loss over the things I haven't done.
- 2. Stay grounded:** My supportive friends and family have given me much-needed reserves to be resilient in the face of adversity on many occasions. I've learned never to lose sight of these people, and to pay it forward when they need support.
- 3. Be compassionate:** Resilience means different things to different people. Hindsight has shown me the importance of understanding what that is for individuals, within my own teams and then working with it, rather than trying to impose a single view on everyone.

— **How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?**

Working in healthcare and developing a medical device with the potential to change the lives of thousands of patients is a huge driver for me. The fact that I'm in the unusual position of being both a surgeon and a CEO means that I get to see the impact of what our business is achieving every day. I find this hugely motivating.

1 - Katrina Hutchinson-O'Neill

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Katrina Hutchinson-O'Neill

CEO & Founder - Join Talent

The first in her family to attend university, Katrina found the real world more engaging and left her studies behind. Working her way up, she discovered her love for recruitment and eventually secured senior roles at the Royal Bank of Scotland and Nationwide. In 2018, Katrina set up her business, Join Talent, providing the solutions she'd been desperately searching for during her career.

“Getting my business off the ground at the very start was the most challenging thing I’ve ever done. In the first year, it was just me at my kitchen table, persuading buyers to take a chance on me. That’s incredibly tough as a first-time founder. What got me through was my vision, determination and staying true to my values.”

— What does being a Step Changer mean to you?

First and foremost I’m incredibly proud and honoured to be included in such an amazing list of humans! Being a Step Changer for me means taking bold, innovative actions to drive significant, transformative improvements in business strategy and performance. It’s about challenging the status quo, embracing change and leading with a forward-thinking mindset to achieve extraordinary results. It also means never accepting limitations or constraints until you’ve really tested them to see if they’re real.

1 - Katrina Hutchinson-O'Neill

— An adaptable and resilient attitude is required to overcome unforeseen circumstances or setbacks. What are 3 lessons you've learned about resilience in your career?

- 1. Live by your values:** When faced with the toughest of challenges and situations, living by your values will always ensure you end up in the right place. You'll never regret doing the right thing.
- 2. Perseverance pays off:** A mantra I use all the time to help me push through setbacks is 'Will this still matter in a year from now?' In 90% of situations, the answer is no. Save your energy for the 10% of issues that really deserve your attention.
- 3. Learn from failure:** Viewing failures as learning opportunities rather than setbacks has made me stronger and more resilient, understanding that each challenge is a chance to improve and innovate.

— How have your actions and leadership positively influenced your community or industry? What lasting impact do you hope to have, and how are you working towards achieving it?

My vision is to establish Join Talent as the birthplace of future leaders in recruitment and talent acquisition (TA), renowned for its commitment to high standards and professional development. To achieve this, I'm super excited to be launching the world's first externally-accredited end to end training programme for internal TA professionals as an additional product offering alongside our embedded hiring solutions.

By developing and promoting comprehensive training & development programmes that address a significant gap in our sector, we are equipping in-house TA professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles. These efforts are helping to foster a culture of excellence and continuous improvement in our sector.

1 - Katrina Hutchinson-O'Neill

How do you motivate yourself to continually push for excellence in the projects or initiatives you lead?

There are three core principles that motivate me to continually push for excellence across all aspects of my work. These are:

- **A passion for impact:** My team and I are driven by the positive impact our work has on our community and industry, which fuels our dedication and commitment to excellence.
- **Building a strong team:** Surrounding myself with talented, motivated individuals creates a supportive environment where excellence is the norm, and everyone encourages each other to achieve the best outcomes.
- **Continuous learning:** Staying up to date with the latest industry trends, client needs and sector best practices is vital.

The values, drive and grit that carried me through a very challenging first year of business, combined with learnings from my many mistakes, have characterised the culture that exists today at Join Talent. In short, this is pace, bravery, and always trying to do the right thing, even if that comes at extra cost.

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