

Featured Article



BUILDING BRIDGES IN CONVERSATION WITH THE FEMALE FRAUD FORUM

Authored by: Phoebe Waters, Alexandra Underwood, Stephanie Duncan and Caitlin Bruce - The Female Fraud Forum

Phoebe Waters, Chair of the Female Fraud Forum (FFF) and Director in the Disputes team at J.S.Held, interviews three lawyers and members of the FFF, to explore their personal experiences of business development and networking in our industry. The FFF is a multi-disciplinary community comprising practitioners (of all genders as of this year, and all levels of experience) in the fraud, asset recovery and investigations field. The FFF spearheads the fight for change so that gender equality and equity become ingrained in the workplace and secured for future generations. With happily over 1000 in its community now, the FFF has been a partner of TL4 FIRE since August 2021.

Phoebe talks to Alexandra Underwood, Secretary of the FFF and Partner at Fieldfisher; Stephanie Duncan, Education Sub-committee member of the FFF and Senior Associate at Charles Russell Speechlys, and; Caitlin Bruce, member of the FFF and Associate at Collas Crill, Jersey.

Phoebe: Hello there, friends!

Thank you for joining me for this discussion. Let's start by explaining to our readers why we have chosen to name our article "Building Bridges".

I recently completed the inspiring, and surprisingly but perfectly practical, course "Women Leading Changing: Shaping Our Future" at the University of Cambridge's

Institute of Sustainability Leadership, where I heard how Sociologist, Centola, uses the analogy of bridges to symbolise our connections in a diverse social network. The theory is that although building 'narrow bridges' can result in faster communications between parties, constructing 'wide bridges' between parties can help strengthen mutual trust and credibility. Creating wider bridges is achieved through forging

multiple contacts between micro (individual) and meso (organisational) stakeholders and is something that we should all do and should all want to do. Building wide bridges helps to: a) form more effective business relationships; and b) develop initiatives to better our working practices and accelerate change for a more equal, positive, and profitable future. Social change happens through networks around us.

When we started our discussions for this article, we resonated with the metaphor of bridges and thought it helped to visualise our experience and goals in the world of BD and networking.

Perhaps we should briefly tell everyone how we all know each other as it is rather microcosmic for how we meet people in our industry on a wider scale. And how did you first come across the FFF and/or TL4? Over to you Alex to kick us off please.

Alex: I was introduced to the FFF by Committee Member Emma Makepeace (Deputy Director of Clerking at 25 Bedford Row). We were at a mutual friend's birthday party and she suggested coming along to one of the FFF breakfasts to meet a group of likeminded women.

Steph: Phoebe is a family friend and I spotted her FFF posts on LinkedIn. I signed up to one of the virtual FFF networking events during Covid. It was daunting joining a Zoom call without knowing anyone, but the group gave me a really warm welcome, making sure to integrate me into the conversation and I felt at ease. I then attended the FFF Summer Party (their first in-person event after lockdown in 2021) on my own where I experienced the same warm welcome, with FFF members taking the time to introduce me to other attendees. I met Alex through the FFF Committee (we were both elected at the AGM in February 2022) and Cait at a FFF drinks reception we held at the TL4 FIRE Starters conference in Dublin in the same month.

Cait: I first met Phoebe and another FFF Committee Member, Molly Sandquest (Senior Manager at FRP Advisory), at that same TL4 FIRE Starters conference. This event was my first international conference since moving to Jersey from Johannesburg in July 2020. Phoebe and Molly, seeing my obvious wit and charm in a sea of new people (read: nervous-babbling) invited me to attend an FFF pre-drinks the following evening where I met Steph and Alex.

Phoebe: You are rather witty Cait, pretty charming too when you want to be (!). Those Dublin drinks were organised with such short notice but we had an incredible turnout and party. We then went back to the same spot post-conference dinner with essentially all of the FIRE Starters in tow. I have to say the 'accidental'

appearance of Luke Dockwray and Ashley Fairbrother (both of EMM) at the FFF drinks has to be a highlight. We didn't expect so many new-comers to our community at an international event – especially one not organised by us – it was remarkable, and really warming actually.

So, would you say that your involvement in, and exposure to the FFF and TL4 has helped your career progression? If so, how has it done so?

Steph: I joined the FFF at a time when I was hoping to be promoted. I knew I needed to develop my personal brand and external network, but I hadn't found the right environment in which to do it. Conferences were generally only attended by those more senior to me. After attending my first TL4 event, a one day event in London, I asked my firm if I could attend the Dublin conference just mentioned, given lots of my new contacts had indicated that they were planning to attend and I thought it would be a good opportunity to build on those relationships. It has since been easy to make a business case for attending subsequent TL4 events as they are well respected, and the mixture of seniority levels (FIRE Starters, the Summer School, etc.) makes them more relevant for different levels. I can also target the events of particular interest to me and my practice.

The FFF and TL4 have both provided me with excellent opportunities to help my career progression. A member of the FFF kindly recommended me to TL4 to speak at the FIRE Summer School at the University of Cambridge. This was my first experience of significant external public speaking and has led to further speaking opportunities. I have also written articles for the TL4 and FFF Newsletters, and have been included in marketing by both communities on social media. I was able to show the good networking I was doing and how this has developed my personal profile when making my business case for promotion.

Cait: I was fortunate to have won the 2021 TL4 FIRE Starters Essay Competition which not only made me LinkedIn famous for the first quarter of the year but also landed me tickets to the Dublin conference (where I was introduced to the FFF) and TL4 FIRE Vilamoura. I was given the opportunity to present my essay in Dublin which was exciting and daunting in equal measures. I have always found it quite

easy to meet and speak to new people. In fact it is one of the aspects of my job that I enjoy the most. But I moved jurisdictions during COVID so TL4 FIRE Dublin was not only an opportunity to establish myself in a new network (which was also, equal parts daunting/exciting) but also an opportunity to show Collas Crill, my then (fairly) new employer, that this was something that I could do. I could not have predicted the extent to which winning the essay competition would boost my career though. I have benefited hugely from the digital marketing that came from the TL4 FIRE Starters Essay Competition and FFF events (thank you TL4 and Phoebe!). I met incredible people in Dublin who I have been able to maintain contact with at the various follow up TL4 events and through the events of networks that overlap with TL4, like the FFF. Some of these connections have referred work to Collas Crill which has served to boost my profile internally too. It is very rare to get this kind of exposure as a junior lawyer and I cannot recommend it enough for anyone considering entering the competition this year.

Phoebe: Thank you both - brilliant insights.

Purton, 2020, defines collaboration as “welcoming problem-solving assistance from others to uncover the best solutions, sharing their ambitions and seeking allies and advocates who are aligned with their vision.”

Together, we have previously discussed the idea that we each have a very personal role to play in bolstering our points of connection: we need to commit our time (often post 'traditional' work hours) and effort to collaborate with others.

Against the backdrop of Purton's definition, which he formed in the context of writing about how to successfully effect change, can you tell me how you collaborate? How do you form your networks and maintain valuable working relationships?

Alex: I keep in touch with people I have worked with on previous cases because I've enjoyed working with them and have a clear idea of their strengths. I attend seminars and events which keep me up to date on the latest developments of law and practice but also because there are lots of interesting people to meet who I hope to work with in the future. My firm has signed up to pledges to offer our clients

gender balanced shortlists for proposed arbitrators and experts. For this reason I regularly meet with female professionals so that I can understand the talent in the market and give my clients the best options.

The collaboration that I do will depend on the expertise of the person concerned. With accountants and investigators I often introduce them to the rest of my team by inviting them to share their knowledge with us. I'm also delighted to present to them on how we can use the powers of the Court to unlock investigations, access information and preserve assets. Our approach is to show investigators and accountants how they can use us to help their clients. We can help them to uncover the full extent of a fraud and to recover as much of the loss as possible. I meet a lot of funders at both TL4 and FFF. This is really helpful because we are increasingly instructed to find funding for fraud cases with strong merits. It is always helpful to know someone at the funder so that your request for money is not the first interaction you have with the organisation. And finally, TL4 and FFF provide networks where I can collaborate more easily with other lawyers – this article being just one example.

Steph: I follow up with new contacts and have been added to mailing lists, and invited to some really interesting events as a result. The benefit of TL4 and the FFF is that I then see those contacts at several events which strengthens the relationship. I've learnt that my aim is not to "work" the whole room. Instead, I try to take the time to build meaningful and lasting relationships with those I connect with, and that happens much more naturally when we have a normal conversation about pets, travel, and all manner of life experiences! It's just as important to strengthen existing relationships (or widen those bridges, P!) and they organically lead to further connections as a contact introduces you to those they know.

Importantly, TL4 and the FFF have created opportunities where I am meeting the right contacts – contacts relevant to my specialisms and with whom I could genuinely collaborate on cases in the future. By understanding more of what my cross-disciplinary contacts do, I have a better awareness of how they can be brought on board to assist my clients. I have had exposure to new creative thinking in various jurisdictions, such as through Cait and

the presentation of her TL4 article. The power of collaboration really can be astonishing when you bring together people with a variety of talents and experiences, all pulling in the same direction.

Cait: In Jersey, there is a well-established framework for networking - there are numerous events and functions that are put on to encourage people in the finance industry to make connections. I think this is one of the benefits of living in Jersey which has a fairly transient workforce. It seems to me that the industry recognises that there will constantly be a sea change of people (okay...lawyers, accountants and bankers) needing to establish and expand their professional networks. Since moving to Jersey I have made a point of putting my hand up for as many of these events as possible so that I can meet new people and boost my profile in Jersey. Often you will see a lot of the same people at different events throughout the year (widening the bridges!) but even on an island of 110,000 people you can fall out of the loop with certain people so I try to maintain contact informally (either over email or meeting up for coffee) after an event.

TL4 and FFF have provided that framework for networking for me in the UK (and internationally). I don't get to London as often as I would like (despite the very short flight) but when I do the trip is usually centred around a TL4 or FFF event. I think something that is particularly great about these events is the fact that they draw such a multidisciplinary crowd. Ultimately, I think that if you are looking for a solicitor, barrister, investigator, e-Discovery provider or insolvency practitioner to work with on a matter you want to know not only that they can do the job but also will they get along with the rest of the team and importantly, the client. I think a firm's reputation can go a long way in telling you whether an individual can do the job but getting to know someone at a conference or an event definitely helps in establishing whether you would feel confident recommending them to your client or colleagues!

Phoebe: It seems like you are all adept at creating those wide bridges already, that's excellent and you provided some great pragmatic examples of how to do so.

Alex – such a good point on your differing collaboration tactics dependent on the practitioner's

expertise. Plus, I really like that Fieldfisher pledges to offer your clients gender balanced shortlists; I have heard a few chambers doing that so far - more firms/companies should follow suit. There is so much female talent in our sector, some of whom may be being overlooked. We do also need to ensure that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives are implemented for all differences between persons though – racial, neurodiverse, disabilities and so on. Operational steps such as pledges can help expedite positive (and much needed) societal change. There is a lot to be done!

A further area of study in the CISL course was how influence mapping can be a helpful exercise to complete, as well as stakeholder mapping. This form of mapping pinpoints those around us who have the influence to effect change. It enables us to understand the depths of our own strengths and skills, and those of others, in addition to appreciating our limits, in order to bring about both small and large shifts on micro, meso and macro levels. It also means that we can identify and prioritise the traditionally overlooked. The two further pillars of Purton's practice points to successfully effect change (Collaboration, as touched upon above, being one) are Humility ("acknowledging the things we do not know and welcoming opportunities to learn") and Flexibility ("remaining open to new approaches that challenge existing practices and beliefs").

Do any of you practice influence mapping?

Alex: I have to admit that I don't do this but I probably should. I have always taken the approach that networking is a long game and that in litigation you never know where the next piece of work will come from. My approach has been to provide as much help to others as I can in the hope, and dare I say it, expectation, that the good deed will be repaid. The only time when I really focus on identifying the decision maker / work generator is when I am targeting a specific piece of work that I know the client needs help with. In my experience, most cases don't fall into this category.

Steph: I haven't heard of influence mapping before, so thank you Phoebe! But it will be something I bear in mind going forwards.

Cait: I too have not heard of influence mapping before and will be taking a leaf out of Steph's book in this regard.

Phoebe: OK, swiftly moving on then! The FFF's mission statement is to support and encourage the advancement of women (I would seriously consider having this as my next tattoo). One particular goal of mine as part of this statement, through leading the FFF, is to help build the confidence of our members.

Do you have suggestions to members of our communities on how they can build their confidence? How has your self-assurance developed over your careers?

Alex: This is a tricky one. Confidence is so important in BD and it is a challenge for many women. When members of my team ask me about confidence I suggest they start by watching the TED talk by Amy Cuddy. Amy's talk explains how the physical poses we adopt convey the appearance of confidence and actually make you feel more confident too. Second I advise that preparation for a meeting is key. If you know more about the subject matter than everyone else in the room, it gives you inner confidence. And finally, I say mirror the behaviours of (some) others. Try to work with colleagues who appear confident and authoritative. Then adapt their style to make it your own.

Steph: As a natural introvert, I could sometimes feel uncomfortable networking and lacked confidence when public speaking. I assumed that the best and most memorable networkers were the extroverts – the louder and bubblier personalities who others are drawn to. Now, I see that being an introvert can be a strength – it can help to build deeper and lasting connections by engaging with someone 1:1 or in smaller groups.

I also attended some training with a former actor where we filmed ourselves public speaking and then analysed it. It was slightly daunting being presented with a picture of an eagle and needing to speak on it for several I.o.n.g minutes(!), but the training really helped.

In the FFF and TL4, I've found a friendly and supportive space that really works for me. FFF members genuinely encourage each other, celebrate and champion each other's achievements, and want to see each other succeed. Likewise, when I presented at the TL4 Summer School in August of this year, it was a lot easier to stand on a stage

when people are rooting for you. The key is finding the right space for you.

My advice would be to push yourself out of your comfort zone – you'll be surprised at what you can achieve, but be kind to yourself – if something doesn't go as well as you might have hoped, it is quickly forgotten and everything is a learning experience. You won't be the only person in the room feeling the nerves and it is likely you look more confident than you feel.

I also completely agree with Alex that preparation is absolutely essential. It gives you confidence, avoids the dreaded mind blank, and it really shows if you are well prepared.

Cait: Am I the only one who is going to say that I wouldn't put it past Phoebe to have the FFF mission statement inked on her?!

I must say Alex and Steph are hard acts to follow on this question. I am reluctant to answer this question by saying "what she said" but I really do agree with their points. I think then what I have to add is more anecdotal and builds on those points. It also definitely bangs the "I am new here. I come from South Africa" drum a bit more so the readers will have to bear with me on that one last time. Simply put: moving to and practicing law in a new jurisdiction in my 30s was a real knock to my confidence. I think the concept of imposter syndrome is well-trodden in today's work-wellness lexicon so I will not say much more about it here save to admit that I felt a very heightened sense of imposter syndrome at conferences and events after moving to Jersey.

I was a fairly established junior lawyer in South Africa in that I had enough confidence in my work to feel comfortable speaking to people at conferences or events (and importantly enough wherewithal to know when I didn't know enough!). Moving to Jersey felt like I had gone back to square one in a sense; having to make and prove myself to new connections again. I am naturally quite outgoing and so I did not find it difficult to convey the appearance of confidence (which definitely did make me feel more confident) but I was quietly (not so quietly) very anxious about whether it would be glaringly obvious that I was finding my feet. This is where Alex and Steph's practice point comes in for me. I was incredibly nervous about presenting my essay at TL4 FIRE Dublin and practiced it to death – researching all manner of tangents that might come in the way of questions (there were no questions, of

course). It did not stop my legs shaking but it definitely went a long way to helping me relax (a bit).

I will also echo Steph's point about finding a space that works for, and is supportive of, you when getting out there to BD. Having a good team behind you (your firm or company) is crucial, as is linking yourself to networks (in which you can find teams!) like TL4 and FFF which are supportive and welcoming. It can be difficult to build your confidence so make sure that the people around you are as invested in that endeavour as you are.

Phoebe: We are very grateful you became part of our community - and team, Cait!

I totally agree with your point S about being self-compassionate; we can judge ourselves far too harshly. Most of us consistently try our best. That's one of the reasons communities such as the FFF and TL4 are critical – we are comprised of individuals who have common goals and are all attempting to work towards them. Let's do that together, be kind to each other and ourselves, and share the labour (and that bottle of wine, maybe?). That will make us more effective stakeholders.

In terms of the TED talk, I think I know which one you mean Alex - Amy presents on being a bear and stretching your arms out as wide as you can, at one stage. If I understand correctly, a bear makes itself as big as possible when facing a threat to try and ward off its adverse party. Amy's point is that if we do that when we are nervous, ahead of a presentation for example, take up as much physical space as possible (in preparation, not starfish on a stage) - then it will make us feel more in control and confident for confronting 'the threat'.

On that note, please each share one practical tip for people when networking or attending BD events. Mine would be to make and hold eye contact with someone you meet, at least until it gets weird (subjective, I'd say). With practice, eye contact is also a useful tool towards gaining greater self-assurance, too.

Alex: Really listen to what the person is saying and ask yourself how you can help them.

Steph: Take Phoebe as your plus one!! And if she can't attend, then don't just talk about work – your new contact is

much more likely to remember you for something other than work.

Cait: I think this builds on what Alex and Steph have said above. I think one should be very wary of doing most of the talking. As I say this I am sure there are some people reading this who I have jabbered on to at BD events thinking – “That woman!?! Giving advice about not talking too much? Pfff” – and they would not be entirely wrong (I am doing it right now!). I am definitely guilty of this and it is something I try to keep under wraps generally but especially at BD events. I think that listening and asking questions can widen and strengthen the bridges we build with people. I find it much easier to pick up with people at subsequent events when I know what they are interested in or what cases they are working on. In addition, I think it definitely soothes the old nerves a bit if you get into the groove of a normal conversation with someone at a BD event as opposed to what can sometimes be very static or cold work chat.

Phoebe: Terrific tips – they may come across basic but actually so many networkers do not follow these guidelines! There is a Chinese proverb that pretty much sums up what you are all advising here: ‘We have two ears and one mouth so that

we can listen twice as much as we speak.’ Someone first shared that with me when I had just joined the London professional scene after my Master’s.

What about any advice for what not to do at a BD event?

Alex: The one that still irritates me is when I ask a question or make a comment and the response is directed to another person in the group (often a male colleague). It is infuriating and remarkably still happens, although less so than it did in the past.

Steph: Don’t forget to introduce people you know to others who approach the group. It will really shape someone else’s experience of the event and help to avoid awkwardness.

Cait: Don’t start a conversation and then start scanning the room for someone else to engage. This is narrow bridge energy in my view.

Phoebe: Each one of those is definitely narrow bridge energy. Time to wrap up.

Thank you for joining me Alex, Steph, and Cait – and if you managed to make it to the end of our piece – thank you very much, reader

(seriously). We hope that some of our perceptions prove valuable for your business development and networking experiences.

We would like to end with a quote from the legend that is Ruth Bader Ginsburg: “Fight for the things that you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you.”

And in the wise words of Cait - what she said.

Let’s build wide bridges.

To join the Female Fraud Forum as a member, or corporate partner, please go to www.thefemalefraudforum.com. We network, we educate, we socialise – and we make a difference. We welcome you to join us in disrupting the system, so that we can support women (and all genders) effect change for a more positive and profitable future together.

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