

“I’ve never felt this awake”: Caroline Franczia on Thelma, Louise and inclusion

Caroline Franczia is a regular columnist for Maddynews, she usually provides entrepreneurial advice mixed with Pop culture. Supported by the incredible Thelma and Louise here she opens up about her experiences of being a woman in the tech industry, working for American corporations and scaleups.

Temps de lecture : minute

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For a long time I wanted to find the right words. I always put off writing about my own experiences as I didn’t think they were important enough. Boom. First problem. Someone recently said that you do not need to earn the right to speak for justice. No matter the proportion in which you were affected, just speak. And so, I realise now that it is not about the magnitude of what one has to say, it is about speaking up. Did I ever suffer from gender inequality? For a long, long time; I would have said no, not at all. I had trust, and a great corporate career, or did I?

Louise Sawyer: ‘You get what you settle for.’

Quota or not Quota?

Female or not Female? Diversity is about education. Semantics can kill a good action, so maybe let’s just agree to move forward? To educate, you must repeat, repeat and repeat again until it is integrated and natural.

The debate is not whether positive discrimination and quotas should or should not be, or whether we should say female founder, female CEO, female title or just 'the title'. The debate is about changing the mindset at its core, and to do this, any step forward helps to move forward. And if it is necessary to set rules for hiring more women, more LGBT, more handicapped, more minorities in general, then so be it. Until one day, it will be normal to be a fun, smart, smiling leader or founder without falling into the classic images of female success: the ice queen or the crazy emotional diva.

Louise: 'You've always been crazy, this is just the first chance you've had to express yourself.'

In my 15+ year career, I am yet to hear a successful sales woman or leader be referred to as an alpha. Why is it commonly accepted to refer to a prosperous man as an Alpha, and why is it that the only translation I have ever heard of was 'Diva'. For the record even the Cambridge Dictionary offers the definition of alpha male but does not have its gender equivalent of alpha female.

Max: 'You know, the one thing I can't figure out are these girls real smart or real real lucky?'

Hal Slocumb: 'Don't matter. Brains'll only get you so far and luck always runs out.'

This might just be a silly, pointless reference, except that it's not.

A few years ago, while I was finalising a reasonable, and well structured

argument against a male peer in a leadership meeting, I was publicly and bluntly asked if my assertiveness was related to a certain time of the month (this was pre #metoo).

I remember once walking by my peers and boss casually having breakfast at a café outside the office before a business review, a gathering I had not been invited to. They were not ashamed, not bothered and not apologetic. They had organised it for their gang, omitting the only female in the team.



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Once, I offered to my leader to present a deep dive on our go to market, with strategic actions to deliver next quarter. I was shut down 'we all have a template, stick to it'. I complied only to hear the applause when

my fellow male counterpart delivered... a strategic presentation.

I have been told I can be *too nice, not cold* enough, *too distant, too emotional*...always too much, never enough. I have been accused of using my charms to close deals or even to sleep with the boss to get better work conditions. After all, why would a woman combine emotional intelligence, incredible organisational skills and hard work ethic?

Thelma : 'Nobody'd believe us. We'd still get in trouble, we'd still have our lives ruined.'

There is an unsaid, subtle constant reminder that women are either too much or not enough, leaving a print for the most balanced, most accomplished to doubt their rightful place in a world governed by alpha - male- founders, leaders, investors.

This leads to three typical behaviours:

The most common one is burnout. By trying to be everything and more, by constantly doubting and working harder to prove, exhaustion takes over. A mental fatigue that cannot be repaired as easily as physical exhaustion. I have personally come close to this situation and witnessed accomplished women going through it.

Louise : In the future, when a woman's crying like that, she isn't having any fun!

Another very common behaviour is impostor syndrome. This is not a situation you suddenly find yourself in. It is something that is infused from

the earliest moments. The strongest, most confident women can find themselves in this situation. From my humble perspective, I believe it is the combination and accumulation of 'the white boys club' doubts and diminishing remarks experienced over years, combined with the arrogant looking down upon those women who made great sacrifices and made it to the top. The result is that many women will pass up on incredible opportunities because they are consistently second guessing themselves. When I find myself in this situation I remember the incredible quote from Richard Branson: 'If somebody offers you an amazing opportunity but you are not sure you can do it, say yes - then learn how to do it later!'

Louise: 'Think you found your callin'?'

Thelma: 'Maybe. Maybe. The call of the wild!'

Last but not least, in the last year, I have learned that happiness might be elsewhere where your work finally meets your personal conviction. I have been approached by my direct and indirect network on how to make such a move. Working for Uppercut First has been an incredible journey. Choosing who my clients should be, working alongside CEOs and smart executives, learning with them and from them. I have grown to be exactly where I wanted to be, not just a sales expert, not just a manager, not just a coach: someone who can think, who can solve puzzles, come up with processes that will have an impact not just on the sales side but the entire revenue stream and process of the company. Someone who can talk to CPOs and CTOs and bring them value and I am finally at peace with owning this title.

Thelma: 'I feel really awake. I don't recall ever feeling this awake. You know? Everything looks

different now. You feel like that? You feel like you got something to live for now?'

If you are doubtful about any of this, there is one thing that cannot be denied, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021, the global gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 years to 135.6 years.

How can you change things? (tip of the iceberg...)

If you are a male, you may be doing the right thing already. But, are your colleagues, executives, co-workers aligned with your values? Don't overlook the white boys club. Ask yourself : are you actively changing things or passively approving the change?

Louise : 'Yeah, where do you get off behaving like that with women you don't even know? Huh? Huh? How'd you feel if someone did that to your mother? Or your sister? Or your wife?'

If you are a woman, own your worth, own your happiness and speak up. Do not just try to fit in. Be a woman who empowers women. Be proud.

Advice to the boardroom

How diverse are the boards you attend/hold? You have a play in this and it is good for business! According to McKinsey, 'Companies with more than 30 percent women executives were more likely to outperform

companies (...) A substantial differential likelihood of outperformance—48 percent—separates the most from the least gender-diverse companies.'

This is the year of 2021 and female founders are still struggling to be credible and gain founding.

This is the year of 2021 and blacklivesmatters is not just a hashtag. Mac Conwell, a successful, respected and engaged Venture Capitalist, managing partner at Rarebreed Venture tweeted less than a month ago: 'I can't explain the frustration or better yet the embarrassment I feel after becoming so scared and anxious just because a cop car pulls up behind me or beside me.'

This is the year of 2021 and repetition remains essential as the subject of diversity and inclusion is not over.

I may have bothered a few people with this special piece and I am ok with this. I know that those who feel uncomfortable are also the ones who still have the most work to do. Denying that it exists slows down the progress and actions to fix.

Thelma : I guess everything from here on in is going to be pretty shitty.

Louise : Unbearable, I'd imagine.

Thelma : Well, look, everything that we got to lose is gone anyway!

Louise : Oh, God, how do you stay so positive?

Caroline Franczia is a regular columnist for Maddyne and the founder of Uppercut First. Experienced in working for large companies such as Oracle, Computer Associates, and BMC, Caroline also lived in Silicon Valley for four years before moving to startups (Sprinklr, Datadog, Confluent) where she witnessed on the ground the benefits of a well-thought sales strategy. These are the foundations of UF: a structure that accompanies the European startups in their sales strategy by giving them an undeniable advantage in their go-to-market.



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