

02nd July 2024

CIHT Dubai Online Seminar – Bulletin

Rachel Smith – Associate Director, Jacobs in London

About the Event

To celebrate International Women in Engineering Day, transport planner Rachel Smith shared six insights for a fulfilling life and career, based on her own experiences and observations.

The speaker set the stage by recollecting the story of Susan Boyle, who appeared on Britain's Got Talent despite initial scepticism about her singing talent. Although not the best singer, Boyle's compelling story, skilfully presented by the TV anchor, made her a star. Rachel highlighted the transformative power of storytelling and pitching ideas. She introduced her concept of "APPLES," six guiding principles to be successful in any aspect and stages of life.

About the Panel Speakers

Rachel Smith

Rachel Smith is a renowned transport professional currently holding the position of associate director in transport planning at Jacobs in London, United Kingdom having over 24 years of work experience in UK, Australia and New Zealand. She delivered two TED talks explaining how we can improve transportation in a sustainably conscious way. During her 16 years in Australia, she envisioned building cycling superhighways and bikeways made of plastic, and involving everyone in the city planning process. Her life's philosophy is to face fears and give things a go, believing it's better to try and fail than to never try at all. As the author of the book "Underspent", she discusses behavioural changes to break shopping addictions and buying habits without drastically altering one's lifestyle.

Webinar Content Summary

Rachel welcomed and addressed the audiences at the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) mentioning her involvement with CIHT for last 24 years with an interval due to her in time in Australia, being involved with AITPM. She then started to explain her philosophies of life.

Self:

Rachel emphasizes the importance of being yourself, using a quote in all her presentations that relates to many people. She criticizes the routine of working hard to afford items that are not necessary and highlights how societal pressures and deep seeded thinking dictate our lives. She reflects on her own experiences, from struggling in school and overcoming limiting thinking, to learning the value of surrounding herself with positive people. Rachel shares insights from her entrepreneurial course, which taught her that everyone has unique experiences and should focus on their strengths and passions. She urges people to stop comparing themselves and to embrace their individuality, using the analogy of being a unicorn.

Act:

Her second philosophy is to act because the world is with full of opportunities. She talked about her childhood dream of scuba diving, which she achieved 13 years later in Australia. While working in the UK, she seized the chance to move to Australia and this turned into a 16-year stay and Australian citizenship, offering her numerous professional opportunities. Rachel emphasizes the importance of taking action to materialize one's dreams, quoting Tony Robbins' advice that success comes from taking massive, determined actions. She encourages others to seize opportunities and act decisively.

02nd July 2024**Prize:**

The third philosophy is to seize opportunities coming in the way. She emphasizes that fear of others' opinions and imposter syndrome often prevent people from pursuing their dreams. She recounts how seizing opportunities in Australia led to success, including winning a bicycle and a scholarship. Rachel shares her experience developing a concept for cycling superhighways and her determination to meet Enrique Peñalosa in Bogotá despite several rejections from hundreds of people. Her persistence paid off, allowing her to work closely with Peñalosa in Bogotá. She encourages others to share their ideas, reach out to industry leaders, and apply for awards, stressing that overcoming fear and taking action are key for success.

Passion:

Rachel recollects how a series of events, starting with meeting Enrique Penalosa in Bogota, led to a significant opportunity to work on the BMW Guggenheim Lab, on an urban planning and transport project in New York, Berlin, and Mumbai. While in Berlin, the speaker was invited to a dinner party and had to make an apple crumble, an experience that introduced her to the sharing economy. This inspired her on minimalism and sharing resources to reduce living costs. She attempted to live without buying new or second-hand items for a year and this challenge shifted the mindset and became a pivotal point in her career. This led two invitations in TED talks and roles on Australian radio and television. The speaker emphasizes that following the passion and seizing opportunities led to a series of successful endeavours. She concluded by adding quote from former Australian prime minister that you need to have to go, to get a go and encouraged others to take initiative and create their own opportunities.

Learn:

Rachel put light on a lesson learned at a meetup when her friend Debbie arrived at breakfast with a heavy shoulder backpack, symbolizing the mental and emotional baggage we carry every day. This baggage often includes feelings of inadequacy, past mistakes, or fears of not fitting in place where we belong, which can hinder personal growth and learning. The speaker shares a personal experience from 2014 when she attended an entrepreneur course, despite being outside of her usual field of transport planning, opened the eyes to new perspectives and opportunities. The experience led to writing a book on traffic decongestion, which was a significant personal achievement to Rachel. The key message is not to let personal baggage prevent us from pursuing our passions and learning new things.

Events:

She emphasizes the importance of networking like a gardener, where constant nurturing and engagement are the key. After her role being redundant in December 2015, just before the Christmas period, Rachel quickly found a new job the next day, not due to personal brilliance but because of an extensive network she builds over the period of time. She wrote a book titled Ready for Redundancy, sharing lessons learned about the importance of being prepared for unpredicted events, despite having shame and anxiety surrounding redundancy. She highlighted the value of maintaining a positive mindset and being proactive in networking and attending events. Rachel concluded by advising to be patient when we have nothing and when we have absolutely everything.

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Questions

you have talked about putting yourself out there to be open for opportunities which on the surface seems to require a lot of confidence which not everyone feels - how do you suggest to overcome this and do more networking / speaking etc?

Rachel emphasized the importance of relentless practice in mastering whatever require. She talked about months of daily practice, memorizing the speech paragraph by paragraph for a TED talk in 2014. Through continuous practice and forcing herself to face the challenges led her to enjoy speaking on stage. She highlighted that confidence, proficiency, continuous efforts, and facing fears led to a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Doing similar tasks in day-to-day basis makes things monotonous. And when we are in a new city with people, we don't have much confidence to open up, how to keep ourselves motivated to keep moving?

Post-pandemic changes and hybrid working have made it harder to build and maintain strong personal connections with colleagues. In the past, having a permanent desk allowed for a sense of belongingness within teams. Now, with hybrid models and hot-desking, these close connections are more challenging to establish. Rachel advised everyone to find passion and participate in activities outside our work. She chooses to join walking groups in London, which had helped to boost her confidence and expand the network.

I've personally found networking more challenging post-Covid, with more virtual events and less opportunity for small talk and meeting people outside my firm. Have you found the same and how have you navigated this?

Rachel advised of taking initiative and creating opportunities for connection, especially in a post-pandemic world where most events are online. She shared her experience of starting lazy Sunday cycle in Brisbane with a colleague. She encourages starting of a social media group to invite people for gathering. The key is to give things a try and be proactive in building professional and social networks.

what would be your advice for students leaving university to have a successful career in the transport planning?

Rachel recommends to build network and having mentorship in building a career. Do not hesitate to ask experienced professional for advice or help, noting that enthusiasm and willingness to engage can make a significant change.

This Bulletin is issued by CIHT Dubai. For further information, contact ciht.dubaigroup@gmail.com.