

A conversation with Rachida Chekaf

Amy Metcalfe reports



What is your role?

Currently I have two roles: I am the Head of Translations and the Head of Quality & Accreditation.

What does the translations team do?

The team primarily manages translation projects. We coordinate translators, reviewers, and so on. That includes core guidance, exams, video work, subtitling, animation, and localization. We've done webpages and marketing content, even emails.

What about on the quality and accreditation side?

Quality and accreditation involves a lot of work with our key partners, PeopleCert. Basically, we set the rules for accreditation and network quality so that PeopleCert can operationalize them.

When we launch a new product, we set and agree the trainer accreditation requirements. We will decide that trainers need to have X years of experience, for example.

How did you end up heading both teams?

I've got a really good, stable translations team. It's a well-oiled machine. They know how to get stuff done and I trust them, so I don't need to be as involved as I used to be.

When I became Head of Quality & Accreditation, it was one of those serendipitous moments where a door opened and I walked through.



It actually makes quite a lot of sense. We are a global organization, but we usually have a UK-centric approach, which doesn't work everywhere. Our rules don't work in the same ways in the USA as they do in China. The global perspective I have from my translations work adds a lot to my role in accreditation and quality.

What is it like being a woman in those industries?

I've worked in the UK for something like 27 years. When I first came here it was a big shock to the system from a cultural perspective—the way that I speak is different from the way that other people speak.

I've always been straightforward, but I've been called aggressive. Big headed. I've been called loads of different things. But a man who is way more straightforward than me might be called determined.

Sometimes I would say something and be ignored. Then someone else would say exactly the same thing, and everybody would stop talking and

listen just because it was a man.

It is what it is.

It's a lot better now than it used to be. After a while I think you just learn to navigate certain things.

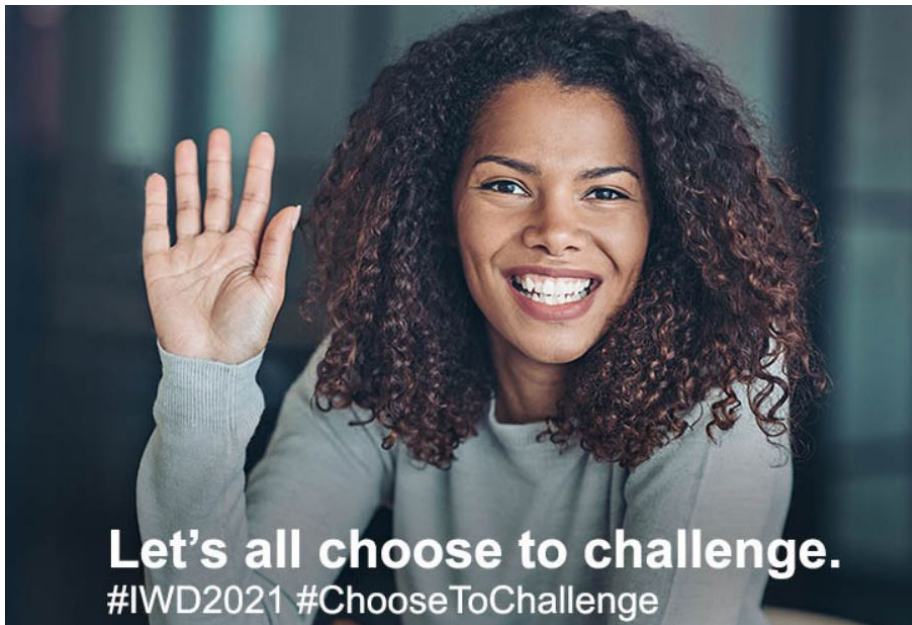
How do you react to biases like those you just described?

The thing is, I'm not a white person. I've always been an immigrant, wherever I lived. Right there, that's two sources of problems that I have to challenge continually.

I've always had to say: "No, sorry that's not right." Or "You can't say that to me."

I've also had to just leave—drop some projects or jobs or whatever—because they weren't right for me.

Sometimes it's a great job, but that doesn't matter. It's not for me. That's not how I want to be treated. I would go to job interviews for amazing jobs and see the attitude of the people, and I would just think "No, I don't want to



work with this person because I know how they will treat me.”

Do you think the professional world is changing?

Well, more and more women are being appointed to senior positions in loads of different industries. I think also with better education there are always more women taking professional jobs.

IT is very male-dominated, but there are some really, really strong women in the industry. When I think about all the authors and SMEs that we work with, all the women who contribute to the industry, there are so many more of them now than before.

But then, I still think the industry does not give enough prominence to women. In IT, people are way more likely to listen to an older white man than a woman, even if that woman is an SME or actually works in the field. Women are too often invisible.

Also, the Me Too movement and recent awareness around BLM have shocked people into action. They can't dismiss a woman complaining about sexual harassment anymore.

What does 'choose to challenge' mean to you?

Don't be a bystander.

Ask the hard questions. I always asked about equity and salary parity and why is this not happening and why aren't we doing that?

I always cared about equity. Not equality: equity. Now I care even more because I have a daughter.

Look at some of the men in recent years who have been accused of disgusting things. A lot of them have got daughters, but it doesn't compute in their heads that what they do to women, other people might do to their daughters.

What issue do you think is most important for women in the professional world today?

Is there one issue? I don't think so.

If anything, Covid-19 has shown that there's a very thin veneer of equality right now.

Look at couples with children: either they've had to hire in help so that they could carry on working, or one of the parents has had to give up work. Generally speaking, the women have chosen to go on furlough. Women tend to be the ones with part-time jobs and are the main carers for children.

It's also really important to talk about mental charge and emotional labour. It's almost always women who take on that mental stress, and it's impossible to understand if you haven't experienced it yourself.

As a manager, do you do anything specific to promote, encourage, or develop the women in your team?

I empower my people. I don't micromanage. And I try to name people; I don't just say 'the team has done really well'. I name people specifically and make them responsible for what they do.

What does a gender-equal world look like to you?

A world where we don't need a special day to celebrate women.

Someplace where I'm never asked how it feels like to be a woman in the workplace.

When having your child does not impact your work-life balance.

I like to think we will get there, but I don't think we are anywhere near. There's so much more to do.

What advice do you have for women starting a new career?

Don't take any sh*t.

Don't apologize. Don't apologize for what you're saying. Don't apologize for what you're doing. If you come into a room apologetically, no one will pay attention, so leave your imposter syndrome at the door.

Be confident in your knowledge. No one has had your experiences and no one has been in your shoes, so if you say 'this is the right way to do it', you don't have to explain.

Be who you are, and if it's not working for you don't change yourself. Go somewhere else.

Be with people who value you and your experiences and start where you are. Make those small changes at your level and make them bigger as you go along.

'A challenged world is an alert world'

#ChoosetoChallenge
#AXELOSforEquality

