

Let's
~~not~~ talk
about
a gender

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Dare to question the status quo, don't accept that if that's how it has always been then that's how should be, stand up to and question attitudes which do not seem fair, be part of those who open up the system.



Maxine Roper
Co-founder of Connecting Food,
France

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Who is Maxine Roper?

Can you explain a little more about your background? (city/country; training, etc.)

I was born and grew up in the UK, near Cambridge. Did a Masters in business at university in UK, then an executive MBA in France. I worked in sales & marketing at Nestlé UK & France, Mars UK & France, then moved to France with Sara Lee, worked at Andros then Avril/Sofitproteo, at C-level positions.

What was your experience at university? (Gender balance?)

There was a good gender balance at University and during my MBA.

What advice would you give to any young person starting to build a career similar to yours today?

Date to make significant career moves to open up your horizons: change country, change verticals (move from food to tech), try entrepreneurship. Then start over.

Do you feel that your career would have been different if you were a man?

YES definitely! I would have asked for and got far bigger pay rises, both in existing companies and when changing companies. I would not have been penalized for having children: I once had to hide one of my pregnancies to be promoted. In one of the companies that I worked for, I had to promise not to have any more children to get a C-Level position. All of this would never have happened to a man with 3 children.

Concerning Connecting Food

Why did you choose/create this company?

While working at big agrifood companies, I saw the opportunity in bringing new technologies into agri-food industry supply chains. Beyond my marketing director point of view, I identified that blockchain had the power to improve efficiencies, increase transparency, and bring augmented quality controls.

I already have had some experience as an entrepreneur before and thought that making food chains more transparent had to be my next challenge. Meeting with Stefano Volpi, my co-founder, made us want to start Connecting Food together.

Would you say that agriculture is really a man's world, or do you see more women in this industry as well?

Agriculture seems traditionally dominated by men, this is unfortunately perpetrated even with new technologies such as AgTech, which seem still dominated by men. Our sales director Samantha Gadene that worked in the agricultural sector in the middle-east even reported that some of the clients she was working for were so surprised she was a woman they did not know how to interact professionally with her!

In France, we are lucky to have a good gender balance in the universities (not so much in tech, but we're getting to it!). We don't have trouble finding very well-educated and highly-

skilled profiles to hire at Connecting Food. (Cheers to H  l  ne, Cil  ne, Sophie, Francesca, Aur  lie, Alice, Samantha, Cyrille, Coline and Elsa, that are part of our team!)

Can you mention some of the gender equality measures your company has in place, which do you think is the best / most efficient?

We strive to have gender balance as much as possible in the company, starting with the 2 founders (50/50), the team (almost 50/50). The most difficult challenge is finding women for the Tech team.

What could they do as a next step? What should agricultural enterprises do better?

The agriculture industry has been slow to adapt to social trends towards animal welfare, fair-pay, transparency in practices and in the origins of food. Any strong bias (gender, age, ethnicity or origin) gives a biased view, older, white, male-dominated industries will not be adapted to world demand, which is made up of multiple age-groups, 50/50 gender balance, etc. Opening up C-level positions and encouraging women can balance this bias on the longer term, and better position agricultural enterprises to identify trends and meet future demand by being more in-line with the market.

Your message

What would you say to your 10-year-old self?

Dare to question the status quo, don't accept that if that's how it has always been then that's how should be, stand up to and question attitudes which do not seem fair, be part of those who open up the system.

What would you like to say to the decision-makers?

Get ready for a new braver world ;))



Maxine Roper,
Co-Founder of Connecting Food, France