



Podcast with Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson – Transcript

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Steve Walker: We're at the SLCC National Conference. The 50th anniversary. I'm here with Baroness Grey-Thompson. A fantastic introduction today when you were our first keynote speaker this morning, and Seize the Day, I think, was the title.

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson: It was - it's about making the most of your opportunities. And I'm very lucky in my career that I had lots of opportunities and I tried to make the most of them. And it's also lovely to be here on the 50th anniversary, which is kind of a real moment of celebration and lovely that people are able to come together and share experiences to each other. I think one thing Covid's made us realize, yeah, technology is great and actually it's been cool because it's been hybrid, but actually having the chance to see each other and talk... and it's as much about what happens behind the scenes over a coffee as the presentations on stage.

Steve Walker: Yes, exactly. I think that the social aspect - COVID gave us probably a two-year gap from any type of face to face activity at conferences like this, where of course, then the attendance today and I know other members of the SLCC, it's absolutely full. I don't think there's any room for anyone else to attend. I think, of course, having persons like yourself, Tanni, here to speak, I think is a big draw. I think it's important. And the message that you're delivering, that you're promoting, I think it's important. The conference is focusing on climate change, which I think is something that's really, really important, and I think it impacts everybody. And you were saying during your keynote that you're trying to help that, aren't you? That you're looking at areas where you can make an impact.

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson: Well, I think everyone can make an impact and I think sometimes we talk about big changes and they're really important, but also lots of little changes can make a difference. So around climate change, everyone can do something in a different way. Whether that's people are more thoughtful about turning off lights for other reasons at the moment, maybe, than just the climate change, but it's things like that. How much energy do we use? How much do we travel? What do we need to do, what can we do differently? Actually, we can all eat less meat and do things in a different way. So, yeah, partly what I was talking about was people's personal responsibility to change, but also being quite creative in those changes that we can make because there's lots of big things around at the moment. Not just cost of living and cost of fuel and climate change. There's lots of things we need to just do better to make a better society.

Steve Walker: Yes, definitely. It's education, always, isn't it? It's explaining the benefits of these actions. But I think climate change is something that definitely everybody feels, that from the council perspective, the town and parish council perspective, from societies like the SLCC, that message

needs to be delivered down to those to deliver to their communities, to show them the benefits of that town. And again, I think during your speech, we were just talking, it's just come to me, actually....there's a slide with a cabbage. We're really interested in this slide with the cabbage. I just remembered that before you came in and joined us.

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson: Yeah, it was the same my grandfather had, which was aim high. Even if you hit a cabbage, no one's got any clue where it's come from. But I think you just made it up. And it's about having a goal in a dream, and I kind of have taken it to be what I want it to be to some extent, but it's about thinking about your own personal impact and it's about not being afraid to dream. That was as an athlete, when lots of people didn't think disabled people could be athletes. That's what I wanted to do. So lots of luck along the way to making it happen. It's not just you decide to do it and it happens. There's a long path to that, but I think sometimes it's really easy to get stuck in the here and now, because that matters. You've got to get your job done today and you've got to get your to do list done, and you have to do the stuff that's there, but it's also taking time. And as an athlete, you do have time to stop and think about the bigger picture. And now in politics, there's less time to do that, but we all need to stop and just think, okay, what's next? What are we going to do? How are we going to do it? And for me, it's always been people in my career that have really made a massive difference to what I can do. And, you know, it's having like-minded people around you, having critical friends, having challenged and question yourself on what you can do differently.

Steve Walker: So do you find where you've done remarkably well in sport, that crossover into politics, the disciplines learned in training in sport, moving into politics, do you find that they're of a great benefit to you, as do they transition those skills?

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson: They completely transition across most of it. So you've just got to get a load of really boring stuff done to have the chance to do the nice stuff. You know, as an athlete, we train twice a day, six days a week, 50 weeks of the year, and that gets you on the start line, you know, sometimes over Paralympic Games or whatever, you know, championship it is. But then you've also got to deliver at the championship and it's the same in working out. You've got to get through the emails, you've got to get through budget, you've got to get through process and governance to have the chance to make a change and do things. I'm a massive fan of process because that had a huge impact on my life as an athlete. I learned very young to train hard and to train smart. And I'd be fibbing if I said I open my inbox every morning and did the emails in the order which they landed, but you've got to get the hard stuff done. But that's just the round. So it transitioned across really well in terms of in politics. You've got a couple of minutes in a bill to make a difference, the same compete on the track, you've got a couple of minutes to win race.

Steve Walker: And that is it. It is. That two minutes, isn't it? As you say, you haven't got all day. You've got to get the headlines over the meat of that out there so that people can take that on board.

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson: And leaving no stone unturned. So probably my family would sound a bit of a control freak over some things. It's whether it's going to a race or going to a bill or going to a meeting, being the best prepared you can be. And if you don't know the answer, I'm a huge fan of just owning it. That's not quite, as always, easy to do, but just being prepared for what you're going to come across. And that's about time management as well. As an athlete, you have to be really good at managing time. And, again, I'm probably not always as good at doing it in politics, but you have to just try and manage the time that you have available, because also, work life balance is incredibly important. You can work 16, 17 hours a day, but it's not healthy. And so part of the reason I like process is to try and make sure that I do have that work life balance.

Steve Walker: Baroness Grey-Thompson, I don't want to take up any more of your time today. I know you're an extremely busy person and it's been really fantastic chatting with you. Are there any messages that you'd like to say to our listeners as sort of a final thought?

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson: I think it's the final thought I had on stage. It was just thank you. The people who do these roles in the community might not be very well known - actually, my frustration with politics is that not enough people know how our British system works. But the role that the people have here today is really vital in terms of getting stuff done and it's a really important part of our democracy. So it's thank you. It might not always be the glamorous ends. I don't think there's always enough recognition for what people do, but I think people, if they can remember that they're kind of a linchpin for what happens in our communities that's really important if they go away. Just feeling that at least your people recognize, and there will be people on the outside who recognize what they do. But what they do doesn't make front page news in terms of when they do really good stuff, it's about just saying thank you and then cracking on and just being the best they can be.

Steve Walker: It's been absolutely wonderful speaking to you. I shall leave you to the rest of the day. I'm sure you've got a lot planned, and it's lovely seeing you and having you here with us today.

Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson: Thank you.