



Catherine Allen graduated from the University of Warwick with a degree in Theatre Studies and is currently Managing Director of Ember TV which has developed an award-winning reputation for creating and distributing highly original video content across a range of media platforms.

It's difficult to know how much being a woman has had an impact as of course I've no experience of what it's like as a man! I think the ways I might be treated differently as a female can be very subtle and as I'm also young sometimes I wonder if it's about that rather than being a woman. I think I was encouraged to do Theatre Studies because it was considered a suitable course for females despite the fact that I'd always been very involved in techie things at home – programming and developing websites etc. However, I did really enjoy my degree and feel that the skills I've gained are very valuable. It was interesting to note what people assumed I'd be interested in though. I joined Warwick Entrepreneurs whilst at uni and was the only girl which wasn't much of an issue for me because I have a very strong personality. But I do think it would have been harder to get my point across if I'd been a more timid female. I pitched to be a sponsorship director and was again the only female pitching which didn't surprise me as I'd already done a lot of reading around gender.

After graduating I was successful in a number of different roles. I'm in joint partnership with a male but when we attended meetings I found clients assumed I was the secretary and would be taking notes. All the discussions tended to be directed at my partner particularly if they were from some of the more male dominated areas we work in, such as finance or manufacturing. I had to learn to assert myself in meetings by introducing myself as a managing partner very early on and by giving out my business card with my job title on it. I then found clients responded differently. I also learned to lower the pitch of my voice a bit on the phone particularly for sales as otherwise it could be a bit screechy. At a networking event an investor commented on how confident I was and I don't think he would have done that if I'd been a male. The advantage though is that I am often the only female at techie events so people tend to talk to me because I'm unusual.

I'm not aware of any discrimination against me but I do know that there are a lot of local business communities centred on going out drinking and potentially even visiting strip clubs. I assume they don't invite me because it isn't something I'd want to be involved in.

In terms of advice for other female students/graduates it would be NOT to think about your gender. Do what you want regardless of whether it's what other people think you should do. Get involved in technology as this is a huge shortage area and needs more women in positions of power. IT skills are crucial in any workplace and make you invaluable so get involved and don't be put off by technology. Look for role models of women who inspire you either in your family or elsewhere and help society to view women and their role in the workplace as positively as possible. Don't be put off if you're the only female doing something – that's all the more reason to do it!