MyPeople®
MEETS

Ninika Nanda
Product & Transformation Leader

We simply need to open our eyes and change our approach in order for talent to flourish.

How to overcome challenges and start building something from nothing!

Diversity and Inclusion - we will only see a change if we stand up and make a difference.

Tell us a bit about who you are and what you do...

I am Ninika Nanda and I'm a Product & Transformation Leader. I've been in the corporate world for the last 15 years, and I am fortunate enough to work with wide range of industries like consulting, Financial Services, Banking, E-commerce & Retail Tech. The common theme in any role I undertake, is my drive & passion for innovation, understanding and solving the key problems, providing product transformation strategies that align with corporate strategic direction. I am also a Board Director and a community leader at various events related to mentorship, the empowerment of women & minority community.

I am fortunate enough to work with a few great mentors who have helped me to grow both personally and professionally. Mentorship is really important, as it helps us to progress in our life, both personally & professionally. I am truly passionate about mentoring others and supporting individuals in different ways to enable people to achieve their goals in both. Currently I mentor in the workplace as well as the local community in various ways.

I'm also a mother to a highly energetic eight-year-old daughter.

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Lead by example, create a circle of safety, support & respect your team members and appreciate their individual contribution.

How did you get to where you are today?

I was born in India to two teachers – a desire to learn and grow has always been important for me, and from my childhood, I have found myself not settling for less than the best. I graduated in Engineering & have a Master's in Management from a prestigious establishment – I must say I perfectly could correlate the inter-dependencies between Business & Technology. For most of my student life, I stayed in a hostel away from home, and this has taught me to be independent and highly collaborative & resilient in demanding situations. I started my corporate career in India, moving to the UK in 2009 to be with my husband, and I have continued building up corporate experience in the UK ever since.

What's your proudest moment?

A couple of things spring to mind:

I worked extremely hard at school, always striving to be top in the class - especially in mathematics and sciences. My parents were teachers, but the drive came from me. Through my hard work I achieved high grades and got to the best university. This was my first springboard.

I'm also proud of my resiliency. This is something that I've worked hard to strengthen myself. Life isn't easy every day, especially being a working mum. But being a mum has made me more resilient in many ways. I am a stronger person, and ironically, I am more committed to my work.

What unique value do you bring to your assignments?

We all bring different things to the table.

I bring the ability to think **strategically** and act **tactically** in parallel. I always find a quick solution to the problem and ready with pan B if plan A does not work.

I can analyse problems quickly, get to the

root cause and produce tailored solutions to address the specific challenges and moving targets.

I am satisfied with what I deliver today, but I reflect on this immediately afterwards and question what I could have done better. This drives me to continually strive for more.

What has been your most career defining moment that you are proud of?

I deliver the best product solution with a blend of best technical & business approach and my education background helps me a lot in understanding this quickly.

As a strategic product leader, this has enabled me to accomplish several key deliverables which I am proud of which includes,

- Building a global ecommerce platform with optimisation, with immediate 20% revenue enhancement
- Building Omnichannel, acquirer agnostic, complex banking payment products with advanced capabilities across wide segmentations
- Delivering an international digital transformational journey for a better user experience, which also reduced business cost by over 15% for a claim process
- Building a strategic platform in an International market for a large retail company

How do you think the Covid-19 crisis is rapidly reshaping the "what" and "how" of digital transformation agendas?

It is extremely easy to focus on the sheer enormity of the situation that we are all facing and think that everything has changed. Whilst a lot certainly has, and some of it may never change back, there are also a lot of things which haven't changed.

Knowing where to start with your digital

strategy can be hard and feel overwhelming at the best of times. It's even more difficult right now with the pandemic. But we can reflect and break it down into what we know to be true, and what we know has changed and hasn't changed. Then we can build it into a strategy which predominantly focuses on our strengths, with enough flexibility in our approach.

The pandemic has accelerated e-commerce growth faster than before and manifested itself in a few ways. There hasn't been much fundamental change in digital marketing channels, digital landscape, and product & services. However, there are lots of changes in customer behaviour which have had a larger impact on how a product or service is delivered. For example, customers have turned to e-commerce for day-to-day essentials, with a substantial increase in home food delivery & pick up, home school learning and so on.

Which technologies would you say have streamlined the e-commerce experience & what impact has Covid had on this?

Covid-19 has taught us many things, including that uncertain times can call for quick pivots to sales and marketing plans & the emerging trend of the e-commerce channel. Businesses have had to evolve quickly with trade shows, events, sales meetings all going online for the foreseeable future, through adaptable sales and marketing strategies.

As we are navigating our new normal, one place that is experiencing an incredible boom in traffic - e-commerce websites. There has definitely been a shift in consumers behaviours to online shopping to gather the essentials as well as other items & Covid has had an enormous impact on that. There are advanced & disrupting technologies affecting the ecommerce experience like advanced identity, CRM integration for better customer experience, mobile dominants

online sales, e-wallet, ecommerce subscriptions, use of social media, voice search, chat bots, as well as emerging platforms like Magento, the use of disruptive technologies to predict customer behaviours like AI, the use of ITO and many more.

What common barriers do you face when mobilizing, managing, and developing high performance teams?

As we all know High-Performance can be a blessing for an organisation, as well as for a true leader. High performers play a crucial role in boosting organisational productivity and growth by meeting challenging outcomes.

In my opinion, the foundational pillars of a High-Performance team are mutual trust and confidence, open communication, and a collaborative approach.

Such teams are sometimes faced with several challenges which act as impediments in their journey of excellence, such as differences in the attitude, approaches, professional aspirations, qualification and experience backgrounds of the team members, role ambiguity, poor leadership, politics, lack of constructive feedback, lack of trust etc.

A true leader is one who knows how to remove the impediments by creating highly collaborative environment.

How would you describe your leadership style?

I practise an authentic, values led leadership approach where I can support & advocate the teams I work with and achieve the best they can, through clear goals, collaboration, and integration of ideas from different areas.

Leading comes naturally to me, and I must say I am passionate about this. From my childhood, whether in as a classroom monitor or a hostel team leader while staying in a boarding, or a team at work, I am passionate to support & advocate for the people I am
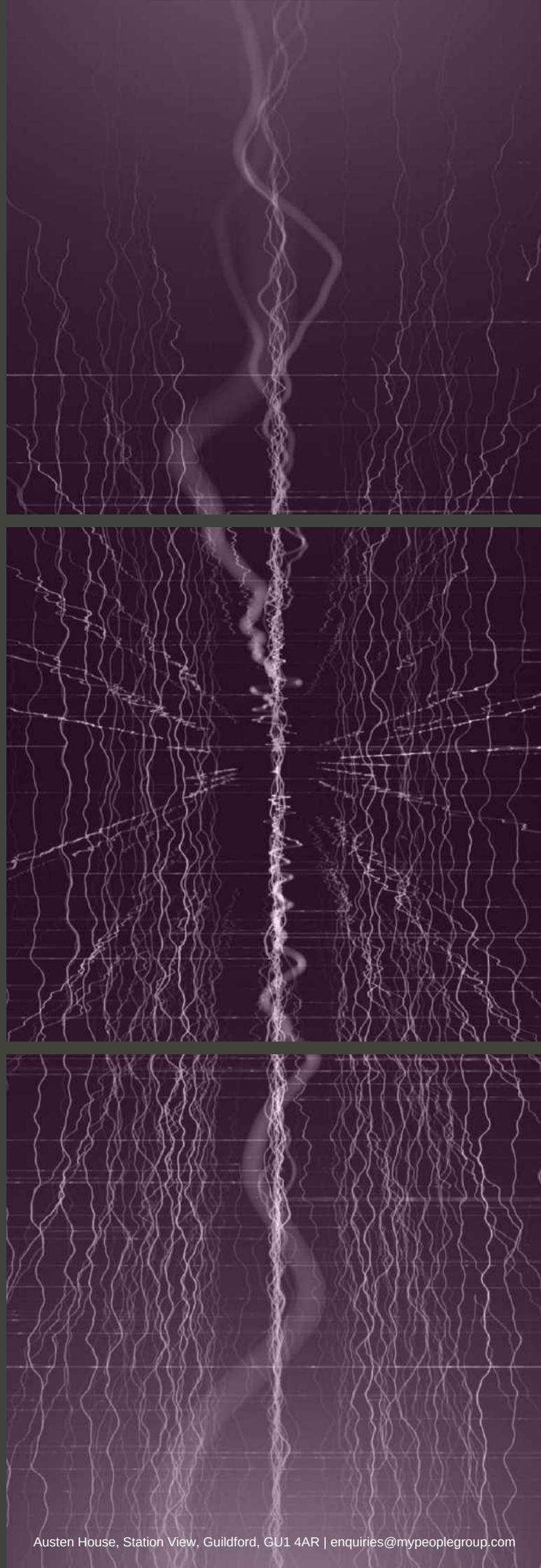
surrounded with.

Leadership is hard in a very practical way. It's about managing politics skillfully and effectively to achieve what's most important; building bridges between people, departments, and siloes; raising hard-to-talk-about issues in a way that others agree to address them; acting courageously in risky situations; showing up in critical leadership moments with confidence; connecting with people in a way that inspires their commitment, responding productively to opposition without losing your focus; skilfully handling people who push back; and building trusted relationships, even with difficult people or people you don't like.

Over the time I have learnt how to build trust not only with a colleague but also among the colleagues in my team, by working towards team collaboration & communication.

Is there a personal inspiration behind you becoming passionate about leadership?

I must say I was inspired from an early age by my mother, as she not only helps & supports people around her but also goes the extra mile to enable & fulfill their needs. She has taught me to try & try again, until you succeed & thrive. There is no failure in her dictionary as she says "Failure is the pillar of success" & we should always treat failure as learning & one step before success.

From my childhood, I enjoyed helping my classmates & teachers by becoming a class monitor. I was a team leader at the hostel I stayed in whilst boarding after 16. I also enjoy helping local community at my spare time. I am passionate to support & advocate the people I am surrounded with & work with.

Many women who want to have children worry about having to choose between being a great mother and being a great employee. What advice

would you give to someone who is looking to continue to progress their career alongside motherhood?

I have come across many great female leaders who are also amazing mothers. Setting up a support system & processes at work and at home is crucial to be a successful employee & mother. I still remember one occasion where I set up some time with the director I had worked with in the past and explained what type of working arrangement would suit me & my family and got his support. I'm fortunate to be blessed with a supportive partner and we often share the responsibilities and complement each other. It's about understanding what works for you as a working mum and having an open dialogue with your employer and partner.

Over the time I have learnt to stop judging myself, focus on delivering the commitment rather than being a perfectionist, communicating my ambition & aspiration openly, asking for the feedback deliberately for better tomorrow, being ruthless with time, prioritising my task, and engaging myself with the activities I enjoy mostly.

Motherhood has taught me to be more organised, resilient, and to multitask. For me, being a better mother & thriving in my profession are both incredibly important. At the end of it all, I want to be a role model for my daughter. **When there is a will, there is a way.**

As a leader, what are your strategies for promoting and nurturing women in the workplace? What do you think we should be doing more of to encourage more girls/women to consider a career in tech?

It has become increasingly obvious that we need to create businesses and opportunities that nurture women and remove the obstacles they face & promote diversity at workplace. Senior management in corporate organisations are adopting various strategies
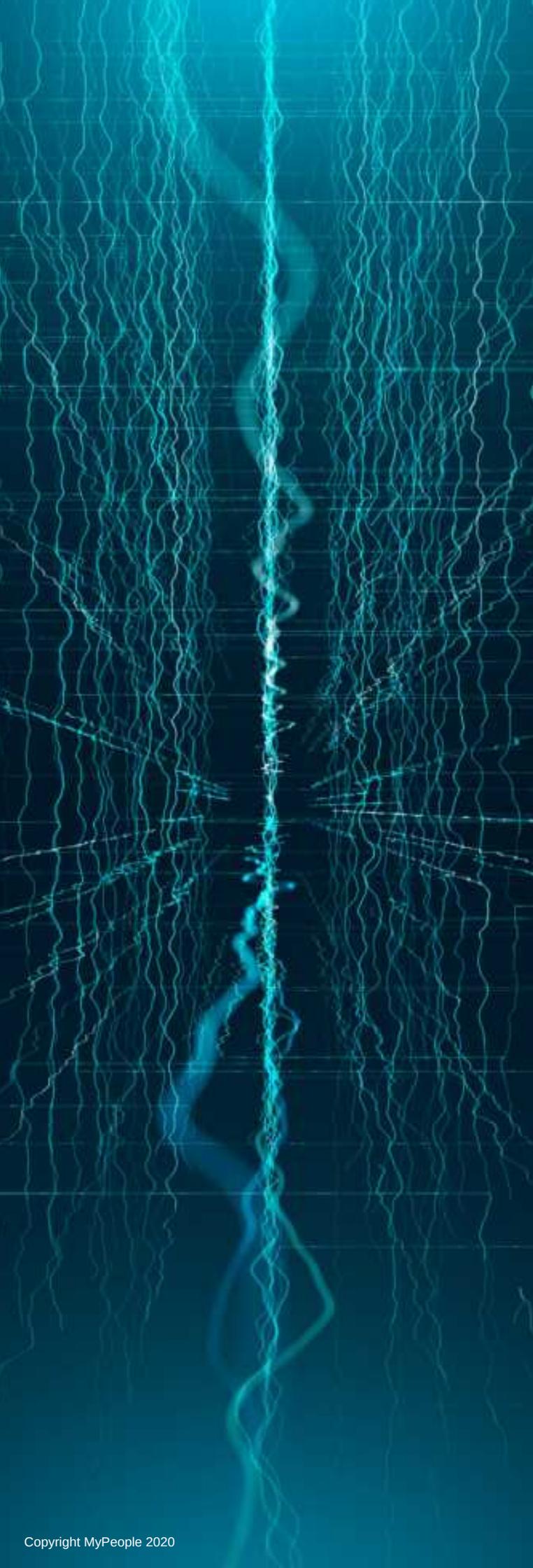
& techniques to promote different women related events.

Creating & practicing flexible working arrangements is important, because once you become a mother, it's likely you will become the primary caregiver & that is a general trend we need to break. Having a system in place (i.e Government) that supports childcare costs and returning to work before the child is age three is important. We need to increase the visibility of female role models who have achieved what they wanted to & promote them. Another major step would be to change the narrative that mothers who 'leave' their children to return to work are 'bad mothers'. There need to be careers that offer progression, including if the role is full-time, flexible hours, working from home, school time holidays etc.

Women also need to LEAN IN and develop greater confidence and self-belief and an understanding that they can follow their dreams and it is not always about climbing the ladder. It is about being able to pursue dreams, interests and learning and having support system at work that provides flexible working and hours around childcare regardless of gender. If your dream is to be a CEO then go for it & if you want to become an interior designer, that gives you immense pleasure.

I understand that you're passionate about Diversity and Inclusion, tell us a little bit about that...

Having been born and brought up in India, moved to UK in 2009, travelled various part of the globe including USA & Europe for business, and worked for over 15 years in various large & mid-sized corporates, with wide range of colleague with wider set of skills – I have experienced and benefitted from a wide range of diversity in terms of people & culture.

I am truly passionate about diversity and inclusion, particularly through empowering

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women & supporting BAME communities and maintaining a holistic work culture. We all need to come forward together to help each other to thrive and grow in the workplace as well as achieve corporate objectives.resilient in demanding situations. I started my corporate career in India, moving to the UK in 2009 to be with my husband, and I have continued building up corporate experience in the UK ever since.

According to a 2018 Tech Nation Study, only 15% of the digital workforce are from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) backgrounds. In your opinion, how can we increase not only the visibility of BAME role models, but create opportunities for individuals from BAME backgrounds to enter the sector?

Go back a few years, and I didn't have any clue what BAME was. I started learning about it in one of the organisations I worked with, and ever since, I stand up for this community.

Current cultural and leadership climates are the main barriers to the progression of talented BAME staff within organisation. There is no doubt senior leaders are committed to understanding the blockages that prevent talented staff, of all backgrounds, meeting their personal aspirations within the organisation and effectively delivering the business goal & getting promoted. **There must be a top-down decision to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are reflected in the company's core values.** Zero tolerance, spreading the awareness through training & open talk about race & ethnicity, identifying the barriers, recognition, equal opportunities are some of the steps organisations are now taking.

Encouraging more role models for this community, as well as supporting & advocating of BAME communities, will help to bring better diversity to organisation by creating equal opportunity for everyone.

Currently I am a member of the steering committee for 'Women in Tech' at Tesco and I am a hardcore supporter of the BAME community at Tesco.

How do you build trust in your team's – what is the critical factor?

It's said that 'workers don't quit their jobs, they quit their bosses.'

There is nothing wrong in saying that trust is the primary ingredient of any kind of relationship – whether that's at work or home. Leading by example, creating a circle of safety, supporting your team members, respecting each of the team members and appreciating their individual contribution, are some of the ingredients in building trust within the team.

I often talk openly & honestly with my team about what I am not good at or what I don't know and ask them for help. It's okay not to know everything.

Do you have any specific reading/ websites you would recommend for staying updated?

The first piece to take care of is news, which means staying on top what is happening around you and about the notable events taking place locally, nationally, and internationally. Industry news, as well as major trends in other industries that affect your own, are also vital. I try my best not to miss the morning & evening BBC news update which is a quick update. I also subscribe to news digests from a range of newspapers, following LinkedIn & Twitter, and newsletters for specific industries. LinkedIn is my favorite place where I love to spend at least 10 minutes every day to get a quick update and I do subscribe to the news I am interested in. Harvard Business Review is my favorite read on LinkedIn.

Also reading a book around your favorite topic is great to upskill yourself. For example, I love female empowerment & leadership
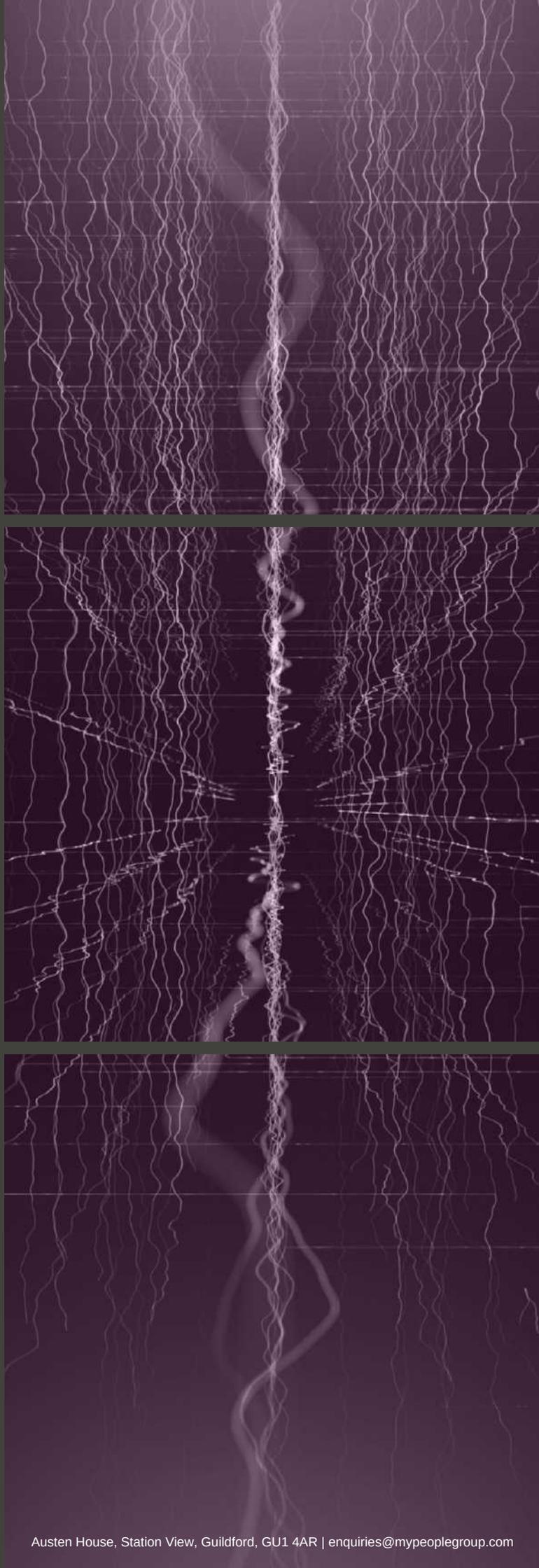
related reading, in addition to industry related books. 'Lean In' by Sheryl Sandberg is my all-time favorite in female empowerment. Currently I am reading 'Power of Positive Leadership' by Jon Gordon. I make sure I spend at least 10 minutes reading each evening, before going to bed.

How you spend your time when you are not at work? Do you have any specific hobbies or interests?

When not working I love to spend time with my family. My eight-year-old daughter keeps me busy with various activities. I love interior decoration, gardening, fashion, and travel. I also have an interest in property investment.

I wish I could spend more time reading books and travelling the world, which I love to do.

What can we expect to see from you in future?

In some ways, I feel like I've only just begun. I have so much more to give.

I want to continue to hone, practice and develop my leadership skills, as well as use my strategic & innovative skills to solve business problems and to achieve business goals.

I want to support & advocate the teams I work with to achieve the best they can, through clear goals, collaboration, and the integration of ideas from different areas with an authentic and values led leadership technique.

I am passionate about diversity and inclusion, particularly through empowering women and maintaining a holistic work culture. I want to help the people around me to thrive and grow in the workplace, as well as achieving corporate objectives. I love getting involved in the local community & charitable activities. I am currently a leader in the Cambridge Community Volunteer Police Cadets in the Cambridge community where I love mentoring the students or teenagers.

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