

Leading Ladies

By Nancy Honey

Interviews by Hattie Garlick

Caroline Michel: *Literary and Talent Agent*

1959	Born in Harrogate, Yorkshire
1982	Joined Chatto & Windus publicity department
1990	Managing Director, Granta
1992	Publisher Vintage, Random House
2001	Managing Director, HarperPress
2005	Managing Director, William Morris Agency (London)
2007	Chief Executive, Peters Fraser & Dunlop

I love being a woman. I want to come back as a woman; I would hate to come back as a man. I think there are natural attributes you can use as a woman and there is nothing wrong with using them.

Timing is everything: being able to work out the mood of a room and the mood of a meeting. And I think women have, generally, a greater ability to do that than men.

A little charm goes a long way. Everything is negotiable, nothing is impossible. I don't believe in confrontation but I do believe in being polite and charming because I think it gets you further.

I believe in the people I work with and I trust them. If you work with people you admire and they know that you believe in them, I think you can do anything.

Women can and do juggle a great deal more. It drives my assistant mad. I'll do my emails, speak on the phone, and have a conversation with her about something while she's in the room, just to get the pace of things done.

I don't think the next generation will be so driven to have it all, all at once. That's the battle our generation of women fought for them, and a right we won for them.

I've been incredibly lucky in the support women have given me. From the gentle intelligence of Liz Calder to the dynamism of Gail Rebuck, each in their way have taught me something and then said, "Okay, now take the step up." Most women feel like someone's about to tap them on the shoulder and say, "Okay, back to where you should be."

For most women of our generation, very little was ever expected of them. At school, we had careers talks about being florists or air hostesses –or, if we were really lucky, getting to Lucy Claytons [finishing school]. That gives you a tremendous freedom to think, *okay, let's give it a go. Nobody was expecting me to get this far and I still feel there's a long way to go.*

Listen to the language that people use to describe women. Men are allowed to get away with being angry, women are called hysterical. Men are allowed to get away with being rude, women are called emotional. Until that language changes, there will always be that battle.

It goes right back to the basics – as women get up in the morning, we look at ourselves and think, *eurrrghhh!* There's that constant feeling of looking at the day in front of you and having to pull yourself together while you're also getting the kids organized in their lives, answering ten emails that you should have done the night before and trying to put your mascara on while telling your seventeen year old son, "No, you can't go off to that festival with X..."

We begin from four steps back. I feel every day like I'm starting from the beginning again. I think it's a terrible, terrible thing that we carry.

Chauffeurs can be put on tax breaks but nannies can't. Now that, to me, seems crazy. Childcare is always a big issue and working women get to a point, sometimes, where they just can't cope. If your child is suffering, because you're not there, what do you do? Will the father take over the childcare? Sometimes they will, but more often it's the mother.

Somebody once gave me a useful phrase: 'in the scheme of things.' When I was younger, everything seems like a massive mountain to get over; I wish I had stopped to ask: "In the scheme of things... is it that bad?"

I'd try and handle things myself rather than turn to someone and say, "Help, I've fucked up." That's what I always say to the people I work with: "Nothing is that bad in the scheme of things. Ask for help, we will sort it out."

What I love most about reaching the age that I am, is how strong one's friendships become. You have all lived your lives and you don't have to posture and there's nothing you can't confess to. There's nothing you can't laugh about and you realize how fallible we all are.

I look at my women friends who are running big companies or holding down legal cases all over the world and there's no way we'd do what men do – waving their willies around. Instead we tend to laugh about the stupid things we've done in the day. And that keeps you human I think.