



**ROTHERAS**



# Women in Leadership Conversations

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Christina Yardley

Partner & CEO

Rotheras

Equality & Diversity Committee Series

***Sarah Singh, a member of the NLS Equality & Diversity Committee and a newly qualified Solicitor in Rotheras Private Client Department spoke with Rotheras CEO, Christina Yardley, in recognition of International Women's Day 2023.***

❖ Can you tell us about your role at Rotheras? What does a typical day look like for you?

As CEO of a growing, people-focused firm there is great variety in my work. Generally, financial analysis and planning, business and strategic development, together with team and individual meetings, make up a good part of my day.

I am a morning person so 4am is my favourite time and I like to read and make notes on bigger picture things whilst my mind is fresh.

My small human, Leo wakes around 6.30am, so I get myself ready so we can have some great time together before I start work properly at 8. I do my best to wrap up urgents for 5pm so we can have a few hours as a family before Leo's bedtime. Like many working mums I will catch up if I need to after Leo has gone to bed but aim not to and make a point of not working at the weekends unless I really need to.

It took me a long time to realise that proper breaks and holidays actually make me much more productive as well as happier.

❖ What do you find most interesting about your role within the firm?

I absolutely love my role as it gives me the opportunity to help our people achieve their potential, which in turn means they can really look after our clients.

I am extremely proud to lead the organisation in its strategic development and to be part of such an amazingly diverse, inclusive and caring firm culture.

❖ What does being a woman in law mean to you?

I recognise the importance of representation in inspiring others into the profession; but I see myself as a lawyer, who happens to be a woman.



- ❖ As a successful woman in the legal profession, have you experienced any significant barriers in your career so far, and if so, how have you dealt with this?

Whilst I've been very fortunate in my career, I hear all too often of the barriers people have faced due to gender, career path/university, neurodiversity, age etc. It's so important that we continue to work towards being fully representative of our clients and the diverse communities we serve. Take gender as an example, as women now make up the majority of the legal profession, law firms with outdated attitudes towards women are surely planning their own demise.



- ❖ What challenges, if any, do you think you face in expediting your role, specifically as a female CEO?

I'm not going to dress it up, balancing being a new mum at 39 with a demanding career during a global pandemic has had its challenges! That said, I have never felt happier, more fulfilled and as productive as I do now. I have found that approaching the challenges with enthusiasm and creativity has helped me. Great support at home and at work is critical and planning flex time each day for contingencies can save your sense of humour.

- ❖ Have you experienced or sensed resistance when taking the lead in male dominated workplaces/situations and how have you handled this, if so?

Yes there have been times along the journey and at best it's irritating, at worst it can be very difficult. My approach has always been to stay focused on what I'm trying to achieve and remember the issue isn't with me, it's with them. At Rotheras I am fortunate to work with great, modern-minded men who know and appreciate the value of diversity in the workplace and that really does help all people to thrive.

❖ Which woman has influenced you the most in life? Why?

My mother, for not only being an incredible cheerleader to those around her but for being without question the bravest person I have ever known. Her example and support enables me to approach challenges with excitement, not fear.

❖ What advice would you give to other women entering the legal profession and those looking to progress in their legal careers?

Choose an area of law that you are passionate about and work hard to become an expert in your field. Dedicate time to honing your soft skills as these become vital in managing progression well. Find an organisation that you not only believe in, but that really values your contribution so you can bring your whole self to work. Aim to establish strong networks and most important of all, never stop learning.

❖ Are there any positive changes you have seen that have actively helped you and/or other women be successful within the profession?

The pandemic has undoubtedly led to a seismic shift in the way we view work. Hybrid models can balance quality time in the office with colleagues and focused time working from home without the commute. It has opened up dialogue about quality of life in a way we've not seen before. Honest conversations around physical and psychological health have enhanced wellbeing within the profession. We've all got a bit braver, I've personally adopted more of a 'let's try it' approach.

As well as fantastic female role models within the profession, I'm really thrilled to see so many men championing women at home and at work.

# Mum

[Muhm] • noun

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The greatest woman in your world.

This woman loves you unconditionally from birth.

The one who always puts her kids before herself and the one you can always count on.



## ❖ How important do you feel family friendly working practices are both to you and your firm, and what measures have you adopted to ensure inclusivity for women and other parents/carers at Rotheras?

Being family-friendly and embracing diversity runs through the fabric and culture of Rotheras and was a key reason I wanted to be a partner here. We currently have an equal number of men and women partners most of whom are parents and grandparents and/or carers themselves, balancing their own life and work commitments around helping people in their teams do the same, whilst ensuring great client service.

Our Hybrid Working Policy means that people come to the office 2-3 times a week for the most part. Flexible working options and generous holiday allowances really help men and women successfully manage their life. In recruitment campaigns across all areas, we actively encourage applications from people with non-linear career paths and from under-represented groups. Promotion within the firm is based on skill. This means that a person's choice to either have a family or take time out to care for one, is fully respected without this adversely impacting on their ability to progress.

Our management team review our employee benefits on an ongoing basis. In the last year alone, we rolled out a new health scheme, expanded our maternity offering, benefits for dependants and pension provisions.

## ❖ What do you think the legal profession can do to further widen diversity at senior levels?

I think the challenge is not just widening diversity at senior levels but maintaining it. The pressure of balancing family, career and health issues for example can mean that very talented people decide the tank is empty and leave.

Leaders and managers need to take responsibility and do the deep work involved in creating thriving, diverse, healthy cultures. As well as having the right policies in place, you need to actively and honestly audit them, being prepared to ask difficult questions and accept the answers you hear with a willingness to respond.

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