



**Say Yes to the Challenge – Season 4 – Episode 1 - Shaunagh Brown – The WorkJoy Jam**

**Beth Stallwood: Welcome to the WorkJoy Jam. I'm Beth Stallwood, your podcast host. I'm really excited in this episode to be joined by a fantastic sportsperson. She'll tell you more about which sport, Shaunagh Brown, and Shaunagh has had such an interesting and varied career, both in sport and outside sport. When I was introduced to her, I just found her story so incredible, really, really inspiring in terms of how she approaches things. I love how she has always asked for help, how she's always done it in a way that has helped her get what she needs. How she's so positive about things, even when things are tough, and she's just a real inspiration to me, and I really hope you love this conversation, I know I did. Welcome to the WorkJoy Jam. In this episode, I am massively excited to be joined by Shaunagh Brown, and when I first had a conversation with Shaunagh, I was so excited, impressed, engaged with her story, with where she's come from and where is now and all the amazing things she's doing, and I can't wait to share this conversation with you. So, Shaunagh, first of all, over to you, can you tell everybody who you are and what it is that you do?**

Shaunagh Brown: So, firstly, hello, Beth, hello to everyone listening. I can tell you in brief, or try and keep it brief. So, as of at the moment, I am a professional rugby player, I play rugby as a tighthead prop for Harlequins in England, and then alongside that, I am a board member of the Student Rugby Football Union. I am part of a feasibility study looking into Women's Lions Rugby tour happening. Then, as we'll get into, like, there's so much that has led me there in the first place, but previously been to Commonwealth Games as a hammer thrower, competed in many a world junior championship but, like I said, I'm very sure we'll get into all of the good stuff later on.

**Beth Stallwood: Amazing, and I love it that you're not just giving that one job you have here. There are many different features of what you're doing, and one thing I didn't know until right now is the feasibility of a Women's Lions Rugby tour. That would be amazing. I would love to watch that, so I'm excited. Hopefully, that will happen. So, Shaunagh, would you be able to do for us, like, your potted career history? Because I think what you've done in the past is totally fascinating. I think everybody else will as well. So often when we see people like you, Shaunagh, and, you know, I was saying to you the other day, I was at Twickenham and I saw a massive picture of you on the side of the stadium and was like, 'Ah, that's so exciting.' We see you for who you are and what you do now, and not the journey that led you here, and I would just love for you to tell everybody about the different things you've done, the journey of your career, and how all of these things have led you to where you are today. So, take it as you will, from wherever you feel is the most relevant, and tell us about your career story.**

Shaunagh Brown: So, like you said, if I start, sort of, towards the end and where I am now, but if I looked back, say, ten years ago, I said to myself, in 2021, I'd be not only a professional rugby player, but playing rugby for England and like you say, have a huge picture of me across Twickenham Stadium, even across the road at Twickenham Stoop Harlequins, there are plenty of pictures of me and the other girls up, I would say, 'Have a laugh.' Not only would I say, 'have a laugh,' I'd say, 'What is rugby?' I grew up not knowing anything about rugby, and just, I guess, it's part of my mantra just to do things and give things a go and see what happens. That's just pretty much where I am now. I'm still just seeing what happens, and people say, 'What do

you want to do when you grow up?' I say, 'I don't know, who knows? I've still got many years ahead of me?' But, if we take it right back, so, I started in sport, like, the reason I am who I am today is almost entirely because of sport. There are obviously external factors like family, friends and so much help and support along the way, but it was all help and support along the way of my sporting journey.

I, sort of, first got into formal sport aged twelve doing athletics, and that was shot put discus and, like, my first life lesson, I guess, was in that in terms of I went to an athletic track thinking that I wanted to run because that's what you done, an athletics track, and that's what athletics track (ph 05.17) are surely made of, is just runners and sprinters. So, went down there with the intention of running and being a sprinter. Soon found out I'm not particularly fast, and that's still true to this day. Actually, not only am I not fast but, for me, it was actually pretty boring, like, just running around. I mean, good luck to all the people that do it. There are many of those who are very good at it, but for me and how my brain works, it was, like, it wasn't for me, and then realised within the sport of athletics, there were so many other aspects to it. The one I picked out was shot put and discus, and there was actually a bit of a referral from the sprint coach. She actually just printed out a bit on the coaching manual and said, 'Here's how to throw a shot put. I think you'd be good at it. Here's a print-out. Go and have your time, like, in a nice, positive way, but I can't actually help you.' In her honesty, like, 'I can't really help you with that, but here are the tools to go and, sort of, help yourself,' as it were.

So, actually, I got into formal sport aged twelve with shot put and discus, and then that in itself has just taken me across so many different places in the world, places in the country, taught me so many, sort of, life lessons along the way. Like I say, starting right from the beginning, i.e. it's not always the headline things that you're good at, and actually you need to try things to know that you're not good at them or don't enjoy them because the two are, again, two different things. Then, from there, sort of, went through all of school doing athletics. A lot of the reasons why I, like I said, experienced so much of the world and met so many different types of people was because of athletics and travelling with my club. Really, now I look back, it was a privilege to be able to be around so many different types of people, whether that be skin colour, personality types, education, and how we speak, what countries we're from, what countries our parents are from, how we came to be in this country. Actually, so many people, even now as adults, don't have that privilege and they are around a lot of the same type of people all the time and don't realise how much joy there is out there in the world to experience. So, yes, pretty privileged in terms of growing up, like, that was very much my normal, like, people from all over the world, people with different accents, different foods, different hair, different clothing. All of that was my everyday growing up.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, amazing.**

Shaunagh Brown: Within athletics, I took it pretty serious pretty quickly because in my first competition ever, I got a bronze medal, and I had not really won a medal before. It was just like, 'Ah, actually, not only is it good fun, but I'm actually quite good at it, it seems.' Then, it was just the confidence from other people who would also tell me, and, again, that's another life lesson, is from people encouraging me and reminding me that, like, 'You are good at it, you can do it,' because even though the distance might not have seemed far or it, sort of, came almost naturally to me, it's still other people saying, like, 'So many people work a long time to get those kinds of distances or to be able to throw the way you do. You've definitely got a talent for it.' So, it's just that recognition from other people and, as we get onto it, it's actually how I got into rugby, was recommendation from other people, which is why, like, we need to expose as many people as we can to as many different life situations, whether it's sport, in work, in family, friends, as we can. Then, like I say, within athletics, took it real seriously and by the time I was seventeen I was competing for Great Britain in the World Youth

Championships, so that's like an under-eighteen age group, and then taking it on from then, it was-, so we started at World Youth Championships, then went onto European Juniors, which is under twenties.

Then, we had Commonwealth Youth Games, which, again, is a, sort of, under-nineteen event, that was in India. Even to this day, that's, sort of, top three best experiences of my life, and that whole concept of meeting so many people from so many different parts of the world. Yes, I got to do that at World Championships, but the World Championships was only athletic, whereas, Commonwealth Youth Games is a whole range of sports and people from places who are not actually even countries, like, they're just territories, people from islands that there are, like, 2,000 people whole population or even just a few thousand. It was just mind-blowing to even listen to their (TC 00:10:00) stories of how they train and the facilities that they don't have and the equipment that they don't have, and what they have to do. They're having to go out to work and provide for the whole family being a fifteen-year-old, being the main breadwinner of a whole family and how they live, types of buildings, types of homes. All of that, I got from a young age. I was eighteen, nineteen at the time, and it's just realising how privileged we are in the UK to be in so many situations. So, definitely, one of the best experiences of my life, and being able to go and watch any sport I wanted any day of the week. Like, once I'd finished competing, I was just going around, and most of it by myself actually. Other people just wanted to chill out or watch the headline events, but I was anywhere that had a ticket or I just liked to keep busy, and, again, that's a theme throughout my life.

Yes, so Commonwealth Youth Games, then a World Junior Games. Then, came to a bit of a sticking point with the transition from being a junior athlete to a senior and, ultimately, I actually changed event in that period. Then, went to the Commonwealth Games 2014 in Glasgow as a hammer thrower, so I'd gone from doing shot put and discus my whole, sort of, childhood and as a youth, changing events, getting older, changing events and finally competed at the highest level in hammer throw.

**Beth Stallwood: Amazing, and hammer throwing is the one that I call, like, the spinny, roundy, chucky one, that's the right one I'm thinking of isn't it?**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, to be fair, they're all quite spinny, roundy, chucky. It's the one that Miss Trunchbull in Matilda is-

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, that's the one. That's exactly how I picture it, as Miss Trunchbull in Matilda.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, and that was a stereotype I had to juggle with growing up, etc, but, yes, like I say, 2014 Commonwealth Games representing England in the hammer throw, made it to the final. Didn't throw too well in the final, very disappointed with myself, like, a lot of tears and a lot of upset, but then that's, kind of, when I started to fall out of love with it the year after that. I always said to myself I was never paid to do it, it was never something that was a career option in terms of income or anything like that and that will go into my jobs afterwards, but I always said to myself if I stopped enjoying it, then it was time to move on. Yes, and then 2015, the end of 2015, that's actually when I found rugby and, I guess, my headline fact in terms of rugby is I had my first game of rugby fifteens in December 2015. By November 2017, less than two years later, I was running out for my first England cap (ph 12.42), my first England game, so it was a pretty good ride, pretty fast ride, but now, yes, just reveling in that. Do you want to go into careers yet?

**Beth Stallwood: Yes. First of all, before you, kind of-, because I know that there's a whole other track, isn't there? There's a whole other story around your career, so this is your sporting career, but that time frame from your first ever trying it out to being in the team is amazingly quick, isn't it?**

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Shaunagh Brown: Yes, it's unheard of, but it's mainly because I had a good foundation and if you do sport, and it just is my, again, like, my mantra, do something now and you never know where it can lead you. So, the only reason why I did excel so quickly in rugby is because I had such a good foundation of strength, speed and power, but then also the mentality side of it as well and being able to keep it. Once I was committing to training, no matter what, no matter whose birthdays, no matter, like, weddings, anniversaries, family parties, it was about going to training, and it was about going to games and that, sort of, competition elite mentality. That all came from athletics and from my coach and that need to be the best almost. I told myself when I started playing rugby that it was just something to do because I'd finished my international career. I thought, 'I just need something to do of an evening because I find it very difficult to just go home and chill out, like, five days.' I can chill out with the best of them, but five to seven days a week, no chance. I just need something to do, so initially just told myself I was going to chill out, and here I am still-

**Beth Stallwood: Here you are on the edge of the Twickenham Stadium in the England team, I love it. Tell us about, so, as you said, you know, when you were doing the hammer throwing, when you were competing, that's not a career that pays the bills. It's nothing something that you can earn a living through, so you were also having a career on the side of it. Tell us some highlights of career you had in the world outside of sport.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, so, my careers as it were, headlines are, the first proper job I had was an apprentice as a British Gas installation engineer. Ultimately, they're the people who come round, rip your old boiler out, rip your central heating system out, radiators, etc, and put new ones in, is the simplest way to describe it. Then, after that, went onto commercial diving, so that's underwater just labouring. So, you look at anything that's halfway out of the water, there's a lot of structure in the water, so sometimes it's literally just a bit of maintenance, going and checking anything that needs changing. It is so broad, it is a whole engineering department in itself. Then, from there, went onto being a firefighter, but going back to British Gas, they supported me so well in the end in terms of with the Commonwealth Games. So, I was with them between 2010 and 2015, like, in the height of my athletics career, and it was a fantastic opportunity. I always knew growing up I didn't want to go to university. A-levels, I tried them, but I went into it thinking they're probably not for me because I was more of the practical learner, so I did gave A-levels a go and tried it for a year. Finished that year, it wasn't for me, so it was about looking for an apprenticeship, and, yes, found British Gas. At the time, I wasn't specifically looking for either a gas apprenticeship nor an installation.

For me, it was just about applying for apprenticeships, so I applied for everything from-, my favourite ones were, within Royal Mail, they maintain their own vehicle, their fleets, so it was a mechanic with Royal Mail. I think I applied to Sky, Virgin Media, Network Rail, so any of those huge companies, BMW in their mechanics. Any of those huge companies with apprenticeships, I was applying for them, and British Gas just happened to be one that got back to me and came up trumps in the end.

**Beth Stallwood: Amazing.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, and just got supported, like I say, through my sporting career with that and got to a point where I asked for this help and support in terms of extra time off work and, sort of, a change of job role to support my athletics career, and just went straight to the top of actually the wider company of British Gas called Centrica and just asked for all of these things, hoping that I might get half of them in terms of support. Ultimately, spoke to the top, and they passed me to this person who passed me to these people. Like, everyone

just wanted to help and, ultimately, made it happen and made the Commonwealth Games in 2014 even possible, all thanks to British Gas and wanting to help and support me.

**Beth Stallwood: I love that for two different reasons. The first one is, isn't it a great example, is if you're really clear about what you need and what you want and ask for it, how much people are willing to help? It's so interesting. So many people say, 'I couldn't possibly ask for these things,' but if you don't ask, you will never get it.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, it is literally that, and I actually don't know where I got that trait from, but it's just, well, it's that kind of moaning thing. If you moan about something, you have to then do something about trying to fix it. If you've not tried to fix it or you've not tried to make it better, then you have no right to moan. Even if you've not told the person, 'This is not quite right,' then you've got no right to moan, so really I just wanted an excuse to moan. I thought if I ask for this and they don't give it to me, I can have a moan, but they gave it all to me, so there's no moaning allowed.

**Beth Stallwood: In my world, Shaunagh, I'm very similar to you. I have a one moan rule, which is you're allowed to moan at me once, but if after that you come and moan at me again and you haven't done anything about it, I'm not going to listen to you because you have to take action on those things. I love that, it's like before I moan, I'll just take the action, but actually the action means I don't need to moan. Wow, that's great. The second thing, which is totally random, but I really love about it is, there are people in this country who you have fitted a new boiler for who probably don't even know that you're now this person who they see on the TV playing rugby. Isn't that interesting, about, you know, the experience of people in different situations?**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes. Yes, there are definitely a few people out there who wouldn't know where I am now. There's actually a family that did get in touch with me afterwards, like, once I'd started playing rugby for England and started building a profile. They said, 'Oh, you came and fitted my boiler back in 2013 or whatever it was.' I was like, 'Oh, that's cool.'

**Beth Stallwood: 'Oh, of course, I remember.' They remembered you. You obviously leave a lovely impression with people. Isn't it great though that alongside your sporting career, you've had support, but you've also had, like, those are really interesting jobs as well, fitting gas boilers, doing the diving, being in these situations of being a firefighter. I feel like you've had a very practical, hands-on career in your non-sport career, and then a real practical hands-on career in your sporting career as well.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, it's more to do with my personality type. Like, (TC 00:20:00) back in 2017, I tried to do an office job for three months. It was just while I was looking for diving work. Honestly, it affected my whole life. Number one, I was bored all the time, but, number two, like, I wasn't as hungry as I usually am. I was always tired. Like, sitting down actually makes me more tired. When I go to training, I think, 'I've been sitting down all day and I'm still not ready for training when I get there.' So, it's that not being tired at night and not being able to sleep as much, and I was just like, 'Wow, this is a different way of life.' Yes, it really wasn't for me, so it was just, kind of, identifying who I am and what I need as a person, and then taking that into your work and not necessarily feeling-, some people, yes, you might feel trapped, but, again, it's that doing something about it rather than come up with the excuses. Just think, yes, you may have to make sacrifices, small or very large, but ultimately life is about being happy, not only in work, but it in life. For me,

it was just realising who I am as a person, what makes me happy within sport, outside of sport and if I'm happy outside of sport, it actually makes me even happier when I do my sport.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, that's really interesting, isn't it, because you've had for many years this, kind of, dual-track career going on, right? You've been doing your sport on one side, and you've been doing your business side on the other of it (ph 21.22). Actually, looking at how those two things complement each other and support each other are not necessarily one is one and one is the other and they give you different things.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, yes, and then there's a lot from my sport that goes into work and learning how to speak to people, learning how to present myself at an interview. Like, learning how people view me, learning commitment, dedication, the importance of arriving on time, the importance of applying yourself fully to a task, the importance of asking for help as well. So, a lot of my work life is enhanced by my sporting, and I would say sport does so much for me than work, and sport enhances work as opposed to work enhancing sport. Like I say, yes, I've had to do both most of the time, most of my years until 2019 when we were awarded professional contracts to play rugby as women, but up until that moment doing a twelve, thirteen-hour day as in leave my house at 08:00 in the morning to go to work, having to go straight to training. Not getting back until, sort of, 22:00, 23:00 at night, that was what I done, that was just-, it was my life, and I don't complain about, that's what I chose to do. Sometimes, you might have a few down days or a few down weeks and you think, 'Oh, I'm knackered (ph 22.43) all the time, why do I do this?' But, ultimately, I chose to get a job where I had to leave before 08:00 in the morning. I didn't have time to go home and eat, I would just eat on the road, etc, but it then got me the success elsewhere, so it's about those choices and me making my own informed choices.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, and that's a really interesting one, isn't it? I would directly rate it (ph 23.07) back to the difference between understanding the choices you made and working with the choices vs moaning about the choices you haven't made, or that you have made, but you've not really understood yet.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, and then, sort of, a lot of people, I'll say, 'Ah, I've got this opportunity come up or I've got this support,' and they go, 'Well, how did you get that?' I said, 'Well, I asked.' Like, 'Whoa, (inaudible 23.33), you don't do that.' I went (ph 23.35), 'Oh, alright, maybe you don't, but I did, and look, look.'

**Beth Stallwood: Look what happened.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, and it's that, kind of, that fear of asking and, again, back to the having a moan, the first thing I would reply to that is, 'Okay, what have you done about it, or have you told that person?' 'Oh, no, I can't do that.' 'Well, why not? Would you like me to tell them (ph 23.55)?' 'Oh, no, no. I don't want you to tell them either.' 'Okay, so that's it now, you've no longer got the right to moan about it because you're not trying to help fix it in any way.'

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, it's amazing. So, I'm loving the fact that you've had these careers that have enabled you to do your sports stuff. It's been like a big, hard slog doing both at the same time, but it's a choice you made because you really wanted to do it and you loved it. Then, 2019 comes and you get a professional contract. What did that feel like?**

Shaunagh Brown: It was a lot of mixed emotions actually because I'd applied to the fire service, Kent Fire and Rescue, got a place, one of 24 after thousands that had applied, so getting a place in itself was an achievement.

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Then, I completed my training. We had our pass-out parade and I was working as a firefighter for a year, and then I got this offer of a professional contract, which, on the surface, I would have to give up the fire service and give up that career that I'd just spent the last two years working so hard for. So, I was, like, 'Well, actually, I'm not sure I want a professional rugby contract because I'm only going to play rugby until, you know, for another few years. It's a very physical sport. You can't do it forever. You can't do it for a long time, but the fire service, I could do for a long time and being a firefighter, and then the different branches I could go into within that. Ultimately, the fire service could have been a job for life, and it still can be a job for life.' So, I had to have a little battle with myself about that and the possibility of actually maybe saying no to the professional rugby contract, but still trying to train around the fire service because, again, I'd had so much support from Kent Fire and Rescue and they made it possible that even when I was working full-time as a firefighter, essentially, I was training full-time as well.

Just because of the way you can do the shifts and work around it and be so flexible, I was having the best of both worlds, and tiring, yes, but I was able to train full-time as a rugby player and be a full-time firefighter. So, it was a bit of a battle, but then ultimately came up with, well, I just asked for help, actually, and I guess a theme running through it, wrote to the top, the Chief Executive of Kent Fire and Rescue. I said, 'I've got an offer of a professional contract, but I don't want to give up my career in the fire service. Can we do anything about it?' I remember, it was about 22:00 at night because I was on shift at the time, sent the e-mail, and within about half an hour, bearing in mind now, she is Chief Exec of the whole of Kent Fire and Rescue. She is a busy woman, and I got a reply within half an hour, and I was like, 'Right, this is a very good sign, straightaway.' It was pretty much a, 'Yes, I'm sure we can do something. Let's talk to the HR Director.' I was like, 'Right, okay, well, that's a good start.' Then got it, so I was still employed by the fire service, I just changed role and changed the amount of hours I was doing so it would complement my time with rugby. Another thing that was important to me, and still is, is not just concentrating on one thing entirely at all times because, for me, that's when I get almost too caught up in it. It would get to a point if I had a bad training session, then I had nothing else to look forward to, so it affected the rest of my day, or I had had a bad competition, especially in athletics, had a bad competition, and it'd affect the rest of my weekend because I had nothing else to think about as such.

So, I knew being completely full-time and having nothing else with rugby wasn't the best thing for me, so it was an ideal situation in terms of the offer from the Chief Exec and the HR Director, 'We could offer you a role with inclusion,' and I was working as an inclusion officer within Kent Fire and Rescue for, sort of, the last two years, and I'm currently on sabbatical with them now, so I am full-time rugby, and then just have plenty of other bits going on as well. Yes, again, it's that theme of asking for help and asking in a nice, positive way because, actually, I did ask one day, 'Why did you help me? You didn't have to. You could have just said, "Oh, no, it won't work out. Sorry, see you next time."' She said, 'Well, just because, number one, you asked, and number two, you asked nicely, you didn't demand anything. You just asked if there was anything we can do, and we want to help people. As much as some people are begrudged by the people at the top and they think no one is there to help us, is that we actually want to help people, and you asked for help, so we offered it and I wish more people would do it.'

**Beth Stallwood: Isn't that interesting, that whole, you know, rather than asking and saying, 'You need to do something, but what can we do?' and getting involved in that conversation about what's possible? I also think there's a theme here, isn't there, about not going locally, but going to the top of the organisation and going, 'This is what I'm trying to do, I'd love it. I'd love to make this happen,' about such positive responses you've got. I'm sure there will be people out here going, 'But I've tried that and**

**it didn't work.' It's not going to work every time, is it? As you said, they could have just said no, but you had choices there. It was a no or a maybe, right? The maybe is a better chance than just not even trying.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, yes, and it's exactly that. As much as the success I do have, I've been rejected, like, I don't know, five times for every one time I've success. People will only see the successful ones, of course, because I'm not going to shout about the times I've been rejected, but it's understanding that you have to ask to get. Yes, you might get told no on occasions or you can't have everything you've asked for, but you can have this. It's just being able to put yourself out there with the potential for rejection, and then being able to come back from that. That is a skill in itself and, as I've learnt, (TC 00:30:00) so many people don't put themselves out there because they're afraid of being rejected or afraid of not being liked or not being accepted when, actually, like, that's the power of you as a person. You need to put yourself out there because you'll probably find that you might feel you're against the norm and you're not going with the tide, but there are a few others as well that also feel that way. Because no one else has spoken up, then they don't speak up, so it all just got (ph 30.25) got a very dominant person in a room who has a very strong view on something, you just assume, because nobody else has said anything, they all agree. Actually, if one person stands up and disagrees, and then somebody else does, and then it's just, just because you're quiet about something doesn't mean you agree or disagree. So, it's just being a bit more vocal with it and you have to take the rough with the smooth and take rejection, but also with rejection does sometimes come success.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, and it's an interesting thing, rejection. I always say to people when they say, 'But I'm scared of getting rejected,' is I feel like rejection hurts quite a lot in the moment you get rejected, right? It's like an acute pain for a moment, but, actually, it's quite easy in the long run to forget about it really, whereas, disappointment of not having done anything is one of those things that I think can eat away at you a little bit. It becomes a bit of a chronic thing vs an acute, 'Oh, that stung a bit that I got rejected.' The, 'I'm disappointed I didn't try,' or 'I could have done something different' is, in the long term, a worse feeling.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, it's that thing of the what if and the regrets. Actually, if you ask me what are my biggest regrets, I don't really have a lot. One of them, I guess, well, the main one would be not taking the opportunity of a scholarship to America for sport, but then, as I said earlier, I didn't want to go to university, so, actually, maybe it wouldn't have been a great decision. It's just that trying to not have too many regrets because, like you say, the rejection in that moment hurts, but especially me and my personality type, I'm going to go off and find something else to do, something else to concentrate on because I know if I don't, I will think about it over and over again and think, 'Oh, what if I'd done this differently? What if I used these words? What if I was in this situation?' Actually, I know that to keep me happy I have to keep busy, and it's that, 'Okay, what's next?' That's happened, yes, it hurts and as much as people say, 'Oh, don't think about it, move on,' it's very hard to not think about something that hurts. It's then about what you do next and, for me, I know I then have to concentrate and think about something else that I'm going to do.

Whether it's related to what I was rejected to [sic], i.e. improving myself and then going back to the original proposal, or something completely different and reverse change in career, change in sport, even in terms of, like, friendship circles, is that the best friendship circle for me to be in? Do I need that person in my life? It can get very deep as to who's around you and, like, the guilt you feel, and especially in terms of family and, yes, there's so much. These things are always going on in my head as there's a lot. Ultimately, it's about



yourself and having to be selfish sometimes, and it's not the fashionable thing to do, but, actually, it can be the right thing for you to do.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, two things that I'm just really reflecting on from what you've been saying. The first one goes back to this point about actually having more than one thing to do, for you, you didn't quite use these words, but in my head, the way I was interpreting it is, is being able to have some kind of reality, some grounding that isn't just the one thing you're working on. Whether in people's lives that's sport, as it is in yours, like, not just doing rugby because that can get very intense and very much, get too emotionally involved, all of that kind of stuff, having something else to balance that out and to be a grounding force. I'm thinking for people in work, I often end up working with people where work has become their entire life thing and they've forgotten that doing something outside of work, whether that's sports or arts or having a hobby, or seeing people or just doing something for themselves, how important that is to actually be good at your work as well.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, when I go back to it (ph 34.15), I think, 'Who am I?' If you looked at my Instagram, if you looked at my social media, if you took away my rugby pictures, anything that involves any sort of rugby, who am I? Can you tell what sort of person I am if you take away the main chunk of my life? There was a point a couple of years ago where I'd say, 'Actually, you probably couldn't.' That could also be to do with how much you're putting out there on something public like social media, but it's just like if you spoke to a friend who, like, not a particularly close one, but someone who knows you, would they be able to say what you stand for? Although on the face of it, I am very consumed with rugby and like we joked about earlier, spending my time, I'd go and watch rugby, go and watch other people play rugby, go and watch other people train for rugby, because (ph 35.02) I've just got a lot going on, so just a lot of rugby going on. Again, that's my choice, but also when I speak to young people who are either applying to jobs or applying to universities, it's reminding them that you need to stick out. These days, I know the levels of trades (ph 35.21), like, your one to nine grades, but equivalent would have been me for like As and A-stars, if you had three As at A-levels, you're not going to stick out that much because there are a lot of people who have three As. If you had three As and a sport or a hobby or something to actually talk about, you're going to stand out a lot more than people around you. Not only because you've got something to talk about, but you can then refer to those situations.

When I actually applied for the fire service, it was a, it's like a questions-based interview, a scenario-based, and they would ask me questions and I'd have to answer it with experiences in my life. I think there were six questions, but of those six, at least five of them were rugby, like, I answered them with rugby-related answers. I got to a point where I was apologising, 'I'm so sorry, but I'm going to have to use another rugby example.' Like, 'No, no, no, that's exactly what we want. We want to hear your examples through life, however you've got there.' It's just that what makes you stand out, and especially as a woman doing sport or doing something that you're passionate about. It just makes you stand out so much more.

**Beth Stallwood: Definitely, and employers look for that, kind of, broad range of skills that, as you said, all the skills you'd learnt from sport you'd taken into your other side of your career because they're all important. You know, people talk a lot about transferable skills, but they're life skills that you can take with you in any situation you're in. The other thing that I was going to pick up on is this point about, you know, sometimes being a bit selfish. I've been saying for a couple of years, and you might have heard me say it on other podcasts or in other things, is that I think in the English language we need a new word. I haven't quite discovered what this word could be yet, but maybe you can help me, Shaunagh, is we automatically assume in our heads, because even you apologised for it then, that the**

**word selfish is something negative. We assume it's a bad thing to be selfish when actually, if you really understand what selfish means, and this is why we need another word for it, where it is looking after yourself, it is doing the things that bring you joy. It is making sure that your well-being, your sports, your happiness is there, that enables you to be great for other people. So, it's actually not a selfish, you know, not a negatively selfish act to look after yourself. In fact, if we all took a little bit more care of ourselves, whether that's physical, mental, emotional well-being, whichever version of it, where we sought out the happiness or the joy or the things that we do well, and all those things that come together, we would be better in service of other people.**

Shaunagh Brown: You're exactly right, and right in terms of, like, selfish is associated with being negative, and, yes, we do need a new word. What about oneship? I'm being at one with myself?

**Beth Stallwood: Oneship, oh, my-,**

Shaunagh Brown: Oneship, do you like that? I've just made that up on the spot.

**Beth Stallwood: I've been searching for years, Shaunagh, and within, like, three seconds, you have the answer for me. I love it.**

Shaunagh Brown: I've been quite at oneship these last few months, but then, I don't know. I don't know, it might need a bit of work.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, I love it, but, yes, keep thinking about that because the stuff you are talking about isn't selfish, but we don't have a word to describe it. People always talk about, like, self-care, but when people think of self-care, the yoga pants, smelly candle stuff comes to mind for me. If that works for you, brilliant. It's not my version of self-care. It might not be your version of self-care, but what is that word that just allows us and gives us permission and thinks about the positive versions of looking after ourselves in the way that works for us as individuals? I think that would be something for us all to really consider in our lives.**

Shaunagh Brown: There is a phrase that the youths (ph 39.16) use, and I must admit I do it myself as well, you just say, 'I'm doing me,' so, instead of being selfish, just, 'I'm just doing me for a while.' 'What does that mean?' 'Well, I'm just thinking about myself, just doing me.'

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, it's a good one, isn't it? I'm just doing me. Isn't it funny how sometimes the young people have all the answers, and then we, kind of, we bash it out of them through education systems and work systems that want people to fit into nice neat boxes vs being really human? I really hope the next generation are able to keep that sense with them.**

Shaunagh Brown: I think they are and will continue. Just when you have conversations, and sometimes it can (TC 00:40:00) come across as, sort of, negative or bad or you think, 'Oh, no, what's this next generation doing?' Actually, there's a lot of self-empowerment coming and some young people don't really seem to have much passion or much, sort of, power or influence towards a subject or just any interest, actually, which can be worrying. Actually, then there's another side of the younger generation where they are self-empowered and they do make their own decisions and they're not afraid to stand up to mum, dad, auntie, step-dad, step-mum, whatever it is and say, 'No, I'm not going to my grandad's birthday party because I don't like any of my family.' That's probably not the best example, but it's that, kind of, not necessarily having to keep up with the Joneses

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and just not doing something because it's what people do or, I don't know, what kind of food you're going to have at Christmas. 'No, don't want turkey this year.' 'Why?' 'Well, I just don't fancy it.' 'Well, it's what we've always done.' 'So?' It's that, kind of, just being happy, making their own decisions based on themselves and their feeling and their emotion at the time.

**Beth Stallwood: I really hope that leads to this lack of peer pressure on people. I remember, you talking about traditions there, I think it's Brené Brown, who I absolutely love, who says that when people use, like, 'Well, it's tradition' as an excuse, it's just peer pressure from dead relatives, that's what it is.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, I love that. Yes, it is.

**Beth Stallwood: So, peer pressure from dead relatives is tradition, and why do we take that, why do we do it? Breaking free of those stereotypes and the things we always have to do can be a really good thing.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, even around, sort of, sexuality at the moment, and so many young people will not identify as heterosexual or gay because it's just what it is. Like, 'I'm with a girl. I'm a girl with a girl at the moment but, in a month, I might be with a boy.' I don't want to put a label on it, it's just fluid. It's just what it is and not necessarily having to say or say it out loud. Sometimes, just go with the flow and doing things because you want to do things. It's just that, kind of, that sign of happiness and taking ownership on yourself and then that's when the not being able to moan comes into it because you've made your own choices. Yes, it can be very difficult going against tradition and actually emotionally draining as well to just ask why all the time. You're told, 'Oh, it's just because that's the way we do it.' For me, that's not, it's not an answer, it's just, 'Okay, so can we change it?' 'Oh, no, no, no.' 'Well, why not?' 'Because that's just the way we've always done it.' 'Right, so, basically, you're telling me I'm not welcome here?' It's just that sense of tradition is not necessarily, it's not a reason to continue doing something. There are respect levels, but then there's also, 'Oh, come on, let's move on here now, guys.'

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, exactly. It's so amazing. Honestly, Shaunagh, I could talk to you for another, like, twelve hours, I think, about your amazing career and I'm absolutely loving it, but we're coming to the point where I want to ask you if it's okay for some of my quick-fire questions.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes.

**Beth Stallwood: Right, are we ready for them? So, question number one, I'm really excited to hear your response to this one, is, for you, what's always guaranteed to bring you some work joy?**

Shaunagh Brown: Being outside, being active, in short.

**Beth Stallwood: Love that because it's not just rugby then, is it? It's the other stuff, being outside, being active.**

Shaunagh Brown: No, even on my days off, like, it'll just be getting out for a walk, and even when it's cold, there's nothing more I do enjoy doing when it's cold, is actually wrapping up real snug and real warm, everything from hats, gloves, scarves, going outside for a walk, but then looking forward to coming home and having that cup of hot chocolate and putting a film on on a Sunday evening.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, like the snuggly warm, snuggle up. I went out this morning massively underdressed for a very cold walk with the dog wishing I'd put about three more layers on.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, the sun is being deceiving at the moment.

**Beth Stallwood: I was like, 'It's sunny, a jumper and a little gilet will be fine.' No, I need a coat, I needed a hat, I needed a scarf, was very cold when I got home. Question number two, what book are you currently reading, or, you know, a podcast, TED talk, anything like that? We'd love to know a bit about what you're learning through things that are out there.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, so, one of my favourites is a book called Natives by a guy called Akala, and I actually listen to most of my books on Audiobooks rather than read them because I spend a lot of time in my car.

**Beth Stallwood: I love listening (ph 44.37), yes.**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, so, Natives by Akala, but then also one I'm actually listening to at the moment is by Gina Yashere, British comedian, and her book is called Cack-handed.

**Beth Stallwood: Ah, okay. Is it good, because I've not read it yet?**

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, yes, it's really good, and listening to her upbringing. I've followed Gina Yashere in terms of her career and I think she's hilarious, and watching her on TV and seeing all the things that she's keeping up with, but actually now to see, like we said earlier, to see where she started, like, where she is now, she wasn't necessarily destined to get there. It's, kind of, the things like having a Nigerian parent and that thought of her mum insisted she would be a doctor as she grew up, but it's that going against your parent, and how strong you have to be as a person to go against your strong parent who's telling you to be a doctor. For her to, kind of, say, 'Actually, I want to be into arts, and not only do I want to be into arts, but I want to be a comedian,' which, we're getting to the point where her mum is saying, 'No, you can't. It's not a proper job, you're not doing that.' So, yes, it's a good book, it's funny as well. There are a lot of funny parts and she's hilarious as she is, but it's a good listen.

**Beth Stallwood: Ah, I think she's great and watching her on TV and things like that, so I'd love to hear her back story. So, I'm going to put that one on my audiobook list, thank you. Right, question three, what's the best or most useful bit of advice that someone has given you in your life that you always find yourself coming back to?**

Shaunagh Brown: So, I've got two of my favourite quotes. One was given to me by my athletics coach, John Hillyer, when he went to South Africa, came back with a fridge magnet, and on the fridge magnet, it said, 'Winners are dreamers who never give up.' That, kind of, physically, I don't have all the best attributes to be the best athlete in the world. There are so many more women out there who are taller, who are stronger, like, have better coordination mobility, but they've not achieved because they've not dreamt it can happen. Whereas, I spend a lot of time thinking, 'Oh, what if, what if?' Then, try and make that happen, so that's the, kind of, dreamer aspect of me, and that stubbornness to keep going with it, so, yes, winner is a dreamer who never gives up. Then, also, there's a Hebrew quote of, 'If not now, then when? If not me, then who?' So, it's that, kind of, 'Well, just get on with it, and nobody else is going to stand up in a room and do it, so be that person to stand up in a room.' With the being on the Student Rugby Football Union board, as much as I spoke about wanting different people in boardrooms, wanting different people to make decisions, well, I thought, 'Why

not do it myself? I can't just keep talking about it. If I've got the capacity to do it, then just go out and do it yourself, be that person, be the different person in the room.'

**Beth Stallwood:** Yes, and it's so important, is that often we can say, 'Well, we want this change in the world, we want to see it,' but, actually, acting on it is the thing that will make the change happen, not just going, 'Oh, I would love it if there were more women on boards. I'd love it if there were more young people.' It's like, 'Well, go do that then, do something about it,' and you really did that, love both of those, amazing quotes, thank you. Right, what is one super practical bit of advice for our listeners, something that they could just go and do now, do today, do tomorrow, kind of, maybe build as a habit, that you think would help them get a bit more joy in their lives?

Shaunagh Brown: Work out, and if it means writing it down, write it down, but work out what makes you happy, and don't feel guilty about it. You don't have to show anyone, so if you've got children, a wife or husband, it doesn't necessarily mean it has to be them, it could be you going out doing you, being your own person. Work out what genuinely, if all else fails, there's nothing else left in this life, what would make you happy. Obviously, it's okay to be the traditional ones of your family, of your parents, of your spouse or children, but it's just that knowing in yourself what makes you happy. For me, like, if I'm having a down day, I know literally just going outside for a walk is just going to lift me up, so it's that knowing what makes you happy and admitting it to yourself and not feeling guilty for it. It might not be, like I said, it might not be the traditional, but that's okay because we're all very different people.

**Beth Stallwood:** It's interesting, isn't it? I often talk about the difference between our, like, internal stuff and getting the recognition or the support from other people, and doing nothing about what really makes you happy. It doesn't matter if it's about something that you want to do, and you're right, you don't need to feel guilty if you're not saying, 'Well, actually, it's my kids, it's this, etc.' It's like, 'But what about you?' and really understand that, I love that bit of advice. For you, that simplicity of just going out for a walk, I'm with you on that one. I think it's, gosh, what's his name? There's a really lovely writer who's a doctor and I cannot remember his name, but he had this quote in his book that says, 'You never feel worse after a walk.' I'm like, 'That is so unbelievably true. I've never felt worse coming back from a walk, ever.' So, love it. Right, thank you. Where can people find out more about you and your work and all of the things that you care about because we haven't even got into loads of stuff that you care about? Where can people, kind of, (TC 00:50:00) discover that about you?

Shaunagh Brown: So, the main one, across social, I've (ph 50.00) got my Instagram, which is my name, Shaunagh Brown, the colour, Brown, and that will be across Instagram, Twitter. You can find me on LinkedIn which is where I pretend to be an adult as well, but then you can also get me on my website, which is, again, just my name, Shaunaghbrown.co.uk. Yes, just keep up with it across those.

**Beth Stallwood:** Fab, and we'll put those into our little notes when we put this out on social as well so that people can click through to see you. It's really funny of you to say about being an adult there. It's actually something I meant to pick up on earlier, about that, kind of, 'What am I going to do when I grow up?' question. My response to that usually is, 'Don't grow up, it's a trick.' It's a total trick. Yes, I still don't know what I'm going to do when I grow up either, so maybe we can help discover that with each other, or just decide not to do it.

Shaunagh Brown: Yes, I was going to say it's just along with-, I guess, another piece of advice is, don't always have a plan. It doesn't make you a bad person to not have a plan. I don't have a plan. I have no idea where I'm going to be in ten years, not a clue, but that's okay, I'm okay with that.

**Beth Stallwood: I love it in interviews, or I hate it in interviews where people say, 'So, where do you want to be in five years' time?' I'm always like, 'I don't know. Who knows what exciting things may come along, the shiny, new, exciting opportunities?' I always feel like if I've made a really serious plan, deviating from it would feel bad, so just have a real more-, I just want to experience everything and see where it all heads, for me, is much more-,**

Shaunagh Brown: Just do you, just do you.

**Beth Stallwood: Yes, you do you, I'm doing me, you're doing you. I love it. Shaunagh, you've been an absolutely wonderful guest. Thank you so much for sharing your wonderful, incredible story with us. I am so excited to watch you on the TV when you're playing rugby, and also to see where, you know, that's the interesting thing is, what happens next will be a really exciting thing for you. Who knows what opportunities may come up in the future because you're there, you're open to them, you're exploring stuff? I can't wait to see where you go to.**

Shaunagh Brown: Just going with the flow, going with the flow, no plan, just going with the flow.

**Beth Stallwood: Brilliant, thank you so much, Shaunagh, and I hope to speak to you again soon.**

Shaunagh Brown: Thanks for having me. Bye.

**Beth Stallwood: I totally loved talking to Shaunagh and, honestly, I think I could have talked to her for hours and hours more. We didn't really get into it, but she's also doing some amazing work in helping more women to get involved in sport. She really wants to help young people get involved in sport because it's had such a fantastic impact on her life and on her career. Do go and follow Shaunagh, find out what she's doing. Watch her on the telly when she's playing rugby, all amazing things. Some of the things that just really stood out for me was this attitude about, like, not moaning, and it's one that I really believe in too, is do something, take an action. Ask for help rather than moaning about stuff. Let's take a little bit of control, take some action. I think this idea of really thinking about yourself and understanding what it is that really, her advice is just so great, that really makes you happy, things that really engage you, and to live by that and to be really okay with that. So many little bits of advice around being able to find the things that you enjoy and that you're good at, and being open and curious to other opportunities. We heard about how she went from being a discus and shot putter to being a hammer thrower, and then getting into rugby, something that, ten years ago, she would never have thought about. So, being open to opportunities and seeking them out, and trying things out is such a good way to find the things that we're passionate about. We're not set at any age. We can still find new things.**

**So, thank you to Shaunagh for coming on the WorkJoy Jam, it was such a pleasure talking to you. If you want to find out more about Create WorkJoy and everything that's going on in the WorkJoy world, do head to the website, [Createworkjoy.com](https://www.createworkjoy.com). There, you will find details about the WorkJoy Way coaching programme and about Club WorkJoy, which is an amazing community of people who are all trying to create and cultivate more joy in their working lives and in their lives in general. In Club WorkJoy, we have speakers once a month, we have networking sessions, not the awkward kind, the fun**

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**kind. We have questions and answers, and a community of people who will get engaged with you and help you to get what you need out of your life and your working life. So, do come join us there. You can either get there through [Createworkjoy.com](http://Createworkjoy.com), or through [Clubworkjoy.com](http://Clubworkjoy.com). Find us, come and join us, we'd love to have you as part of our community. I've been Beth Stallwood, thank you so much for listening to the WorkJoy Jam. Do go and check out our other episodes.**