

## **CAMILLA TOMINEY – INTERVIEW WRITE-UP**

Camilla Tominey is a British journalist and broadcaster with editorial focus on political reporting and the British royal family. Since January 2023, she has presented *The Camilla Tominey Show*, a Sunday morning politics show on GB News along with her role as an associate editor of the Daily Telegraph. The show's intention of bringing news from the frontline of politics means that Camilla has engaged in conversation with a diverse range of political interviewees, including amongst numerous others: David Davies, Oliver Dowden, James Cleverley, Mark Harper, Stephen Timms, Priti Patel, Michael Gove, Luciana Berger and Liz Truss. Camilla's 23-year journalistic career has consequently given her a wide ranging and distinctive insight into both the British political establishment and Britain's royal family.

### **ADMIRED LEADERS**

*'Conviction and courage are the most important leadership attributes.'*

Camilla's prompt response referencing leaders she admired was recognition for Winston Churchill and his leadership attributes of conviction and courage, emphasised as being the two most important characteristics for a leader to have. Margaret Thatcher's ideological conviction was also commended, noting that while she may not always have been right, her strong beliefs, commitment and follow through were recognised as being admirable leadership traits. The point highlighted that you can't be a successful leader unless people invest in you and support a clear vision.

Business leaders were also admired, in particular leaders of small businesses who built from scratch and created something out of nothing and achieving success through a mixture of hard work and luck. Jim Shanks, who after winning the Nuffield Farming Scholarship in 2009 was noted as an example. After learning about things such as biogas and anaerobic digestion on farms where dairy slurry is turned into green energy, Jim went on to develop his business as well as sharing environmental learning with others in UK agriculture. Jim Shanks went on to be the only large-scale commercial grower of tomatoes in Scotland.

James Dyson, the British inventor best known for inventing the bagless vacuum cleaner was also commended for his innovative and resolute approach to business. His time spent on research and development, including producing 5,000 plus prototype failures and the learning involved from each one before finding a solution, is indicative of his drive and dedication. Continued innovations have resulted in significant business success, and his investment in the Dyson Institute of Engineering and Technology in Wiltshire whose stated aim is to develop the best engineers in the world encourages continued innovation and learning.

Along with admiration expressed for leaders' courage and conviction characteristics, Camilla also put forward the view that these qualities are infrequently demonstrated by politicians and questioned whether those who speak from conviction are undervalued in the political world. Leading by example and making effective human connection were also emphasised as core leadership requirements.

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### **GAIN TRUST – NEVER ADOPT TRICKERY**

Journalism is about telling stories, and as a journalist you need to be able to connect with emotional intelligence. Avoiding undue exploitation by telling stories with integrity was advocated as Camilla's journalistic approach. Never adopting trickery has Camilla's endorsement, citing the importance of gaining trust. The trust factor was acclaimed as having a significant influence on enhancing journalistic reputation for integrity, noted by Camilla as being better after 23 years' experience. The biggest journalistic challenge to responsible reporting depending on getting evidence to endorse interesting stories.

Journalists recognised as inspirational include the Washington Post's Bob Woodward & Carl Bernstein and their intensive investigations into political administration misconduct known as the '*Watergate scandal*'. Its findings eventually led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. David Frost's interviewing approach was also commended for avoiding sycophancy and never using what was described as '*got you!*' journalism, relying instead on charm, intelligence and research. Lois Lane, the character who played the part of a journalist in the '*Superman*' stories was additionally noted for demonstrating professional journalism in her role as an award-winning reporter.

Connection at a human level is needed to get to the heart of a story, the danger of not shutting up and listening and auto-filling silence gaps were noted as particular skills needed for TV journalism. Not taking ourselves too seriously, using the possibly underrated quality of using humour and seeking to influence relaxed body language were also advocated. To get to the underlying issues at the forefront of politics in certain circumstances, it was additionally noted that an intense interrogative interviewing approach can be appropriate.

### **THE BEST QUESTIONS ARE SIMPLE ONES**

Camilla referenced the scenario when called to Downing St following then Prime Minister Theresa May's decision relating to the bombing of Syria, noting that out of the deluge of questions addressed to her, the best question asked was '*Did you lose sleep over the decision?*' Its simplicity in asking about personal influence and how she felt was effective because of its emotional impact approach. To get to the heart of a story needs human connection so it's important to build relationships and for people to feel included, and the best questions are the simple ones that are sensitive to others and ask how people feel.

### **POLITICAL CULTURE IMPRESSIONS**

While noting that she had never been made not to feel welcome, Camilla initially found Westminster intimidating and cliquy, noting that the Oxbridge influence can be alienating. Westminster's introductory cultural impression was that of a subsidised heavy booze consumption influencing addiction and alcoholism. Its evolving culture was however recognised, including gender balance improvement with more female journalists involved.

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Journalists were referenced in general as being '*universally hated*', perceived as being odd as a breed and described as being discerned as a '*dysfunctional bunch of people*'. While it was noted that there are some '*bad eggs*' who display self-centred arrogance, and pompous behaviour, emphasis was made on a journalist's professional role being to seek the truth, and that this is principally achieved through hard work, focus and determination.

While a journalist's work situation may be competitive and those working in the political environment are out for themselves, a conviviality between them was also acknowledged. Political journalism and the connections within Westminster noted as being a safe and equally collective environment.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA TOXICITY**

*'You don't need to be rude to make a point.'*

Social media toxic culture's tendency to invoke abject personal abuse, defamatory comments and general rudeness has created a pernicious scenario that can be problematic to deal with. And while Camilla used to take social media abuse personally, she now stands by her original well sourced stories, disregards abusive comments and doesn't care what strangers think. Standing by what you believe in, being humble, being kind and not being offensive advocated as being the professional journalist's approach. Integrity is also indicated by avoiding rudeness to make a point, '*Don't be an a\*\*hole, just get on with the job*' declared. Concern was additionally expressed about younger journalists who feel compelled to edit themselves regarding Twitter, advocating the need to show courage of conviction and to just tell what you believe, even though this may not be popular and could incite online abuse.

### **AGREE TO DISAGREE**

*'What bothers me is the lack of agreeability about the disagreement.'*

The skewed life balance for both MPs and journalists was noted as being hugely divisive, and differences of opinion both across and within different political Parties being inevitable. Barry Gardiner, MP for Brent North since 1997 was however noted as a particular example of despite disagreement with others, who in tune with PQ principles, gets on with those who have conflicting points of view. Rather than taking an argumentative confrontational approach, his aptitude for expressing courteous disagreement with those whose opinions differ from his own was commended.

Disagreement should be welcomed as well as expected, and despite having opposing views, what's important is to defend others' rights to have the courage of their convictions and to express these. Canadian psychologist and media commentator Jordan Peterson's opposition to so called tolerance and his voice against cancel culture, plus MP Danny Kruger's belief in the rights of the unborn child are notable examples.

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Having strong beliefs requires accountability however for the importance of expressing why such opinions are held.

Prioritising truth over popularity and having the courage to express unpopular views was recognised as being as important in journalism as in politics. Camilla noted that what she especially enjoys is having a discussion with someone she disagrees with. What was also noted as being good to see, was going into Strangers' Dining Room in Westminster and seeing people engaging effectively after having public disagreement.

### **NOBODY IS INDISPENSIBLE**

Media interest in and '*red carpet fever*' for individual show business celebrities frequently changes according to their popular appeal or notoriety. Media contacts are subsequently constantly evolving depending on who's in the limelight. There is however a different and more consistent scenario relating to the royals, whereby journalists aim to build up long term and trusted relationships with contacts connected with royalty. A similar degree of transparency and investment in trusted relationships also applies to political journalism.

The challenge of putting out a newspaper was described as being like producing a book every day and agonising over every word. And while a newsroom may be full of egos, journalists keep producing with recognition that no one is indispensable. Interdependence is massive in terms of getting ideas from others in the collaborative environment of an open plan workspace.

### **ADVICE TO YOUNGER SELF**

The straightforward advocations given when asked about what advice Camilla would give her younger self were:

- Don't drink as much in your 20s!
- Never forget the importance of listening.