

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey, friend. Welcome to She Said/She Said. Here on this podcast, I'm joining forces with top-notch guests to share life and career lessons, always with an eye toward insight inspiration, and the drivers that help us build influence. I'm Laura Cox Kaplan. I've spent three decades mastering the art of influence. Whether you're starting a business, raising money for a cause, advocating for a promotion, or running your own household, understanding the different levers of influence will increase your chances of success whatever your goals may be. Listening to She Said/She Said podcast may just be the smartest, most efficient investment you can make in you.

Hey, friend. Welcome to the podcast. Today, we're talking to the woman behind the social media campaign #ThisLittleGirlsMe. She's my friend, Miriam Gonzalez Durantez. Miriam is working to inspire young girls and women around the world while simultaneously flooding social media platforms with positive uplifting messages, advice, and perspective. Miriam is hoping to encourage all of you to embrace the role of role model by sharing your own unique journey, advice, and perspective. We're going to talk about why that matters and why it's such an important part of building influence. And of course, influence is our theme for this season of She Said/She Said podcast. The campaign #ThisLittleGirlsMe is part of an organization that Miriam founded called Inspiring Girls International. It operates in almost 30 countries. But that is only one part of Miriam's story. She has had an amazing journey, from growing up in a small town in Spain to bucking conventional wisdom and expectations by pursuing a career in international trade law and negotiations, something that she had not seen other women from her community do.

She has held senior positions in the EU government and when her husband was elected UK's Deputy Prime Minister, she faced down the British tabloids, maintained her own professional pursuits and continued running her family. But she also realized that the increased visibility enabled her to create a platform. And from that platform, the Inspiring Girls International organization was born. Miriam and her husband, Nick Clegg, have three sons and the duo has just celebrated their 21st wedding anniversary.

In our conversation today, Miriam shares her journey, her perspective on the campaign and why she wants you to be a part of it. And she shares incredibly candid perspective about not only her own journey, but also her own self-doubt and how she's learned to manage it. We also tap into her expertise as an international trade lawyer and negotiator, and we get her perspective on having those all-too-common difficult conversations with family, friends, and neighbors. I think you're going to love this conversation. So stay with me. It's coming up right now.

Miriam. Welcome to She Said/She Said.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Thank you so much. It's a pleasure being with you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Well, I'm so happy to see you. It's been a long time with all this COVID business that we've not seen each other in person and quite sometimes. So it's really, really nice to have a chance to visit with you.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

It's amazing. It has really made us think what really is important in life, and what is important is the people we like and we love.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yes, absolutely, absolutely, no question. You have had this amazing, amazing career, but before we get into that, I would love for you to talk about the project that you're investing a lot of time and energy into, which is Inspiring Girls International. Tell us about what that is and what you're trying to accomplish.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, Inspiring Girls International is an international organization that is present right now in 27 countries. What it does is something really simple, is to connect female role models and girls to inspire them and to show them all the enormous amount of things that they can become. And also, to push them a bit, to make an effort and to aim high because it's only with effort that ... You know, in life, there is like lack an effort, but without effort nothing happens. It has been one of the most rewarding things that I have done in my life really, being able to work with the next generation. I really recommend this to every woman.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. You started this organization back in 2016. Talk about what the original inspiration was.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, I have actually done another kind of part of the organization, just focused on the UK in 2013. And there, in two years and a half, we got 25,000 women going back to schools all throughout the UK, inspiring girls. The reason I started doing that was twofold. First, that I kept being asked constantly at interviews and at events, "Don't you think that there are not enough female role models?" And that really is something that has always ... It has always made me uncomfortable to be asked that question because my answer always is, "But there are so many. There are thousands, millions of female role models. The issue is that you don't see them because they are not in the magazines and on the television." So the issue is, how do we put the spotlight on those women? And then in parallel, I was seeing some really good research about how girls themselves feel that they do not have access to female role models. More than 55% of girls between 11 and 18 feel that they do not have that access.

I found myself at the time, my husband was in government in the UK with some public attention, some media attention, which was unwanted. For a while, I tried to kind of internally fight against it. And then at one point I thought, why don't we use it for something positive and why don't we use it for this? And that was the beginning of inspiring women at the time. Lots of countries started, women from different countries started getting in touch. And that is why in 2016, I decided to make it international, but I should stress that I'm only the beginning of this organization. I just had the idea and I keep putting as much energy as I can into it. But the ones who really, really run it is the thousands of women who, in every country, go back to the schools, talk to the girls, do it remotely. It's just a big network now who do the day-to-day job, which is the really important job in that organization.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah, absolutely. I'd love it, Miriam, if you would dig in a little bit deeper. You referenced your husband's role in government. He was the Deputy Prime Minister at one point. You did not quit your job and your career when he took on this role in government, which I think starting inspiring women really reinforces your desire to maintain your own role and profile, but also recognizing that you, all of a sudden, had this additional platform potentially that you might not have had otherwise. Maybe talk a little bit about that

experience that you had and balancing that and the trade-offs. I mean, it's like having two full-time, three actually, because you're a mom of three, so you had three full-time jobs.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Don't we all have lots of different jobs and we handle them together?

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

But for me at the time, and I'm Spanish, and I found a cultural issue there in the UK probably very similarly to the U.S. The families of the politicians, and in particular, the wives of the politician tend to play a role in their political careers and they're very exposed. That doesn't really happen in my country or indeed in a lot of continental Europe. So for me, when I suddenly found the paparazzis at the door of my house just taking pictures of what I was wearing that particular day and so on, I struggle a little bit with that at the beginning. And certainly, what I saw that public expectation that I was meant to be the accessory of my husband for the picture, the sort of flower pot.

You know, I come from an environment very close to politics. My father had been a politician in Spain and I am of the view that those are the kind of jobs that people around them need to help. And also the public has the right to see how they are in the more personal environment because they are trusting those people with taking the decisions of their country. But this really was at such a level and it was all kind of superficial. And I found it very difficult at the beginning to accept that many people thought that I really should not work at all. And I should just be there like the prop for politics. When I said that I wasn't going to do that, that I wasn't going to give up my job and just follow him around and do press releases like some of the other wives of the other leaders did at the time saying, "In the morning, I'm wearing Zara top and a whatever skirt and I'm going here and there."

My press releases was like, "Miriam is wearing her clothes and going to the office." And that was a bit of a joke at the beginning. But we found a really good middle point, which was when I realized, why am I fighting this? I should be using this for something positive. And if they want to talk about my shoes being orange, welcome if in addition to that, you talk about inspiring girls and we use this to inspire the next generation. And I think that that is how I managed to navigate that period. I have to say that certainly in the UK, it has gone now in the right direction. I think that the wives in particular of the leaders, because many of them are still men, are not playing so much of that role anymore. And I think that is a much more natural space.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

There is a different standard, I think any woman in politics would say. But hopefully, that is changing as we're seeing more and more women rise to those higher and higher positions.

I'd love it, Miriam, if you'd talk a little bit about your origin story. You mentioned that you grew up in Spain. I know your father was also in politics, but maybe talk about what young Miriam was like and what some of your early aspirations were.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, young Miriam was born in Francoist Spain, so there was still a dictatorship in Spain and it was a dictatorship there until I was eight. I was born in a small village, a small town in the middle of ... It's

called Castile-León. It's almost the middle of nowhere in Spain, and the British media used to call it "The Dusty Village." So you get an idea how they look at it, but it was a period, on the one hand, it wasn't a good period for women. Until I was eight, women in my country could not have their own current account. They had to have like a sort of permission from a man associated to them to be able to travel and so on. But when I started realizing that I was a human being when I was eight, nine, I had the luck of living one of the most wonderful periods of the history of my country, which was the transition to democracy, which has been one of the most successful transitions to democracy in the world.

It was like seeing the energy of the whole country is going in the right direction and everybody believing that we could really be part of the democratic world. And at a more personal level, we were being told all the time, you can be whatever you want if you invest in education and you really make an effort. Wow! The world is your oyster. And that to me, coming from that small place where I was been in the state school all my life up to the end of the secondary school and then the closest university because that is what you did. The girls didn't go very far away.

That really changed not only my life in terms of the opportunities that I have had, but also my outlook of the world and of politics. I have always retained a big interest in politics. And I still believe no matter how many terrible things have happened in the world, I still believe that if a country invests in going in the right direction and having the right energy, if we can really put together the people, we can all do amazing things. I have seen that myself in my country.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Did you have role models when you were growing up?

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, not so many because not very many women worked at the time. I vividly remember my mother who was a very vocational physics and chemistry teacher being one of the few women in the village who worked. I remember her having sort of to defend her right to work and that she wasn't diminishing my father by doing that. And then I found out it was just really actually funny if you think about it that many, many years later, not in Spain, but in London, I had to do the same to defend my right to work and that I wasn't diminishing my husband by doing that. But I definitely had role models later on.

When I started later on working in the European Union and I worked in foreign affairs and international relations, and it was the beginning of some of the female foreign ministers and some of them very young, like for example, Anna Lindh, who was the Foreign Affairs Minister of Sweden, sadly assassinated by a Euro skeptic. To me, seeing somebody like her was a revolution. Every woman who was in that space beforehand was power dressing and behaving in a really tough manner. And there came this woman with t-shirts and a backpack and she spoke normally and it was so fresh and it made me think, "Wow, if she can do it, perhaps we all have hope."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. That's amazing. And it really underscores the importance of this whole effort that you have underway. So right now, with Inspiring Girls, the next leg in the organization and something that you've just launched, I think a couple of weeks ago is the #ThisLittleGirlsMe campaign. Talk a little bit about what that campaign is and what you're trying to accomplish with it.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, #ThisLittleGirlsMe campaign is running from the 13th of September till the 11th of October, which is the International Day of the Girl. And what we want to do is to flood social media and in particular, Instagram with female role models. And we want girls to follow female role models using that hashtag. And what we are asking women to do is something really simple is to post a picture of themselves when they were little and to either speak about their ambitions at the time or the advice that they would have given to their younger self.

We have really powerful research being done by female lead as to how much it changes the outlook of girls whenever they see inspirational women in social media. For us, this is a really important effort because we try to be where the girls are. A lot of our work is in the schools, but whenever we try to work with girls in the schools and to bring the female role models to them, obviously, you take time from the teachers, and this is a tricky time now. The teachers are really very busy trying to cope with everything that has happened in the last ...

Laura Cox Kaplan:  
Make for lost time.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

... in the last year. Exactly. We also try to inspire girls through a video hub where we have the female role models there in a video hub, but the girls have to come to the video hub to do it. Our constant thinking, "Where are the girls?" And the girls are in social media, so why don't we bring the role models to social media where the girls are. And this is the whole point of the campaign. Part of what we are trying to convey to them also is that sometimes they look at the female role models and they think, "Oh, they're so far away from me, right?" These are women who have done ... Everybody has done so many things. It doesn't matter their level. And by the way, the campaign is open to absolutely everybody. But by seeing them as girls, we are hoping that the girls themselves will establish the connection and realize that all of us were girls at a certain point and we have the same doubts and questions as they are having today.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. Any surprises with the campaign so far? Maybe talk about some of the women who you've profiled. And I think to be clear, it's not just the most high profile women. You're actually encouraging all women to post and to talk about what they wanted, maybe what they wanted to be when they grew up, or a particular piece of advice that they wish they had known in order to really flood social media in a very positive and uplifting way. I love the idea. Maybe talk a little bit about either some of the surprises or things that have come out of the campaign so far that you're really happy about.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, we are totally overwhelmed by the success of the campaign. This is the very first time we do something like this, and we were thinking that it could be towards the last week of the campaign that it would pick up. It has been a complete revolution on LinkedIn already. It has been trending the whole week. It has been on topic of the day just yesterday. In Instagram, it's running very hard as well. And for me, the biggest surprise has been how quickly we have gotten to where we wanted to be, which is to have all sorts of women from all sorts of backgrounds, opening up and just giving their advice to girls. And you can see there from a six times Paralympic champion, a top singer, like Annie Lennox, a woman at the top of business, like Sheryl Sandberg, or the president of Instacart to every kind of possible job and role as stay-at-home moms, women working in supermarkets. Really the full spectrum.

And actually when you look at it, which is something I really believe in is that sometimes the most inspiring stories are not necessarily the ones of those women that we all know. It's the ones of the women that we don't know. And the things, the stories that women are posting about, the difficulties that many of them have gone through their ... All sorts of stories there. From people who have suffered bullying, a lot of bullying and feeling different, and having to overcome all that, daughters of people who have immigrated and they found themselves being very different to everybody else. Those who have started seeing their dreams come true and suddenly something happened with their bodies, with their life, and they had to reinvent themselves. And indeed, many women who haven't fulfilled their dreams and they are doing something else and they are coming realize that they can do whatever it is that they are doing now really well.

I mentioned earlier, one of my favorite post, which is a woman working in a supermarket that speaks very realistically about, "I had all these big dreams and it didn't work out. I have ended up working in the supermarket, but it was during COVID that I have realized how important my job was." It's those kind of messages that I think that are really, really important to girls. Wherever you are, life throws you in lots of different ways, but wherever you are just strive to be your very best within your abilities, right? That's what we are aiming for.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. That's beautiful. Thinking about the news cycle, and there's a lot of discussion about whether social media is good for young people, young girls and young boys, and you're the mother of three sons, and I'm the mother of a daughter and a son, both who are ... My daughter's almost social media age, but around that age of 13, when they really legitimately can be on these platforms is also when kids oftentimes have a lot of self doubt, especially girls. Maybe talk a bit about how you see the campaign having an impact on the self-doubt and also some of the negative stuff that we're hearing about the impact of social media, whether people agree with it, or don't agree with it. Maybe talk about how this can perhaps have a different impact.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, I think the dip in self-confidence of girls is a fact and to me, is the biggest surprise because I didn't expect to see that really in all these many years that I have been working with girls. We are in lots of different in countries, from rural Morocco to Chile, Australia, the outside of Wall Street in New York, all throughout the U.S., no matter where you go, no matter the kind of school, not matter the background of the area, you keep seeing girls who, at that age of 12, 13, it varies a little bit country to country, they start dropping subjects because they think that they are not for them. It tends to be the science subjects. They start dropping sports because they think that some sports are just for boys. I'm very curious, very often that happens while they are good at those subjects that they are dropping.

And it is so much of an issue worldwide that now you have, and I'm really glad of this because we have work with them on this, you have the OECD in their peace analysis that they publish every year, they are looking specifically at this issue, the impact of the gender stereotypes at that age in girls. And also something else that happens to girls that does not happen to boys, which is the fear of failures. The undertaking risk is much more of an issue with girls at that age than with boys. And I think that some of those stories about how women went through that journey and they found their self-confidence is exactly the kind of things that girls need to see. And also in terms of undertaking risks, that life is not a ladder, that you are going through lots of different ways until you come to be whatever you end up being. And they haven't really, many of them you can see when you talk to them, that they haven't really internalized that.

Now in social media, I come from the point of view of thinking the social media is a tool and is tool that can be used in lots of different directions. It can be used for good things. It can be used, of course, for bad things. And there are lots of discussions there. My other hat is on the regulatory and trade space. So if I put my regulatory hats on, I think that there are issues there on making sure that if there is a certain age below which children should not be in social media, how do you enforce that? And you have guarantees, and there are obviously some issues that one has to keep reconsidering because some of these technologies are rather new and therefore there is a trial and error on all of it, not only on social media, but any use of technology. Whenever you see some specific issues, some particular groups of girls who are suffering for whatever it is, how do you overcome that and how can you try to send the right messages?

But on the broader issue, which is how do we make sure that in social media, there is more positive content, the answer is on all of us, how we are using it. I have now dedicated for this campaign an enormous amount of days just looking closely what is there in social media. There is a lot of cleavages, there is a lot of body images, there is a lot of parts. The answer to that is not that that is banned, the answer to that is all of us post better things. And that is partly what we are trying to do with This Little Girl is Me. Let's just flood it with positive content. And it's so easy, you know, the majority of society just wants to use all this in a positive way, but let's start doing it. And indeed, we can do that in many other areas, but the answer is us. Nobody else is going to do it for us.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Right. Right. And for those people who are listening who have children who are of social media age, 13 and above, encouraging them to follow more positive images and more positive hashtags. I mean, I realize, people are probably snickering saying, "Yeah, yeah. How are you going to reinforce that?" But look, it has to start at home. This is a really important alternative. I personally think this is true, not just for kids, I think it's true for adults as well, that the more you seek positive content and positive images and positive thoughts, the more that reinforces what's in your feed. And that you end up with a much more positive experience than when you are seeking those things that are inherently negative that make you feel like garbage.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Completely. And if I may, that is part of what we are trying to do with #ThisLittleGirlsMe. We are currently trying to get as many women as possible from all around the world and all backgrounds onto the campaign. And on International Day of the Girl, we are going to pivot that towards the girls, just asking everybody if you are a girl directly over 13, otherwise, we will be asking your parents, your daughters, your nieces, any girl you know who is using social media, ask them to click on the #ThisLittleGirlsMe, and follow one woman, at least one ... That's all that we are asking. We are not asking that they stop doing whatever they are doing. Just follow one of these women. Because if you follow at least one, what you are going to find is that in your feed, you will start getting suggestions from all other similar women and hopefully, we would have started a bit of a positive spiral that grows on its own.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. I absolutely love that. As we launched this season of She Said/She Said podcast, our emphasis is on this idea of influence and how we grow it. What I noticed over the course of three years of content and conversations is that there were so many examples of drivers that help us, as women, build influence, and ultimately help us achieve whatever our goals may happen to be. I'd love for you to talk

for a second about any link you see between role models, seeking role models and this idea of developing or building influence.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, I think that the link there is the visibility. In order to be influential, very often with whatever group it is, so if you are doing it globally, you have to be very visible, but even if you are doing it in your most immediate environment, people need to be able to see you to kind of follow you and to change whatever it is that you are aiming to change, which is where influence happens. I believe very strongly that influence is about to change and that we are in a period of the history of society that probably because of all the means that we have at our disposal and some of them we have just discussed about like social media, it is easy to get distracted and to think that you can be influential just by making lots of noise.

And that is a difference thing. Making noise sometimes is good to bring visibility to a certain cause, but you are only influential if you manage to change something and to move the tile in a positive, hopefully, you can also be influential on the negative side, but hopefully in the positive direction. And that is where I think that is not so much about the role models, the existence of role ... They are there, right? They could be doing lots of wonderful things without that visibility, but in terms of actually carrying the girls with them and getting them to do a change, which is what we are hoping to do with the girls, which is get rid of that lack of self-confidence.

Women like me, and I don't mind acknowledging it, I have lived with an issue there of lack of self-confidence that I had to fight against at some points. And then I got comfortable with it, and I know how to deal with it, but it is always there. It could have been so wonderful if when I was little, I would have got rid of it because it's like a bad weight that somehow distracts me in my life. I don't want it, so I shouldn't have it. If we can help as many girls as possible to identify it and discard it at that age, I think that we would have eliminated so many barriers that then grow during women's lives. I'm convinced at lack of self-confidence at the start there is what then explains that many women do not negotiate properly their salaries, that they don't ask for the right promotions, that whenever they are appointed to something, they think, "Oh, well, perhaps they are doing this just because I'm a woman." All that, we can sort it early on and actually the earlier, the better, I think.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I love that. If you're willing to share with us, I'd love for you to talk about, you know, you acknowledged the fact that you had a self-confidence issue or were having self-doubt and that it's just something that's with you, right? It's annoying, but it's there. But you mentioned you learned how to deal with it. Can you share with what's in your toolkit? When you feel those feelings, which I don't know if you feel them now, I sure as hell do, but when you feel that feeling creep up on you, what's your go-to? What helps you plow through it?

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, I have very often been in situations, and I have done lots of different jobs, so I haven't been somebody who has been static professionally. So I have had plenty of occasions where I could feel lack of self-confidence. And I have been very lucky that I have always had many people from my family, my husband, my friends kind of pushing me in the right direction whenever I was having self-doubt. But I remember, for example, when I started becoming a member of boards and that coincided with a period in my country when they were, you know, the government was really pushing for more women being on boards and me thinking, "Oh, they are only asking me this because I'm a woman." And I had to find

myself just two or three years later becoming the head of the audit committee at companies and banks thinking, "Yeah, they would not ask me to do this if they thought ... That is just because I'm a woman because it's far too important."

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's a very big loop hole in the board.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Exactly.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yes.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

You learn yourself through your life to identify those thoughts and think, "Oh, how stupid that I'm thinking in that way." For a long time, I tried to fight against it. I have come to just let it live with me. And I try to use it in a positive direction. Whenever I'm starting something new, for example, this week, I have started teaching international trade at the University of Stanford and I get fear, I feel the fear, I let myself feel the fear. To all of us, it happens in different places. To me, it happens kind of at the back of my neck. I just feel it there. I just let it there. I recognize it. It gives me a sharp edge because I know that whenever I feel that I'm going to make more of an effort and I'm going to go there properly prepared.

And then what I really do is to try to mentally say, "Okay, now, this is done, you have seen it, you are going to discard it, and you are going to do it." And that is how I personally have managed to deal with it. And most of the time, I have it control. And actually, I think that now it helps me, but everybody's different. So everybody, if you happen to have it, my only message is you can live with this and use it in the positive direction. Just find the trick that does it for you.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. But the starting point, I think what you said that's so incredibly important is the recognition that you have to be self-aware to know, "Okay, I'm feeling fear, perhaps it's an irrational fear. I'm going to just feel it for a minute, acknowledge that it exists, recognize it for what it is, and put it aside." I think that's so important. I don't know about you, but I wasn't raised learning how to do that. I wasn't raised necessarily with those tools. Those are tools that I have learned and that I try to employ, but it's so incredibly important because the starting point is just recognizing, I'm feeling fear. It's normal. It's not a bear chasing me in the woods. It's this is something that I can just recognize and move forward with. I think it's such important perspective and advice.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Exactly. That's exactly what we try to do with the girls. Just as this is growing in them, it's like, recognize it, that sometimes you may be taking that decision that you are dropping maths, for example, while you are actually good at maths. And that is not because of any rational thing, it's simply because because of us really. Because of the impact that has the rest of society, letting the gender stereotypes stay there and therefore the kids think from the age of six, that there are jobs for men and jobs for women. That is what is making them think in that way. If they can identify it, they can get rid of it. And to me, the same is about undertaking risks.

I was brought up to have a stable job. The thing that all Spanish families wanted, especially from girls at my time was that we would become civil servants and we would have a career for good with a stable salary and not undertaking any risks. When I moved out to private practice, my mother ... is It was a revolution in her. "Where are you going? And why are you doing this?" And I have to push myself to undertake risks sometimes because my tendency is what they told me when I was little, "Go for the safe job." And I have learned that the safe job is never the right job. Where I'm happy, I personally, is when I'm stretch and when I feel that I'm undertaking a risk. I'm 53 now. So you learn that with age. Hopefully, all of us can make younger women and girls learn that much earlier so that they don't have to go through the same things.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. You referenced an issue that I think is true. I mean, it's true in a lot of families, it's true in a lot of cultures where oftentimes what girls and women are facing are cultural or familial expectations in terms of the role that they will play. Maybe talk for a second about how you deal with that. When you have your family as you did, with your mom saying, "Whoa! What are you ... What are you doing? This is a big risk. Are you sure you want to take this risk?" Talk for a second about how you had the confidence to push back and say, "No, I think this is what's right for me."

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, this is one of the key messages that we always tend to give to girls and it's freedom of choice. I think that it is still such an issue with women and girls that we somehow ... Because many of us are raised to please and to please others and in subtle ways and sometimes we don't really see it, but I compare my education to my brother's education, for example. He was definitely pushed, or allowed to fail a bit more often, to not to please so much, to be on the naughty side or whatever. That didn't really happen to me, which has made me a big perfectionist, which is another issue I deal with. But sometimes when you have that kind of cultural background, you really need to say to yourself early on, "I'm going to choose whatever I want. And I need to do this work of really deciding what it is that I want."

You could be surprised how many times I meet girls constantly that you ask them, "What do you want to be?" They kind of stop sometimes, "Are you really asking me?" Like, "do you think that I am the one who has to decide what I want to be?" That's the very beginning of the process is not what society expects of you. It's not what your friends expect of you. It's not what your parents expect of you. This is your life. You need to decide what really makes you happy. That is why, by the way, I have a bit of an issue sometimes with some of the initiatives that are about getting women just on STEM or trying to make them all CEOs of whatever company. Some of us may not want to do that.

Surely the message is decide whatever you want to do. And that, yes, I think that whatever you want to do, try to do it to the best of your ability. But we see that, as you can imagine, because of the kind of countries we work in, some of them have a strong cultural issues, still not overcome in relation to women and though we are an international movement and I think in inspiring girls, and I think that it is important that that is seen globally. In Morocco, we have Moroccan women talking to Moroccan girls and in Singapore, we have Singaporean women talking to Singaporean girls and only the women of this countries really know the cultural influences on girls in all of our countries and there are issues definitely in all of them, including where we are, here in the U.S.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. That's a great point. It's a really great point. Miriam, I would love to shift just a bit and talk a bit more about your work. You are an international trade lawyer, very successful international trade lawyer

and negotiator. I'd love for you to share because of this moment that we find ourselves in where I think we're having more difficult conversations, more contention within families, within neighborhoods. And it's not just about politics, it's about all kinds of things. And it feels like people have a sort of a ready trigger, if you will, and are having trouble getting along. Maybe share with us some perspective as you think about having difficult conversations, maybe knowing that you're going to have a difficult conversation and perspective that you've learned as a negotiator, for some tips that the audience can take away from someone who's been there in really challenging circumstances.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, if only I had the solution to this.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

I was hoping.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

But let me perhaps say that I think that we, as a society, we need to put our disagreements in perspective, first of all. And we have a tendency, all of us, and I see it here in the U.S., I saw it in the UK, that I lived the Brexit time in the UK, I see it now in my country. And we all tend to talk ourselves into how incredibly polarized we are. Like we are a society that is coming off a script and suddenly we are behaving badly by having disagreements with each other. I think that we have to recognize that we are in a big transitional moment in the world. We are having this technological revolution that is making us go in lots of different places. It's reshaping all the international environment as well. Some of the decisions that we are taking now are big decisions.

Sometimes the world goes through periods where it's just business as usual, right? And we just keep going, but there are some moments when we need to start taking options and those options will shape in a big way, how the next generations will live. And it's only right that we have big disagreements with each other as to how that needs to be done because it's only by having those disagreements that hopefully we will find some good ways.

I think that A, we need to put things a bit more in perspective. But to me, the other thing, and I was thinking about this the other day because I was teaching some of the students about how to negotiate, how to be a good trade negotiator. I was explaining to them how in the business world, for example, we tend to think that a good negotiator is a tough negotiator. So somebody who really destroys the other side because they take it all. And how in the world of trade and international relations is almost the opposite. In order to be a good negotiator, everybody needs to feel that they have won something because otherwise, they would step away. So the difficulty is about finding that middle ground that makes everybody happy and it's that kind of persuasion and that being open to what the other thinks and understanding them, that is really the key to be able to do that job properly.

And I think that we need to pivot some of those discussions that we are having in society to understanding all the different sides. It's not that the other side is going to disappear, we have to live with each other. So we are going to have to find some middle way there where somehow everybody ... And middle way is not necessarily the 50/50 distance, but yeah, in some issues, on one side, in some others, some other, and we are going to have to navigate it because we all live in the same countries and in the same continents. So there is no other way forward.

And a lot of these, I think comes to all of us understanding also that all these new means of communication that we have found really need to be used to communicate with each other. And

communicate is not just talking at somebody, it's listening to them and then having the conversation. And that doesn't mean that you need to compromise all the time. I'm somebody who I feel less and less sure about my opinions with age, but I feel more and more sure of my values. So it's not about compromising all the time, but it really is about understanding the other side.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. I love that. It's really, really well said and such great advice. Okay. Just a couple final questions. I'd love for you to share maybe any practices that you're engaged in that help you stay centered and focused with our listeners. Maybe things that you do to kind of help you stay on track. We've talked a little bit about sort of dealing with self-doubt and some of those bigger things, but maybe little things that you do on a day-to-day basis.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, I tend to be very on track. So I have to the luck that probably because I'm very passionate about everything that I do, I don't have many problems to just focus 100%. If anything, my issues is always the reverse, how do I step out? And I realize that you also have to calm down sometimes and to recharge because otherwise it's very easy to lose perspectives.

And the things that I do, I'm sure that most of our listeners do them as well, I think that the sport is the magical way to get there and to clean your mind. I'm a piano player and I did a degree on piano. So yeah, I think that music is the other thing that gets me there. And finally, something that I have had the luck to do since I came to live in the U.S. two and a half years ago, even more often is to be in touch with nature. I think that the nature that you have in this country is breathtaking. The kind of dimensions of nature that you have here is something that we just don't have in Europe. And whenever I'm feeling a bit lost, I just go out to the natural world to see, wow! This beauty exist. We shouldn't be destroying it, right? So we need to work positive direction as human beings.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Absolutely. How about in addition to Inspiring Girls International, which I know is a big part of what's inspiring you right now, how about a book that is a particular recommendation that's leaving you inspired or something that you're listening to, or something that you're watching that's really sort of boosting you and making you feel more inspired?

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Well, in terms of books, I cannot really give you many because I'm reading a lot about international trade. That would be really, really boring for your listeners.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

It's all subjective, right? What inspires you, may or may not inspire me, but that's okay.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Exactly. But something that I'm watching that I'm enjoying enormously. It's actually a good watch and I'm sure that lots of people would love is the series, The Chair. It is about a university. I'm loving how it puts sense of humor into a lot of the things that are happening lately in universities and all these issues of generations kind of confronting each other and people having fear of communicating openly because it's not either really correct for one side or for the other or whatever. I think that a lot of the answer to

what we are going through is just a little bit more sense of humor. That would go a long way to get us all more together.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Yeah. That's a brilliant show. Joel and I watched that over the summer. It's really thoughtful. Sandra Oh is the lead character and it's really quite brilliant. Miriam, this has been such a joy. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

Miriam Gonzalez Durantez:

Likewise. It's a pleasure to be with you. Thanks so much for having me.

Laura Cox Kaplan:

Hey, friend, thanks so much for joining us today. I hope you found great value in Miriam's perspective. Whether it was her thoughts on the power and importance of role models for building influence or her especially candid perspective on dealing with self-doubt, I hope that you found this investment in you well worthwhile.

Be sure to check out the show notes for today's episode, episode 162. We have expanded and reorganized the notes just a bit to make them more useful to you, so be sure to let me know what you think. And be sure to share your feedback on this or any of our She Said/She Said podcast episodes as well. You can reach me via the links in the show notes.

I also hope that you'll join us in sharing your own social media post at #ThisLittleGirlsMe. Please be sure to tag me, @LauraCoxKaplan, as well as She Said/She Said podcast, Miriam, and the Inspiring Girls organization. I've included all of those links in the show notes as well.

No matter where you sit or what you do, each of us can be a positive and inspiring role model and have an impact that just might change someone else's life for the better. It's both an especially good use of time and of these platforms that I think we sometimes forget can be a tremendous force for good. With that, take care and I'll talk to you again next week.