

# From guest to Head of Events, a journey of empowerment

Cleo McGee shares the life and business lessons she has learnt from attending an event as a guest to becoming Head of Events for Congress London - a not for profit Women's Group, and how it moulded her into the person she is today.

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Congress London is a women's group that has given me the confidence I needed to succeed in the working world. I attended their first event as a guest in 2016 and in the last four years I have been through ups and downs career-wise, some fantastic moments, others less than desirable. However, what Congress taught me along the way has made me into the person I am today and I am forever grateful.

There is often an intensity that comes with working somewhere new, you have to fit into the existing group, whilst also showcasing your talents and hard-working ethos. Navigating the workplace, interviewing for new jobs, dealing with the rejection of not getting something you wanted, having a challenging boss, working alongside difficult people.

The world of work is now one that is full of moments that are not always the easiest to navigate. In my career to date, I have had a great many moments of not knowing what to do, I believe we have all been there.

*“The thing we have in common is that we always want to fix it, but sometimes we just don’t know how best to solve the issue.”*

Sometimes we are unsure if it is indeed our fault, or just how much we should be apologizing for, or if we should be standing up for ourselves in the situation. When I first attended Congress I remembered what it was like to feel part of a gang, a crew, it brought me back to my university days when my friendships were solid and we wanted each other to succeed.

I watched these epic women take to the stage and I felt so out of depth. They were so well presented, with so much knowledge and powerful job titles and I felt like a little girl does when she sees a princess and wants to be one. However, as I grew with attending Congress events I started to see myself as standing alongside them.

I recognised that everyone has flaws, and everyone has strengths and that I too had versatile and useful tools in my arsenal to call upon. I worked on building up my tools, I worked on self-confidence, upward managing, dealing with difficult people. I worked on learning and bettering myself regularly.

This past year I have even stepped up to the Congress Committee and I now run their events. To cement my learning by standing alongside women I admire and call my equals really shows how far I have come. It also showcases how far we have all come and how far you can come too if you make a promise to yourself to keep growing and learning as an adult.

Education is great but it doesn’t always teach you practical tools to deal with working life. We spend the majority of our times working with or for people we may not have chosen to even be friends with.

Recently we had Margaret McCabe speak at an event. Margaret founded and runs Debate Mate, initially set up as a charity to promote and help children from difficult backgrounds how to properly debate; they now do this on a global scale and honestly, the kids they have showcasing their talents made me question my own skills, but in a good way! Margaret was a top legal barrister, she was a single mother, she founded a women’s group with Cherie Blair whilst she was a lawyer. She has strived and struggled her whole life and is open and honest about her past.

But what struck me was how the systems in place, the gender bias of the law courts, being a single mother, none of it stopped her from achieving great

things and setting up something that she felt would benefit the world and help give those children who need it a leg up in the world. When she spoke at our event, everyone was captivated. I had organised for her to speak and knew she would be a hit, even her fellow esteemed panellists were in awe.

Personally, I get so much satisfaction from talks like this, and immense pride knowing that I can pass this knowledge on to our Congress members. I want the women who come to our events, to be both awed by the people speaking and also feel like they can relate and achieve great things too.

All of the women who have ever sat on our Achieved Wisdom Panels shared their stories of struggle, of knock backs, and of how they got back up there, carried on and went on to succeed. It has been a pleasure to be a part of something that can give back to other women the strength and sense of hope.

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For me, I am part of Congress because it gave me an opportunity to find my voice. Katherine Baker, a career coach and co-founder, talked me through some very difficult work situations and gave me the courage to sit in rooms and have conversations that I did not want to be in or have.

*“Big tip-power posing works!”*

Anna Morrogh is steadfast and her marketing knowledge is out of this world, she practices empathy and kick-ass girl power at every opportunity. Dahlia Basir helped me negotiate a contract, realising that my value is not just the hours spent doing something but the history of my knowledge as well.

Ciara Byrne has helped me perfect my CV, a practical and invaluable tool, Caroline Weller and Felicity Cranfield have helped me on my journey to become a writer by reading and subbing my work, something I am ever grateful for.

Rebekah Dobson has been there many times on the phone whenever I need someone to listen to me. All these fantastic women make up a mixture of founders and Committee members and all have skills that they want to pass on to other women.

Our Whatsapp chats offer great opportunities to help each other out, but also a reminder to say well done to each other. Sometimes, what you really crave is for someone to pat you on the back and say that was hard, but look you did it, or we can help you just tell us what you need.

Congress London is about sisterhood, it is about women helping other women and building each other up. Too many times women are pitted against each other in the workplace, and too many times people are scared that if you shine, that it will make them seem dull in comparison.

*“If I had one wish for the future it would be to remember that the sky is full of stars and each of them shine brightly, without dimming or taking away from the other one. That actually together they form a beautiful picture.”*

If only women could remember that asking each other for help, advice etc is no bad thing. That if we helped each other succeed by literally helping each other rather than just talking about it, our sky could be dazzling in all kinds of ways.

One of our next events after lockdown will be a co-run event with [Debate Mate](#), where we will learn a little bit about the art of debate. It is truly not to be missed, details on dates will be updated on the [Congress London website](#).

*Read also*

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