

## Shelley Zalis Transcript

**Shelley:** I hire for passion, train for skill. I was passionate about what I was doing, resilient. I knew I was onto something and I wasn't going to stop.

**Matt:** To thrive in a rapidly evolving landscape. Brands must move at an ever-increasing pace. I'm Matt Britton, founder and CEO of Suzy. Join me and key industry leaders as we dive deep into the shifting consumer trends within their industry, and why it matters now. And how you can keep up. Welcome to The Speed of Culture. Today, we're excited to be joined by Shelley Zalis, The CEO of The Female Quotient, working with companies to curate experiences, thought leadership, and solutions designed to achieve gender equality at work. In 2018, Shelley was the Matrix Award honoree, issued by New York Women in Communications. And has had so much more great accolades and success. And Shelley, it's so great to see you here at CES.

**Shelley:** And I'm just like, I'm already on fire with you.

**Matt:** I know.

**Shelley:** We could just talk forever.

**Matt:** So before we even started filming the podcast, Shelley and I just kind of jumped into it. So this could be an exciting one and tell me about CES. You've been here for how long?

**Shelley:** It feels like one day has been four weeks already because we've had so many amazing conversations.

**Matt:** I mean, how many years have you been coming here?

**Shelley:** Oh, gosh. I think this is our 10th year here. We're the official equality partners of CES.

**Matt:** So what does that mean?

**Shelley:** Well, we help them with their programming. We ensure that there's diversity on every stage for them. We also brought the sex toys back, which is amazing. I mean, I don't know why they got rid of them. So we brought those back because that's important too. But most importantly, we do a walking tour. A Girls Gone Walking tour. Yesterday, no, Tuesday, we did the first morning. We had over 300 women walking the showroom floor together. And it was remarkable. Remarkable. And we started, I mean, that's how The Female Quotient started, was at CES.

**Matt:** And that's interesting because electronics tech is predominantly a male-dominated industry. And CES used to be completely different. Because CES, when I used to come, was electronic devices. Now you have media and tech companies here. But was that why you came to CES specifically, just based on the makeup of the industry?

**Shelley:** I'm a woman in tech, so I pioneered online research. So if you've ever taken one of those shitty surveys on the internet, sorry not sorry, but I'm the mother of that invention. And that was probably in 2000. I started a company called OTX, Online Testing Exchange. And migrated research

from offline to online. And that was in a day and age where only wealthy old men had broadband connections.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** You know, 14.4 modems or something like that.

**Matt:** It was before the iPad. It was before the iPhone.

**Shelley:** It was way ahead of its time. And it was before SurveyMonkey and all that. I had to create the blender is what I called it with online samples and mixing and matching.

**Matt:** Why did you decide to start OTX?

**Shelley:** Well, I was in market research and mall intercept and telephone surveys.

**Matt:** Yeah, clipboards, all that stuff.

**Shelley:** Yeah, you know, when, you know, we would check, check, check, you know, if you were the right demographic and paper-pencil surveys and all of that kind of stuff. And I was then doing website testing and efficiencies and all of that kind of stuff. And then I had this idea to, well, why not just move research online? But there was no one online. So I had to build the whole ecosystem. And I remember one day closing my eyes and thinking about how we did RDD, Random Digit Dialing. And you needed the phone books. And we'd go into the phone book and find the people that you would call. And how do I simulate that same scenario?

**Matt:** Phone intercepts, doing it online.

**Shelley:** Yeah, how do you migrate that concept to do online? And I thought, well, we have to pull the sample from all of the different websites.

**Matt:** Right, the statistically significant sample set that your client's calling.

**Shelley:** And so I thought I had to build this blender that would take samples from everyone.

**Matt:** Did you have a tech background when you started it?

**Shelley:** No.

**Matt:** So how did you learn about it?

**Shelley:** Well, that was the way to do it. You have to go to the lowest common denominator to do a representative sample for research.

**Matt:** But even to build the technology, you needed technology chops.

**Shelley:** I hired this guy. He was 21 years old, he was helping me do website testing. He said, I just need sort of a website for market research. It was sort of a website at the beginning. And it was quite an amazing evolution.

**Matt:** So being in the market research industry even today, I can tell you that in online research, there's just a lot of hesitation in terms of the audience quality. And, you know, a lot of clients don't want to work with the legacy services because they trust them more. It's an industry that doesn't move fast. It must have been challenging to get clients to adopt and buy into it.

**Shelley:** You have no idea.

**Matt:** I have some idea, but probably not as much as you, because you were the pioneer in this space.

**Shelley:** You know, I always say when you're building something new, you have to be the first, the second. And the third.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** The first is always the innovator who makes all the mistakes. You have to fail to succeed. The second is the copycat. They copy everything that you do, but they don't understand what's under the hood.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** The third is the sweeper. They ride in on the shiny white horse because you've already built the ecosystem and they win the game.

**Matt:** That happened with MP3 players. It happens with social media.

**Shelley:** But when you are someone that has worked their ass off and believes in what you're doing, I always said to myself, I need to be the first. I'm going to be the second. And I am going to be the third because no one will beat me at my own game.

**Matt:** So you disrupted yourself.

**Shelley:** I disrupted myself every single time. And I sold the same company three times. And that's a whole other story in and of itself. And if I tell you the tricks of the trade of things I did and how I brought an online business where everyone told me it wasn't the right time, I have to wait. There's no ecosystem. And I remember I do a lot of teaching in business school because I love listening to young people and giving back and learning. I don't like grading papers and all that, so I'll never be a full-time professor, but I love learning. So I go in and out and do guest lecturing. And I was at Wharton teaching a course. And I was talking about the whole blender. And everyone told me, oh, that's so unsophisticated. I'm like, no, but it's true. You need all samples from different places to create a representative population. The first 18-year-old that needs to go to this survey will come, boom, boom, boom. And I rotated like this. And I said, gosh, it's like Dr. Seuss's One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish. And I remember saying, okay, class, get up. We're going to go down to the library. And we went down to the library. And I had everyone sit around. They had a little kid's area. And I read everyone the book, One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish. And I said it's like you need to have the big ocean where you have all kinds of fish. That's an ecosystem. And that was the inspiration behind my blender. I needed to collect. I needed to collect all samples from all different places, but put it into this big blender because you can't just have a sample from Greenfield at the

time and sample from AOL and just use the AOL sample because you need it to blend. It could be skewed.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** You get it. And that was the inspiration for my blender. And then from then, everyone started getting into the business. Then I said, Oh. I wanted samples from even mobile companies because there was this young guy Matt Dusek who had his mobile thing, but he didn't know how to use it. And so I put his sample in and this and this and this. And then next thing you know, I had 100 sample providers. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.

**Matt:** What about the customer side? What about storytelling the customers, getting people to buy into your product?

**Shelley:** That was so easy because I built a whole model around incentivizing.

**Matt:** But did the clients trust the data and they trusted the research?

**Shelley:** Of course they didn't. No. But I parallel tested against the mall data and we had tons of data. I said to clients, don't trust me.

**Matt:** Right. It's like a Coke-Pepsi challenge kind of thing.

**Shelley:** Because I have no norms.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** And so I parallel tested and I gave free data.

**Matt:** Smart.

**Shelley:** Free data. And you know what I did? And this was before we even had... Online data. And they all were, they wanted paper. And so I would give them back stacks and stacks of paper because that's what they were used to.

**Matt:** They wanted a paper trail of the research being a real work behind the data.

**Shelley:** But what they trusted still was offline. And I started in the movie business, even though my background was CPG, Consumer Packaged Good Data. And so I started in the movie business. In CPG, it's womb to tomb, TV commercials. In the movie business, in which I had zero experience, you needed information within 48 hours. Movie trailers, which are two and a half minutes long, not 30 seconds. The hardest thing to do online because you have to DRM. You have to make sure you secure it because a movie could open and close in two seconds flat.

**Matt:** Yep.

**Shelley:** But to secure online where it was still very slow.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** I mean, you understand that, right? And how do you secure your stuff? This is in 2000. This is a really long time ago, way ahead of its time.

**Matt:** Video barely worked on the internet in 2000. It pixelated. It wasn't right.

**Shelley:** I mean, it's like if you're on a freeway with lots of traffic with a 14.4 modem, imagine the download. And tons of people on it. I mean, now we have, you know, very high-speed internet, but at the time it was really slow.

**Matt:** What gave you the ambition and conviction to do something so disruptive? Was that the first time you were an entrepreneur and then started something?

**Shelley:** Yes.

**Matt:** So what was the moment where you're like, you know what, I'm going out on my own, I'm going to launch this?

**Shelley:** I saw it. And by the way, everyone. And I was at a traditional.

**Matt:** That's not enough for seeing it. A lot of people see stuff, but they don't start a company.

**Shelley:** I was at a traditional research company, ASI. And I went to my bosses. I said, I have this ridiculous idea, but it's time to migrate research from offline to online. And they all told me it's not the right time. No one's online. And I happened to be on a panel with Larry McGee, who was the chief research officer of Procter & Gamble. And my bosses are all in the front row. And I'm whispering to Larry. And I come off the panel. And my boss has all said to me, what did you talk to him about? What were you whispering to him? So I just asked him, when's the right time to come into Procter and Gamble and talk to you about migrating research from offline to online? And he said, next week. And I said, oh, my God. Okay. And my boss has said, great. Paul will go, Ringo will go. And Star will go. And I'm like, what about Shelley? And they said it's a boys club. That's where the right team to go. And I said, well, if I'm not going, I'm going to cancel the meeting and you can all wait for the right time.

**Matt:** I love that.

**Shelley:** And I call these heartbeat moments. It was my heartbeat moment where I was like, when and why? My not right. When can I be the boss?

**Matt:** Right. So you made yourself the boss.

**Shelley:** The only way I'll ever be right is if I'm the boss. And I had already been doing website testing and I did infomercial testing and I built new solutions. And I just said, you know what, I'm going to go. And I needed a million dollars because I promised this young kid that if I ever I'm going to do this, I will give him a million dollars. I didn't have it. And I said, but if someone ever buys into it, I will give you a million dollars. And I went to Nielsen.

**Matt:** To do what? To give.

**Shelley:** Build me an online portal.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** I saw it in my head.

**Matt:** All the development. Yep.

**Shelley:** No one believed me except my father and my husband. And they each said they'd give me half a million. But I didn't want to take their money because I knew that, A, I didn't have it. My husband is a butt doctor and colorectal surgeon, but he was a fellow. We didn't have the money.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** And I knew if I took their money, I would not take risk. I'd be safe.

**Matt:** That's the problem with taking friends and family money. It's too personally connected.

**Shelley:** And I didn't even know that at the time. And so I went to Nielsen and I said, I'm going to pioneer online research. And they said we love that idea. What do you need? I said I need a million dollars for this kid. I didn't think about me. And they said, okay. And I gave away 80% of the business, whatever the business was going to be or not going to be. And I handed this young kid a check. I said, let's build it. And that was that. And that's how I started.

**Matt:** Are you still in touch with him today?

**Shelley:** and I called it, Yeah. He's Patricof.

**Matt:** Oh, wow. Alan Patricof's son?

**Shelley:** He's Trevor Kaufman who went into business with Patricof's son.

**Matt:** Right. Yeah.

**Shelley:** And that is how I started. And I called it Reel Research, R-E-E-L, at the time. And pioneered it at Nielsen, and built a whole movie business around it, the first of its kind. And the way I got my first client, which is hysterical, was I went to Warner Brothers. And there was a company that was Joe Farrell, NRG, was... Legend. And they had a monopoly in movie research. It was mall intercept testing. They had every studio. And they were unbreakable. There was no competitor. And I said to Warner Brothers, Are you completely satisfied with how you do movie research today? And I use the word completely. And they said, well, who's ever completely satisfied?

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** And no one's ever broken the monopoly, ever, because Joe Farrell was the godfather to every single movie studio. CEO, producer, director.

**Matt:** He was institutionalized there.

**Shelley:** Because he was the studio whisperer. Told everyone how their movie was going to open and close and whatever. And he had the keys to the castle.

**Matt:** Were you based in LA at this point?

**Shelley:** Yeah. I knew no one in the movie business. But I was a brilliant researcher. But I knew no one in the movie business. The head of research looked at me and I said, I have this crazy idea to migrate research to the Internet. The internet? What is that? And I said, And I won't charge you a nickel. All I want is when you to test in the mall. I want to parallel test the same spot online for one year. Give me all your data.

**Matt:** That's the way to do it.

**Shelley:** And that's all I want. And they said it's a deal. They said, but we have exclusivity with Joe Farrell. You can't tell anyone because we will be in trouble.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** I said, Mom's the word. That was the deal. And they said, but we have a contract and it has exclusivity. I said, let me see your contract. In the contract, It said they have exclusivity with NRG for mall intercept testing.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** That was the loophole. I said, but I'm online. And that is how I got into every single studio.

**Matt:** And you took that year and you proved that your data was just as good and more efficient.

**Shelley:** It was even better than that. I said, when you go to meetings, what I found from what I was doing, while I didn't want to replace the recall testing and all of that because that was normatively based. What online had at the time that was genius was the open-ended responses. I had the best open-ended.

**Matt:** The qualitative why behind the what.

**Shelley:** Was genius. And at the time, people were putting in bold and exclamation. And I said to the studios, I want you to go into the producer meetings and give them still the mall testing quant.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** And you bring in the quant. And don't tell them where it came from because then they'll doubt it. Just show them that. And so they would go in with their quant. And I think you can even call it NRG if you want. Let them think that's what it is. And just come in with the quant, the new enhanced. And the producers and directors were like holy shit. What the hell happened? This is the best stuff I've ever seen. Where'd you get it? And like, oh, it's this new thing. It's online. And then I said slowly. And I'm going to now not give you all these pages. I'm going to start sending you stuff online so we can start eliminating some paper trail. And when I would send the online, I would also send homemade chocolate chip cookies and milk. I said when you read it online. Here's a little something. Enjoy your reading. Next thing you knew, word traveled. And then I started parallel testing and calibrating norms and showing them that actually, my data was more reliable than Maul's. And within two years, I started replacing them. And poor Joe Farrell started calling me her. If you are gonna use her. I'm not going to give you my data anymore. But by then, I was already able to

replace his scores. I was the only company in the world that was able to break an unbreakable company that was the only company in the world providing scores to the movie industry. And that was my little company that became OTX, the first company in the world that was now an alternative to NRG.

**Matt:** That's amazing. We'll be right back with The Speed of Culture after a few words from our sponsors. Hear the story, it's like the things that dawned on me as you had conviction, you had perseverance, you know, you believed in yourself. Those things are really the hallmarks of what a great makes a great entrepreneur, right? Because without those things, you could have a great product, but you're not going to have that internal willpower to push through.

**Shelley:** You know, I hire for passion, train for skill. I was passionate about what I was doing, resilient. I knew I was on to something and I wasn't going to stop. And I built an un-corporate model. You know, I always say when you love what you do, it's called passion. When you don't, it's called stress. And I loved what I did. And there were tons of hurdles. You know, I built something for the first time. And, you know, today what makes me so proud of online research is there are so many spinoffs. I mean, online research is a thing. I mean, it's not, it wasn't a trend. It stuck. And a lot of people take a lot of credit for online research. I know where it came from. You know, we didn't have social media at the time and there's not a lot of reports written. I mean, you'll see a lot of stories, but this is a long time ago. And a young guy that worked for me has taken the sample blender technology and has now built a huge sample company, just sold it for, I sold my company for 80 million. He sold my sample technology. A lot of sample companies have come from that. He sold it for a billion dollars, you know. And so watching the evolution and the evolution and the evolution.

**Matt:** You paved the path for companies like Suzy, we should rename our company, Shelley.

**Shelley:** Yeah, but I love that, you know. And I think that makes me proud, you know, to see what has come from all that and how technology, I mean when I was doing online surveys, I was using avatars. My kids have little talking avatars for surveys. Or we were using the concept of QR codes before QR codes. It wasn't sticky then because, as you said, consumer adoption has to be ready for it. It was too ahead of itself. Avatars, now everyone's like, oh, Web3 and virtual world. I was doing that. No one wanted it. It was like, ugh. or, you know, QR codes, you need the adoption. Consumers weren't there yet. It was a good idea.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Too ahead of itself.

**Matt:** You ran that for 10 years?

**Shelley:** Oh, gosh, who knows? You know, I was the only female CEO, top 25, my entire career. I've been in a boys' club my whole career. Didn't hold me back at all. I'm sure I'm owed a shitload of money. And I'm sure I was paid less than, you know, everyone in my field. And if I went back and checked my paycheck, I could probably get paid a lot. They probably owe me a lot of money.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** Didn't affect me at all. I was always, I always believed in myself.



**Matt:** You were passionate, too. And you love what you are doing.

**Shelley:** Yeah, no regrets. I have a philosophy of, you know, I never want to look back and say shoulda, woulda, coulda. I have zero regrets. And I've had the most amazing journey. And it led me to where I am today.

**Matt:** Yeah, so let's talk about The Female Quotient. For those in The audience who don't know what The Female Quotient is, what is it?

**Shelley:** I sold my company, OTX, to, well, when I left Nielsen, I went to iFilm. iFilm was YouTube then, which, you know, was an amazing company. And I built the next iteration online, so it was Reel Research at Nielsen. I then went to iFilm and created OTX, then sold it from iFilm to Bob Pittman and Strauss Zelnick, which was, you know, really an entrepreneurial undertaking going to the VC. And then from there, I sold it to Ipsos, the third-largest research company in the world. And was running innovation in 83 countries. I stayed there for five years and realized after that it was time to give back. I gave back with generosity what I wish I had my entire career.

**Matt:** Which was?

**Shelley:** A network of women supporting women. I'm 61 years old. I did not have that. You know, I lived in a madman era, truly. You know, I rose the ranks very successfully, but I did feel that what I really could do now was give back what I wish I had. And so I decided I wanted to go to CES. And this is the question that you asked me, a tech trade show. I was a techie. But I built for the lowest common denominator because that's how you get consumers, which is what you need for market research. And I heard 150,000 people was going, less than 3% were women. And so I called five girlfriends of mine and I said, let's walk the floor together. I don't want to go by myself. If you know other women, please invite them. 24 hours later, 50 women showed up to walk the floor. That was... 10 years ago. And the most remarkable things happened. Two things. One, 50 women walking the floor? I called it Power the Pack. A woman alone has power collectively, we have an impact. When I would walk the floor alone, you're invisible. When 50 women walk the floor, the invisible becomes visible. It was this whoosh moment. That's all I can explain because that's what I felt like. Every single guy's head turned like, where the hell did all you women come from? And it just lit me up. I was like, this is an incredible feeling. And the second thing that happened was I was surrounded by women just like me.

**Matt:** How'd you find them? or how did they find you?

**Shelley:** I knew women in the industry.

**Matt:** Just your network, Right?

**Shelley:** Yeah, but we were never together. You know, we've always been individuals.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** And we were talking about work-life balance and imposter syndrome. And we were all doing deals with one another. And we all had tons of money spending it with each other. Wow, what a concept. There's such a scarcity of women at the top. We were trained to compete with one another, but why? And we were in my little hotel room that the next day. 50 turned to 100, 100 to

300. And we were in my suite. And that is how The Girls' Lounge started. It was called The Girls' Lounge. The opposite of a boy is a girl. The opposite of the club is a lounge. If there's a boys' club now, there's a Girls' Lounge. And then I thought, gosh, if I could connect women in tech, what about women in marketing? What about women in media? What about women in finance? What about women in cybersecurity? What about women in space? What about? So I thought, gosh, I'll do these girls lounges, these pop-up spaces where women could connect and collaborate and have safe spaces and meet other women and not feel alone at these big conferences dominated by men at every conference. So I did a Girls' Lounge at Cannes and a Girls' Lounge at South by Southwest and a girl.

**Matt:** Did you think about a business model at that point, or you just want to solve the problem of getting women together?

**Shelley:** Well, I needed a business model because I don't charge membership.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** And so I needed brands to sponsor it. But. I didn't have that concept yet, so I sponsored it myself. Right. And thought, simple. I'll just pay for that. The idea started when I was at Ipsos. So The Girls' Lounge started at Ipsos. And I had Ipsos pay for it because I was running global innovation. So I'll have Ipsos. It was the Ipsos Girls' Lounge. So that's how the model started. Ipsos was the brand sponsoring it. After my five years at Ipsos, I decided time to go and do it myself. Then I get invited to the World Economic Forum. My invitation was, we want you to come. But you might not feel welcome. Once again-

**Matt:** They said that to you?

**Shelley:** Yeah, that was the invitation. It was one little spot left. My head said, who wants to go? That's not a very nice invitation. My heart said I must. And I've always wanted to be invited to the World Economic Forum.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** That's a dream come true. I went to a big brand that goes to the World Economic Forum. And they said, we love the idea, but we don't like the name. You got to change the name. I said I'm not changing the name.

**Matt:** The name of Girls' Lounge. Right?

**Shelley:** Yeah. And so. And it was called The Girls' Lounge, the place for the 17%. Because at the World Economic Forum, only 17% of white batches, which is the official Congress, are women. I didn't get the sponsorship money that I needed, which was \$250,000. And so I called a girlfriend of mine who was the COO of Bloomberg, Jacki Kelley. I said, Jacki, you got to go with me. I don't want to go by myself. It's too scary. But we're going. And she said I'll go with you. So I took my own money, paid for it, and knew I had to go. And we showed up, put my little shingle up, The Girls' Lounge, place for the 17%. And we had the best content. I did not do hair and makeup in the lounge.

**Matt:** Best content meaning you brought people together and you would just bring speakers.

**Shelley:** We had a little tiny shack. With big windows so everyone could see in. I hung a chandelier, which I always hang to bring the feminine. It looked beautiful. Great food, great content. People poked their heads in. But women... With the badge that knew of us from Cannes or from, we already had a reputation.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Came. And then Jamie Dimon came. And Jamie's like, oh, my God, this is the best thing I've seen at the World Economic Forum. I'd like to be a speaker here. And he shows up. And became a speaker. And he said I want to sponsor this. This is the best thing I've ever seen. And then Anne Finucane.

**Matt:** Jamie Dimon, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase.

**Shelley:** Just saying.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** That's the one. Yep.

**Matt:** Yep.

**Shelley:** Next thing you know, Anne Finucane from Bank of America, she's retired since then, says, why am I not speaking here? And then everyone's like, well, why am I not speaking here? And then the original company I went to was like, oh, their CEO came and said, this is the hottest spot here. And this is 10 years ago, nine years ago, little Shock. And they wanted to be a sponsor now with The Girl's Lounge name. I said, you can't. And they said, why? I said because someone would. Has exclusivity in that category now, JP Morgan.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** Jamie is the first one every year now. His team calls and says he wants to write into the schedule to make sure he can be there. He is our greatest champion.

**Matt:** That's awesome.

**Shelley:** Every year. A real, true champion of change.

**Matt:** Can you get him to run for president?

**Shelley:** God bless. And I have to tell you, today we are the destination for changing the equation and closing the gap at the World Economic Forum, standing room only with the most incredible champions for change across Fortune 500 companies. We trend the top five there. We have a two-story glass house. Right in the middle of the street, diagonal from Congress. And we have moved and shifted the power source. And we've changed the gender at Davos, where I think the place for 17% are men now. I mean, it is remarkable. And our big sign when you walk in now says equality is possible if you want it. And we attract conscious leaders who all show up. And they bring their A-game. It is just quite... Incredible. And so today, The Female Quotient is all around changing the equation, closing the gap. We have the largest global community of women across every

industry supporting one another. And we also have the most incredible partners, which are Fortune 500 companies with CEOs that are intentionally, purposely, and consciously all in on closing the gender gap in the workplace. And that is their legacy.

**Matt:** And it's going to be your legacy.

**Shelley:** It's ours collectively.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** And, you know, the World Economic Forum says it'll take 131 years to close the gender gap. And we say not on our watch. It is a mindset gap. And if we want it, we can do it.

**Matt:** And that's your mission. And besides World Economic Forum, you're here at CES and I've seen you in Cannes before.

**Shelley:** Yeah, we're all over.

**Matt:** All the big places where influential industry people come, you set up these forums where you bring speakers sponsored by, you know, your corporate partners. And it gives women a voice and it gives awareness to the things that women are doing in business to bridge that gender gap.

**Shelley:** But we also, because we have the largest global community of women in the workplace across every category, we also are a media brand now.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** So, you know, we're in experiences, media, and advisory on how to close the gender gap in the workplace.

**Matt:** As a CEO of a company, what advice could you give me to make sure I'm proactively trying to push? Gender equality in the workplace? Like what are some things that you've seen well-intentioned male leaders miss?

**Shelley:** Well, first of all, I don't think it's about whether you're male or you're female. It's just about intentional action, priority, choice. And realizing that of all the Sustainable- SDGs, and Sustainable Development Goals, it is the only one of the 17 that you can control and do. Because it's a mindset gap. In your workplace or the world.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** The other ones, hunger, poverty, sustainability, climate, you have to rely on the rest of the world.

**Matt:** Yeah, externalities, Right.

**Shelley:** To do. This is the only one you can control. The pay gap, you have the data, you can fix that one. The care gap, you can fix that one as well and not rely on the government, but rely on yourself to put the policies in place.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Leadership gap, you can control that one as well. Well, they're all fixable and they're not hard. In procurement, which is a supply chain, less than 5% of the supply chain goes to women. And it's not because it's a lack of women. It's not because the women aren't as talented. It's legacy issues. If you look under the hood.

**Matt:** Legacy, the old boys network. It's just in place.

**Shelley:** Ba-doom, ba-doom, ba-doom, ba-doom, bam.

**Matt:** Yeah. Right.

**Shelley:** Boom. Not complicated. Workforce. For women in underserved parts of the world, the solutions are not complicated.

**Matt:** Also investment too. You look at the VC investments. I read very small percentage goes to women-run companies.

**Shelley:** And actually, if you look at why if you actually understand why. Most checkwriters are men. So the data that we're seeing is very misleading. If you look at when there are diverse check writers, the percentage is much higher. We're just looking at the wrong numbers. So it sends you down the wrong path. AI, look at the bias in AI. So we're working on a whole new solution called the Algorithm for Equality. And we have... Women in 100 countries helping rewrite the rules.

**Matt:** You're already saying bias in AI.

**Shelley:** Of course. Junk in, junk out.

**Matt:** It's regurgitating what's on the internet. And since that exists, it's going to facilitate.

**Shelley:** I mean. And we're not even profiling. I mean, look at the latest The New York Times only profiled the men in AI. You don't think there are women in AI? Of course, there are. Facial recognition. We didn't even have black people in coding. So we've missed so many crucial variables. I mean, I can go on and on and on about the bias, the biases. Algorithm for equality, just even that tagline 10 years ago. Who knew AI was going to be hot?

**Matt:** A lot of what you're talking about is sort of like the leadership striving to change. But when I hear about your story and what you did at OTX. You became the change you wanted to see. So I think, to me, there's two pieces of it. It's making sure the leaders facilitate this, but it's also making sure that the woman, the young woman who entered the workforce has the wherewithal and the confidence that don't feel they need to ask for permission to go for it. How did you have that confidence? You talk about your parents, your father supporting you. What are some things that we can do to make sure the young woman can also drive it themselves?

**Shelley:** Listen, sorry, not sorry. Permission granted. When I started my company, I didn't have a choice because... I am a mom and a grandmother. I wasn't a grandmother at the time. Primary caregiver.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** And I just created the un-corporate rules because if I didn't, I wouldn't be in the workplace.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** And so I decided that it's the only way I will thrive in the workplace is by being my boss, writing my own rules, which is how I became a chief troublemaker. I broke every rule that made no sense and created new ones. And so either you follow the status quo, which is the rules that were written by men over a hundred years ago for men. And I'm not saying that was wrong. It just was what worked then.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** But nothing has been redesigned. So I just designed a workplace for me that would work for everyone. Because if you design it based on what a caregiver needs, it's going to work for everyone. I designed it for the lowest common denominator, which is going to work for the majority.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** That's just what I did. So sorry, not sorry.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** And yesterday in the lounge, we stamped out the imposter syndrome concept. And we wrote in the new alternative that we're kind of coming up with a new name because that's just so dumb. We just think that you have to follow the status quo because that's what it's been. But what about the possibilities of what can be? Let's stop holding on to the past and let's open up the new door of opportunity and write it forward. It's not very complicated. Just because it hasn't been done doesn't mean it can't be done. And sometimes we think it's...

**Matt:** Well, you did it. That's what I'm saying. You did it yourself.

**Shelley:** But I didn't know. I didn't know.

**Matt:** You didn't know, but you did it. So the fact that the empowering part for me of what you're saying is you're somebody who went through the battle and won. And now you want other people to win their battles. But you've done it yourself. And I think that's why you're successful. And that's why people believe in you because you did it yourself.

**Shelley:** I got to tell you. They didn't believe in me from the beginning.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** And even today. And this is, you know, Laura, you talked about her.

**Matt:** Laura Desmond, Yeah.

**Shelley:** When I did. Girls' Lounge. A lot of people didn't like the name Girls' Lounge, even women. They're like, we're not girls. And I'm like, have you ever heard of men objecting to being a boy in the boys club? Like, they didn't like the name, you know, because women were, we dressed like men and we didn't wear makeup and we didn't do hair publicly. And I very consciously did it publicly. It was scary. Trust me. And I don't blame senior-level women who didn't want to come because it wasn't where the power was.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** We weren't powerful.

**Matt:** It was counterculture in some ways.

**Shelley:** It was so counterculture. I stuck with it, but I had to pay for it myself because women were the only ones, men weren't going to pay for it.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** Brands weren't into it. I very consciously wasn't a women's space, even though I was called a women's space. But I wasn't a feminist organization. I called it the business of equality intentionally, but I didn't have CEO support. I didn't have CMO support. I didn't have women's support. I had no one's support.

**Matt:** Right.

**Shelley:** But I've always been alone. Remember that. And so it took me a long time to break in. You have to hold your ground.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** I didn't have the money until I had the money to support myself to do it. So it's complicated. So it's not like I can just say to everyone, go spend your own money to believe in yourself. But you know what I can say is it doesn't cost money. To believe in yourself. It does cost money to start your own business, but it doesn't cost money to believe in yourself. Because if you don't believe in yourself, no one else will. It costs \$0 to shut that bitch up in your head, which is imposter syndrome. \$0, for men and women.

**Matt:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Men tend to ignore the voice. Women let that voice get louder. But the loud voice needs to be the confident voice of you got this. You are awesome. You have amazing ideas and you don't need to have them all. But the idea you do have to have is to follow your heart, not your head. Your heart doesn't have imposter syndrome.

**Matt:** Right. It's amazing. Well, it looks like we're running up on time. I mean, I feel like we could do this podcast for another hour and I want to, because I want to, I want to dig deeper into things that are more tactical and can push us forward. And I'm sure you get this a lot as people hear you and they want to take action. That's how I feel.

**Shelley:** All about action. And the one thing I also say is to stop putting pledges on the table because pledges. No one follows up on a pledge. But what you do follow up on is intentional action. So if you want to move forward. Commit to transformative, intentional action. Action for change. That pushes you forward.

**Matt:** We're going to leave it with that. This has been amazing. Thank you so much for sharing your story. I cannot wait for our audience to hear it. And I'm incredibly inspired. I want to figure out ways we can collaborate more in the future.

**Shelley:** Amazing, because we're going to talk about why you also called it Suzy.

**Matt:** Yeah, we'll do that too.

**Shelley:** As a guy, because I can't wait to hear that too.

**Matt:** Absolutely. On behalf of Suzy and the Adweek team, thanks again to the great original Shelley Zalis, founder and CEO of The Female Quotient, for joining us today. Be sure to subscribe, and rate. And review The Speed of Culture podcast on your favorite podcast platform. We're here live in Vegas at CES. And we'll see you real soon. Take care. The Speed of Culture is brought to you by Suzy as part of the Adweek Podcast and Acast Network. You can listen and subscribe to all of Adweek's podcasts by visiting [adweek.com/podcasts](https://adweek.com/podcasts). To find out more about Suzy, head to [suzy.com](https://suzy.com). Make sure to search for The Speed of Culture at Apple Podcasts, and Spotify. And Google Podcasts, or anywhere else podcasts are found. Click follow so you don't miss out on any future episodes. On behalf of the team here at Suzy, thanks for listening.