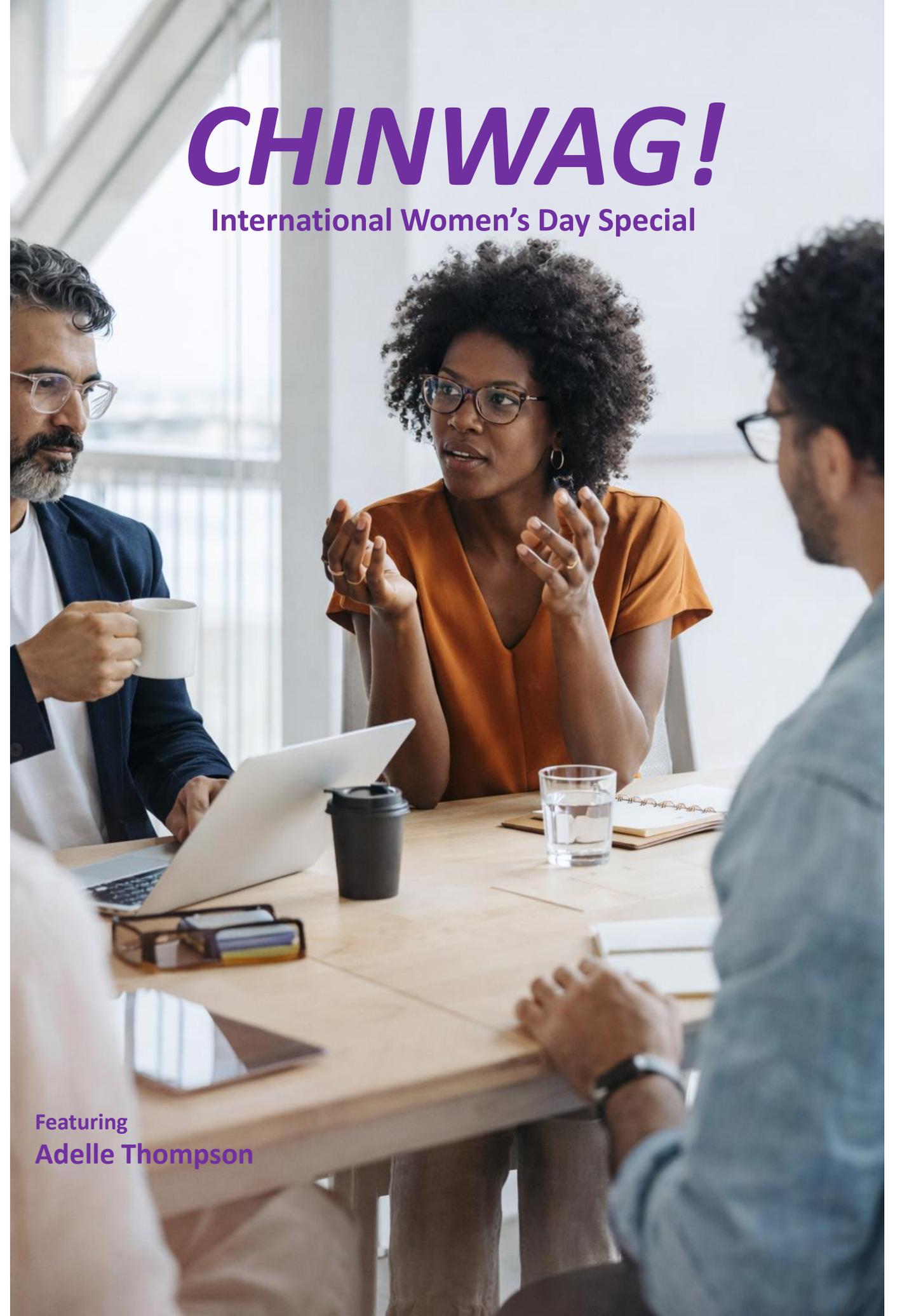


# ***CHINWAG!***

**International Women's Day Special**

Featuring  
**Adelle Thompson**



# CHINWAG!

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## Editorial

### Beyond Celebration

International Women’s Day often arrives with statistics, slogans and celebration. Social feeds fill with declarations of empowerment. Organisations publish tributes. Panels are convened to discuss progress made — and progress still to come.

Beneath the banners, however, sits a quieter truth: advancement has rarely been straightforward, and never evenly shared.

The history of women’s work is not only a story of milestones and breakthroughs. It is also a story of steady navigation — of learning how to move within professional spaces that were not always designed with women in mind. Progress has often been secured not through spectacle, but through competence, persistence and thoughtful recalibration.

In working life, assumptions still linger. About authority. About ambition. About temperament. Some are subtle. Others less so. Many are inherited. And so progression is not only about access to opportunity; it is about how that opportunity is shaped, occupied and sustained.

This edition of *Chinwag!* focuses on that process. What does it really take to move across sectors with confidence? To challenge limiting narratives without becoming consumed by them? To establish credibility without performance? To progress while remaining grounded?

Through the professional journey of Adelle Thompson, we explore what reinvention can look like in practice. Her trajectory — spanning sectors, expectations and professional cultures — offers a lens through which to consider how growth is negotiated in real time. The emphasis here is not on applause, but on substance: the decisions taken, the judgements made, and the steady adjustments that make movement possible.

International Women’s Day matters because the conversation is still evolving. Celebration has its place — and rightly so. But reflection matters too. If workplaces are to change meaningfully, we must continue to look beyond symbolism and towards the everyday dynamics that shape authority and opportunity.

The pages that follow offer one perspective within that wider dialogue. Not as a final word, but as part of an ongoing conversation about work, progression and professional space.

Enjoy your read — we welcome your feedback.

Regards

**Team Serious About Solutions**

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# Be the 3%.

*What happens when you stop  
accepting other people's  
assessment of your potential?*





## **Adelle Thompson, Founder of AT Enrich and host of the Five for Two Careers podcast, on leverage, belief and the psychology of progression.**

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When Adelle Thompson was told that “corporate would eat you alive”, she cried.

The comment came from someone senior — experienced and authoritative — the kind of voice that can quietly redirect a life — if you let it.

At the time, she was working in early years childcare. No corporate background. No HR qualification. No obvious pathway into recruitment — let alone leadership. The assessment sounded rational. It was also wrong.

Sixteen years later, Adelle has moved from recruitment into HR management and on to Operations Director level. Along the way she has negotiated not just salary increases, but pension uplifts, commission structures, shares and flexibility. Today, she runs AT Enrich alongside her corporate role, coaching women on career pivots and salary strategy.

Her story is compelling.

But the real interest lies not in the progression — it lies in the positioning.

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At one stage in her career, she was told that only around three per cent of applicants successfully make certain transitions.

Most people hear that statistic and withdraw.

She heard possibility.

“Someone has to be in the 3%.”

It is not delusion. It is positioning.

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Most career ceilings are not structural. They are interpretative.

Someone tells you something. You internalise it. It becomes a boundary.

For some, that comment would have confirmed limitation. For Adelle, it activated something else.

“I am born to prove people wrong,” she reflects — not with bravado, but with clarity.

That instinct, she acknowledges, has roots. Caribbean parents. Survival thinking. Work hard. Be grateful. Don’t assume entitlement.

Gratitude builds resilience.

Unexamined gratitude can also suppress ambition.

The shift comes when inherited narratives are interrogated rather than absorbed.

Instead of asking:

*Am I good enough?*

She began asking:

*Why am I not the 3%?*

*Continued...*

## Learning in Practice

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Statistics describe groups. They do not predetermine individuals.

That cognitive shift alters behaviour. If you assume exclusion, you prepare defensively — or not at all. If you assume potential inclusion, you act.

Calculated belief becomes strategic advantage.

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One of the most striking elements of her career pivot was not reinvention — but translation.

Report writing became compliance capability.

Parent communication became stakeholder management.

Safeguarding became risk assessment.

Nursery management became operational oversight.

“You don’t need to start over,” she says. “You need to learn how to communicate what you already know.”

In a labour market that often fetishises qualifications, this reframing is quietly radical. It does not dismiss formal education. It questions whether we overestimate its exclusivity.

Confidence, in this framework, is not personality.

It is evidence, properly framed.

Negotiation, too, is not framed as entitlement.

It is leverage.

Adelle quantifies value. She ties performance to revenue. She understands that a standard 3 – 5 % annual uplift often maintains position rather than advances it. She asks what exchange is occurring — not whether she feels deserving.

“If I leave tomorrow, who makes this much money for you?”

It is not aggression.

It is clarity.

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Research has long suggested that women are more likely to apply for roles when they meet most listed criteria, while men apply when they meet some.

“Women wish we had the audacity of men,” she says.

But the deeper issue is conditioning.

Many high-performing women are raised to demonstrate competence before claiming progression. Many men are socialised to claim progression as the route to competence.

In that context, the “3%” question becomes less about ego and more about permission.

Why assume exclusion?

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The labour market in 2026 is shifting rapidly. AI is reshaping entry-level roles. Offshore models are evolving. Linear career ladders are dissolving.

In that environment, passivity carries risk.

Adaptability — cognitive and strategic — becomes currency.

The question, then, is not whether barriers exist. They do.

The question is whether we internalise them as destiny.

“Why am I not the 3%?”

It is not a slogan.

It is a pivot.

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# A Snapshot of Progress

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Some indicators suggest progress in workplace inclusion. Others show how uneven that progress remains.

## Women in senior leadership

Across large UK organisations, women now hold around **40% of board positions**, but significantly fewer executive leadership roles.

## Application behaviour

Research consistently shows that women are more likely to apply for roles **only when they meet most listed criteria**, while men often apply when they meet **some**.

## The pay gap

The UK gender pay gap persists across sectors, reflecting differences in seniority, occupational segregation and progression patterns.

Statistics describe groups.

They do not predetermine individuals.

\* Sources: FTSE Women Leaders Review (2024–2025); Harvard Business Review; Behavioural Insights Team research on job application behaviour.



# The Myth of Corporate Fit

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Few phrases sound as reasonable as “corporate fit”. Yet, as the preceding story illustrates, progression is often negotiated within unspoken definitions of belonging.

On the surface, “fit” suggests alignment. Shared values. A natural ease within an organisation. That sounds fair.

But “fit” is rarely neutral.

More often, it is shorthand — for familiarity. For comfort. For “someone like us”.

Capability is discussed openly in organisations.

Fit is discussed quietly.

You may be qualified and experienced. But if you are perceived as not fitting, the language shifts. You are described as “still developing”, “not quite ready”, or “better suited elsewhere”.

The wording is polished. The signal is not.

## Fit and Reform

Diversity initiatives have opened doors that were previously closed. That progress matters.

It is also true that reform has not been evenly distributed. In many Western contexts, white women have benefited most from gender-focused inclusion programmes. That reality should be acknowledged.

But it also tells us something important.

Access and belonging are not the same thing.

If organisational culture remains shaped around a narrow template — of background, accent, education or confidence style — those closest to that template will advance first. Even in institutions that publicly champion equality and reform. That is not conspiracy. It is proximity.

And proximity has always influenced progression.

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## The Hidden Cost

The power of “fit” is not only organisational. It is psychological.

When someone senses they do not fit, the instinct is to self-adjust.

Speak differently.

Dress differently.

Be louder.

Be smaller.

Over time, the question becomes less about the system and more about the self.

That shift is costly.

## Rethinking Fit

Values matter. Collaboration matters. Alignment matters.

The myth is not that fit exists.

The myth is that it is objective.

Fit is interpreted. And interpretation is shaped by history, hierarchy and habit.

If progression continues to be framed as a matter of fit rather than evidence, reform will remain uneven — rewarding familiarity before performance.

The real question is not whether someone fits.

It is whether the definition of fit has evolved.

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# Repositioning Your Career

## Five Structural Moves

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Progression is rarely accidental.

It is often the result of small but deliberate shifts in how experience is framed, communicated and negotiated.

The following strategies appear repeatedly in the careers of professionals who successfully navigate organisational systems.

### 1 Translate Your Experience

Skills are often hidden inside roles that sound routine.

Operational tasks can reflect strategic capability when translated correctly.

Supervision becomes leadership.

Reporting becomes risk management.

Client communication becomes stakeholder engagement.

Career movement often begins not with new experience, but with **new language**.

### 2 Understand the Value Chain

Many professionals understand their responsibilities but not how their work connects to organisational outcomes.

Progression tends to favour those who can answer a simple question:

# Repositioning Your Career

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**“If this role disappeared tomorrow, what problem would it create?”**

Understanding that link helps position your work in terms that decision-makers recognise.

## 3 Evidence Your Contribution

Confidence in professional environments rarely rests on personality alone.

It rests on **evidence**.

Projects delivered.

Problems solved.

Revenue protected or generated.

Processes improved.

The ability to quantify contribution transforms discussion from opinion to fact.

## 4 Question Assumptions Early

Career ceilings are often built from inherited narratives.

Comments such as:

*“That role isn’t for people like us.”*

*“You need a different background.”*

*“It’s too competitive.”*

may reflect perception rather than reality.

Progression often begins when those assumptions are examined rather than accepted.

**At some point, awareness becomes negotiation.**

# Repositioning Your Career

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## 5 Negotiate From Clarity

Negotiation is frequently misunderstood as confrontation.

In practice, it is usually about clarity.

Understanding the value you bring, the problems you solve, and the outcomes you deliver allows discussions about salary, responsibility and progression to become grounded rather than emotional.

**Clarity creates leverage.**

Career progression is rarely about fitting perfectly into existing systems.

More often, it involves recognising how those systems work — and positioning yourself within them with **agency and intention**.

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