Headtorch Wellbeing Hour:

Sue Sanders Racing Through Life, Knowing When to Take a Break

**Amy:** Welcome to the Headtorch Wellbeing Hour with me, Amy Macdonald

**Angus:** and me, Angus Robinson. We'll introduce today's guest, Sue Sanders, in a few moments. As you settle in, a heads up that we're recording this conversation, so if you want to listen back or share it, it's available as a podcast. And please do follow us on those various channels.

At Headtorch, we work with organizations to develop and maintain a mentally healthy culture. The Wellbeing Hour is an important extension of our work. I'll be back a little bit later to field some questions and comments to our guest.

**Amy:** Indeed, we look forward to hearing those thoughts from those of you who are joining us live today.

In the meantime, I'm going to be asking my own questions of Sue, including how does a dancer become a rally car co driver? And in a field as potentially dangerous as motorsports, how are people encouraged to look after their own mental health? Today's session is entitled Racing Through Life, Knowing When to Take a Break,

and for this chat, I'm delighted to welcome our guest, Sue Sanders, Director of Learning and Development at Motorsport UK. Sue, we'll hear more shortly about how you arrived at this role, but before we go any further, you've got a question for our listeners, which is If there's an opportunity, what stops you saying yes, why not?

So for those of you joining us today, that question is now being popped into the chat. We'll come back to this a little later on, so do please drop your responses in there to that question and any other questions or thoughts that you have for Sue, and we'll come back to that a little later on. Sue Sanders then, let me introduce you.

You have been a dancer, you've worked as a beauty therapist, a marketing manager, a senior lecturer in marketing, communications and business, and you've run your own management and personal development business for years. Sue, you have co authored Safety Guidance and Regulations for UK rally events, and these have now been adopted internationally.

As Learning and Development Director at Motorsport UK, you manage a team with responsibility for over 10, 000 volunteer marshals, over 3, 000 volunteer officials, and the elite program with over 100 competitors, competing at the top level both nationally and internationally. Welcome, Sue. Introduce yourself using your mystery object.

**Sue:** Okay, I will. Thank you very much for that introduction. It just sounds a bit crazy really when somebody else reads it out, it's like, oh really? But yes, it's true. I have to say that is all true. So my mystery object is my little tiny owl. I don't know if you can all see my little owl. This is my wise owl.

So the wise owl represents my father, he was always called the wise owl in the family and everybody used to come and come around and go and see Gordon and chat about family matters, personal matters, financial matters, whatever it was. And he always had a very balanced way of answering things without telling anybody ever what to do, but he kind of gave them the information,

and that's just been such a good model for me to follow as, as the years have gone by. And the little owl was given to me by my daughter about two and a half years ago, and she said, You know, Mum, you've told me about Grandad, because she was never able to meet him, she said, You must be my wise old owl.

And then she said, Oh, perhaps not the old yet, which was kind, but you must be my wise owl. And, and I thought, do you know, that is such a good way to think about how to be throughout life. And to try and channel my dad and to think about, you know, how I can guide and support people, but not tell, and for me, that's what I try and do as part of learning and development.

And I guess I just continue to work towards that. Don't always achieve it, but I try.

**Amy:** Lovely. So it's about giving that kind of balanced. That balanced thinking. What, what do you, yeah,

**Sue:** it's a lot about asking questions and what would happen if, and so why do you think that? And, and oh, give me an example,

I don't quite, I don't think I quite understand what you've said, maybe because what they said sounded a bit awful. Something, you know, let's rephrase that a minute. It's those, I guess they're coaching questions as much as anything, but not thought of necessarily in a formal coaching way. Just a way to encourage people to rethink their own decisions, really, and come to a place where they go, Oh, actually, yes, that is what I want to do.

Very good. And then it's their idea. It's even better.

**Amy:** Absolutely. So how does that, how does that empower them then to take it

**Sue:** forward? Well, it's huge isn't it? When, when you see somebody who's coming and said, Oh, I don't know what to do about this. How do I do this? And it's a big panic. And you say, well, let's think about it.

And then after about five or 10 minutes, they can sit there and go. Well, I know what I need to do. I need to do this, and, and do you mind if I go? And I need to do it now. Yeah. Okay. Bye. And they're gone cause they're so enthusiastic about their plan that they want to go and implement. And for me, that is just the best, you know, it's their idea,

they're happy about it and they're doing it and they own it, you know. I maybe just turned the key a little and off they go. It's a bit like a clockwork thing. It's lovely.

**Amy:** Yeah. Yeah. That really ties in with our approach really to having supportive conversations within the workplace is about creating that thinking environment, isn't it?

Where if somebody's struggling, it's about them just being given that space to think about it, them coming up with the ideas of what they want to do next. You might put some suggestions out on the table, but it's not about telling them what to do, right?

**Sue:** Absolutely. I mean, I think everybody has so many good ideas,

and the challenge is when, when you get to my age, I'm, you know, I'm about to, I'm not retiring, but I get to retirement age next month. There are lots of things you've experienced, there's lots of things you could say, I would do this, but really that's neither use nor ornament to somebody else. You know, what would they do is, is really the most important thing.

You know, what are they going to feel comfortable with inside themselves? And as you said, I mean, I did manage a training company for many, many years and that was very much about enabling other people to do things and helping people. And we had 10 trainers at one point and there is no way I was going to tell them what to do because they were experts in their field, but I might have guided and directed in some of the ways that they could do it.

I've seen some of the chats coming in as well, by the way, so that's quite nice. Yeah, lovely. Yeah.

**Amy:** Yeah, we'll, we'll, we'll come, we'll come to that, we'll come to that later. I think what you're talking about is it's about empowering others, isn't it, to be the best, to be the best of themselves, right? Yeah.

Let me take you back to the beginning, because you've not always been as involved in Motorsports UK. I hinted at that earlier, of course, because, first of all, you were a volunteer within the Motorsport, but before that even you were, you were a dancer. and, and in fact, if you don't know, for those of you listening in, Sue here, in fact got down to the last seven in audition for Pans People Yay,

a fabulous female dance troop that were weekly seen on top of the pops in the 1970s. So how did Sue the dancer take her first step into the motoring world?

**Sue:** It's a very strange thing because I had no brothers, so nobody in the family had really, really been involved. I actually went to watch a couple of stock car races, when I was about 14 and then did nothing at all.

But maybe that was it, or maybe it was the fact that my dad said, well you've got your own car now, you need to be able to learn how to fix it. So a piston broke very early on. It was a Ford Anglia and it's like, well, come on, we've got to mend this. So maybe it was his influence making sure that I could do my own repairs.

Or maybe it's going back to a christening card that my Pop, my grandfather, gave to my mum and dad when I was born, and in it he said to my father, little note, long may you change gearboxes together. Now, I never saw that till about four years ago when, when I was tidying my mum's house up. I had no idea that existed until I was tidying up mum's house when she went into a care home, so that was weird.

Who knows? So, it was basically, I always wanted to drive. I drove the tractor on, on my uncle's farm whenever I could. Dad taught me to drive in the Series 1 Land Rover, and I just always enjoyed that. So, the minute I was, you know, able to drive, I was driving. Get the test done, drive wherever I can, drive mum and dad everywhere I possibly could.

Yeah. And, and then as soon as, as soon as I'd kind of finished the dancing piece, and I was more settled in one place, it was like, Mom, she worked for Johnson Brothers, the pottery company in Stoke on Trent. It was, Mom, do you know whether there's a motor club or anywhere I could join? And she looked at me like I was completely gone out, and said, well, I'll ask at work.

I have no idea what you mean though, and she came out, and yes, there was one a mile down the road. so it was perfect, and then I found out that they met on a Tuesday night. I just got brave one night and walked into this room full of people. I thought, I'm just going to head straight for the bar, like I know what I'm doing, and order a drink.

**Amy:** And how old were you?

**Sue:** 18.

**Amy:** Wow. And in terms of walking into that room, I might be you know, thinking stereotypically here, but I'm assuming there was probably more men in the, in the room than there were women?

**Sue:** And it was full, and there was this huge hubbub of talking. It was, it was a terrific atmosphere and I stood at the bar and said, I have no idea what I'm going to do now. I didn't dare look left or right. I just ordered this drink and I thought, I just do not know what I'm going to do next. And luckily, some people on my left started speaking to me. Oh, who are you? Where have you come from? Okay, I'm going to talk, and then some people on the right, and there was a lady involved there, and they started talking, and it was like, okay, these are real people, it's all right, I could talk to them, but it was, yeah, a very big scary moment, but yeah.

**Amy:** So what was it that you were given in that first moment that helped you to, to stay?

**Sue:** It's my yes, why not question. It's like, if I want to do this, if I want to get into there, I've got to decide why wouldn't I do it? You know, that's, that, if I want to do it, I've got to, stand up, put my shoulders back and take the effort because it's not going to come to me.

So it was like, I need to do this. I'm, I'm an only child. You've got to stand on your own two feet. You've got to be able to do everything if you want to do it.

**Amy:** Yeah. So not to put too heavy a pun on it. It was a real inner drive to. Yeah. Did you like that?

**Sue:** I do. Yes, very neat.

**Amy:** So how did Sue, the dancer, then move on to becoming Sue, the rally car co driver?

**Sue:** Via beauty therapy? No, seriously. So because I was part of the Motor Club, I actually started to go out and take part in events. I mean, I initially went to an event at Trentham Gardens and watched the Lombard RAC rally. And that was my first real introduction to proper motorsport. And I loved it so much. I saw this gentleman driving around before the cars came through competitively and I said, what's he doing?

I don't know who I was with or I might even have gone on my own. What is he doing? And whoever it was said, oh, that's somebody driving the safety car around. They're checking that the stage is set up correctly before the competitors go through. And I said, oh, I'd like to do that. 20 years later I got to do it.

It took me a while but I got there, you know, so that was really my first and I just started to go out and marshal and volunteer and then somebody asked me if I would co drive for them on a night rally in Whitchurch. Ooh, I don't know what this is about. So I did that and then I was asked to be, a co driver in, in a safety car and I hadn't got a clue what I was doing really, but, but I did a little bit of that.

I managed to lose both my front teeth and, you know, some, some quite hairy escapades, which I never was daring, daring to tell my mother about. but then it just grew and, and eventually, I mean, I was doing more and more organizing, taking on some of the more senior roles. I became chair of the motor club, so that became my motor club, and I, and I looked after all these 250- 300 people, and it was fabulous.

**Amy:** what were the skills you were developing then as a co driver?

**Sue:** Huge. Co driver skills are very much about remaining calm under pressure, you know, whatever, whatever speed you're going at, whatever's coming up in front of you, whether it's a tree, or whether it's a big hole in the road, or whether it's a sharp bend, or, it's always staying calm, and your voice is like, So this is a 90 right got 200 yards before you get to a hairpin left T junction.

It's all that calm, steady, no drama at all unless it's stop . So you might occasionally need to do it, but generally it, it's a lot about remaining calm under pressure.,

**Amy:** how do you, how did you manage that then? I mean, I know if it was me, I'd be absolutely hopeless.

I, I'm just like, what? So how did you manage to stay calm?

**Sue:** I think part of it was the fact that it was, I was doing this for pleasure. This was not a job. So in the first place, don't do it if you don't want to do it. I think that, that was the thing. So that was nice. And I only, I only sat next to people that I wanted to sit next to.

So if there was someone I didn't like, or I didn't think were perhaps safe enough, I wouldn't, I wouldn't do it. But I was very, very competitive. So if you want to do something competitively, you've got to do it in the right way, and, and I knew that if I got enthusiastic or excitable, it wasn't going to help the driver.

So it was a means to an end, if you want to use that phrase. Um. And, and it, and it was just, well I know what I'm doing, I know what I'm doing on the maps, I can read the maps clearly, they're not always accurate, and if, in which case I will say it's not clear in my own way. and then it was just fun. I remember one occasion when I was with someone who I'm, thankfully I'm still friends with.

If he was going too slow, I used to dip into my co driver bag and bring out some colouring crayons and a fireman's, a fireman's colouring book.

It was much easier than saying anything, you know.

**Amy:** You got, you got the message then, he got the message. Yeah, yeah. Now, I understand that you, what was, what was the most number of races you did one year?

**Sue:** It was an awful lot.

39, 39 different events in one year as a competitor and then I was doing volunteering on top of that. It was, it was my life. It's pretty much what it is now. Yeah,

**Amy:** You know, the title of this session, of this session is racing through life, knowing when to take a break soon. So how does that, how did that tie up for you?

**Sue:** So during those early days, it was quite easy. I mean, you know, you're single, you can do what you like, when you like, you've got as much energy as you want. Go out and do these things, you're having an absolute ball and it's, and it's wonderful. You're with, you're with similar people every weekend. They're like a big family and it's just, just like having a social event with a competitive element and it's just great.

So that was really easy, there was no pressure. The work I was doing was, was fantastic. I worked for a cosmetic company and I would leave home on a Sunday night or a Monday morning, get back on a Thursday and then do a rally at the weekend. And it didn't matter because I had no other responsibilities, so that wasn't a problem.

But I think the challenge is that when you try and continue that with other layers of responsibility, it's going, you know what, you can't always do everything. There have to be some priorities and it's knowing what those priorities are and knowing when to pull back. I think that can be that real challenge.

**Amy:** Yeah, absolutely, absolutely. So I mean, dance and beauty is kind of a world away really from motorsport. and, you know, again, thinking quite stereotypically, but one is pretty female dominated, I suspect, and the other quite male dominated. What, how did, how did you manage that contrast?

**Sue:** Well, the crossover was really, it wasn't as difficult as it would appear from the outside.

So when I was working in cosmetics, I was working for a direct sales company. They still exist now, a company called Oriflame, marvellous company, brilliant product, love it all. And I was, I was responsible for training four and a half thousand self employed women. I was 19 at the time. So that in itself was probably the biggest learning curve I ever had, was Only ever tell the truth,

don't try and bluff your way through anything because it won't work. Just tell it like it is and if you don't know, say so. That, that was huge. Particularly with some of the very, very lovely ladies from the East End of London who were definitely not going to take any rubbish from a 19 year old. Quite right too,

but that was about organizing training courses. It was about delivering training, it was about working with product development officers, it was about, you know, new fashion products going to the spring and the war secretariat events and going to the fashion shows. Pulling it all together and then presenting product launches and big, big presentations and so on.

And then I got headhunted across to a hairdressing manufacturer, which wasn't such a good, such a good experience, and I stayed with them for a couple of years. And then I was invited to join a local college as the, a senior lecturer in marketing and management. Which just brought everything together because I'd been the marketing manager for this other company.

So I brought all of that presentation skills, communication skills, management skills all together and I started working with, you know, major companies like GEC and Alscon, Royal Dalton, Wedgwood, those sorts of companies.

**Amy:** How did your experience within the motorsport, how did it, complement what you were doing in your work, if you like?

**Sue:** Working in this, and then in the training environment, but then the motorsport then became much more about organising events. And when you're organising events, you are running projects, basically. It happens to be a single day or a couple of days at the end, but it's project management.

So I started to really enjoy project management, and then I became a Prince 2 trainer, which is pretty difficult, but I became a Prince 2 trainer because I loved the project management side. Started to deliver more and more project management training, and then Motorsport UK, then called the MSA, asked me to come and do a proposal for some consultancy work for them, which I was successful.

So at that point, I was running a training company, not working for the college anymore, and I ran that as part of the business. So I ran the consultancy over three years called the Volunteers in Motorsport Project, which was to increase the number of volunteers in the sport because it was in a decline.

And so that brought together, project management skills, motorsport knowledge, training skills and it brought it all together and gradually I did more and more consultancy work. The MSA became Motorsport uk, and then in 2019, we had a complete shift of structure and people, we had David Richards, who'd been a very famous world co-driver who I'd known since the eighties.

He took over as chairman. Hugh Chambers took over as Chief Executive and they asked me if I would do so many days a week as a consultant. To take the training, the development and the learning and structure it into a way that could actually deliver effective programs for all our volunteers and officials and to look at tidying up what was happening for our elite athletes.

So that was 2019. So they just gently, gently, gently came together, I stopped my company of Summerfield Sanders and just became entirely motorsport. Yeah.

**Amy:** So you found a way to weave in your, passion that you participate in your, in your, spare time, as it were, with your, with your working life,

and now it sounds like they've kind of, they've, it's kind of come full circle and they're all, they're all as one, as it were. How, how, how fab is that?

**Sue:** I am so lucky. And I think the big thing with motorsport, and it's absolutely the case with so many of the people, you know, that are in the sport now is, the transferable skills are huge.

So if somebody comes and works with us as a volunteer and maybe they are a sector marshal in rally or a post chief in a race, those management skills go straight back into the workplace or they bring the workplace skills out to us in motorsport. So if somebody's looking for career development, all of that side, that transferable,

nature of what we're doing. It is volunteering, which in itself is very valuable, but this has real skill development as well.

**Amy:** Yeah, yeah. And you've delivered safety training, I understand, in something like over 50 countries across the world. What have been some of the biggest challenges with that?

**Sue:** I think the very, one of the very first ones, it was a massive challenge. We went to Kazakhstan and we were expecting there to be proper translation services there, but there wasn't. There was somebody standing up with us. We both had microphones, so two trainers and one translator. We had to speak, wait, then they had to speak,

and it was just, well, what we planned for a day with translation, was never going to fit into a day. So that was, that was definitely challenging. I had no clue how to say anything in Kazakh. So that was, that was really challenging. But yeah, they went on to do great things. We, we did improve the translation the next few times we went,

and we got to a good place with it. And now they run international cross country events based on the training that the two of us did, you know, way back in about 2014 or 15. So it's wonderful.

**Amy:** Oh, that's fantastic. Yeah, we've worked with a translator before and it's a whole different experience, isn't it?

Although I have to say, I had great joy when the translator, as we often use actors in our sessions as well, and the translator was sort of acting and it was just brilliant. It was, it was actually wonderful to watch. and you've, you've trained, you know, so many volunteers. What, what do you get from, from working with people that are essentially giving their time and energy into the sport that you know and love?

**Sue:** I don't know how I'm going to pin this down into a few sentences. As, as a sport, we all think of ourselves like cousins. That means we, we get on, 90 percent of the time, but we can have a few shlaps. We don't always think the same because we're passionate. You know, and then we're going to have different views,

and learning to accept that is a big part of being involved in the sport. But I think the big thing for me is when, when people are perhaps a bit set in how it was, rather than how it either is or needs to be, it's finding a way to share with them the whys rather than the whats. Because if, if they can understand why this has to happen, and it's coming from somebody who's experienced it, lived it, delivered it, and isn't just a theorist.

If you can get them to go, I actually get it now. For me, that's a real big win, you know, that's because then they're coming with us on the journey to improvement and getting things better all the time. So it's not always possible because some people won't, won't move from their place, but the vast majority went, if you always give the Why in good reasoning, you know, and you say it from a place of experience, it helps massively.

**Amy:** Just thinking of your Wise Owl coming in there, how does that help you?

**Sue:** So I'm, I'm, I'm known as all sorts of things with Auntie Sue, Mama Sue, all sorts of things I get called whether it's the UK or elsewhere. And I think that's their version of them calling me the Wise Owl because it's like, okay, who are we going to get to ask this?

We'll, we'll ask Sue, see what she says. And I mean that, for me, that's such, such a glorious thing that I can give back. I mean, I've, I've been doing this for 48 years now. To be able to give back and help people make their decisions and make it better. You couldn't ask for a better gift than to be able to do that.

**Amy:** Lovely. And You know, again, you know, you worked in, you were working in dance, beauty, and then, then moving to motorsport and, and, but equally within motorsport, you're working with volunteers and you're working with elite, you know, again, huge contrast. What, what do you get from working with those contrasting bodies?

**Sue:** They are in lots of ways, they're very different, but both sides have passion. So you've either got the competitive passion to, do the best you can and take that extra second in a race. and, and to work, to help them do that, we've introduced coaching qualifications. There are now unique motorsport UK led.

coaching qualifications, both at an introductory level and award and at level two, you know, we're thinking of threes and fours in the future, but right now we are getting across 640 instructors and we're gradually getting them to take this level two coach qualification. So we've got a set standard and to achieve that and deliver that it's, it's through, you know, one of my team, Katie,

and it's a brilliant achievement. She's done so well with that, and that's, that's getting great accolades. Maybe even will go international, but it's so good. So they have that passion to compete and to win, but the volunteers have the passion to actually be seen to achieve something, to be recognized, to make a difference, and to actually get to a point where they have to take decisions or they're responsible.

And it's quite a journey to get to those responsible positions, you can't just walk in, you've actually got to work your way up. So helping them on their journey, so we've created a pathway, a Marshall's pathway. So whatever discipline you're in, you can start with all of them, but you work your way through each one and to give them a clear way of progressing, which is transparent, and it's easy, and it's open.

It's work, but it's still obvious what they've got to do. That's been a big thing. Got a little bit more work to do with the officials, so that their journey is equally easy and transparent, but that's this year's job. But the other things are now the solid foundation stones that you would have for any business.

You know, even the marshals that, that will come to us with a bit of a sharp question via email or whatever. The minute you pick up the phone and go, what was it you actually meant by this? And you can have a conversation. It's easy when we're back to being friends, and those things are really good, turning people into happy people rather than slightly cross people.

**Amy:** Yeah. So basically it sounds like it's, it's, it's working with people with where they're at and helping them to, again, it's about that being the best they can be, isn't it? Helping them to, to, to achieve that. Fantastic. Let's move now to when you took on the role of Learning and Development Director with Motorsport UK.

Would you like to share with us what, what happened to you over that period?

**Sue:** I can share it with a smile now. At the time it might not have been quite so easy. So when I took the role on, this was in 2020, literally the beginning of Covid. So I took on the role and it was for the volunteers and it was for the, competitors as well.

Absolutely what I expected, no problem, I've been kind of doing that three days a week, so yeah, doing it for five days a week shouldn't be a problem, I can, I can do all those things. And then, well, can you take this on as well? Because you all know, you know the clubs, you know this, you know this. Can you take all these extra things on?

And of course, when you knew into a full time post, I'd managed my own business for the previous 25 years. Well, of course I can do it. I'm a yes, why not person, you know? So yes, why not? Yeah, of course I can. But actually the switch from being my own manager, running my own business, working in a self employed mentality to actually working in corporate, even though I knew what corporate was, I know we have to do reports, I know all these things, but those extra layers took far more time than I ever anticipated.

The extra roles that fitted on top of my original two were huge, and they all needed big change because this is what the new chair and the new chief exec come in to bring about. And I wanted to do that change because it was the right thing to do, and I was trying to do my best. But in amongst all of that, you can lose sight of who you are

and you focus so much on what you're trying to achieve and why it's the right thing to do, that you end up just playing catch up and going, Oh, I need to do this. I need to do this. And, and then you get lost and you are forgotten in the mix. So that's a little bit of that.

**Amy:** I understand there was, you, you had some stuff going on outside of work as well,you know, and again, that's, it's, it's, it's really difficult, isn't it, when there's, when there, it's almost like so much going on in, in so many different parts of your life to, to find that, to find that balance.

**Sue:** Exactly. I mean, social services just said my mother could no longer live at home. She had to go into care home. Not something I wanted to happen at all. Anyway, I'd just cleaned the house and had the carpets cleaned, and the furniture. I just had it ready for when she came out of hospital and she wasn't allowed to come home for safety reasons.

So that was a huge mental shift that, okay, my mum can't do this. I'm living with her and suddenly I'm living on my own. There's a lot of, a lot of changes with that, and we also had an individual in the workplace who was quite simply not a nice individual. And they, they started because in hindsight, because maybe they weren't confident themselves, they then started to pick on other people and because I was in a weaker state with the extra work and the, you know, the emotion of my mother,

I think I was considered one that could be picked on. And that then developed and there was not just with me but with others so there were layers of things going on living in a house I was now on my own, it wasn't really mine. I didn't want to be there. So all of those things just added, added layers onto what was already a challenging situation.

And of course it was COVID. you know, working all hours God sends, creating guidelines for safety. Can we make sport work? Can we let it out? What's the social distancing? Who has to wear masks? How can we manage time cards in rallying? They can't be passed backwards and forwards. How do we do this without anybody touching each other?

And so it was, it was huge layers.

**Amy:** Absolutely. So what did, what did you need most then to help your own mental health?

**Sue:** Again, hindsight being the marvellous creature that it is. I needed someone that would turn to me and go, just stop it. You cannot do any more. This is ridiculous. Behave. Take a holiday. Take weekend.

You need to have some breaks. And of course, when you're in that place you think, I just need to work harder to get on top of it. I need to do more. If I do more, then I'll feel fine and then I can breathe. It's always, I'll just, and then I'll. And that's not the right thing when you're under that amount of pressure.

You know, you need both physically and emotionally to just give yourself time, and I just needed someone to give me a hard time. At the workplace, we were all, all of us in that same place. We were all trying to do it, and I don't think anybody at work had ever experienced bullying in the way that we had. None of us really knew how to manage it.

We got an interim HR guy who was lovely, but he was there to help with organisational change. Not to deal with HR and people issues. So it was, you know, so there wasn't somebody in there to actually spot it from the outside to step in with any sort of intervention. People would say kind or helpful things, but when you're in a position where your confidence is shot, you hear it as a negative, not as a positive.

So you don't listen clearly to the words that are being said, but that distortion is awful.

**Amy:** Yeah, distortion is awful. So, you know, thinking back, what could people have done differently that might have, that you might've been able to hear in a different way?

**Sue:** I think people were kind. Are you okay? Do you need any help?

So there was kindness, but I needed someone that said, stop, your performance is affected. And it's not that you can't do it. It's that you don't currently have the capacity to do it. You need to, because we want you, and I needed someone to say that I was still needed. So that the confidence came back up so that I could then say, I'm struggling.

But when you don't have the confidence, you daren't say you're struggling, because if you do, are you going to lose your job? Does that mean you've failed? And nobody wants to feel that. So a bit of hard love would have been really good, but with that love very, very strongly in there.

**Amy:** Yeah, and you know, we hear it time and time again that, you know, when, when someone is unwell, we don't, when we're unwell, we don't necessarily notice it ourselves,

and it's so important that people from the outside are saying, Hey, you're not your usual self. What's going on? You know, and, and have that inquiring mind that you, you were talking about earlier, you know, just that sense of what's happening, what's going on, and allowing, allowing that individual to think about what they need to do next.

but yeah. and and, and, and, and it is, that thing of stop, let's have a conversation rather than, just continue.

**Sue:** And I also think external intervention would be very good because there are things that you can say to someone that's not in the business, you can't say to somebody in the business and it's only a small team,

there are only 60 of us, you know, it's not going to stay close or you don't know, and it's going to stay close. I do believe in hindsight that everybody genuinely did everything they could. And as it's turned out, it was marvellous, and they were doing good things, but you don't always see it. now I've got nothing but praise for where we are and what we've done, but it was very difficult,

that external, or someone dedicated internally with that knowledge and training and experience would have made a big difference.

**Amy:** Before we move on to thoughts and questions and so on from everybody who's joining us here today, how do you know now when to take a break?

**Sue:** now it's like, okay, I have, so I started work on the 2nd of January and I finally took a break on the 18th of January.

So you could say this is not learning, but yes I did, because my break was away from home. Because you always have jobs to do at home, don't you? That's not a break. So I actually went to stay with a friend and I knew very well that we would sit and we would treat ourselves to a nice bottle of sparkly something and that we would just sit and chill or go for a walk and that's what I did for two days and just took myself away from it all.

So it's that family and friends time where you're not tempted back in, leaving the works phone, you know, in the car, not taking it into the cottage. That sort of thing and it's just, those breaks are critical and not losing sight of people outside of work. Keeping in touch with them. So I still do volunteer work for Motorsport because I still love every part of it,

and, and sometimes that's a challenge because you, I can turn up now, and in my role people will go, I just need to say this, and sometimes it's a bit of a moan, and I'll have to sometimes go, do you know, stop. I'm, I'm only like you today. I'm not working today. I'm not working. Don't tell me.

That that's hard to do 'cause you actually want to help.

So it's like, okay, I'm gonna write it down, but I'm not gonna answer till Monday. .

**Amy:** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Sue, thank you. I'm gonna ask Angus, to join us again now and we will have a look at those, responses that people have been pouring into the chat. What have you found there, Angus?

**Angus:** We've got, there's some a few comments on what's, what's holding you back.

So fear and self confidence. What would you, what would you say about that Sue?

**Sue:** I think you need to think about what is it you're afraid of and be honest with yourself. What are you afraid of? Is it that fear of failure? Or is it a fear of the unknown? Because they're ever such different things. I was saying in our little pre talk, my daughter's she's a performer in London and I've always said to her as she's going for auditions, which are the most stressful thing in the world, I can't, you know, awful.

It's a really fine line between which side do you fall. Do you fall on the I am terrified or I'm very excited? Because it's such a fine line and she now knows to channel the inner excited, when she goes for an audition, not to channel the inner terror. Although she knows it's there and it never goes away.

And that would be a big thing for me to say, think about why you're afraid. Is it real? In which case, don't do it. You know, that's not the right thing to do. But actually, is it just that you've tipped 1 percent the wrong side of your line? Try and tip it the other way, and remember, you're doing this for a reason.

And originally, it was because you wanted to do it. Find that piece again and go for it.

**Angus:** Great, thank you.

**Amy:** And Bep, welcome. Bep has said, it depends on whether it aligns with where I am, at that moment in time, and whether I feel a passion for it in response to your question, if there's an opportunity, what stops you saying yes, why not? What do you, what do you, what do you think to that? I saw you giving a thumbs up there.

**Sue:** Bep, I think you'll love my top five tips. Because you have hit some nails on the head there, that's absolutely where I would go. Yeah, it's got to align and, and it needs to align with you first. And that's morally, ethically, all your values, because if you're not comfortable with those values then you need to find another place to be.

That was why I only stayed for a short while with the hairdressing company. They were not my values. It was just not a development, giving, nurturing place. so that's, that's one big piece. The other thing is what will it do for your team? I mean, how does it fit for the team? Is it aligned with them? And then lastly, does it actually align with the whole organization?

So for me, you build up from your personal value set, your team value set, and then organizationally, and ideally you want all of them to be nicely chunked together. Then it doesn't matter how hard it is, you know you're doing the right thing and you can do it from inside.

**Angus:** Thank you. We also have a comment there from Luke.

Luke Erling about imposter syndrome. What would you say to that Sue?

**Sue:** Oh, it's horrible. Yes, it is. Genuinely, it's horrible. My early days of sitting around the senior management table. It's like, oh, all these people and they all seem to know each other, and I feel like I've come in as a consultant. That imposter syndrome, it's horrible.

It's true and ridiculous and we can't help ourselves. And it, and again, it's not exactly the same, but it's, what's the difference between humility and arrogance? And we need that balance, don't we? And the imposter syndrome puts us in the too far below humility level and we can't push too high because then we become an arrogant know it all and we don't want to be in that place either.

But you were put there for a reason. Somebody selected you for a purpose. You chose to apply for that role for a purpose. Just go back to what, what were those things? And I tend to write stuff down, you know, and I physically write it down, I don't type it in because if you engage with it, with your pen and pencil or whatever on a piece of paper A nice piece of paper, admittedly,

then you just get it back into your brain a little bit more. And you connect through all of your senses. So for me, it's just think about where you were in the first place, and has something changed? And if so, why? And is it somebody else that's doing it to you? And if so, are you letting them? Which I know I was, yeah.

Try and stop them letting you, letting them get to you. Wise words.

**Amy:** Yeah. Also makes me think back to what you were saying about when you walked into the, the, the motor club when you were 18 years old. Yeah. You know, you, you could so easily, couldn't you have had that sense of I'm an imposter, but actually it's just about showing up of, you know, I, I know nothing, but I'm eager to learn.

Yeah, lovely. Yeah.

**Sue:** Completely that honesty.

**Amy:** Yeah. Kyla Edwards has said, Someone once said to me, Who do you think you are to think you can't make a mistake? That gets me out of self and I will go for it.

**Sue:** I'm going to have to think that. Just say that one again. That was like lots of things.

**Amy:** Who do you think you are to think you can't make a mistake?

**Sue:** Ooh, very good. And then let's look at the opposite, I can't. Yeah, exactly. I like it. Yeah. And, and that is, that is the choice. I mean, what was it? Somebody said, Coca Cola company was built on cans and not cannots. Wasn't that the one?

**Amy:** Oh, oh, like that one.

**Sue:** I like that one too. Yeah, it is true. And it is.

Well, why not? Seriously think about why not? If there's some good reasons why not, then don't. If you can't think of any quickly enough, there aren't enough. This is a quick, why shouldn't I do this? I can think of, right, give it a try. You're only dipping one toe in the water, you're not committing yourself for life.

Well, you shouldn't make those big decisions that quickly anyway. But you know, it, it, it is. Why not? But what's the ripple effect? You know, you will instinctively know. There's a huge amount to be said about using your intuition. It's, it's so powerful and we sometimes overthink things and then we get into the, oh should I, shouldn't I?

But go for the intuition and, you know, trust your instinct. It's very often right.

**Amy:** Yeah, and I think also it sounds like, you know, for me, that statement, who do you think you are to think you can't make a mistake is you're safe here to make a mistake. And I think that's so important, isn't it, to have that sense of psychological safety in that it's okay if I make a mistake because, hey, we're learning stuff here.

**Sue:** Absolutely. Nobody, nobody knows everything. You know, just go, do you know what? I don't know. Tell me. I've forgotten.

**Angus:** Cool. So I think one last quick one. how do you personally feel when you're not working? Do you feel guilty? From Chas

**Sue:** Okay, I'm going to do two answers to this one. When, when it had all become too much and I had to stop work and I had to stop work because I got to the point where I actually couldn't walk up the stairs without stopping because my stress levels were so high, it was absolutely horrendous.

I couldn't walk down my mother's garden without stopping to take a breath. So I had become completely debilitated. I was only able to sit in front of the television and I couldn't have told you whether it was on or off, I had no clue. So I was, I had reached a really, really bad place. and when I went to see a psychotherapist, they quite, a clinical therapist, I forget, whichever, she said, Yes, they've told you to take a break for a reason,

you need to do nothing. What do you like doing? Family, friends, motorsports, what I like doing. Well, she said, don't do the motorsport bit, but do the family and friends, do all the things you like. And I couldn't. I actually couldn't, because I had worked for myself for all those years, my work ethic is, you've got to be really, really ill not to work.

And if you've got a really bad cold, well, you can still do something on the computer without spreading the germs, you know. I, I don't understand having time off unless you're physically on an operating table or recovering, you know. It's just not natural for me. So I think that question is brilliant because it's so hard to do.

I took two weeks off because I was physically unable to do anything else, but then I begged to go back because the workload was still building and the pressure of knowing that all my work wasn't gonna be able to be done by anybody else. That was worse than anything, so I ended up going back two days a week.

So that I could at least keep on top of some of the things. And then the company Motor Sport UK, were amazing. They, they then redistributed all of that extra work back out, and the Chief Executive, bless his cotton socks, took such a lot of it on. And he still manages that now because it was so important it stays with him,

and that allowed me to go back to doing the job I'd been originally employed to do. Which in itself is like, so, you know, and it took a little while, but I would say I kind of started to get back to normal probably a year after I'd gone off. It took a while, this is not quick, took a year to get there, took a year to come out, I would say.

And maybe it's the same for any amount of time, I don't know, but that was my experience. But at a weekend? Mm. I can switch off, but I have to decide I'm going to switch off. Mm-Hmm. If I'm just sitting around on a Saturday and there's nobody about, it's like, oh, might as well go into a couple of emails. So you've really gotta go,

nope, not doing it then, or I'm definitely going to the pub, or I'm definitely going for a meal. Now you've got to do things that prevent you from doing it so that you do get a good chunk of time to yourself.

**Angus:** Thank you, Sue.

**Sue:** Yeah, plan it. .

**Angus:** Thank you. We always say that rest and recuperation is so important.

Really important. Yeah. Amy.

**Amy:** Yes, and Jatindar thanks for your comment there on the importance of knowing that confidence is in our gift, such a powerful thing that you've shared with us there, Sue. Let's move now to your top tips for us then, Sue. Our first one here is be open minded.

**Sue:** Yes, who knows what opportunities are going to face you?

You know, every day we make decisions, and every decision has an impact on the rest of your life, whether it's a little one or a big one. And some of those things, if you don't mind and go, Oh, that sounds good, well, find out a bit more. If you think, Oh, I don't like that, then don't do a bit more of it. You know, but I mean, I went, as she said, I mean, I went from being a dancer and my mum said, Well, you're not going to go and do that.

You're not going to be allowed to go on the stage and audition until you've got a qualification. I got it. I didn't want it, but I got it and my word, what a good decision it was. It led me into working for this big company and then I had the opportunity to go and work for the hairdressing company. They weren't my values, but I learned about marketing.

I learned about management. I learned about financial accounts. I learned so much more. It was great. Then my cousin said, why don't you come and do something else? And I did something. Those opportunities are there, and for me that think outcomes not actions is the big one. If you start to get into the detail of I've got to do this and then this and then this, you're lost.

But if you think that will help me achieve this or become that, those outcomes, that's why we do stuff. We don't do it so we can write more memos. We don't do it so we can type more emails. We do it because it's going to make something better, whether it's you or somebody else, it's outcomes.

**Amy:** Lovely. Does it excite you?

**Sue:** Yes. And if the answer is no, don't do it. Even if it looks right on paper, if you have no bubbles inside, nah, you'll only stay a short while and you'll regret it and you'll be miserable. It's better to take less money and enjoy it. So when I was working at the hairdressing company, cause I didn't like exactly what I was doing in the first place, I then became the marketing assistant.

Far less money, no company car, but do you know, I was learning new stuff. Yes, life was really tough to pay for what was going on, but I was actually doing something where I could learn and I could develop and then I became the marketing manager. you know, sometimes going down to come back up isn't such a bad thing.

**Amy:** yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Does it align with your vision, yours, your team's or the organization?

**Sue:** Yeah, I've shared that one already. If it's, if it doesn't fit. Again, it's not for you. Excitement and alignment are two top, top things for me.

**Amy:** And what's the ripple effect?

**Sue:** Yeah, you've got to think about that, you know, is that going to affect the rest of your family?

What that decision is, is it going to affect the rest of your team? Will it affect you financially? Will it bring about some really positive changes for you and then for others? But just think about it quickly. But for me, most of the decisions we make could, be made very quickly if you took your instinct and then when you make your decisions later on you're only looking for the evidence to reinforce what you originally thought, if you're truthful.

**Amy:** If you're truthful, yeah. I love from throughout the conversation, you know, it's, it's become apparent that really you've lived this your, your whole life, right? From, from, from dancing to motorsport to, and, and beyond kind of thing, you know, you're, you're, you're finding what's exciting, you're in, in life.

You're, you're doing it because you're driven. You kind of know where you're going, do you know? Or you're, you're open to the possibilities of, of what might happen.

**Sue:** Yeah, that's the, that's the one. I did have a plan when I was young. I was going to retire at 55. Thank goodness I didn't follow it. I would have missed out on so much, you know.

Yeah, you can have a plan by all means, but really, if you get a new opportunity that you like more, ditch the plan, go for a new one. Write them in pencil.

**Amy:** Love that. Sue, are you ready for your rapid quickfire questions?

**Sue:** Come on, I'm ready.

**Amy:** Here we go. What does vulnerability mean to you?

**Sue:** Oh God, scary feelings in here.

Not knowing the answer to things, not having done enough preparation, standing in front of a group of people and not being sure you've got the answer, or not having the numbers that you need to back up for the argument that you're presenting. It's all that lack of preparation and being found out.

**Amy:** What little thing you notice, zoom into, celebrate every day?

**Sue:** My daughter, every day. Yeah, yeah, she is such a tough cookie to take the rejection she does for auditions and yet still, still get there, you know. She's actually achieved leading lady on the West End. She's bust a gut to work so hard to get there. Every day, she's the gift.

**Amy:** Wow. What message would you give your younger self?

**Sue:** Maybe be even a little bit braver. Don't always listen to your mum.

**Amy:** What message would your younger self give you?

**Sue:** Some decisions that you were nervous about taking because tradition says you should stay in this place. If that's not the right place to stay, blow tradition. Do what's right for your health and for everybody else.

**Amy:** What would you say to leaders that use only plasters, give lip service to workplace mental health and well being?

**Sue:** Leave.

**Amy:** And on that note, Sue Sanders, thank you so much. I'm going to hand over now to Angus. Thank you.

**Angus:** That's great advice. I love that Sue.

What comes over listening to you is your passion, your energy. Yeah, as Vanessa said in the chat, a career led by passion. Empowering people to help them make their own decisions. Also the fact that you push yourself, that's very, very clear. Pushing yourself out there and staying calm under pressure, but also the vulnerability.

Yeah. The ability to say I was burnt out. I couldn't do any more. I had to stop. you know, a really, really, really interesting conversation there. Also knowing the benefits of hard love. Yep. I love that. And long may you change gearboxes together. So thank you, Sue, thank you very, very much. It's been a wonderful pleasure having you here on the Wellbeing Hour.

We really appreciate it, and we look forward to seeing you in the future as well. So thank you very much. Really appreciate it.

**Sue:** Thank you so much for inviting me and thank you for giving me a chance to share some things that hopefully will be helpful to others.

**Angus:** It's a great pleasure. Thank you. On the wellbeing order coming up, next month we have Matt Coyle.

Matt is Client Relationship Director at Baillie Gifford. Baillie Gifford are a big investment fund, they were very early, investors in Tesla, for example, and, Matt is also head of the wellbeing group. So 20th of February, 12 noon, his, his title is Don't bottle things up, creating an open workplace culture,

so it's going to be a good one, come and join us then. We also have, dates for your diary. On the 21st of March, we have Tamana Ayazi and she is an award winning documentary filmmaker from Afghanistan. So again, something really, really different and I think also going to be fascinating. 25th April, we have the Wellbeing Hour and it is a panel event.

We're going to change the format a bit. We're going to have some guests on that panel, and I think it's going to be quite controversial. So join us then and, and join in that controversy as well. Please stay in touch, follow us on LinkedIn. It does make a difference. And, find out about our tailored solutions for senior leaders, people managers, and frontline people.

Please get in touch, we'd love to hear what you're doing in terms of workplace mental health and well being. So that's it from the Wellbeing Hour. It's been a great honour and pleasure having you all here, we really appreciate it and thank you once again.