

Starting Up & Starting Over

From Club Singer
to Startup Investor

Bryony Cooper



A Quick Introduction

Though I'm not yet 35, it feels like I've lived several lifetimes already. Things got really interesting when I started saying 'yes' to things that scared me.

From the years spent as a professional singer, entertaining a crowd of 10,000 revellers one night and four disinterested drunks the next, to accidentally becoming a CEO (three times in a row), you might say that my career path has been ... unconventional. I have experienced epic highs and spectacular failures; I stood on top of the world and I hit rock bottom. These days I run a Venture Capital fund, managing \$15 million and investing in tech startups – and this chapter of my life may prove to be the biggest adventure yet.

Back to the Beginning

My childhood in South East England was pleasant, comfortable, and unremarkable. Raised by a loving family in a country cottage in a small village, I got good grades at school and kept out of trouble. A penchant for singing emerged around the age of 10, affirmed at my sister's karaoke birthday party; I sang "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" by Cyndi Lauper (a hit from my first album on cassette tape, of which I'd learned every track by heart). That would be the first live performance of many to come.



My journey to becoming a Venture Capitalist (VC) has been atypical, to say the least. Rather than coming from a business, technology or economics background, my roots are wholly creative. The entrepreneurial bug bit me at the tender age of 16. As a

small-town karaoke Queen with big ambitions, I dreamed of stardom; I spent my teens singing, songwriting, rehearsing lyrics, and training weekly with a voice coach.

As soon as I was legally allowed to perform in bars and clubs, I registered as self-employed, took out a loan to buy sound equipment, got myself an [agent](#) and a manager, had a professional photo shoot and recorded a demo. For the next seven years I drove around the UK to perform live gigs every weekend (alongside my studies). Though I drudged through bookkeeping and tax returns, I didn't yet identify as an entrepreneur; those were simply the necessary measures that enabled me to do what I loved.



I never made the 'big time' as a singer, but in hindsight I'm relieved; the older I get, the less appealing the idea of celebrity becomes. I look back on this phase of my life with gratitude and without regret, content with what I accomplished. I had the opportunity to record a single for charity and [three studio albums](#), to collaborate with talented musicians and producers, to perform to crowds of thousands, and to sing at prestigious venues like Café de Paris, the 100 Club and KOKO in London, Caveau de la

Huchette and Disneyland Paris. I even had a [Marilyn Monroe](#) tribute act. Those years played a big part in shaping my character, instilling self-motivation from a young age.

What I can say for certain is that the whole experience gave me an invaluable advantage for presenting on stage in a business context. There's no question that stage skills in entertainment are fully transferable to public speaking. The transition from a jazz club to a tech conference stage did not feel like such a huge leap—though the way I hold a microphone still gives me away, apparently!

Business Beckons

My first office job was at [the Business Club](#) in Peterborough. Here we worked closely with local businesses, organising networking events and coordinating service exchanges between members. It served as a great launchpad to learn what it takes to build a business and the importance of leveraging your local professional community. From there I moved to London, lured by the bright lights and big city, which incidentally led to the winding down of my musical career. My enthusiasm for singing had waned after years of singing the same corny cover songs at small town social clubs, weddings, holiday parks, and wherever else paid the bills. It had slowly sucked the joy out of music for me; I no longer took any pleasure in performing.

A new passion for business and entrepreneurship was developing. Aged 23, I joined [Bartercard](#) – again working with SMEs (small to medium enterprises) to foster trade exchange deals and build network connections in the business community. Alas – only six months into my employment, a full branch redundancy forced me to look for



new work, fast. London doesn't let you live lean for long. I took the opportunity to think hard about what I really enjoyed doing; having spent many years writing songs and poetry (English Language & Literature was my favourite subject), I decided to look for work as a copywriter. I found a job online quite quickly; the pay wasn't great but it sounded interesting and the office was in Shoreditch – a trendy part of town. The role acquainted me with content creation and I became adept at online marketing; writing web content, articles for SEO (Search Engine Optimisation), blogs, advertising text. I enjoyed the job itself, but my boss was ... taxing. Taking on tasks way outside my job description and above my pay grade I could handle; but enduring his unwanted advances and inappropriate comments, I shouldn't have had to.

At that point I had not yet built up the self-confidence (or self-worth) to speak out and stand up for myself; not to mention the fear of losing my job, coupled with the fear of him losing his infamous temper. I lost sleep and felt deeply ill at ease for the duration of my employment. Let's call that time of my life 'character building'; a steep learning curve. Despite everything, I still can't say I regret taking the job because that one decision was the catalyst for a series of events that would lead me to where I am now. That particular employer sponsored me to take evening classes at [Birkbeck College](#), the University of London, for a Bachelor's Degree in Creative Writing. Whether it was intended as a genuine gesture to support my advancement or consolation for his appalling behaviour (aka damage control/incentive for me not to file a lawsuit), I'll never know. But I accepted it and said "thank you, bye".



I could write a novel about the instances of sexism – subtle and overt – that I have been subjected to throughout my career. From the unconcealed surprise at my gender as CEO (“Oh, I was expecting a man!” “Aren't you the secretary?” “Gosh, I assumed it was Mr. Cooper...”) to disbelief (“Surely you must be an actress hired to play the

CEO in company videos...”), to outright sexual assault. The most serious incidents only occurred when I held junior positions, illustrating just how much power dynamics come into play. Unfortunately these behaviours are not uncommon, with new cases coming to light all the time – even in companies we consider progressive, like [Google](#) and [Uber](#), not to mention the distressing examples I’ve learned of from personal connections.

Women deserve work environments where they feel safe and valued and heard.

I strongly believe that having more women and more diversity at an executive level will drive down the frequency (and possibility) of incidents like this, disrupting the ‘boys club’ culture that remains prevalent in so many sectors – from Silicon Valley tech bros to longstanding institutions imbued with patriarchy. I suppose becoming your own boss is one way to evade creepy dudes in the workplace; how tragic that it could even be a factor.

Becoming my Own Boss

During my time as a copywriter I got to know one of my colleagues (who shall remain nameless): a shy web designer and developer. He dreamed of running his own company and was full of great ideas, so he suggested we start our own web development agency. Both of us Directors, he designed and built websites, I populated them with SEO-driven content. We acquired enough clients to hire a team of ten people, finally earning our independence.

My partner was very much the visionary; we experimented with several business concepts and internal projects alongside our paid work. Eventually one idea took hold, so we sold off the SEO portion of the company leaving us free to pursue our first startup venture. On recognising an aptitude for people skills and communication through team management and client relations, my partner encouraged me to take the

lead as CEO of our new company. I have my mother to thank for that trait; she coaches managers in personal development, so I guess I inherited some soft skills through osmosis. Over time I have learned the importance of EQ (emotional intelligence) over IQ when it comes to leadership. Of course it's valuable to be smart and have expertise in your field, but effective leadership requires assets such as self-awareness, humility, integrity. Managers should be approachable, good communicators, and most importantly, they should inspire loyalty and dedication from their team. If you're running a startup you probably can't afford to pay the most competitive salaries, so the team must believe in not only your vision, but in you. Refining these skills requires dedication and constant personal development; you never stop learning. And if you think you know it all, you definitely have more growing to do!

Private Hire transportation became a specialty topic for our agency; we had several cab operator clients. My partner had the idea to build a virtual fleet platform to book minicabs throughout London; it was called 'Tick

The logo for 'TICK TOCK TAXI' features the word 'TICK' in yellow, 'TOCK' in black, and 'TAXI' in yellow, all in a bold, sans-serif font.

Tock Taxi'. We onboarded around 40 minicab companies to accept booking requests via our website and gave it a user-friendly design. Acquiring customers was very successful thanks to some hardcore SEO driving traffic to our site. However, the quality of service provided by the cab operators was... lacking. We quickly realised that many of these companies were small and super outdated, still using fax machines and radios to take bookings. That left a lot of room for human error.

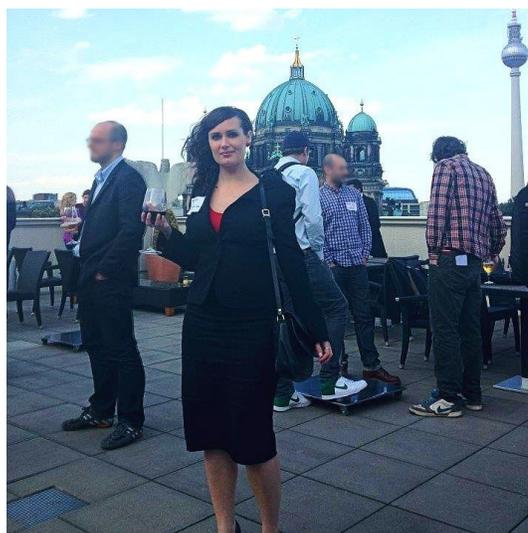
We began to research the industry's back-end operations to find out why the service was so unreliable and how it could be improved. We spent time sitting in the cab offices learning how the entire process worked. This is how we discovered dispatch software: a clunky, dated, hardware-installed solution only affordable for the largest cab operators. The 80% market share made up of small fleets was not using any software or automation at all. So voilà, we had found a gap in the market! We

developed the world's first cloud-based cab dispatch and fleet management software. It ran on any web browser, drivers received bookings via a mobile app and it was a pay-per-user model, making it accessible to even the smallest cab fleets.

In 2011 T Dispatch was born. We started out as three co-founders; me as CEO, my business partner as Chief Product Officer, and our Lead Developer as CTO. We registered the company in early 2012 and launched it at the national Taxi & Private Hire Trade Show: the exact same day as our only direct competitor (who would later beat us to the finish line). In the end we learned that being the first-mover in your field only gets you so far — it's the execution that counts.

Into the Startupsphere

We needed some funding to get this business off the ground, but at this point we didn't know anything about the startup world or VCs (Venture Capital investors) or angels (high net-worth individuals who invest). After some online research we applied to a startup competition by [Seedcamp](#). They organised contests internationally, selecting ten finalists to pitch on stage for a chance at winning €50,000. Three days later we found ourselves in Berlin, in the finals, for an intensive all-day bootcamp. Mentors and workshops and pitch practice, meeting other founders, polishing our presentation. That was my first real startup experience: our initiation. The next day I presented 'T Dispatch' to a room of 100 people (mostly men in suits) with plenty of investors in attendance. I was so nervous. But boy, was I grateful for my performer-past that day! Next to the nine other finalists (whose nerves were palpable) I managed to come across as



composed and confident. Being the only woman also made me stand out. But that was not enough; we didn't win the grand prize. The universe had other plans for us... One of the investors in attendance loved our pitch, and within two weeks he made an offer to invest €75,000 into our company! There was just one condition: we had to move to Berlin to join their company builder program. We didn't speak the language or know anyone in Germany, but this opportunity was too good to miss. The three of us packed our things and left London two weeks later. For me this meant dropping out of University a year early and not graduating, leaving my friends behind and watching my comfort zone disappear over the horizon.

It was a life-changing decision and I admit, I was terrified. Every fibre in my body resisted; my head kept repeating "I don't want to go". I had to fight the urges to run back to safety, stepping onto a lonely path full of uncertainty and instability. It was time to jump in the deep end, sink or swim. I honestly had no clue what I was letting myself in for, or the depth of the challenges ahead of me. But even knowing all of that now, I would do it all over again; I couldn't see it then, but moving to Berlin would be the best decision I ever made.

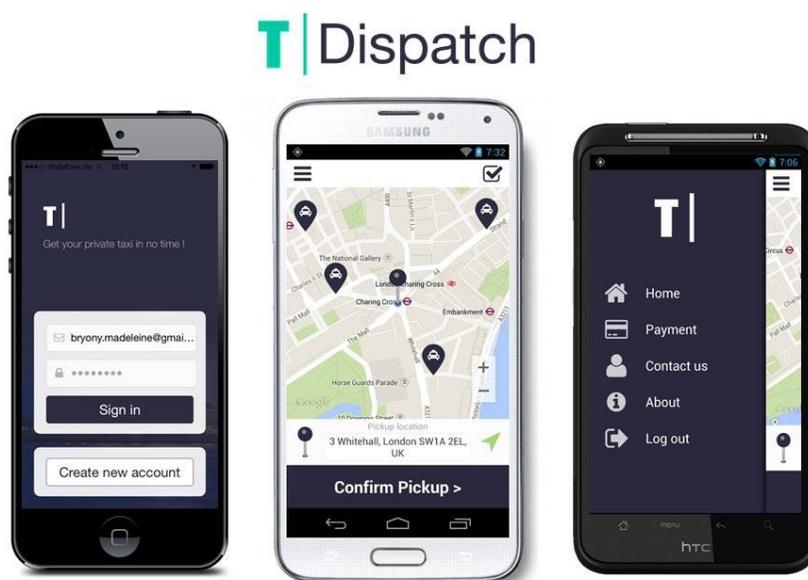
“Winning investment from my first ever pitch is still one of my proudest achievements; I learned afterwards that funding does not always come so easily.”

Whilst being a woman did make me stand out from the crowd, I do feel I had to fight harder than my male counterparts to be taken seriously throughout my time running a startup. As a young female CEO in the transportation technology sector I was a glaring minority in my field. In addition to being the only woman in the boardroom, I also witnessed a massive imbalance at tech events and conferences – both in terms of attendees and speakers represented on stage. This lack of executive women extends

to most startup and technology-focused industries, and of the female founders I did meet, many were sticking to topics perceived as “traditionally female” such as beauty, babies, cooking or fashion. Very few were in fact building technology-driven, scalable, investable businesses. Later I would discover how widespread that trend really was.

Trials & Tribulations

To say that my years at T Dispatch were a rollercoaster would be an understatement. We had many successes and staggering failures. We were riding on the wave of digital transformation for passenger transportation brought forth by the likes of Uber and on-demand ride-sharing apps that became ubiquitous, threatening the businesses of our incumbent clients and driving them into our waiting arms. I was responsible for everything that wasn't technology or product. Wearing many hats I juggled sales, marketing, management, finances, customer support and more. We grew our team to 22 people from 14 different countries. We raised €2 million of investment (our largest investor being [HTGF](#)), expanding our service to clients across the globe.



By year two, the cracks began to show. The company took some major hits with problems scaling the technology, affecting the product's reliability which led to losing customers. We faced near-bankruptcy several times. Under intense pressure, the behaviour of one co-founder became highly erratic and created a toxic work environment. I experienced burnout as a result of all this (though I would not acknowledge this until much later), and despite me staying with the company for another two years, we never managed to recapture the glory days.

Towards the end we had unhappy customers, unhappy investors and an unstable product. I decided to step down in 2015 when it became clear that I had given all I could to the company and was no longer able to perform effectively. I didn't see a way forward for the company; though some investors still believed it could be saved, I couldn't be the one to get it there. I was spent.

One major takeaway from that experience was that you learn a lot more during the hard times. When things are at breaking point you have to learn fast, fail fast, and always pick yourself back up again. My motto became "Weebles wobble but they don't fall down"; the jingle from a children's toy advert in the 1980s. It came to represent the enduring resilience I had to develop over the years – that tenacious survival instinct that would prepare me for every challenge life had yet to throw at me.



Dusting Off & Moving On

I really should have taken a sabbatical after T Dispatch. Next time you hear of an entrepreneur backpacking around Thailand for six months between ventures, please

don't judge them; the brain and body need to recharge after years of all-consuming stress and excessive work hours that steal your sleep and your sanity. I wish I had been in a position to do that. But having been a struggling startup founder I had no choice but to jump right back into work to gain some financial stability. I knew that I loved the Berlin startup scene and the contagious enthusiasm of entrepreneurs, but I was not prepared to found another startup. So I looked for opportunities where I could work with founders in a more advisory role, to help them avoid some of the hurdles I'd faced and to share all the lessons I'd learned.



That's when my good friend and now mentor Christoph Raethke (former CEO of Berlin Startup Academy, now founder of [Angels of Deutschland](#)) introduced me to [IXDS](#): a service design studio specialised in connected hardware projects for large organisations and global brands. At first I couldn't see a fit, but then I was introduced to their internal startup venture. They needed someone with startup experience to get it off the ground and turn it into a viable business. And so I became the CEO of [HINT](#), a digital health IoT startup in its nascent stage, co-founded by a designer and a developer at IXDS. Like running a startup, but with the security and resources of a successful agency behind it. After a few months, IXDS asked me to head up a new spin-off company, which served as an innovation hub to co-create startup ventures. I gladly agreed, impressed by the creative environment and progressive mindset of the management team. As CEO of IXDS Labs I worked on a couple more digital health IoT ventures, also serving as interim Managing Director for [Fritzing](#) (an open source platform for electronics design). I organised an [IoT Hackathon](#) to find founders for our final startup project, into which we invested €30,000.



During those two years we tried multiple different business models to support and build startup ventures, but ultimately none of them were financially viable without the safety net of corporate consulting, teaching startup innovation methodologies. And if I'm being honest, I was a square peg in a round hole, having no background in design. I decided to leave in 2017 after agreeing with the Managing Partners to wind down the company's activities.

For the next few months whilst deciding what my next move should be, I took the time to study intensive German – four hours a day in class. I'm still not fluent, but can hold a conversation at least. Better late than never!

Accelerating with Brinc

[Brinc](#) was on my radar long before the Director of Poland, Mateusz Soltysiak, approached me to join them. One of Brinc's co-founders had delivered a very energetic talk at an IXDS Meetup the previous year. I remember being impressed by what they were building: a Hong Kong-based accelerator and early-stage investor for IoT (Internet of Things) and Connected hardware startups. Now they were expanding to

new geographies and into new categories, such as Drones and Robotics, later Food Tech and Clean Energy.



Mateusz had tried to headhunt me years ago – unsuccessfully – whilst I was still at T Dispatch. We stayed in touch over the years and he occasionally solicited my advice on tech projects he was consulting. When he invited me for coffee to discuss a new opportunity in 2017, the timing was perfect. The offer to join Brinc, heading up an accelerator program and serving on the investment committee (investing up to \$100k per company) seemed like the perfect fit, and a natural next step in my career. And it was!

There was just one small catch... the accelerator was in the Kingdom of Bahrain. That tiny island nation in the Persian Gulf, nestled between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Quite a change from the bohemian lifestyle of Berlin! And so it was time for another trip outside my comfort zone, into the unknown.



A Middle Eastern Adventure

Arriving in Bahrain with bright purple hair and a nose ring, I rather... stuck out. Though I had researched how to dress with appropriate modesty, my style was still very 'Berlin' and drew stares wherever I went. The women here were all so glamorous! I felt positively scruffy in comparison. It took less than a week for me to dye my hair dark brown and change my nose ring for a delicate diamond stud; along with a full face of

make-up and daily blow dries (humidity is my hair's worst enemy), I finally started to look the part.

My ever-supportive partner agreed to come with me, which made the move a lot less scary. In Manama (Bahrain's capital) I helped to set up Brinc's new accelerator at the [Brinc Batelco IoT Hub](#). As well as running the MENA region accelerator, I curated and delivered a corporate training program on innovation and startup methodologies for executives at [Batelco](#): the country's leading TelCo and our corporate partner.

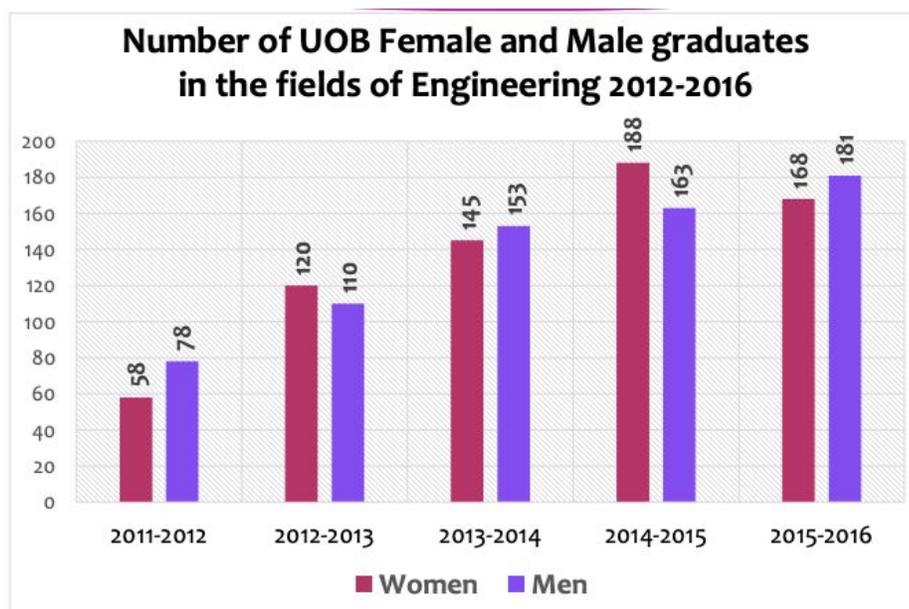


I found the job fulfilling and really enjoyed working there. In addition to a lovely team and cool co-working space, the role enabled me to broaden my knowledge of evaluating startups, in a region where the ecosystem was in its nascent stage. One of the best things about working in such a small country was the direct connection to decision makers; I was invited to round table discussions at the Economic Development Board as part of the '[Startup Bahrain](#)' initiative, where they can influence legislation concerning entrepreneurship. It was a chance to actually make an impact for

the local startup ecosystem! Plenty of public speaking invitations also came my way, seeking out new perspectives from the ‘fresh blood’.

The locals were very hospitable and the food was delicious (I gained ten kilos). The sun was too hot to stay outside for long; we drove everywhere door to door, as everyone there does. Those nine months in Bahrain reminded me to appreciate many things I had come to take for granted in Berlin: the colourful nightlife, affordable wine, pedestrianisation, cycling, recycling, green grass and picnics in the park, casual political discussions, diverse social groups, alternative fashion... I even embrace winter chills now!

I encountered some fierce women in Bahrain (in the Beyonce sense of the word), several in leadership positions at accelerators and in public institutions. Something else I observed in Bahrain was an impressive ratio of female to male students graduating from technical Universities. Just take a look at the balance of engineering students over the last decade:



Source: SCW Statistics of BAH Women in Engineering, 2017. <http://www.mohandis.org/women-eng/pdf/pdf05.pdf>

But despite all that tech talent, most graduates still shun the path of entrepreneurship in favour of working at one of the Kingdom's large organisations, such as a bank or telecoms company. Of the few tech startups in the community (and we did know them all), male founders were developing products for various business sectors; insurance, finance, property, construction, agriculture. But when the applications rolled in for a startup pitch competition we organised exclusively for women, the trend was clear. Cupcake bakers, jewellery designers, headscarf designers, home-cooked meals, wedding planners, beauty salons... almost all applications were ideas for small, local businesses in sectors traditionally considered 'for women'. Hardly any were investable technology startups.



Of course one must take cultural differences into consideration, as well as the concept of startups still being so new to the region, but it really got me to thinking about what I had witnessed back in Berlin and elsewhere. The Bahrain example is an extreme case, but the trend for female founders sticking to “women’s topics” happens everywhere. I am really keen to invest into startups with female founders, but few meet our criteria as a VC; we can only invest into innovative, scalable, technology-driven businesses. Of

course do meet some kick-ass women tech founders, but they're still in the vast minority. I want to see more.

Venturing into Capital

During my time on Brinc's Investment Committee we closed 14 investments into early-stage startups. It taught me what criteria to pay attention to when evaluating companies and what red flags to look for. I discovered different ways to source investment opportunities, which personality traits made for the best founders, and the biggest risk and success factors.



Brinc had crossed paths with [Arkley](#), a Warsaw-based VC fund, on several occasions; the most notable being a collaboration at Hardware Massive. It was an event for hardware startups where Brinc's co-founder was judging a pitch competition alongside Arkley's CEO. The synergies shared by these two companies were undeniable; both supporting early-stage IoT and Hardware startups with capital, know-how, and

network, and both with a vision of a connected, sustainable future powered by technological innovation. From here our collaboration began.

Brinc, Arkley and I embarked on a joint initiative to co-create a new fund with [PFR Ventures](#) in Poland. The application process was comprehensive, spanning more than nine months of interviews, background checks, deep dives and presentations. I'm very happy to say that the hard work paid off, and our bid to create the fund was accepted! In October 2018, I became Managing Partner at [Arkley Brinc VC](#).



Now that I work in Venture Capital (specifically in Deep Tech sectors), I once again find myself in a minority, with women making up [less than 10 percent](#) of VC decision-makers. Throughout my career I have made it a priority to work in companies with diverse and balanced teams; IXDS, Brinc and Arkley Brinc have done a great job at ensuring equal opportunities within their organisations, with about 50/50 representation of men and women right up to the top tier. Living in my comfortable Berlin bubble where I know so many awesome women at the top of their game, it

would be easy to overlook the uncomfortable truth; that unfortunately, this balance bubble does not reflect the norm – neither in my industry nor in workplaces around the world. And especially not in tech startups.

One day, whilst assessing the hundreds of applications we received for Brinc's accelerator programs, I checked the statistics regarding the demographics of applicants. **92 percent of them were men.** Only 8 percent out of hundreds of founders were women! I assume that this figure was more drastic than other accelerators due to our focus on IoT, Connected Hardware, Drones and Robotics, which are still very male-dominated industry sectors. Nonetheless, it almost made me fall off my chair.

That's why it's so important to support and raise up women entrepreneurs. Women need more visible role models who they can identify with; they need to see kick-ass women in industries previously thought of as 'for men'. It's not news that having women at executive level actively increases profits and performance. Hell, [Goldman Sachs](#) won't even take your company public as of 2020 unless there is at least one woman on the board, because those companies have proven to give better market performance. And yet there is still rife resistance, prejudice, and a desire to cling to traditional gender roles. DOWN WITH THIS SORT OF THING!

It's not a dirty word.

It saddens me to see that the term 'Feminism' has been corrupted. Just the mention of it causes eyes to roll or glaze over. Its meaning is so frequently misunderstood; minds jump to militant, bra-burning, man-hating extremists who want to eradicate men – but that's just not it. Feminism is simply a synonym for gender equality, aka equal opportunities for all *regardless* of gender.

A friend of mine from the industry remarked that women currently have an “unfair advantage” due to the trends, initiatives and headlines for Women in Tech or female founders. It’s true that you will find plenty of events and content just for women. But it begs the question: can any advantage offered be deemed “unfair” when the starting line was so much further back for women to begin with?



I genuinely wish that there was no need for quotas or women-only incentives. I wish that gender parity would happen organically, but the fact is that it hasn’t. We’re not there yet. Sure, we’ve come a long way in the last century, but we’re still a long way from equality – and I, for one, am not willing to wait another 100 years for that to happen ‘naturally’. So until we see measurable, statistical evidence of:

- Equal pay for equal work
- Equal opportunities regardless of gender
- Diverse representation on boards and at executive level
- Diversity at tech events and conferences, and
- An absence of gender-based discrimination (and just because you have not personally witnessed/noticed this, it doesn’t mean it isn’t happening),

then all advantages afforded to women should be considered fair, just and necessary. Until the playing field is even, we need to continue creating platforms and opportunities for women’s voices to be heard, and continue giving all minority groups the leg-up they deserve.



Representation of women at high-profile tech events these days is still pitiful, and it's not due to a lack of inspirational, accomplished women. However, I have met many women who actively avoid tech events because of the prevalent 'tech bro' culture; of course they'll feel uncomfortable if the men to women ratio is 50:1! Take, for example, the scandal at NOAH Conference in Berlin 2016 where a host of escorts turned up at the after party, causing some of the few business women in attendance to be mistaken for sex workers. Or the ongoing [accusations of sexism](#) dogging CES in Las Vegas. Or that time an investor at a startup event drunkenly leered that I was "far too pretty to be a CEO". And people wonder why more women aren't lining up to attend!

Tech conferences MUST continue their efforts to attract more women – whether that's with free tickets or female-focused content – whilst ensuring the environment they create is safe and inclusive. And diverse representation on stage is a must. And those actions are not unfair advantages to women; they are baby steps towards righting a wrong that has dogged the business world for decades.

The Other Side of the Table

After so many years of pitching to investors and chasing cheques, it's quite a relief (and deeply satisfying) to be sitting on the other side of the table. I'm now in a position where founders pitch to me, asking us to fund their tech startups. I didn't follow the typical VC route; I don't have an MBA, I never worked in investment banking or management consulting. But I am a serial startup entrepreneur and that is an asset. I know the myriad of challenges that come with building a company from the ground up. I'm all too familiar with the risks and threats that startups inevitably face. I've been in their shoes and can relate to what they're going through; empathy is helpful for establishing trustful relationships. And not forgetting the bullshit radar; founders have a tendency to exaggerate and inflate numbers, putting a positive spin on their story and concealing the ugly parts. I know the telltale signs to look out for!

When I started this role I was already familiar with the investment process, having executed multiple fundraising rounds and investor negotiations. My startup days prepared me for what's needed for the Due Diligence process; I got to grips with legal language and the plethora of documents required for investment deals. So the transition from founder to investor seemed very natural, and it feels like the perfect fit. After a decade of paying my dues, I'm very excited to have embarked on this next phase of my career.



My business partner at Arkley Brinc is the strong and silent type, so he's happy to let me take centre stage when it comes to representing the fund (I'm never one to shy away from the spotlight!). From networking to mentoring, delivering keynote speeches and workshops, from PR opportunities to

shareholder presentations, I still rely heavily on the skills I developed during my singing career. Who knew that all that karaoke would pay off in the boardroom?

Back to my Roots

In 2019, in an unexpected twist, my passion for singing **reignited** after ten years of lying dormant. Following a few impromptu performances that the universe put very prominently in my path, I now have a side gig as the front-woman in a blues/rock band with a group of fantastic guys – all of whom work in investment or the tech startup scene. We call ourselves ‘BC & the VCs’!

“I used to hide that side of myself from the business world, worried that I would not be taken seriously if someone saw me channeling Jessica Rabbit vibes in a smoky jazz club.”

But now I finally feel confident enough to be both: I am a singer and a business woman. I’m into Burlesque and Deep Tech. I can wear vintage dresses and a nose ring and close a million dollar deal. I learned that you don’t need to fit any mould to be successful; you don’t have to sacrifice one side of yourself for another. And you don’t need to dial down your femininity to succeed in a ‘man’s world’ (or dial it up). Play to your strengths and [*cliché noted*] be true to yourself.

When asked which women are my role models or who inspires me in the world of business and technology, I don’t have to look very far; the women in my family are KICK-ASS. I know a lot of people might say that, but I believe that coming from a family of self-driven go-getters shaped me without me even realising it.

My sister, Katy Cooper, is the coolest geek I know. She's a Digital Design Consultant, Usability Expert and UX Lead with over 13 years at Accenture under her belt. After graduating from Imperial College London with a Masters degree in Electrical and Electronic Engineering with Management (didn't she hear that subject is for *boys*?) she joined Accenture Digital UK/I's Interactive Delivery team, and was an active member of their award-winning Inclusion and Diversity programme's LGBT Network. She recently took the leap to go freelance (as [Katy R Cooper](#)) and is contributing to a forthcoming book on Diversity in the workplace. Oh, and she also plays bass guitar (and Double Bass and Bass Ukulele), has blue streaks in her hair, is an accomplished Lindy Hop and Blues dancer and a science buff. See? KICK-ASS.

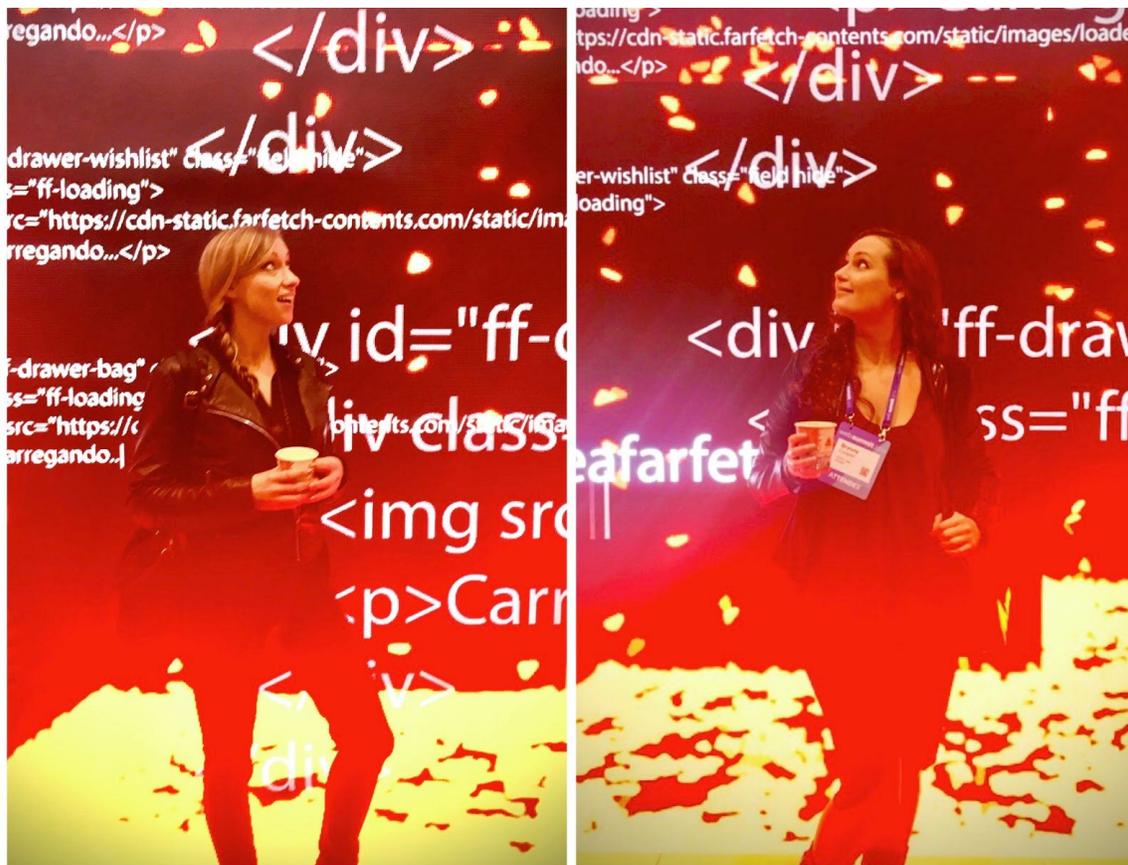


My mother, Julie Cooper, is a Trainer, Coach, and Author specialising in people skills and leadership development. She runs her own business, [Spring Development](#), which helps organisations nurture their staff through bespoke training and development. She's the author of several business books, including '[Face to Face in the Workplace](#)' (which featured in The Sunday Times and has many five star reviews) and co-author of '[The One to One Toolkit](#)', which is widely used as a textbook for training Careers Advisers. She's also creatively talented in the home and garden, is quite the expert on plants and herbs and is generally brilliant and lovely.

Even my Grandmother, Eve, was inspiring and independent. She took evening classes at college to get her qualification in Accounting (higher education was rare for women in those days), and later as a divorced woman (also rare back then) she was completely self-sufficient. She went back to college and got a diploma in Business Studies and a Certificate in Education,



worked as a Senior Lecturer and co-owned a property development company. She rode a motorbike, owned a boat, spent summers in France, was a champion at the card game 'Bridge' and was basically unbeatable at any board game.



"Sisters who tech": At Web Summit, 2017

Inspirational tech womxn move in my personal circles too; accomplished individuals such as [Jillian C. York](#) (Writer, Activist, Director of International Freedom of Expression at [EFF](#) and a founding member of Deep Lab), [Ariki Millikan](#) (Writer, Information Architect, former Editor at WIRED and founder of [LadyBits](#)), [Tanya Karsou](#) (digital security and privacy pro, former COO of Droidcon), [Edlira Kasaj](#), MBA (MSc in Computer Sciences, digital entrepreneur and innovation leader) . . . the list goes on.

Woman on a Mission

I'm making it my mission to help more women establish scalable, investable businesses in the technology sector. In my spare time I mentor founders through accelerator programs and events, and give workshops for early-stage startups. I'm here to support all founders, but I'm especially keen to endorse initiatives for women in tech and womxn entrepreneurs.

If you're a woman who wants to share your experiences and find an ally, please reach out; I see you and I'm here for you. If you're someone who wants to better understand what it's like to be a woman in the tech startup/VC world, let's talk. And if you're a jazz trio looking for a vocalist... let's jam!

Thanks for reading; I hope you enjoyed learning more about my professional journey so far.

If you'd like to connect, write to me on hello@bryonycooper.com.

