



DIAL ONE: A Platform to Explore Technology and Telecom

BREAKING BARRIERS WITH CORINTHIANS

Transcript: Episode 3

Helen Tither (Guest)

0:00

I work in law, I'm the only woman doing this. I work in, you know, tech or whatever it is, and I feel like I'm on my own. But this has inspired me.

And you know what I say to those women?

One of our Corinthians actually came back to play after having a baby in the 1960s, which is very progressive at the time.

Responsibilities.

So, we've literally built that into the edit of the film. So it's taken us longer, but I'm OK with that because at the end of the day, I've seen my kids and Craig's seen his kids and we've still managed to make a film.

<Trailer of the documentary “The Corinthians: We Were The Champions” plays>

Sonali Diddie (Host)

3:48

What you just saw was more than a glimpse into the past. It was a window into courage, resilience and the uninstalled story of women who refused to be sidelined.

You know, with World Telecommunication and Information Society Day just around the corner and this year's theme focusing on gender equality in digital transformation, today's conversation feels even more relevant. At Tech Mahindra, diversity inclusion education has been very, very close to our hearts.

In fact, we recently co-sponsored the documentary The Corinthians We Were the Champions along with BT, a product that beautifully captures the essence of inclusive leadership and giving voice to diverse stories. The movie is a powerful reminder of the quiet revolution that have shaped our world, often without recognition.

Today we are here to reflect on what the story meant for us now in the world of leadership and everyday impact.



I'm Sonali Didee and today I'm honoured to host this conversation with the storyteller who brought these voices to life, filmmaker Helen Tither.

Helen, thank you for joining us. We are really looking forward to having a meaningful dialogue during this session and uncover the stories and perspectives that are still unknown to many. So let's dive in.

Can you please start by telling us who were the Corinthians and what drew you to their story in the first place?

Helen Tither (Guest)

5:21

Well, thanks for having me today. It's great to be talking to you and I'm so proud to be speaking to you all at Tech Mahindra and for your, your, you know, support and sponsorship of the film. So thank you for that.

So, who were the Corinthians? Great question. That's what we start the film with. They were a women's football team set up in Manchester in the UK in 1949. And at that time there was a ban in England on women playing football. It was put in place by the British Football Association in the 1920s and it was a ban that lasted for 50 years. And basically what it said was women weren't allowed to play on official pitches affiliated to the Football Association. They weren't. Any clubs that let them play would be struck out of the association. Any referees or coaches that helped them will be struck off.

And that ban was in place for 50 years. It lasted until 1970/71 and the reason for that was women's football was really successful. I mean women have always played football. You know, back in ancient China there's women playing football. There's, you know, women playing football in Victorian times and it was set up and during the war, during World War One, it became very successful.

In the UK they'd have crowds of, you know, 50,000 people coming to watch women's teams play. So by the 1920's the football station didn't like that. They thought it was affecting the men's game and they plumped down on it and basically the ban men that there was nowhere for the women's teams to play.

These women's teams that were all over the country. And gradually, gradually, you know, they died out. They were sidelined and they could just play on parks or anywhere they could find.

So the Corinthians were set up in 1949 by this by this guy Percy Ashley, who was a football scout, whose daughter Doris was an amazing football player. She's possibly one of the best female football players we've ever had in this country. And she was amazing. So she set up this team around her so she'd have a team to play in. And she formed this sort of super team and he advertised in the local paper.

They found a local park. They made that their base and they set up a team and they played for two decades. They played for 21 years until the ban was lifted. They carried on after that and they became one of the most successful women's football teams we've ever had in the UK. They toured the world. They became known as the



globetrotting Corinthians, a time, you know, when not only in this country but in many countries around the world, women's football was being clamped down on or banned. They they played Germany in 1957 to win a European Cup, and they were the first women's team to tour South America. So they became globally famous.

But back home in the UK, they were still banned from playing in stadiums or on proper, you know, grounds and had to sort of play on parks to whoever they could get to come and watch them. So that's who the team were.

And sadly, they became forgotten even in, in where I'm based in Manchester in the UK, even in our their home city, they were forgotten until more recently when their story started to be told again. And that's when I sort of noticed a local article in the paper and thought that'd be a good documentary.

Sonali Diddee (Host)

8:24

Absolutely. I mean, I'm amazed at how in those times, and you would think, you know, that British were pretty modern during those times. But I think across the world, you know, there was this whole urge of not letting women do what they wanted. So creating a film like this must have been will come with its own unique challenges.

What was the journey like? You know, were you able to speak to some of these interviewers, I mean, to the people? And how did you put the whole story together?

Helen Tither (Guest)

8:54

Yeah, OK. Well, the journey I make documentaries for a living. So I find stories. I mainly focus on stories to do with women and untold stories. That's just my passion.

So I found this story. And at the time, women's football, you know, is enjoying the resurgence, you know, isn't it? It's just it's massive, especially here in the UK. And I thought, great, this to the beginning of the journey was basically me thinking this will be an easy film to make because everybody loves women's football and we'll easily make it and and get it shown.

Not the case for many reasons, because even though it is, you know, everybody loves women's football now, it doesn't mean that, you know, there's necessarily the acceptance that we think more widely. So that was a bit of a battle getting it made, which is where, you know, kindly, we've had this sponsorship from TechM and BT to help us make that. So there's that sort of struggle of it.

But also, you know, this team played from 1949 until the 70s into the 80s. And many of the women have died, you know, sadly, and never told their story. And some of those women never told their story at all and never told anybody they played football because it was sort of seen as taboo, you know, at the time. And there's a bit of shame attached to it for some people. So they never told anybody.



And when we started, we basically the first step was to get any surviving players together. And we got a group of maybe 30 players together at the National Football Museum in Manchester. And I met them and I told them the process, how I work making a film and how I like to include the women themselves in the film and make them part of the process and make sure we're telling their stories, you know, accurately. So I met them there in 2022.

Bear in mind we're in 2025 and we're just finishing the film. So it's a much longer process than I thought.

But yeah, when we met them all and we were pitching the story to get it commissioned and so on, sadly, more women were dying because, you know, they're in the 70s and 80s. And we thought, and they're going to, you know, this story isn't going to get told unless we just commit to it and make it.

So we, we, the me and the crew who've worked together before, before we've got any funding in place, we set up the interviews and we did a week of interviews with the women because they and their families were so keen to tell their stories to us and get them on camera.

So that was one of the challenge was there's so few surviving members to tell the story, but we have 10 ladies who tell the story from 1949 up until about 1971, which is where we finish and they tell the story between them and the film is told entirely in their words.

So it's all told by them. There's no narrator, there's no voice over, there's nobody else. It's entirely told in the women's words. And that was really important to us to make sure, you know, this is the only film that is that we know of that it's been made of women's stories in this.

When they were banned from playing football. So we thought, if this is the film, it's got to be told by them. And that's what we we sort of do.

So there's many, many challenges finding archive. We've been rotting around in people's cupboards, attics, tracking down trophies, missing footage that's not been seen for 50 years. We found cine tapes, we had them digitized. There's been a lot of research and, you know, digging out facts. And because it was banned, banned at the time, proper records weren't necessarily kept of all the games and they weren't all filmed. So there's been a detective job in pinning down all the facts of what happened when and who won what match and where did you know?

So, that that's taken a long time as well. So many, many challenges. But it's been, it's been fun. We've found a lot of things that we didn't know existed before.



Sonali Diddee (Host)

12:36

So actually, what stood out for me was not only how boldly these women created space for themselves at a time when it was all banned. Yeah, but some society just denied them one.

And I'm also, you know, I also admire your team, you know, trying to give them a voice. You know, it must have been so exciting for them to know that somebody is still interested, wants to tell the story because somewhere in the world, you know, there would be a lot of people who will get inspired by the story.

So, representation isn't just about visibility. It's about rewriting the whole narrative.

What does representation mean to you? And how did Corinthians embody it?

Helen Tither (Guest)

13:17

Yeah, I think representation to me is, yeah, I make a lot of films about women in history or, you know, untold stories of women and what I've, you know, on screen is in the UK anyway. And you know, I know it's come up in Hollywood films and so on.

It's not only are women not represented on on film, you know, 25% of documentaries in the UK are about women and 25% of documentaries are directed by women. So we're not taking up much space on screen. And you know, there are studies into how many lines women say on screen in dramas, how many women are shown as part of a program. And we're not we're not 50% of coverage on screen.

So that's really important to me is to try and redress that balance. And that's why we tell those stories. And that's why it's important to me that if we're making a film about women, whoever they are, they're the ones telling the story. They're the ones with the words. They're the ones saying what they want to say.

I mean, for instance, we made a film about Emmeline Pankhurst, the suffragette, a few years ago. And there's no footage of her speaking, but she did write an autobiography. So what we did was we had an actor bring her to life and read out lines from her autobiography. So she was speaking in the film.

And I think it's so important to give women literally a voice.

There are, there are programs that are made about women where they, someone else is telling their story for them. And sadly, so often in history, women's Diaries and archives and things like that are lost and forgotten.

So, we have these women, they're here. So, it's so important for them to speak.

So, we spent a long time, I've got to know them really, really well, you know, before we



even started filming. I went round to their houses. I met them lots of times. I took down all their stories. So, I knew exactly what their stories were.

And we had, each of them had a sort of half a day with us, with the crew.

It was very, we filmed at a football club in Manchester because we wanted to portray them as footballers, not as elderly ladies, you know, and or you know, women over 60 or so often portrayed as nan grandmas. And we want to know these are footballers, these are football women. And so they got to know me and the cameraman and everything really well so they could be themselves.

And another technique we use to help them tell the true story and represent them.

I wanted people to watch it and feel like they were in the room with them listening to their story like I was, because I felt so lucky that I'd heard all their stories and I wanted to get that feeling for the viewer.

So, we use this cover on the lens of the camera, which is basically like a series of mirrors. So, when I'm sat here behind the camera, cameraman me, they can look into the camera and see my face. So it's very, very hard if you're not ATV presenter to talk to the camera and be yourself.

It's very nerve racking. And we wanted them to be themselves and tell their stories. So we set this special device up. And so I was in the screen of the camera and they felt like they were talking to me.

And I think when you see the film, you'll feel that they're chatting to you and they're very natural and they're able to tell their stories in a way maybe we don't see women of that age telling their stories.

So, I think, yeah, representation for me is truly like, not just saying, yeah, we'll make this film about these women and we'll have a presenter and we'll tell it how it was.

No, let those women say what happened and give them the opportunity to give their sort of best version of their story. So that's, yeah, that's how we've done that with that film.

Sonali Diddie (Host)

16:55

You know, it's, it's amazing what you just said because in even in the world of technology and telecom, we still see under presentation, Yeah.

And under representation at the leadership level, at that level that where I work. Yeah. Stories like these inspire us.

And I think what I'm, I will take away from what you're just saying is, is this society or is our organization giving, you know, building an environment for their voices to be told, you know, for the women to come back, you know, when they go for maternity leave and, you know, still hold the same position.



And therefore there is a lot of work.

We actually in Tech Mahindra as well as I'm sure I see that in BT as well, doing a lot on trying to make sure that we have women at the right leadership level, you know, and giving them the voice, giving them the training, giving them the support that they would need to do that.

Now, Helen, from our experience as well, we see that while gender diversity is extensive at an entry level, because women as they age, they do take a break when you know, they start their family and then they come back.

We start seeing that the numbers start to drop as they go towards the senior. Now, do you see that happening at your side as well?

Helen Tither (Guest)

18:08

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I work in TV usually, you know, in the TV industry, in the media industry. For that, I worked in newspapers, in print.

And yeah, definitely.

I've got two kids. I've got two boys. And I took it, you know, I took time out when I had them. I'm a freelancer, so I can come up with my own ideas and so on. And I found that when I came back, not very long after maternity leave, but you know, guys who had been runners or researchers for me were suddenly directing and they sort of there's a leapfrog effect. Isn't that when you come back?

And also, you know, it's our industry. I don't know about your industry, but you know, the media industry is long hours. There's a lot of travelling. There's a lot of sort of barriers there for for mums, but it's not impossible.

But I think the notion is, oh, she won't be able to do that. Oh, she won't be able to fit that in without even asking of women. Is this how you, how, how would you fit back into because we've got so many skills, you know, we've got so much experience and skills. And then you have your kids, you come back with even more skills. I mean, time management, juggling, juggling demands from children, you know, and and I find anyway that you know, parents, mums and dads who've, who've, who've got young families come back and some in many times work more efficiently because you've got that deadline. You want to get home to pick your kids up. You've got, you've got that. So you're working more efficiently when you are in work and you're bringing extra skills, I think.

Yeah. You're talking about inspiring people. And, you know, even playing the trailer and taking, I've taken the Corinthians to various events and they've done talks and, you know, they've had standing ovations from people, women who aren't necessarily interested in football, but find the story of women with a courage and and sort of



rebellion really inspired in their own industry. Afterwards, people have come up to us and said, I work in engineering.

I'm the only woman in the room.

I work in law.

I'm the only woman doing this.

I work in, you know, tech or whatever it is.

And I feel like I'm on my own. But this has inspired me. And you know what I say to those women, one of our Corinthians actually came back to play after having a baby in the 1960s, which is very progressive at the time.

But what I always say to them is. You know, you think you're on your own and you think you're the 1st in your industry to do this thing, but you're probably not. There's probably women who've gone before you who've made those same strides, but maybe they've not been, maybe they've been forgotten about. Maybe that's not been recorded.

So do a little bit of digging, you know, have a little look around, see who the women are in your field who've done those things and, you know, let them inspire you a bit further.

But as well, I suppose, I think it's about what they call it, You know, it's about men stepping up as well within organisations and asking women questions when they're coming back and and you're encouraging them as well.

It's not just about us as women having to sort of like push all the time.

Sonali Diddie (Host)

21:04

It's about that support, isn't it, Helen?

Absolutely. These conversations are so important.

And I do remember when I came back, you know, after I had my son, I and I had my conditions and, you know, like you said, you know, that I would not be able to travel.

And my organization take mind adjusted to everything.

Even working from home. I was the first working from home registered in the UK. Yeah.

So they changed. So the organization, my manager, George Ministry, they actually change policies, you know, to make the workplace inclusive. And it's just for the fact that I'm a young mother, you know, And so I, I completely, completely get that my Tech Mahindra, we believe inclusion is a culture and not a checklist.

And but making that shift from policy to practice isn't easy. Did you see that kind of intentional inclusion show up in your filmmaking process as well?

Helen Tither (Guest)



21:59

Yeah. So, so we we set up a company. We set up the company to make the film. And it's something I've always wanted to do.

But, you know, like I say, I've got young kids and, you know, I need to earn a living. And I thought, you know, in the future, in the future.

But this is the project that, you know, have this WhatsApp group of 10 Corinthians and we chat all the time and they really inspire me all the time. And, you know, and I was like, I can't let these women down. We have to make this film.

So we set up the company to make the film and but what I wanted from the start was to do things how I thought it should be done and how, you know, not how necessarily I'd experienced it. So I wanted inclusion. You know, the women, I wanted them to be part of the film. It's not my film.

It's not the company's film.

It's our film and they're part of it. And I've been and I've shown most of them now the film itself.

And they're already happy with it. And, you know, I want them to feel like that's a representation of them.

So there's inclusion of the, of the cast, if you like, of the the women taking part, but also of the of the team making it.

You know, there's no way I could have made this film without the editor, Craig, the cameraman, Greg, the producer, Sarah, who in that first few weeks when we were like, we need to start filming, all said, forget about the money. Let's go and film it. Let's make it happen. And we know, we know you'll find the money. We know you'll make it work. And they sort of all stepped up.

So everything we do is that's our core, you know, filmmaking team and others who've helped us, the illustrator, John, other people along the way.

But as well, like in working practice and the editor I'm working with lives an hour and a half from me. So, we've worked remotely online with the edit for most of the time. And sometimes I go and see him and we've both got young kids.

So, we start after the school run, we work work really hard and then we finish at the school run time and we both go and pick up our kids. And because it's important to me that, you know, because it's not just women, it's men as well have to our responsibilities.

So, we've literally built that into the edit of the film. So it's taken us longer, but I'm OK with that because at the end of the day, I've seen my kids and Craig's seen his kids and we've we've still managed to make a film.

So I think though, you know, I would like that to be a sort of practice going forward that we can build a company where, you know, people have families and it's not a detriment.



It's part of who you are and those skills are great and sort of bring them in. So yeah, that's how it sort of worked with our process, if you like.

Sonali Diddie (Host)

24:28

Oh, that's amazing. Actually.

If you ever notice, you know, my signature always has this, this thing, this message that coming together is beginning, staying together is progress and working together is success. And I always believe in that.

You know, so if you take collaborate and take the people together, I mean, you could you could actually almost get anything.

If the Corinthians could speak directly to a young professional today, especially women breaking barriers today. What do you think they would say?

Because you spoke to them personally, didn't you?

Helen Tither (Guest)

24:57

So, oh, yeah, I speak to them all the time. And yeah, and they say this kind of thing to me. But yeah, I know what they'd say because I've seen them, you know, be asked a similar question. And they basically say don't let anybody tell, you know, don't let anybody tell you what you should be doing if you love something.

For them, it was football. But if you love something, don't let someone stop you. Just go and do it.

And I think, you know, whatever field you're in, I'm not the best at sport, you know, I'm not the best at football. I was never the first person picked for a team. But they inspire me every day.

And I've got women from all walks of life that I look to, you know, and we all struggle with work tasks. But I think you sort of need to latch on to those, those people, whatever background they're from. It might not be from the tech industry. Say it's a footballer, say it's a Corinthian, you know, but that gives you that boost when you need it to think I'm not the first. And I think I think they would, yeah, they would definitely say go for it, whatever, whatever field you're in.

But I think for me, you know, I think people think to be the first that something feels great. You know, sometimes misunderstand the, the struggle that we have as women in different fields that actually it's hardest if you're the 1st, it's the hardest to push through those barriers and to know that there's somebody in the past, however, a year ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, who pushed those boundaries as well. They're sort of stood on your shoulders and they're pushing, they're helping you.



I think that the fight for equality and inclusion is, is a bit easier when you know you've got those women behind, you've done it before from whatever field.

So the message I know from them is definitely take no for an answer. Always go for whatever it is you want to do.

Sonali Diddie (Host)

26:40

No, you're absolutely true. And I would really like to add that the courage today is someone else's legacy tomorrow.

And I think their courage that they showed is actually look, you know, going to be something that when people see inspire them to actually go ahead and do.

That's what I, I remember when I was looking at your trailer, that was one of the Corinthians who said that I could kick really well and I was in and the team, you know, and that kind of confidence, that kind of boldness to know what you're good at and then just go out there and, you know, perform.

So thank you. Thank you not only for making this feel, but also talking to me and also bringing out these stories. And I like the way the trailers been put up. It did feel to me as if they are having a conversation with me. So thank you for that.

Thank you for everyone watching. This conversation isn't ending. It's the beginning.

So let's keep listening, let's keep building, and let's keep breaking barriers together.

Thank you, Helen.

Helen Tither (Guest)

27:37

Thank you.